

INVESTIGATING MEDIA NARRATIVES OF  
BISEXUAL PEOPLE IN SPORT SETTINGS.

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## **Abstract.**

Societal attitudes towards bisexuality have often been argued to be overwhelmingly associated with denial, erasure, and stigmatisation. Bisexual people are considered to be disadvantaged amongst other sexual minorities due to various complexities, such as its disruption to heteronormative ways of thinking in addition to harmful stereotypes that have come to be attributed to it over time. General bisexuality research up to this point in time have tended to focus on generalised bisexuality or have included bisexuality under the guise of LGB or LGBTQ+ etc. acronyms but without much focus on it as a separate entity. Moreover, media coverage of bisexuality sports athletes has also been found to be limited in comparison to other LGBTQ+ groups such as lesbian women and gay men in sport. This study takes the stance of a textual media analysis through which the narratives presented about bisexual people in sport were analysed and cross-examined with existing literature, in addition to theoretical lenses such as the work of Goffman and Gramsci to make sense of certain themes. A total of 44 texts were sourced from mainstream and LGBTQ+ specialist media outlets. Thematic analysis produced 5 overarching themes attributed to being bisexual in sport were identified: bisexual burden, bivisibility, mental health, intersectionality, and sporting environments. While the narratives confirmed aspects of bisexual burden already present in current literature, they offered some initial insights into various sociological structures and factors that also shape and contribute to how bisexuality may be perceived in sport, such as religion, culture, and sport-specific environments. Being openly bisexual in upper levels of sport is overwhelmingly framed as brave and a positive step in the direction of LGBTQ+ equality, however the components of bivisibility are also contested with regards to significance over talent. Finally, future areas for research have been identified to combat bierasure in sport academia.

## **Introduction.**

At present, very little is known about the lived experiences of bisexual sportspeople. Despite acknowledgements of its importance and relevance to modern-day academia (see Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; House, Jarvis & Burdsey, 2021; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017), it is a subject area that has received significantly less attention in sport sociological comparative to other groups within the LGBTQ+ community. For example, an extremely high volume of focus on the experiences of gay and lesbian athletes has provided them with ever-improving standards of representation and strong voices for enacting change of traditional ideologies found in sport. However, this does not allow for the representation of the collective community of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals. Due to the saturation of studies of homosexuality in sport, the lack of attention towards bisexual other plurisexual identities in sport has virtually gone unchecked. Even research concerning transgender individuals within sport is steadily growing (e.g. Anderson & Travers, 2017; Hargie, Mitchell & Somerville, 2017; Hilton & Lundberg, 2021; Jones *et al.*, 2017; Love, 2014), leaving what Griffin (2014) has conceptualised as “the missing B” in LGBTQ+ sports studies.

As put by Magrath, Cleland & Anderson (2017), professional sports have come to welcome social change, by which lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes are much better received than they have been previously. Tokyo 2020 saw the highest population of LGBTQ+ athletes in any Olympic Games in history, whereby at least 186 out athletes took part across a wide variety of sports. In comparison, only 23 known LGBTQ+ athletes took part in the London 2012 Olympic Games. Despite there being questions raised about the true nature of progress for sports inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community (Caudwell, 2011; Storr *et al.*, 2021; Torrance, 2022), these figures may serve as evidence of change to the social climate. With this in consideration, and despite contemporary sport seemingly appearing more progressive with issues concerning sexism, misogyny, racism, classism, ableism, and anti-LGBTQ+ behaviours such as homophobia, there remains a clear need for all identities to be represented if further progress towards equality is to be made.

It has previously been suggested that sport is reflective of society (Lumpkin, 2008), whereby it is recognised to have acted as a vehicle for social order for over 200 years. As such, it is contended that certain societal values or ideas cannot be fully understood without considering the impact that sport has on our day-to-day lives (Jarvie, 2017). A statement such as this suggests that sport is such a significant part of global culture to the extent that it has become completely engrained in the fabrics of human relationships, perhaps most prominently between families and friendship groups (Lumpkin, 2008; Washington & Karen, 2001). As such, sport's importance to society – particularly Western – can be traced back to its roots as an organised recreational activity during the period of industrialisation from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Moreover, due to sport being a now integral feature of everyday life for millions of individuals worldwide, it perhaps has more power than most other institutions or domains within our society, through which it can shape minds – especially those of younger and more impressionable generations. As such, one could argue that this level of power that sport upholds could be potentially problematic, due to its legacy of controversial and arguably outdated ideologies that have endured for over a century.

Arguably, it was sport's contribution to maintaining heteronormativity and the gender order during the Industrial Revolution – particularly in the United Kingdom – that has produced certain concepts, beliefs and ideas that remain interwoven in the foundations of modern organised sport. For example, sport has previously been acknowledged to exist as a heavily male-dominated part of society where cisgender, heterosexual, masculine men uphold power over all genders and sexual orientations (Anderson, 2005, 2011a; Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Connell, 2005; English, 2017; Messner, 1992; Long & Hylton, 2002; Walton & Butryn, 2006; Pronger, 1990). Despite more recent claims that the climate has changed overtime and that women and LGBTQ+ individuals have become far more integrated in sport, associations between masculinity, heterosexuality and sport and exercise spaces do remain and go together with negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ sport community (Denison, Bevan & Jeanes, 2020). Not only are gender norms reflected in sport through the segregation of men and women alongside the multi-faceted and obvious favourite of male sports, but also through other means of social stratification (Anderson & White, 2018). Sexuality in addition to race, class and disability are just some

of the other sociological intersections from which prominent issues have developed both in sport and generalised society. However, it should be recognised that there have been and currently are attempts being made and work being done to break the status quo through the likes of policy and legislation changes alongside various campaigns and initiatives.

It is important to note that although there appears to be limited knowledge on bisexuality and the existence of biphobia in sport, there are some accessible studies that have examined it from a broader and general angle (e.g. Anderson & Adams, 2011; Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016; Woolley, 2020). From these studies, it has become clear that the lived experiences of bisexual individuals are likely to present far more complexities, difficulties, and thus significant differences to those of gay men and women (Barker *et al.*, 2012; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Anderson, McCormack & Ripley (2016) have thus proposed the notion of ‘bisexual burden’: an umbrella term for the unique experiences encountered by bisexual people due to their identity. Bisexuality, much like other plurisexual identities within the LGBTQ+ community (including pansexuality, queer, omnisexuality), is often regarded as a phase rather than legitimate sexual orientation; an experimental experience in which those who participate will use the term ‘bisexual’ while they distinguish whether they are gay or straight. As such, bisexual people are labelled as sex-crazed, promiscuous, and greedy, and are further criticised for their ‘indecisiveness’ and the subsequent confusion they inflict on those around them (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Burleson, 2005; Diamond, 2008; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009; Klein, 1993).

Bisexuality is therefore often considered to be too complex of an identity for others to understand as with other sexual identities that defer from heterosexuality of homosexuality; comparable to difficulties in understanding non-cisgender identities. Due to this, the existence of a socially-constructed sexual binary – heterosexual-homosexual – exists, built upon the mentality that one must identify as one extreme or the other and that there is no real in between. Further, and regardless of the existence of homophobia in the world today, homosexuality is considered easier for society to comprehend and grasp the concept of, due to it being viewed as the opposite to heterosexuality (Anderson, 2008; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009; Klein, 1993). The problem with bisexuality is that it is argued to present itself

similarly to both, therefore interrupting society's way of thinking. Sexuality becomes less black and white than society would perhaps prefer, hence why there is arguably much more stigma surrounding bisexuality compared to homosexuality. This does not excuse harmful stigmas associated with gay men and lesbian women nor the existence of homophobia in the world today; rather, it highlights that there is still much work to be done where equality is concerned, and the simple act of legalising sexual fluidity will never be enough.

Such a lack of understanding, ongoing dismissal and resultant erasure of bisexuality makes any form of research on the topic of bisexuality seem undesirable – although it is perhaps for that very reason that it requires more academic attention. There remain many unknowns about the experiences of bisexual people, particularly in sport sociology. The very notion of bisexuality being complex indicates a need for more education and thus a greater understanding of individual unique experiences, especially when we consider the many negative and harmful stereotypes associated with it. The same concept can therefore be argued to apply to bisexual sportspeople, as there appears to be a lack of representation for the bi sports community both on the playing field as well as in academia (Anderson & Adams, 2011; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017). As it stands, a small percentage of athletes competing in popular sports and / or at an elite level are openly bisexual, compared to a growing population of openly lesbian and gay athletes.

This has been made increasingly obvious by the lack of attention towards bisexuality in the media (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017), despite arguments that attitudes towards bisexuality in general Western society are improving. Elite athletes often gain popularity and attention through the media, and therefore the power the media has is paramount when it comes to reporting on sporting individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. All media types such as articles, broadcasts, and blogposts are all able to do more than report on news events. In a context such as this, they can portray individuals, sporting events, sexual orientations differently depending on the language and discourse used, and the narrative that they want to articulate. Further along, this can make an impact on readers who digest the content and accordingly form opinions. As such, due to the lack of media attention towards bisexuality (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017), it could be argued that this could be part of the problem when it



comes to society not understanding bisexuality wholly and without the stereotypes associated with it. Additionally, many of the bisexual athletes that have come out are either now retired or compete in low-profile sports or at lower levels from elite. Due to both factors, it is arguably less likely for mainstream media outlets to report on their stories – or at least not in much detail.

When it comes to audiences themselves, there may be those who are naturally more able to access more information and in turn be more educated on bisexuality than others. For example, there are many media organisations and outlets that specialise and report on news directly linked to the LGBTQ+ community, such as Gay Times, The Pink News and Outsports. These media sources could be considered less accessible to the heterosexual community due to their target audience being and perhaps appealing more to LGBTQ+ readers. On the other hand, stories covering bisexuality within sports setting in mainstream media, as stated, are rare. As such, specialist sources including those mentioned above may be able to give more insight into bisexuality in sport.

The aim of this study is to examine and dissect narratives presented by specialist and mainstream media sources using news articles and blogposts concerning the subject of being bisexual in sport. In addition, this study seeks to examine how these written experiences could be made sense of with sociological theory and with findings from previous works of academic literature. As this subject area remains limited, past studies that have covered similar topics such as the experiences of gay and lesbian sport athletes will be of use to make sense of how and why bisexuality may be perceived in certain ways. Moreover, this study also touches upon the work of Erving Goffman as a means to provide a vehicle of understanding the narratives on bisexuality presented by the media can be explored more explicitly. Goffman's theories encompass the political processes that establish and challenge the rules of social engagement and everyday power relations (Dennis & Martin, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2011). As such, political and social dynamics between the bisexual community and all outside groups can be understood through this theoretical lens, in addition to it making sense of how sport may play an important role in the formation of these interactions.

## **Literature review: An introduction to bisexuality in academia.**

Since, the 1990s, academic studies concerning bisexuality and the experiences of bisexual individuals have increased, accordingly influenced by bisexuality organisations (MacDowell, 2009). However, across the last decade alone, there have been several academics who have addressed the lack of attention towards bisexuality in sport academia and the media comparative to studies and reports on homosexuality and homophobia. For example, Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham (2016) acknowledge that bierasure is present in sports academia, but also within the media – particularly where sport is concerned – and that it is a significant area that academics should be encouraged to explore far more. House, Jarvis and Burdsey (2021) note that most references to bisexuality in academia have been made under various acronyms, such as LGB and LGBT. Additionally, Griffin (2014) states that the ‘B’ in LGBTQ+ sports studies has often been disregarded, as there have been few efforts to distinguish biphobia from homophobia in addition to differences between the experiences of bisexual, lesbian and gay sportspeople.

This has consequently left bisexuality excluded from important and arguably vital academic attention, which is clearly evidenced by the comparison between such a noticeable lack of work on bisexuality in sport and a much greater volume of studies that cover gay and lesbian athletes and homophobia in sport. Further, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a growing body of research into transgender athletes beginning to circulate the pool of LGBTQ+ sports academia (Hargie, Mitchell & Somerville, 2017; Hilton & Lundberg, 2021; Jones *et al.*, 2017; Love, 2014). Griffin (2014) also asserts that there are problems where conflation between homophobia and biphobia are concerned, whereby the two are often confused and few efforts have been made in the interest of differentiating the two terms. Moreover, homophobia has been used as an umbrella term in academia and in media reports alike to conceptualise all anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes, which could be said to deplete important discussions of biphobia as its own entity. It has therefore become increasingly clearer in recent years that it is necessary for academics to research and study bisexuality in sport for the purpose of promoting inclusion and representation for bisexual communities, in sport, academia and wider society.

### *Defining bisexuality.*

It has proven difficult to define bisexuality, and definitions have changed over time. Starting from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century whereby it referred to forms of life that were considered to exhibit characteristics of both sexes; from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was attributed to a combination of non-physical masculine and feminine qualities in an individual, in addition to sexual attraction to both sexes; the later years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century determined bisexuality as a form of sexual attraction, identification or practice (MacDowell, 2008). As time has gone by and more research has been done, improved ways of distinguishing bisexuality as a sexual identity offers insight into it being different from homosexuality due to it being far more fluid. However, its fluidity has arguably also been its downfall when it comes to being socially accepted.

Since better acknowledgments of it presenting itself in different ways from person to person, the complexities in defining bisexuality have been acknowledged by several academics (e.g. Barker *et al.*, 2013; Eisner, 2013; Monro, 2015; Ross *et al.*, 2018; Swan, 2018) as have ways in which it is often viewed by others of different sexualities. For example, all plurisexual individuals' (including those identifying as bisexual) gender attraction is often misconstrued to be comprised of a 50:50 split between men and women, which reinforces the idea of gender binary (Angelides, 2001; MacDowell, 2009). Moreover, bisexuality has also been likened to the concept of a person being 'half gay, half straight' (Nelson, 2020). However, it has been contested that the term 'bi' – although technically defined as meaning 'two' – should not be taken literally to mean attraction to two genders. Rather, it is argued that the term 'bi' where sexuality is concerned implies attraction to more than one gender (Callis, 2014; Cipriano, Nguyen & Holland, 2022; Dyar *et al.*, 2015; Eisner, 2013; Galupo *et al.*, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2016; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015; Swan, 2018).

This approach has caused some confusion and issued in differentiating bisexuality to pansexuality, although it is important to consider the role of self-identification and how the individual is able to identify and distinguish how they feel. For example, a specific sexual orientation may mean something very different for one individual to the next, such as two people identifying as bisexual but being

attracted to different genders and have differing preferences (Callis, 2014; Cipriano, Nguyen & Holland, 2022; Galupo *et al.*, 2014b; Mitchell *et al.*, 2014; Rust, 2001). This not only reiterates the fluidity of human sexuality, but also highlights that there are many ways in which sexual orientations can be uniquely defined due to no two experiences being the same. Although a limited area of research, another consideration when it comes to defining bisexuality is the notion of sexual and romantic attractions being two different entities. For example, someone may be sexually attracted to more than one gender, however their romantic preferences may lean towards one gender (Ybarra *et al.*, 2019). As such, this form of orientation may be referred to as “mostly heterosexual” or “mostly homosexual” depending on the gender of the individual in addition to how they choose to label themselves (Eliason & Streed, 2017; Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013; Thompson & Morgan, 2008). It is also important to note that gender and sex are two separate constructions in the social sciences. The definition of sex is composed of biological factors and is assigned at birth; by contrast, notions of gender are constructed by societal norms and expectations of masculinity and femininity in relation to one’s assigned sex.

*An introduction to the bisexual experience: Bisexual burden and bierasure.*

Alongside other minority groups, the bisexual community is believed to be much more disadvantaged than LG people within the current global society – even though it is still one that continues to place privilege in the hands of heterosexuality (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016). It is also contended that the lived experiences of bisexual individuals exhibit more complexities than those of LG identities (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016; Burlison, 2005; Ripley *et al.*, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), further implying that to be openly bisexual, you are potentially opening yourself to a higher risk of social and psychological suffering (Burlison, 2005; Ripley *et al.*, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Moreover, bisexual individuals are said to be burdened with facing discriminative practices from heterosexual individuals (Firestein, 2007) in addition to gay men and lesbian women (Ochs, 1996; Cipriano, Nguyen & Holland, 2022). As such, the challenges faced by bisexual individuals are argued to be intensified by social and political divisions that exist between them and other groups of sexual minorities such as lesbian women and gay men (Dodge, Sandfort & Firestein, 2007) which in turn

highlights the existence of a hierarchy amongst sexual orientations (Brickell, 2009; Rubin, 1984). It is here that the sociological concept of bisexual burden should be addressed properly and explored in further detail.

A term brought to academic attention by Anderson, McCormack & Ripley in their 2016 study of openly bisexual sixth form girls, bisexual burden is an umbrella term that refers to the ways in which the marginalisation of bisexuality is strongly connected to outsider views on its legitimacy and how these views differentiate and go beyond what is experienced by and aimed at gay men and lesbian women. Processes of marginalisation of the bisexual community have hence taken form through stigmatisation and stereotyping, all of which have roots tied with traditional societal standards of gender and heteronormativity, of which sport has played a vital part in reinforcing throughout history. As such, heteronormativity, as insinuated by its name, is the normalisation and expectation of society being organised by cisgenderism and heterosexism (Habarth, 2014; Tolman, 2006). The very notion of heteronormativity therefore makes any form of sexual minority identity to appear deviant, bisexuality included.

There are many stereotypes that have been formed based on misinformation and a lack of understanding, and the most common stereotypes of bisexual that researchers have been able to identify are largely psychological. They include the inability to love or be monogamous in addition to being sex-crazed and promiscuous (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Barbary & Guzamna, 2018; Klein, 1993); being confused about their true identity in relation to ideas of binary sexuality (heterosexual-homosexual) (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016); being neurotic, unstable and attention-seeking (Eliason, 1997); and being subjected to accusations of being in a phase rather than their claims of bisexuality being authentic (Barker & Landridge, 2008; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009). These stereotypes have generalised the behaviours and personalities associated with being bisexual, and these ideas have endured overtime despite improvements in societal attitudes towards the collective LGBTQ+ community.

Despite being recognised as a form of sexuality for several decades, bisexuality has faced many issues in integrating into society as a legitimately recognised non-heterosexual orientation. Despite its

recognition, it has previously been referred to as a disruption and a threat to heteronormativity (Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009) similarly to homosexuality but with even less acceptance. In turn, this signifies a severe lack of societal education on bisexuality and sexual fluidity overall. Ever since the acknowledgement and legitimisation of homosexuality as a part of the human experience, claims made by individuals expressing bisexuality are in fact hiding their true identities, and that they are in fact gay or lesbian. Furthermore, they are described as cowardly for not admitting to being homosexual (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Burleson, 2005; Diamond, 2008; Eliason, 1997; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2008). An explanation for this can be linked to the notion of monosexism: a social construct that refers to being attracted to one gender is more appropriate and retains more validity (Borver, Gurevich & Mathieson, 2001; Eisner, 2013; Nelson, 2020; Roberts, Horne & Hoyt, 2015). Therefore, any form of identity that extends beyond heterosexuality and homosexuality – including bisexuality – is very likely to be considered illegitimate or perhaps lesser than. Additionally, a result of specific stigmatisations of bisexuality, the term ‘bicurious’ also came to surface and has been used interchangeably to describe this apparent phase (Thompson & Morgan, 2008). In turn, the idea of bicuriosity acts as a problematic barrier for individuals to properly distinguish, identify and come to terms with their sexual preferences.

Drawing upon wider sociological theory, Erving Goffman acknowledges the existence of stigma as a generally normalised aspect of social life and is used as a form of discrediting an individual based on that result in a ‘spoiled identity’ (Holley *et al.*, 2016). Further, his work identifies three distinct forms of stigma: group or tribal (such as religion, race, ethnicity), physical deformities (disabilities such as blindness or deafness) and finally, blemishes of character (homosexuality, mental illness, addiction) (Goffman, 1963). In relation to the subject of sexuality, the idea of “blemishes of character” including homosexuality not only signifies traditional heteronormative ideologies, but in doing so can also be attributed to other forms of sexual orientation including bisexuality.

Literature highlights the distinct areas that contribute to the process of stigmatisation (e.g. Goffman, 1963; Herek, 2004; Link & Phelan, 2001). As such, Herek (2004) outlines the process stigmatisation as henceforth. To begin with, stigma is attributed to a constant trait or feature – physical or figurative

– exhibited by an individual. In the context of this study, that attribute could be bisexuality and its implications of attraction fluidity. Next, meanings are given to the identified attribute through processes of social interaction, which are then further recognised to having a negative connotation by the outside group. In addition, negative connotations assigned to specific attributes of a person's identity are a symbol of deviance and otherwise deserving of ostracism and condemnation. It is pointed out that not all members of society will respond to certain stigmas, however knowledge is shared of the mark of specific attributes being valued in a negative light.

It is suggested that developments of stereotypes and stigmatisation are used by individuals outside of many communities and cultures to make sense of those groups in which they are not involved (Hamilton & Sherman, 2014). In this context, not only can this concept be applied to power dynamics between heteronormative society and the LGBTQ+ community as a collective, but in addition could be used to explain power dynamics between heteronormativity, monosexism and plurisexuality. Ideas are formed about these groups – such as sociological groupings formed by age, social class, race and gender, or traits associated with different sports or tastes in music for example – which then allows people to believe they can navigate their way through society by believing they understand how to approach and act around them (McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002).

An issue with stereotyping is that such ideas are formed by looking at the bigger picture rather than the finer details. Therefore, it often goes unacknowledged that the individuals subjected to stereotyping all possess their own agencies and unique personalities, and so become totally defined by others for being part of a specific group. Others will fail to see that, just because these individuals reside in these groups or are even just connected by common interest, these groups do not comply with the 'one size fits all' rule. Stereotypes merely generalise communities in a negative light, which is much more harmful than people perhaps realise. They also pose a risk for these individuals as calling bisexuality a phase invalidates it as a legitimate sexual orientation, which then may lead to identity suppression and poor mental health.

### *Bisexuality and mental health.*

According to past research, bisexual people exhibit higher rates of poor mental health issues such as depression and anxiety in comparison to gay men and lesbian women (Taylor *et al.* 2019). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) seeks to explain this pattern, by conveying how sexual minorities such as bisexual people may experience chronic stress resultant of unique and negatively associated attitudes towards them from wider society (Meyer & Frost, 2013). The same theory has also previously been applied to gender minorities such as trans and gender nonconforming communities (e.g. Bockting *et al.*, 2013; Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Moreover, Meyer (2015) highlights the existence of distal (external) stressors which can take the form of daily events, including everyday discriminations and microaggressions. Furthermore, an individual of a marginalised identity may experience internalised stressors (referred to as proximal stressors) such as concealment of their sexual identity. In consideration for the existence of bisexual stigma, discrimination, and subsequent erasure, it could be suggested that bisexual individuals who choose to suppress their sexual identities are likely to suffer with their mental health as a result (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). As such, the mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals is a subject that has been explored in sociological study (e.g. Callwood & Smith, 2016; Cunningham, 2019; Russell & Fish, 2016; Taylor, 2018; Taylor *et al.*, 2019).

<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Heterosexual or straight</b>	95.0	94.6	93.7	93.6	93.4	93.4
<b>Gay or lesbian</b>	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.8	1.9	1.8
<b>Bisexual</b>	0.8	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.5
<b>Other</b>	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.6
<b>Do not know or refuse</b>	2.3	2.5	3.0	2.6	3.0	2.7

Source: Annual Population Survey from the Office for National Statistics

Figure 1.0: Sexual orientation population % in the UK 2017-2022.



According to data gathered by the Office for National Statistics (2023), there was a surge in population numbers of openly LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK. Using the above figure, it can be theorised that the year 2020 upholds much significance for the bisexual population in addition to the gay and lesbian communities. As such, the span of time between 2020 and 2021 has strong ties to the COVID-19 global pandemic – which has been previously referred as a period of self-discovery (Paterson & Park, 2023).

Although not specific to bisexuality, it is important to acknowledge the available studies carried out during the pandemic – such as Banerjee & Nair (2020), Barrientos *et al.* (2020), Gonzales *et al.* (2020), and Gonzalez *et al.* (2021) – which have all highlighted that the global LGBTQ+ community experienced a higher degree of vulnerability and mental health issues particularly during government-enforced lockdowns. For example, Banerjee & Nair (2020) found that lockdown affected LGBTQ+ individuals through increased in minority stress, leading to a risk of psychiatric disorders, substance abuse and suicidality in comparison to non-LGBTQ+ individuals. Moreover, Barrientos *et al.* (2020) discovered that LGBTQ+ communities suffered more psychological distress during the pandemic due to social and physical isolation from support networks, and further difficulty expressing their identity. Gonzales *et al.*'s (2020) research results show that 60% of their sample population experienced psychological distress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic, and Gonzalez *et al.* (2021) deduce that LGBTQ+ wellbeing could have been facilitated better had governmental policies advocated for them more during the lockdowns.

### *Conceptualising sexuality.*

An issue when it comes to understanding human sexuality is that it is difficult to conceptualise visually. Previous attempts include the popularised 'Kinsey Scale' (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948), a model that was developed with the intent being to illustrate that human sexuality does not fall explicitly under exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual. The model demonstrates the concept of sexuality being a continuum rather than rigid categorisations. The theory behind the model was that sexual behaviour can be measured between two extremes and are also subject to change. It attempted to

recognise the fluidity of human sexuality; however it fails to acknowledge several aspects of sexuality that are known in modern sociological study.

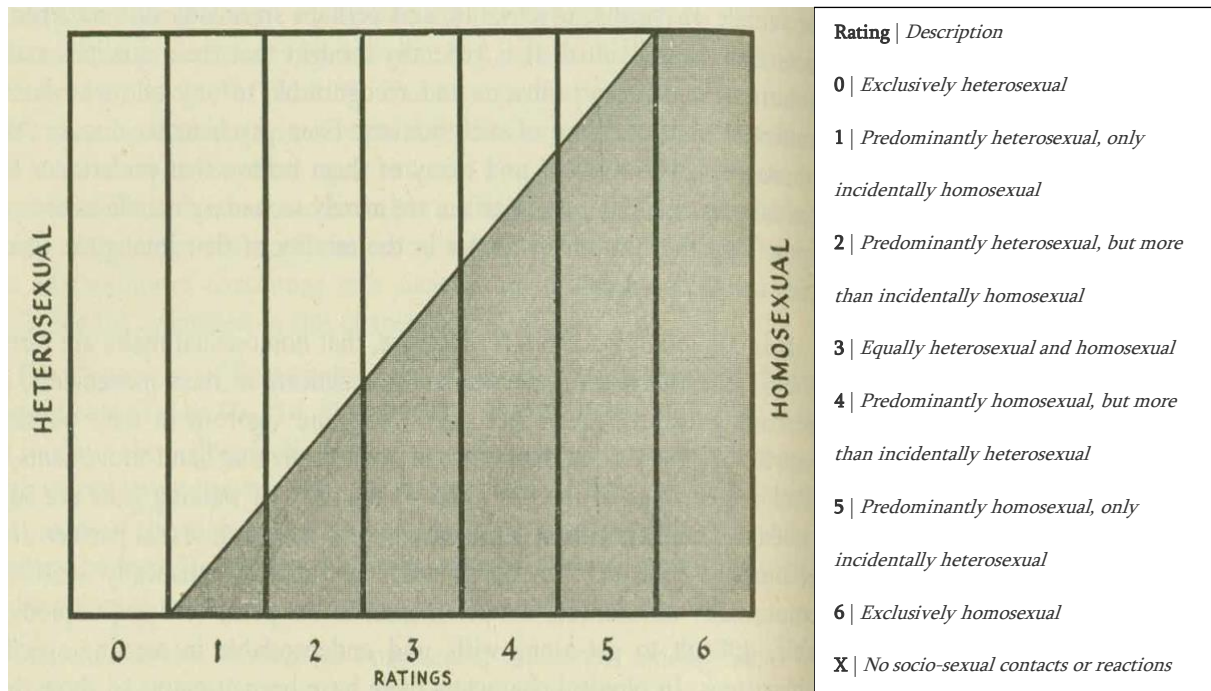


Image: *The Kinsey Scale model of sexuality, retrieved from kinseyinstitute.org*

This conceptualisation of human sexuality does have some merits. For example, it does not comply with a binary way of thinking and recognises the nature sexuality being fluid. As such, it does not contribute to bierasure as opposed to binary ways of thinking. Additionally, there is some acknowledgement in the X rating for sexual identities that do not experience sexual attraction, such as asexuality. However, there are also issues with illustrating sexuality using this model. Firstly, it does not take romantic attraction into account, which is an entirely different entity to sexual attraction; however, as acknowledged by Scheller *et al.* (2023), past research on distinguishment between both terms is limited. Additionally, this model also makes sexuality seem over-simplified, and could be said to pressure individuals into identifying under categories that do not align with their true identities. Moreover, it was designed without consideration for gender minorities and therefore contributes to binary ways of thinking about gender, which could be explained by the fact it was designed almost 80 years ago and discussion surrounding this topic has dramatically changed and developed to be more open over time.

The intersection of one's gender plays a significant role in society's ways of establishing a person's sexuality from the outside looking in. According to Anderson and Adams (2011), men are often divided into sexual orientation categories of a binary nature, which in turn contributes to the erasure of bisexuality as a viable sexual identity. It is considered far more acceptable for women to engage in same-sex sexual encounters; however this is normally backed by same-sex acts between women being highly sexualised by men who then use those encounters as forms of pleasure. In addition, gendered aspects of bisexual burden have been constructed in similar ways to gendered aspects of homosexuality. We still live in an inherently heteronormative world in which relationships between heterosexual society and sexual minorities are arguably based on traditional associations between gender, masculinity, and femininity (Connell, 1990, 1995; Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Plummer, 1999; Pronger, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Due to this, it is almost impossible to understand how one's experiences may be shaped based on their sexual orientation without firstly considering how these social constructs came to be.

For example, another aspect of bisexual burden comes into view when an individual enters a relationship and are sometimes labelled straight or gay depending on the gender of the secondary person in that relationship (Yost & Thomas, 2012). Here, the one-time rule of sexuality should be acknowledged, as a bisexual individual that engages in one same-sex experience may be assigned with a homosexual label by outsiders (Pronger, 1990). Conversely, bisexual individuals in straight-presenting relationships are subjected to scrutiny and accused of holding on to heterosexual privilege (Burlison, 2005). It can therefore be deduced that the underlying cause of bisexual stereotyping and stigmatisation comes from a place of denial amongst outsider communities.

#### *A Goffmanian approach to understanding bisexual stigma and bierasure.*

Goffman's theories of stigma, the presentation of self and dramaturgy can be used to unpick the idea of privilege for a bisexual individual in a straight-presenting relationship, in addition to processes of bierasure. The presentation of self is everchanging due to being formed by time, situational

circumstances and societal institutions interacted with by an individual (Ozbilgin *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the concept of performance in Goffman's theory of dramaturgy is defined as the process of developing one's self-identity in relationships (Goffman, 1963). Goffman further asserts that an individual's performance takes place on a metaphorical stage when they are interacting with others, which is referred to 'frontstage' or 'social stage.'. Here, an individual works to satisfy the expectations laid out by society, or to present themselves in what they perceive to be the most appealing (Jones *et al.*, 2011). Alternatively, the concept of 'backstage' encapsulates when an individual is not being observed by others and is considered the more authentic presentation of self, due to not being constrained or suppressed by any outside expectations (Goffman, 1959).

If we consider that Goffman's dramaturgical theory is constructed by the notion of human interactions being performative and concurrent with an actor playing a role on a stage in front of an audience (Goffman, 1969), it can often be questioned as to whether those performances are entirely authentic, or if an individual is managing that performance by only revealing selected aspects of themselves in that moment. Frontstage performances may change depending on one's environment or circumstances, such as the people they are performing in front of. For example, a bisexual person may be comfortable with revealing their sexual orientation in accordance with their social identity amongst certain individuals but may choose for this to remain a backstage performance when interacting with individuals who may not be so accepting.

It could be argued that straight-presenting relationships could be considered preferable for bisexual individuals, as such relationships do not deviate from heteronormative society to the physical eye in the way than non-straight presenting relationships do. However, potential accusations of inauthenticity then may come into view when an individual reveals their sexual identity to others, as the fluidity of bisexuality is not obviously shown when in straight-presenting relationships. A bisexual individual may also choose to keep their sexual orientation hidden from their social identity and therefore that aspect of themselves it may only appear in their backstage, often referred to as being closeted. For that reason, there is a sense of bisexual individuals needing to prove their sexual identities through having multiple relationships with multiple genders while in frontstage performance, however this in turn

demonstrates a poor understanding of bisexuality and how it can be presented in a truly authentic way without pressure to conform to what society expects of them. It is therefore suggestable that authentic bisexuality is perceptible depending on the individual observing that person's performance.

Furthermore, Goffman noted that the success of the presentation of self is a collaborative achievement, whereby face-to-face interaction has the power to control how other individuals perceive us (Smith, 2006). To quote, he conceptualised his theory of performative characters through the following extract:

“An individual does not . . . merely go about his business. He goes about constrained to sustain a viable image of himself in the eyes of others. Some local circumstances always reflect upon him, and since these circumstances will vary unexpectedly and constantly, footwork or rather self-work, will be continuously necessary.

(Goffman, 1971: 185).

In the context of heterosexual privilege, it could be suggested that being bisexual in a straight-presenting relationship – also referred to as ‘passing’ (Gupta, 2020; Moscovitz *et al.*, 2019; Seidman, 2004) – may be preferable due to heterosexuality being considered the most normalised and a “given” sexual orientation (Farvid, 2015). There is therefore a sense of security for these individuals to comfortably exist without assumptions being made or having to deal with stigma and bisexual burden if they aren't open about the nature of their sexuality. However, the problem therefore lies with people questioning the authenticity of this kind of performance, in addition to accusations of privilege. The same could be said for a bisexual individual in a homosexual-presenting relationship however with much less emphasis on the idea of privilege due to homosexuality being considered “lesser-than” to heterosexuality (Fobear & Baines, 2019). Problematically, it therefore may be difficult for bisexual people to exist as authentically as they are arguably pressured to be. Further, the stigma surrounding bisexuality may encourage an inauthentic performance in a bid to avoid biphobic comments.

*The relationship between sport, gender & sexuality: A historical sociological background.*

With Goffman's work providing theoretical explanations as to why bisexuality is so stigmatised, it is also important to consider the role of sport in social constructions and expectations of sexual identities. Both Goffman's theories and the foundations of modern sport may also provide insight into why there is such a huge lack of openly bisexual individuals competing at elite level. It is important to recognise that the LGBTQ+ community is still very much marginalised in sport and wider society despite the improvements in attitudes, decline of homophobia, and introduction of better legislation and policies that have come into fruition gradually across the last few decades, it is vital to consider that the institution of sport reproduces and promotes heteronormativity in order to gain understandings as to why the LGBTQ+ community has been and currently is still ostracised.

Comparative to the global phenomenon that it is now, sport held very little cultural value prior to the Industrial Revolution, particularly in Western society (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; McCormack *et al.*, 2021; Mrozek, 1983). This period of industrialisation evoked a rapid development in Western civilisation, but not only through the erection of factories and railways as it is popularly associated with. It was at this time that sport became a much more important aspect of everyday life, particularly in the cities and amongst the working class (Rigauer, 1981); moreover, it became a significant vehicle in the fabrication of masculine and feminine ideals, which would go on to shape and construct the gender order (Burton-Nelson, 1995; McCormack *et al.*, 2021; Messner, 2002; Pronger, 1990). It is thus imperative to understand that traditional societal roles of men and women significantly diverged at the time of the Industrial Revolution (Cancian, 1986; Griffin, 1998), with sport at the forefront of this social change.

The increase in vitality of organised sport in Western society parallels with the cultural transition from agriculture to industry, during which newly industrialised cities became densely populated. It is thought that due to denser populations, the concept of male homosexuality first came to be recognised as a reality as opposed to a myth (Spencer, 1995; McCormack & Anderson, 2014; McCormack *et al.*, 2021). Although it is understood that homosexual acts were not uncommon during the periods of the Ancient

Greeks and Romans (Halperin, 2012), the influence of religion in Western society – particularly Europe – resulted in homosexuality becoming more of a story rather than a reality or something that people would see day to day (Henshaw, 2014). Theoretically, if one considers the nature of a previously rurally populated society, same sex / gender relationships or sexual encounters between men would have been much less exposed or even frequented (Anderson, 2009). Therefore, homosexuality would have remained to exist as something that members of society would come to irrationally fear and oppress, with the desire to preserve heteronormativity being far more prevalent. Here again the existence of stigma is present, whereby the idea of homosexuality was considered a tarnished aspect of one's social identity. As people would gradually come to recognise the existence of male homosexuality as a genuine feature of the human experience, narrower norms and expectations of men, women and what it means to be masculine or feminine would begin to control the ways in which society operated. Gender regulation laws were introduced, and convictions carried out – perhaps the most famous being the sentencing of Oscar Wilde on the grounds of gross indecency (Cocks, 2003).

While the women at this time were expected to simply exist as domesticated housewives with little purpose other than to raise children and perform household tasks such as cleaning and cooking (White & Vagi, 1990; Brailsford, 1991), the lives of men revolved around their work, being breadwinners and financial support for their families. However, due to the absence of men in the home and in turn the lives of their children, it was feared that boys would be somewhat encouraged to mimic the behaviours and demeanours they would observe whilst spending more time with their mothers. Hand in hand with recognition of homosexuality, a period of cultural hysteria came into fruition due to the fear that boys were “going soft”. For boys to display what were considered effeminate behaviours, this was seen as synonymous as being gay (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). To a newly industrialised, highly religious, and heteronormative society, this was seen as unacceptable and in need of correcting, and so laws were introduced that would make same-sex acts between men illegal. In addition to new legislation, it was believed they needed to engage in some form activity that would encourage them to “toughen up” and deviate away from these connotations of homosexuality. Organised sport was thus brought forth into society as a masculinising institution for young boys and men to eliminate the

potential for them to appear effeminate (Anderson, 2005; Pascoe, 2003; Ricciardelli, McCabe & Ridge, 2006; White & Robinson, 2016). This form of socialisation would continue from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, where it is a normal occurrence for boys to be encouraged to play sport from young ages (Anderson & Adams, 2011; Bullingham, Magrath & Anderson, 2014; Latinen & Tiihonen, 1990; Mills, 1997; O'Donnell, Walters & Wardlow, 1998).

According to Rigauer (1981), organised sport was believed to provide middle- and upper-class boys with a new, character-building afterschool activity, and in doing so provided an environment in which they could learn the qualities expected of them when they became adults and, in turn, their family's sole financial source. These qualities included discipline and obedience, which were key at the time of societal industrialisation due to the main sources of work being in dangerous environments such as mines or factories, in addition to public services such as the police and military. It was thought that boys and men should exhibit tough personas through which they would assist in raising their masculine capital and distancing themselves from homosexuality (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). Such personas included the exhibition of behaviours that included violence, competitiveness, discipline, and homophobia (Anderson, 2002; Connell, 2008; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Mangan, 2000; Messner, 1992; Nauright & Chandler, 1996).

Over time, gendered ideals have persevered in conditioning present-day societal norms and values, and therefore contribute to the continued policing of heteronormative frontstage behaviours. Modernised sport being designed for white, cisgender, straight men subsequently and automatically excluded female participation in competitive settings, backed up accordingly with reasonings such as it being damaging for their fertility (Taylor, 2001). It was for this reason women were encouraged to partake in sports that were low impact, not associated with violence and therefore feminised. This again paints a clear picture of what little value women had at this time other than for childcare in addition household activities, whereby reproductive health was seen of more importance than recreational gratification (Parratt, 1999). Women's rights would come to improve drastically over time, including eventually being permitted to compete in the Olympics in 1920. However, despite clear and large improvements in



standards of gender equality in addition to LGBTQ+ rights, it is difficult to ignore that women and the LGBTQ+ community are still marginalised populations in the world today (Knoester & Allison, 2023).

*Sport & the LGBTQ+ community: 20<sup>th</sup> century – present day.*

Bisexual people in sport may be the key focus of this study, however it is also essential to explore and acknowledge the experiences of lesbian and gay (LG) athletes in this review of literature. One may question the necessity of it, as the bisexual experience – as noted prior – presents unique challenges, complexities and encounters that will not resemble those experienced by LG individuals, both in sport and out (Burlison, 2005; Ripley *et al.*, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). It is for that reason however that understanding the experiences of LG athletes throughout history is of use to identify how receptive sport was and is of different non-heteronormative identities. There have also been suggestions highlighting that biphobia and homophobia are closely linked yet very different entities (Anderson & White, 2018; Griffin, 2014).

*The gradual decriminalisation of homosexuality and its implications on sport climates.*

Before looking at the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and their initial navigations through the unaccommodating world of sport, it should be acknowledged that there are records of gay (and non-cisgender) athletes competing in sport prior to anti-gay laws being dropped in both the UK and the US. As previously stated, the UK was historically governed by religious teachings that contributed to the overriding opinion of homosexuality was a sin. Due to the importance of religion in previous centuries, this meant that homosexuality was made a criminal offence until years into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Private acts of homosexuality, specifically for men over the age of 21-years-old, were only decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967 – fifty-five years ago. This was later followed by Scotland in 1980, and Northern Ireland in 1982.

What is important to note here is that the law surrounding the legal acceptability of homosexuality was specifically directed towards male members of society, as according to online sources (see The Pink News, 2022), lesbianism has never officially been overtly criminalised. Rather, sexual encounters

between women were still regarded as indecent but perhaps less of a threat to the gender order than similar acts between men, thus again highlighting how the lives and doings of women were considered to have little impact on social structures. There were several attempts to legally prohibit lesbianism during the 1920s and 1930s, however these were unsuccessful based on beliefs that it was such a rare occurrence that needn't be advertised to the public (Morgan, 2020), in addition to thinking it would only promote female homosexuality and create more lesbians (The Pink News, 2022).

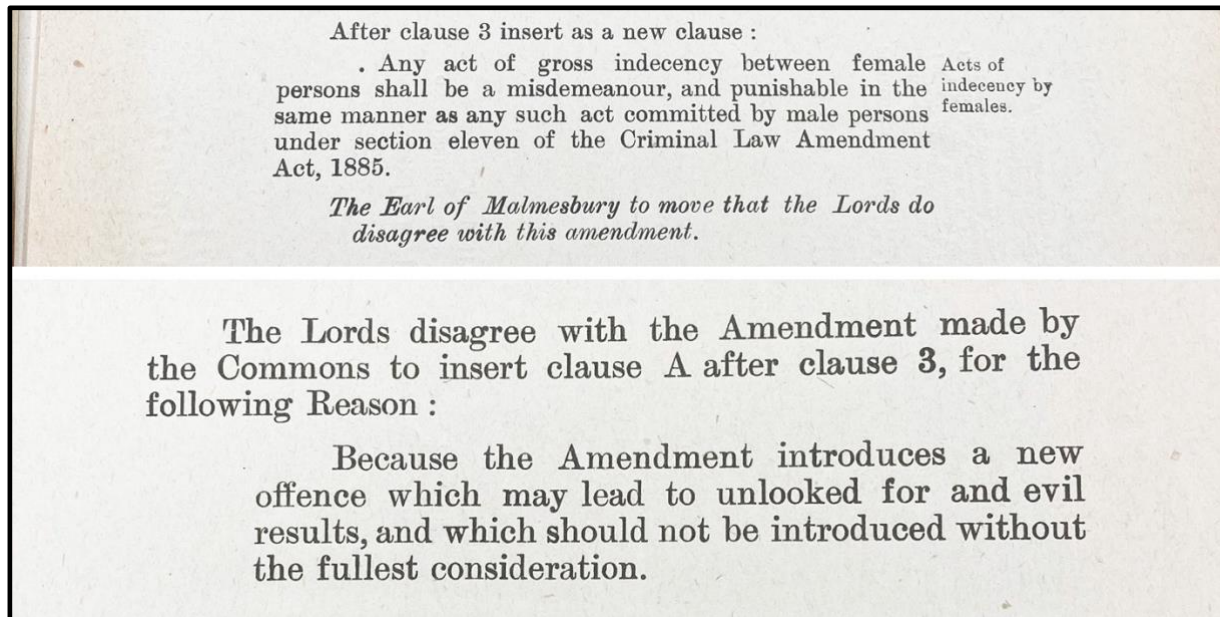


Image: the imposed clause by the Commons to criminalise sexual encounters between women, followed by the rejection from the Lords. Retrieved from The National Archives, retrieved 05.07.2023.

*“Suppose there were a prosecution, as there might be. In my judgment, the results would be even more appalling. It would be made public to thousands of people that there was this offence; that there was such a horror. It would be widely read. We know the sort of publicity that sort of thing gets, and it cannot be stopped.”*

Quotation taken from [https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1921/aug/15/commons-amendment-2#S5LV0043P0\\_19210815\\_HOL\\_107](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1921/aug/15/commons-amendment-2#S5LV0043P0_19210815_HOL_107) retrieved 05.07.2023

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw homosexuality conditionally legalised in the UK; however it was only decriminalised nationwide in the US in the year 2003 – just 20 years ago. Moreover, the official legalisation of same-sex marriage in the UK was not passed by England, Wales, and Scotland

until the year 2014, followed by every state in the US in 2015 (excl. Massachusetts in which the law was passed in 2004), and then Northern Ireland later in 2020. In the world today, as of March 2023, there are currently 64 countries that officially forbid homosexuality in all forms, and some of these countries deem acts of homosexuality punishable by the death penalty according to an article from the BBC (2023). Just 33 countries in the world recognise the validity of gay marriage. While there is an evident global trend when it comes to the decriminalisation of sexual acts between same-sex couples, many of the laws enforced by these countries adhere to cultural and religious beliefs that oppose the existence of the LGBTQ+ community. However, it should also be noted that countries that allow same-sex marriage also contain groups and subcultures in which phobic attitudes and behaviours towards the LGBTQ+ community are rife.

Here, it is important to recognise the role of intersectionality also affecting how groups such as the LGBTQ+ community are treated and perceived, thus linking again to Goffman's work on stigma. Sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion, and social class are some examples of sociological factors in which power relations exist, and as such exhibit historical, political, and social inequality (Cole, 2009). The aforementioned factors all fall into the differential segments of stigma theory (tribal/group, physical deformities, or blemishes of character) and therefore all these groups are subjected and attributed to negatively perceived meanings and stereotypes. Meanings or stereotypes that have been attributed to each separate intersectional aspect that contributes to an individual's social identity arguably become more specific when combined. For example, constructions of gender make an impact on how sexuality is perceived (Anderson, 2005). Certain cultures in certain countries do not accept or permit homosexuality based on religious teachings (Bartkowski & Read 2003; Norris & Ingleheart, 2011). Black women in sport are considered more masculine, hypersexualized and sexually undesirable than white women (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014). As such, it can be assumed that intersectionality plays a role when it comes to the experiences of bisexual people in sport. However, this remains a relatively unexplored area of academic research.

*Parallels between female and LGBTQ+ integration in sport.*

A clear result of gendered roles and subsequent norms has expanded to the extent of which masculine and feminine activities and appearances are considered important factors in establishing the gender and sexual identity of individual people (Connell, 1990, 1995; Messner, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Plummer, 1999; Pronger, 1990), but without much consideration for gender and sexual fluidity in proper relation to identity expression. For example, a masculine-presenting female is likely to be assumed to be a lesbian in the same way that a feminine-presenting male is to be assumed gay due to disrupting binary gender norms and crossing socially constructed boundaries (Herek, 2000; Krane, 2001; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Linking this concept to the world of sport, for a woman to participate in a physical activity may allude to their sexual preferences violating heteronormative societal standards, thus it was and still is common for sportswomen to be labelled “lesbian” (Caudwell, 1999; Griffin, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Lenskyj, 2013; Pronger, 1990; Sartore & Cunningham, 2010; Soler-Prat *et al.*, 2022). This is purely based on organised sport initially being designed and appropriated for boys and men only with the sole purpose of conditioning them to appear less effeminate.

The earliest record of a prominent LGBTQ+ sports figure is Bill Tilden, who was an openly gay tennis champion from the US, and the first American tennis player to win Wimbledon in the year 1920. Noteworthy names following Tilden include Polish runner Stella Walsh, American track and field athlete Babe Didrikson Zaharias, German high jumper Hermann (then Dora) Ratjen, and American runner Helen Stephens. All of these athletes competed as women in their respective sports in the earlier decades of the 20th century, however their appearances caused much controversy due to supposed connotations with masculinity. As such, Walsh and Ratjen were found to have ambiguous genitalia (Griffin, Carroll & Ziegler, 2012), and Zaharias and Stephens were both challenged for having masculine appearances. As an eventual outcome after identifying the existence of ambiguously gendered athletes, the IOC introduced mandatory sex testing for all female athletes in the year 1968, just one year after the decriminalisation of private acts of homosexuality in the UK. It is here that socially constructed controversies surrounding the LGBTQ+ community and sport really began to take shape, as not only did homosexual people face prejudices, but the acknowledgment of non-cisgender

individuals brought a new dynamic to the LGBTQ+ community's presence in sport, a dynamic that has retained much controversy to this day.

*Sport's use in construction of sexual hierarchies: Homophobia, biphobia & hegemony.*

Both gender and sexuality have acted and often still act as significant barriers when it comes to involvement in sport (Jarvie, 2017). Not only have athletes been rejected from sport for their bodies not complying with societal and eventual legislated standards of gender identification, but gay and lesbian athletes have also faced dismissal and discrimination for not adhering to sport's heteronormative ideals. Although this study's focus is the experiences of bisexual athletes and generalised bisexuality, there is much significance in exploring the literature that focuses on homophobia in sport.

Sport has traditionally operated under the guise of being a masculinising institution, a large part of which was to attempt in diminishing the possibility of them becoming gay. Therefore, the presence of misogynistic attitudes and homophobia have often been used to construct gender-normative performances amongst athletes (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). The 1980s, which is known for being a period of cultural homophobia (Anderson, 2009) due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Due to theories of the diseases being spread from gay men, sport's role in individual men distancing oneself from homosexuality became increasingly prevalent, similarly to when it was first institutionalised (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). However, it has also been claimed by many scholars that homophobia in sport has been in decline since the aforementioned homophobic attitudes in the 80s and 90s lessened (Anderson & White, 2018), with rates having dropped significantly since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anderson, 2005a, 2011a; Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Anderson & White, 2018; Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005).

Many academic studies that sought to examine gay men and lesbian women in sport have adopted a distinct focus on sport-specific displays of homophobia and how gay lesbian athletes navigate these environments and atmospheres (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Griffin, 1998; Hekma, 1998; Pronger, 1990).

Having previously discussed how organised sport was society's way of trying to rid itself of homosexuality, the foundations of homophobia in sport have been clearly laid out. Moving forwards, it is imperative to examine why homophobia has prevailed in sport much more significantly than other societal institutions. It is perhaps largely to do with male-dominated sports such as football (soccer), American football and rugby, which have previously been repeatedly described as bastions of homophobia (Anderson, 2005; Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990; Wolf-Wendel, Toma & Morpew, 2001). The homophobic culture in sports such as these is considered resultant from their undisguised bias towards men and the promotion of hypermasculine physiques, behaviours, and attitudes, which are key contributors in the construction of orthodox and hegemonic forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2008; McCormack, 2014).

On top of the construction of orthodox masculinity, sport has also aided in the fabrication of hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2005). Although the concept of hegemony draws upon Antonio Gramsci's neo-Marxist analysis of social class relations, it has been utilised in research into understanding other forms of power relations. The defining element of hegemony articulates 'the ongoing struggles involved in legitimising and normalising ruling ideologies to appear natural and sensible rather than forced and oppressive' (Molnar & Kelly, 2013: 95). Although Gramsci's work concerned how the ruling class legitimise their dominance over lower classes (Coakley & Pike, 2014), hegemony is considered very much applicable to patriarchal structures of sport and society (Anderson & White, 2018; Connell, 1987, 2005; English, 2017; MacDonald, 2014; Rowe, 1998). Sport is a domain in which dominant ideologies from political society (e.g. governing bodies and politicians) are conserved through negotiations of coercion and consent by civil society (e.g. sportspeople and fans) (Guilianotti, 2015), hence why sport is still considered to be ruled by white cisgender straight men. As such, it applies a 'king of the hill' mentality for men to assert their dominance against other men and to assist in the continuation of gendered and sexual hierarchies.

The traits and behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity include distancing oneself away from homosexuality, which is often done through repeated exhibitions of misogyny and homophobic attitudes (Adams, 2011; Adams *et al.*, 2010; Anderson, 2002, 2005a; Anderson & White, 2018). In

addition, men will seek to raise their masculine capital by displaying heteronormative, hypermasculine behaviours and characteristics (Anderson, 2005; Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010), including muscular physiques and competing in physically demanding competitive team sports (Connell, 1987, 2005; Messner, 2002). As such, this has developed into certain sports such as football, American football and rugby retaining certain stereotypes, such as being intrinsically homophobic environments. Alongside theories of hegemony, Goffman's theories of stigma and dramaturgical performances are also present here. Stigmatisation occurs through the concept of homosexuality being a tarnished aspect of one's social identity, and as a result, men perform certain behaviours that distanced their own identities from being tarnished. Despite their frontstage appearing this way, their backstage could look very different in contrast. It is known that men may perform homophobic behaviours or experience internalised homophobia as a way of coping with their sexual orientations not being heterosexual and not conforming to heteronormative societal order (Anderson, 2011b; Clarkson, 2006; Williamson, 2000). As such, such behaviours in their frontstage performances serve as a coping mechanism and a way for them to avoid stigmatisation whilst also contributing to their standings in gendered and sexual hierarchies.

For societal institutions to reflect the existence of gendered and sexual hierarchies between the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities is not uncommon (Connell, 2005; Herek, 2007), and sport is very much a key player in this phenomenon due to its reproductions and reinforcement of patriarchal structures and heteronormativity (Barber & Krane, 2005; Griffin, 1998; Messner, 2002; Messner & Solomon, 2007). Sport is a naturally competitive setting and is considered perhaps the most competitive out of all realms of modern society (Caudwell, 2003; Messner, 2000). However, competitiveness in sport is not just in terms of performance and event results. As such, the concept of hegemonic masculinity in particular highlights the existence of hierarchies, not only amongst men but all genders and sexual identities. With sport's lack of bivisibility taken into consideration, such hierarchies become even more prominent. Heterosexuality is esteemed above other sexual identities and relationship types in all realms of global society, such as entire cultures, religions, laws, and institutions (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016).

Efforts to dismantle patriarchal structures in addition to improving LGBTQ+ equality can be attributed to the notion of counter-hegemony or hegemonic resistance (Pringle, 2005), whereby power relations are contested by civil society following detachments and no longer consenting to ruling ideologies. Problematically, social power is not equally accessible from one individual to the next due to intersectional factors coming into play (Holub, 1992), therefore allowing for ruling ideologies to prevail. A key example of this in contemporary sport can be seen in the regulations in female classification for participation imposed by the IAAF (now World Athletics), whereby testosterone levels in females must be measured under a certain level in adherence to an ‘acceptable’ and ‘fair’ volume. Despite appeals against this invasive and non-inclusive form of gender classification and therefore participation suitability, the rule was instated based on testosterone providing significant performance advantages in female athletes according to World Athletics president Sebastian Coe (as seen in *The Telegraph*, 2019). This case demonstrates disproportionate power relations between women in sport and governing bodies, made clearer by rigid attitudes towards gender identity through reinforcements of biological determinism. As non-cisgender groups are included in the LGBTQ+ community, such as trans, gender non-conforming, DSD (differences in sex development – new terminology in replacement of intersexuality), and non-binary individuals, this case also highlights how sport continues to grant privilege to cisgender straight men above all other genders and sexualities.

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony can also be utilised in examining the power relations amongst sexual orientations. Previous research concerning sport, gender and sexuality has acknowledged many similarities between individualised LGBTQ+ groups in addition to each orientation having considerably varied experiences (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016). Therefore, despite being grouped under one homogenous acronym, it is argued that for each group to be visible, their experiences need to be acknowledged separately from each other (Soler-Prat *et al.*, 2002). Coming out is viewed to be uniquely different for bisexual and other plurisexual identities (Page, 2004) due to such problematic views and attitudes towards it causing the need for these individuals to defend themselves and their truths. As such, the discrimination, segregation, and stigmatisation of bisexual individuals, as well as the existence of bisexuality itself, has become a relatively common and somewhat expected normalisation of their



experiences (Herek, 2002; Mohr, Israel & Sedlacek, 2001). In turn, the existence of these stereotypes has subsequently manifested into displays of biphobia.

It may be difficult to comprehend, but research has shown that bisexual people have found to be ostracised within the LGBTQ+ community by those who reside within different orientations, such as lesbian women and gay men (Ochs, 1996). This is perplexing due to the LGBTQ+ community already being a collectively marginalised group in an extraordinarily heteronormative world. It is agreed that bisexuality and homosexuality are similar in that they threaten the reinforced heteronormative ideas of human existence (Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009), however misconceptions and lack of understanding have produced a largely negative social stigma that serves to scrutinise and challenge bisexuality as a legitimate sexual identity. As previously stated, the stigma surrounding bisexuality has produced and overtly negative outlook particularly in more conservative generations or communities, subsequently leading to the production of biphobic attitudes and behaviours comparable to homophobia.

#### *Bisexuality and sport.*

Research that has studied and examined the relationships between sexuality and gender tend to circulate around concepts and theories concerning masculinity and femininity. Moreover, they look at how behaviour and appearances in conjunction with one's gender also feed into associations with sexuality (Connell, 1990, 2005, Griffin, 1998; Messner, 1992, Pronger, 1990). These forms of study typically examine masculinity, femininity, and gender in sport relation to heterosexuality and homosexuality, and there have been far less if any studies looking at the same dynamics but with bisexuality. This could be for several reasons, such as the 'safety blanket' mentality whereby bisexual people are able to appear heterosexual (Burlison, 2005), and sexual fluidity in this specific sense is presented far more ambiguously based on a person's physical appearance alone. It is perhaps due to the apparent complex nature of bisexuality that makes it difficult for people to associate bisexuality with society's physical standards of masculinity and femininity. It could also be suggested that this becomes more complex when a person's gender is also androgynous. However, this is not to say that gender stereotypes in relation to heterosexuality and homosexual should be taken literally however, as sexuality is not defined

by appearance nor behaviour. In sporting environments for example, a woman engaging in a physically demanding, male dominated sport such as rugby is arguably as likely to be straight as she is to be bisexual, a lesbian or any other orientation.

The subsequent stigma of bisexuality indicates much dismissal of its legitimacy. This forms further narrow perceptions of human sexuality being comprised of a sexual binary: straight or gay. This is reinforced by comments such as “pick a side” or “stepping stone phase” that have been recorded in previous research. To elaborate, Anderson (2008) has shown that perceptions of human sexuality commonly adopt a polarised ‘one or the other’ mentality, whereby heterosexuality and homosexuality are acknowledged, and other identities are erased – hence the existence of bierasure. More specifically, Anderson and Adams (2011) discuss the existence of ‘the one-time rule of sexuality’, which references how the hypermasculine culture embedded in men’s team sports feeds into a narrative of one same-sex sexual experience confirming homosexuality (Pronger, 1990). Therefore, it can be argued that human sexuality is believed to be less complex in this instance; it is considered a black-and-white phenomenon in which a person is either straight or gay depending on the gender of their sexual partner(s) (Anderson, 2008). Therefore, and with reference to Goffman’s theory of stigma, fluidity is often discredited and met with biphobic comments and stigmatisation as a result.

Studies concerning homosexuality, homophobia and heteronormativity in sport have become increasingly saturated. Over time, they have produced arguments and important insights through the analysis of sociological processes. Bisexuality in sport, however, remains to be a relatively unknown aspect of human experience, meaning that sport can be argued to be a large facilitator of bierasure. As such, there is a significant difference in the noted number of openly bisexual elite athletes in comparison to those who identify as gay or lesbian, which translates into bisexuality having few opportunities for representation. This is where we can see a cycle of problems come into view, whereby bisexuality is virtually non-existent in sport, and due to the sheer level of underrepresentation in this field, it can be argued that non-elite bisexual athletes and people are not able to see themselves and their identity accurately or positively (Alarie & Gaudet, 2013; Berbarry & Guzman, 2018; Epstein, 2014; Pallotta-

Chiarolli, 2011, 2014). This concept is not exclusive to sport either; rather, it encompasses all societal institutions, cultures, and discourses.

Heteronormativity is a deep-rooted ideology that has become complexly intertwined with sociological processes across the world, defined through the idea of cisgender heterosexuality being coherent, organised, and privileged (Berlant & Warner, 1998). In other terms, it is considered the norm for human individuals to be romantically and sexually attracted to members of the ‘opposite sex’. Heteronormativity has existed for an unprecedented amount of time despite acknowledgements of homosexuality and other orientations, as it is strongly linked to religious teachings all the way back to creation – for example, Christianity and the formation of Adam and Eve as the first humans, who were designed for each other. Religion itself has been found to be a significant intersectional factor when it comes to identity, due to the politics associated with various religions having an anti-LGBTQ+ stance. It is perhaps a reasonable explanation as to why bisexuality in sport is so uncommon, due to the concept that there could be multiple bisexual individuals remaining closeted due to their religion and that religion’s culture and politics. This is not unreasonable, as there are countries heavily governed by religious ideologies that send people to their deaths on the grounds of being gay. One could suggest that due to the fluidity of bisexuality, bisexual individuals are able to hide in plain sight in such places.

#### *Bisexuality in the media.*

Sport media has been known to reproduce idealised, orthodox forms of masculinity for male athletes (Vincent & Crossman, 2008) in addition to sexualising female athletes in adherence to traditionalised, misogynistic, sexualised standards of femininity (Trolan, 2013; Vincent, 2004). In turn, this has previously contributed to poor standards media framing of LGBTQ+ athletes; however, within the last couple of decades, general media coverage of gay athletes has seen significant improvements (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; McDonald & Eagles, 2012). It is also acknowledged that there remains to be a lack of media reporting on bisexual athletes despite claims of increasingly positive attitudes towards bisexuality in Western societies (Anderson & McCormack, 2016a). Of course, this is primarily down to there being very few openly bisexual athletes in elite sport in comparison to openly gay and

lesbian athletes, however there has been an increase in bisexual athletes coming out throughout the last 10 years.

In their study of perspectives on bisexuality amongst team sports athletes, Anderson & Adams (2011) identified that accepting attitudes towards bisexuality appear to be linked to the acceptance of homosexuality. They interviewed sixty football players between the ages of 18 to 22 from three separate universities and the results delivered several key themes: declining homophobia leads to decreased biphobia, complex understandings of bisexuality, and some semblance of bisexual myths being present in the athletes' perceptions. When examining complex understandings of bisexuality, it was noted that sexuality could be broken down into (at least) three constituents: identity, orientation, and behaviour, which further implies a rejection of the concept of a sexual binary. As such their attitudes towards sexual minorities appeared positive and inclusive. As such, this finding exemplifies inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2009), which places emphasis on more positive attitudes from straight men towards gay men, in addition to adopting certain behaviours that have previously been thought to be associated with homosexuality. Further, Anderson (2011a) conceptualises inclusive masculinity as a form of undoing homophobia, and in turn challenging hegemonic forms of masculinity.

A lack of visibility and representation of bisexuality is a direct result of social erasure comparative to the actual global population of bisexual people (Yoshino, 2000). Despite this, it appears that apparent improvements in attitudes towards sexual minorities and the proposed growing acceptance is not enough for more individuals to come out. Statistically, it is unlikely that there are not any bisexual elite athletes left in the world to come out, however it remains to be seen exactly why bivisibility in sport is so minimal. While enormous amounts of media and academic attention have traditionally been directed towards homophobia towards lesbian women and gay men, both in sport and broader society, there have been and continue to be far less that have investigated the nature of biphobia and the behaviours associated with it. However, these are too little on contrast to studying concerning homophobia despite exhibiting correlative patterns. As such, there is a small selection of studies (e.g. Anderson & Adams, 2011; Morris, McCormack & Anderson, 2014) that imply that the same change in attitudes shown by the media for gay athletes now extends to more positive and inclusive attitudes towards bisexuality.

For the purpose of this study, the ways that the media frames bisexual people in sport are of particular interest. It is understood that the media, particularly mainstream news outlets, have been significantly involved in the facilitation of traditional masculine ideals and standards (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; Nylund, 2004; Vincent & Crossman, 2008) in addition to the sexualisation of and misogynistic attitudes towards female athletes (Cooky *et al.*, 2013; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Kane *et al.*, 2013). Despite this however, research that has examined how the media has framed openly gay male athletes has shown an overall fundamentally positive outlook (Cleland, 2014; House, Jarvis & Burdsey, 2021; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kian *et al.*, 2015; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; McDonald & Eagles, 2012), while the examination of media attitudes towards lesbian athletes coming out requires further research to form a comparison (Bullingham & Postlethwaite, 2019).

Moreover, the erasure of bisexual sportspeople in the print media is considered a prominent issue. It has been suggested that media attention can influence how bisexuality is perceived in society (House, Jarvis & Burdsey, 2021) whereby stories of bisexual individuals and their experiences provide more education and more insights about what it means to be bisexual, in addition to what it means to be bisexual in sport. However, it should be considered that media narratives are entirely constructed by the reporters and authors themselves in accordance with the desired messages they wish to convey (Scheufele, 1999). As such, a review of current available media stories about bisexual sportspeople or generalised presence of bisexuality in sport settings, can be argued to require far more attention to understand the extent of bivisibility in sport.

## **Methodology.**

### *Qualitative methods.*

Qualitative research allows us to examine a huge variety of social phenomena and how they are or can be affiliated with the subjects being studied (Avis, 2005). As past research on the topic of bisexuality is scarce, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate for this research project, as qualitative research can better examine the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a specific topic, experience, or opinion (Jones & Gratton, 2014). Scholars such as Mertens (2005) and Avis (2005) stress that reality is socially structured and is thus subjectively viewed from person to person. This assertion promotes the idea that lived experiences, such as the ones investigated and analysed in the research process of this project, cannot be measured quantitatively. Each singular experience, regardless of similarities to others, presents differently and is relative to every individual (Veal, 2017), therefore cannot be represented or understood in more detail by quantitative data. Rather, data formed by opinions, attitudes and occurrences can be interpreted, providing a gateway into understanding, and developing concepts and theories drawn from past research and findings.

In adherence to the concept of reality being socially constructed, we assign meanings to things and interpret them in ways that make the most sense with the evidence we have available to us to make sense of the world around us. We acquire knowledge, and that becomes our reality (Towner, 2011). However, it is important to consider that not everyone will attain the same level, depth or even field of knowledge, and that there are many sociological factors that affect how one constructs their own reality and views of the world (Ültanir, 2012). As such, the goals of this study reside within the interpretivist paradigm whereby it seeks to explore a topic rather than to prove a theory (Jones & Gratton, 2014) or produce generalised statistical figures (Williams, 2007). As qualitative research often produces richer data from often examining perceptions and opinions of participants (Creswell, 2009; Thanh & Thanh, 2015), an interpretivist stance is predominantly used when making sense of such data as it supports the idea of reality being complex and socially constructed (Thomas, 2003; Willis, 2007). Interpretivist studies do not generally begin with a theory or assumptions of what the data might produce;

alternatively, theories and explanations are drawn from the emergence of patterns found within the collected data (Creswell, 2009; Williams, 2007).

In this instance, the data collection and analysis process have been carried out with intent to provide an insight into what it means to be bisexual in the world of sport, which is arguably a complex reality. This very notion is evidenced by a lack of previous research in this subject area in addition to the existence of bias, stigma, intersectional factors, and the social and political dynamics between each subgroup within the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, it can be suggested that sport may amplify the aforementioned issues based on previous research of a similar subject such as the experiences of gay men and lesbian sportspeople. As such, the notion of bisexuality as a complex reality presents an opportunity to explore and interpret the ways in which the mainstream and LGBTQ+ specialist media constructs narratives of bisexuality in sport, particularly through choices of carefully selected quotations, and the discourse evidenced through the ways in which each article has been written.

#### *Research design.*

This project took the form of a content analysis of mainstream and LGBTQ+ specialist media articles and blogposts covering stories of bisexual individuals in sport settings. Originally, the intention of this study was for it to be undertaken in the form of semi-structured participant interviews to answer a different research question focusing on the lived experiences of bisexual individuals in sport settings. However, there were several challenges faced in the process of acquiring willing participants from the population of interest, the main one being a lack of responses despite advertisements posted and shared via social media. The original advertisement in question was even shared by Stonewall UK, which would have theoretically attracted willing candidates for interviewing; however, only two respondents came forward following this. Additionally, at the time of the recruitment process, the UK was nearing the end of nationwide lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of everyday life, the pandemic caused much disruption for participant recruitment and data collection processes (Parker *et al.*, 2022), and researchers had no choice but to adapt quickly to different and innovative ways of carrying out their research online (Roberts, Paklavis & Richards, 2021). One barrier that became

evident for this study's original intentions was that of recruitment and being able to reach the desired population. Although the advert was shared on social media, which has the potential to provide a wide range of wider geographical reach (Darko, Kleib & Olson, 2022), only 4 respondents came forward, and just 2 interviews were carried out. As such, due to time constraints, it was decided that this study should take a different form and for the aims to be changed accordingly. While the original study design would have offered arguably more detailed results and deeper insights into the current treatment of bisexual individuals in sport, this does not discount the findings that the new study design produced, as either design would contribute to a subject that remains relatively unexplored.

Content analysis has previously been used in academia to analyse and explore a variety of texts, from visual forms such as newspapers and autobiographies to visual forms such as television shows or films. Similar forms of study have been conducted previously in the region of sport sociology. These include examples such as Kian and Anderson (2009), Knight & Guiliano (2001), Magrath, Cleland & Anderson (2017), Ogilvie and McCormack (2019) and Vincent & Crossman (2008), all of which looked at the ways in which the print media frames gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Jones & Gratton (2014) describe a typical content analysis involving a researcher using selected textual resources to determine and interpret meanings of certain words and concepts within them. As such, a research design such as this is can be content or hypothesis driven, whereby it is either exploratory or confirmatory (Mackieson, Shlonsky & Connolly, 2018). In accordance with the research aims being investigative of the subject matter, the data collection and analysis process were driven by an exploratory and interpretive stance, as no hypotheses were made prior to engaging in the research.

There are several approaches to content analysis, the stance of which may be determined by whether the research is driven by a hypothesis, or the content being analysed. As this study is exploratory, a social constructivist approach was used. This form of analysis focuses on how reality comes to be constituted in human interactions and in language, including written texts (such as news articles and blogposts) and the discourses found within them (Gergen, 1985). This differs from ordinary discourse analysis as it seeks meanings beyond how different phenomena and experiences are represented, such as looking at specific words, phrases, portrayals, and descriptions (Krippendorff, 2018).



Despite acknowledgements of subjectivity being present in this study, a constructivist epistemology contrasts to a subjectivist epistemology due to differences in accumulative definitions that form the ways in which humans understand the world. The concept of knowledge itself is very much a human construction. To make sense of something, we as humans build upon our own subjective analysis of what we see to understand it; in other words, we create psychological realities. Such realities are argued to be shaped and affected by things such as culture, language, and social interactions (Young & Colin, 2004). Furthermore, our experiences become our way of understanding the world and how we define phenomena, meaning that there is no one truth in anything as different experiences for different individuals produce different definitions, values, and explanations.

#### *Considerations for potential bias.*

One consideration to account for when conducting content analysis-based research is the position of the researcher themselves as inherently subjective (Jones & Gratton, 2014). Analysing any form of content (in this case, text) involves the researcher deciphering meanings from what has been observed or written. This in turn risks misinterpretation (Kaptchuk, 2003) in addition to the potential of bias on the researcher's part based on experiences or knowledge of the subject they are investigating. Such a form of bias can affect one's choice of content to include in their analysis to suit their desired argument or narrative. There was also my position as the researcher to consider, whereby being a white cis woman that identifies as bisexual and in a straight-presenting relationship had the potential to shape my views when it came to analysing each text and forming a narrative for results. Having personally experienced aspects of bisexual burden both in and outside of sporting environments, there is arguably a risk of expressing relative empathy towards the stories being told in the media content.

To combat the risk of bias in any form of qualitative research, it is suggested that the researcher implements reflexivity into their strategy (Mackieson, Shlonsky & Connolly, 2018). Reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of self and potential influence on the study's outcomes (Probst & Berenson, 2014), in addition to continuous reflection processes during the collection and analysis of data (Fischer, 2009). Furthermore, reflexivity is often considered vital in qualitative research in cases

where one's interpretations of findings shape conclusions – such as this study. For many content analysis studies, the use of triangulation in which multiple researchers will review the same sources, make notes, and then compare is commonly implemented to further reduce bias and increase validity (Noble & Heale, 2019; Webb *et al.*, 2012), however this was not possible in this case. Similarly, had human participants been involved in this process, the data they provided would have been available for them to review or adjust anything that the researcher had perhaps misinterpreted, a process known as Informant Feedback (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller & Neumann, 2011; Thomas, 2017; McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedhal, 2019).

Following this, processes of reflexivity were implemented to diminish aspects of bias from the analysis. This required the researcher to consider their position of investment in the subject matter, whereby one's own negative experiences should not lead the discussion. Rather, considerations for the researcher's role in constructing conclusions should be taken (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017). In this case, myself as a bisexual person conducting this study may be seen as a form of justification and bias towards how I perceive and subsequently conclude how the media constructs narratives of bisexuality in sport. Despite this however, the content of each article differed hugely from my personal experiences. Therefore, while I was able to relate to some of the quotations from athletes that had been included in each media piece, their realities differed to mine in many ways. To address potential of bias for my position as the researcher, the use of non-emotive language was imperative as to not convey strong emotional responses to certain topics that have affected my own personal experiences as a bisexual person. Moreover, the project's supervisory team were able to advise on making any changes to the style of writing and the language used during the write-up process to avoid this.

#### *Data collection methods and sampling.*

A total of 44 articles and blogposts were explored and analysed for this research project, sourced through a range of different media resources and internet searches. The sample was conducted using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling further along in the process. A purposive sampling strategy is often used in qualitative research as it consists of a non-random and intentional selection

process where the sample is made up of, for example, specific participants based on their experiences in a relevant field (Bernard, 2002). Moreover, they are often selected on the assumption of having different views on the topics being discussed (Mason, 2002; Robinson, 2014).

In the case of this study, each text was assessed and screened for relevant content in relation to the research aims before being selected – much in the same way as living participants would be. As such, there were no strict criteria in mind for the articles; only that they needed to focus on an aspect of bisexuality in sport, such as a specific athlete's coming out story, or LGBTQ campaigns and initiatives to name some possibilities. In addition, it was considered useful for each article to contain some form of interview format with the athlete subject matter, whereby direct quotes from the athletes themselves could be used as the primary source of understanding the media's narratives of bisexuality. Not having overly specific criteria also allowed for a broad search into bisexuality in sports media, which links back to one of the aims of this study whereby representation and media attitudes were to be explored.

It was important for the articles and blogposts to be sourced from both LGBTQ+ specialist and mainstream sources as there was potential for a difference in attitudes in the writings from both sides. As such, 30 of the articles / blogposts were sourced from various LGBTQ+ specialist online media sources such as *Outsports*, *The Pink News*, *Advocate*, *Attitude*, *LGBTQ Nation*, *Sports Media LGBT*, and *The Gay Times*; the remaining 14 articles / blogposts were collected from mainstream online media sources consisting of *The Guardian*, *The BBC*, *Sky Sports*, *The Mirror*, *Daily Mail*, *The New York Times*, *ESPN*, and *Haaretz* (an Israeli news organisation). A full list of the articles can be viewed in Appendix 1. Each text was sourced via at least one of the following search terms: bisexual sport; bisexuality in sport; sport bisexuality; bisexual sports athletes; football bisexual; bisexuality in football; bisexual sport coming out; sport bisexuality, bisexual coming out sport. In the interest of adhering to the study's aims where media representation was concerned, it was important for there not to be a huge limit on the number of desired articles to be included. Subsequently, the sampling process revealed that after a certain number of texts had been acquired, it became gradually more difficult to find articles on the subject matter, particularly ones that differed from each other and did not cover the same stories nor contain the same tailored quotations from the athletes. This would later become a topic for

discussion post-analysis. Noticeably, more texts were sourced from specialist media outlets in comparison to mainstream media outlets, which suggests a discrepancy between how bisexuality is perceived in terms of significance in specialist and mainstream media, in addition to how accessible such articles are to the general non-LGBTQ+ public. This is also drawn upon in more detail in the discussion section.

Some articles were also sourced through snowball sampling, whereby similar and relevant articles were identified through online links on the same webpages as articles sourced directly from keywords in search engines. Although snowball sampling in research methods has been previously criticised for limitations such as selection bias (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019), such criticisms were not relevant in this case. Selection bias is considerably more likely in qualitative research studies that involve human participation (Noy, 2008; Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019), whereas the sample was able to be assembled before being analysed to construct further discussions later. This was completed following the identification of potentially relevant texts, whereby all were screened for their relevance in accordance with the project aims and were read in full prior to inclusion selection.

These articles covered the coming out stories and experiences of 31 named athletes, 1 anonymous athlete, and 1 fan. All athletes were / are from different levels of different sports ranging from elite to grassroots. Multiple articles covered the same athletes, some of which published similar content; others covered a variety of issues and topics including their coming out experiences, campaign work, and sport legislation for anti-LGBTQ+ behaviour, language, and actions. This arguably exemplifies the state of bivisibility in sport due to a lack of openly bisexual athletes and therefore media attention being on the same individuals.

It was beneficial for a variety of sports to be covered where possible due to the previously discussed gendered stereotypes associated with different sports, in addition to exploring the state of bierasure in sport overall. It would allow the data collection and analysis some further depth for discussion in relation to past research studies of similar standpoints. As such, the total number of sports that these media pieces covered was 17, ranging from traditionally masculinised sports such as (association)

football, American football, and rugby, to more feminised sports such as figure skating, diving, and gymnastics (Pfister, 2010).

### *Analysis.*

This study had two main purposes: to identify and examine the experiences of bisexual individuals in sport, and to gauge an understanding as to how bisexuality is framed by different media forms. To best adhere to these aims, data was analysed using a thematic format to make sense of the data. Thematic analysis is a tool that has been used frequently in qualitative research across all fields of study and has been credited for its flexibility in accordance with theoretical frameworks and research designs (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Terry *et al.*, 2017). The process of analysing data thematically allows for the yielding of patterns which in turn allows a researcher to make sense of and construct discussions from said data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Furthermore, the flexibility of thematic analysis also allows for a broader range of data to be explored. Despite arguments that this can also be considered a disadvantage based on there being too much data to explore and causing overwhelm for the researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2017), following the clear aims of this project allowed for irrelevant content in each text to be ignored.

During the first stage of analysis, a sentence-by-sentence examination of sources was conducted, from which various codes emerged identifying features of being bisexual, and the different experiences written about in each source. Said features included areas of significance such as bisexual burden, mental health, intersectional factors such as race and religion, the role of gender in accordance with sexuality, and sport as a setting for sexual minorities. Following this, initial thoughts of the researcher were written down with intent for them to prompt in-depth discussion later. These initial thoughts were arguably emotive in comparison to what would be used in the final discussion; thus it was important for the researcher to be able to rationalise those thoughts into concrete interpretations that could be linked to previous research or identified as new, emergent knowledge of the subject. An initial example of this process of analysis can be seen in Appendix 2. Codes were then organised into relevant categories and put into overarching themes after identifying similar patterns in each text. The frequency of appearances for each category was recorded, as higher numbers may signify higher value (Jones &

Gratton, 2014). As such, less frequent experiences are also considered important as they may offer a form of enlightenment to a specific issue or topic (Krane *et al.*, 1997) and so would be included within the different subcategories where appropriate. The overarching themes and their subcategories were decided and organised by their significance and relation to each other. For example, there were many elements of biphobia and bisexual burden mentioned throughout all 44 texts, therefore that became an overarching theme with the individual elements, such as stigmatisation / stereotypes and prejudice from the LGBTQ+ community, then being able to be discussed individually in their subcategories. This process of analysis was a strenuous task that took several months to complete, due to the sheer amount of emergent data that required much interpretation from a general and theoretical standpoint.

As shown in Table 1, there is a huge difference in the number of sports covered by mainstream media in comparison to the specialist sources, made possible through ease of access via internet searches. Many of the sports covered by the specialist media outlets consist of low-profile sports and report on low-profile, non-elite athletes such as individuals competing at collegiate levels. Moreover, this again highlights how stories about bisexual individuals in sport coming out are perhaps harder to find due to being covered by non-mainstream outlets but are equally easier to find when looking in the right places. Of course, there are likely to be more than 44 articles and blogposts that specifically report on bisexuality in sport, however the ones included in this sample are arguably the most accessible. Some required more specific search engines than others and could therefore be considered less accessible.

The selection of articles gave accounts for 31 named athletes, 1 anonymous athlete, and 1 fan.

*Table 1: the sports covered in the sample texts, comparison between mainstream and specialist.*

<b>Sports covered by mainstream media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Sports covered by LGBTQ+ specialist media</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Football	5	Wrestling	6
NFL / American football	4	Football	4
Rugby	1	NFL / American football	4

Swimming	1	Rugby	3
Ice hockey	1	Figure skating	2
Basketball	1	Skiing	1
Diving	1	MMA	1
		Basketball	2
		Swimming	1
		Dance	1
		Rowing	2
		Gymnastics	1
		Taekwondo	1
		Ice Hockey	1
		Athletics	1
		Volleyball	1

*Table 2: the number of texts covering each bisexual individual mentioned within the sample.*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Total occurrences in articles</b>	<b>Sport</b>
Ryan Russell	6	American football
Jahmal Howlett-Mundle	3	Football
Levi Davis	3	Rugby
Jack Dunne	2	Rugby
Harry Needs	2	Swimming
Zach Sullivan	3	Ice Hockey
Anthony Bowens	2	Wrestling
O'Shay Edwards	1	Wrestling
Toni Storm	1	Wrestling
Russell Rogue	1	Wrestling
Jared Evans	1	Wrestling

Keita Murray	1	Wrestling
Sam Clarke	1	Football / wrestling
Richarlyson	1	Football
Luke Turner	1	Football
Andrew Ford	1	Football
Anonymous	1	Football
Regan Gascoigne	1	Football / dance
Luke Strong	1	Gymnastics
Karina Manta	1	Figure skating
Amber Glenn	1	Figure skating
Breezy Johnson	1	Skiing
Bri Tollie	2	Basketball
Gili Mosinzon	1	Basketball
Maarten Hurkmans	1	Rowing
Jack Woolley	1	Taekwondo
Haleigh Washington	1	Volleyball
Kaitlyn Long	1	Track & field
Conner Mertens	1	American football
Tom Daley	1	Diving
Jeff Molina	1	UFC / MMA
Megan Duthart	1	Rowing
Jack Storrs	1	American football



## **Results and discussion.**

All 44 articles and blogposts - regardless of type and / or being mainstream or specialist publications - covered or mentioned coming out stories in differing levels of detail. A total of 4 subject areas were compiled from overarching topics covered in the 44 texts: (1) bisexual burden; (2) bvisibility; (3) mental health; (4) intersectionality; and (5) sporting environments. There is arguably a degree of overlap between these distinct thematical groups and in turn the subthemes found within them; however, they are also able to be examined as individual factors, which will contribute to helping to fulfil the research questions and aims. The use of quotations in this results section have been taken from the authors' writings in addition to their own use of quotes from the athletes', their peers, and coaches etc. As such, it is important to note the quotes the authors have included in the texts will have been carefully selected to suit a narrative (Duncan & Messner, 2002; Messner & Soloman, 1993). This is turn will adhere to the analysis of the media's framing of issues surrounding bisexuality in sport.

The analysis generated a broad outlook into the experiences of being bisexual in sport, with some of the texts in the sample diving deeper into the stories than others. Alongside presenting the results from the textual analysis, this section aims to unpick the experiences of each bisexual individual whose stories were included within the sample in greater detail, and in turn link each experience to the theoretical lenses that were included in the review of literature. Moreover, the way each theme has been constructed with the assistance of the media's framing will also be discussed.

### 1. Bisexual burden and biphobia.

#### *Distinguishing biphobia from homophobia.*

As previously noted, the notion of bisexual burden is defined by the many unique challenges and problems faced by bisexual people in their day-to-day lives, specifically beyond what is also experienced by gay men and lesbian women (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016; Barker et al., 2012; Burlson, 2005; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; Ripley *et al.*, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). As such, a significant issue that appeared throughout the texts was that of homophobia and

biphobia being used interchangeably, or with homophobia being an umbrella term for all anti-LGBTQ+ language and behaviours. The use of the term ‘homophobia’ was used by both authors and athletes to define phobic language and behaviours used towards them; however it should be debated as to whether that is a more accurate term than ‘biphobia’ when considering the sexual identities of the people such acts were aimed towards. For the purpose of this study, these incidents will be referred to as biphobic due to being aimed at individuals that identify as bisexual; the issue of distinguishing between the two terms will be examined in more depth below.

For semi-professional footballer Jahmal Howlett-Mundle, who came out as bisexual in 2021, the media’s framing of his experience of biphobia appeared to manifest as homophobic. It was stated that another player on the opposing team **“committed a late tackle on Mr Howlett-Mundle and verbally abused him”** (BBC, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2021). According to a piece in *The Athletic* (2022), the prosecution verified the verbal abuse in question, where the player said, “shut up you gay pussy,” in response to an innocent comment from Howlett-Mundle. Following the incident, Howlett-Mundle’s club Sheppey United released a statement following the incident in which they strongly condemned homophobic abuse and said there was **"no place for it in our game or society as a whole"**.

It could be suggested that homophobia may extend to bisexual individuals in some instances. Arguably, the difference between the biphobia and homophobia is dependent of the type of prejudice towards an individual in relation to their romantic or sexual interests and can also be constructed by the stereotypes and stigma associated with either sexual orientation. For example, an act of homophobia could be directed towards someone if their physical appearance was seen to deviate away from socially constructed expectations and appropriations of their gender (Anderson, 2005; White & Robinson, 2016), or if someone felt insulted or offended by exclusively same-gender relationships. However, the issue when it comes to distinguishing whether something is inherently homophobic or biphobic can be complex and arguably subjective to the individual on the receiving end, dependent on the language used, any physical variables considered offensive – such as body language of the perpetrator, and the context in which the incident happens (Denison *et al.*, 2021). In this case, it could be argued that this was an act of homophobia due to the language being used, specifically the word phrase “gay pussy”;

however it could also be argued to be biphobic due to being directed at Howlett-Mundle who identifies as bisexual. Alternatively, it could be that the perpetrator may not have understood the difference between bisexuality and homosexuality, or that homosexuality was an umbrella term for all non-straight sexualities. The question remains to whether the comment was made due to Howlett-Mundle's comment about the tackle potentially being considered a sign of weakness and therefore relating to ideas of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2005; Messner, 1992), or if it was aimed at his identity as a bisexual man but targeting the same-sex attraction aspect of his orientation.

As such, out of all 45 articles, a display of biphobic behaviour towards Jahmal Howlett-Mundle was the only specific and high-profile incident to have been reported on; other incidents of biphobia were far vaguer and did not include legal action. This paints a complex picture when referring to literature findings in addition to the findings of this content analysis. On one hand, it demonstrates that despite significant improvements towards the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in sport, they are still marginalised and discriminated against. Moreover, the incident was described using the term 'homophobic', meaning it may not be seen as biphobic. However, the incident in question appears to be an isolated incident of what could be considered a manifestation of biphobia in sport (as it occurred after Howlett-Mundle's coming out announcement) and this can be seen to be a positive sign.

Assuming that the term 'homophobia' is used as a way of describing prejudiced attitudes towards the same-sex attraction aspect of bisexuality, there could be an argument to suggest that media framing is assisting in this portrayal. An Outsports post covering the story of bisexual college American footballer Conner Mertens by Cyd Zeigler (28<sup>th</sup> January 2014), included the following: **Despite being a successful football player, he feared losing his friends and teammates if he talked about his homosexual tendencies.** Due to it not being a direct quote from Mertens himself, it is of interest as to why this was phrased this way by Zeigler. Zeigler himself identifies as gay, and therefore this could present more insight into how bisexual people are perceived by other members of the LGBTQ+ community. As such, describing the same-sex attraction aspect of Mertens' sexuality as 'homosexual tendencies' raises questions as to how Zeigler views bisexuality with regards to legitimacy, in addition to contributing to the concept of a sexuality spectrum by essentially describing Mertens' as straight with the tendency to

be fluid. However, this would be a bold assumption on what could be considered an ambiguous phrasing as there is no real elaboration on the topic of conflating homosexuality with bisexual. It is also important to acknowledge that taking Ziegler's sexuality into consideration does not mean that he shares in prejudiced views towards bisexuality.

In a separate online article from Sky Sports (23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021) covering Jahmal Howlett-Mundle's coming out journey, the incident was touched upon again with reporter Jon Holmes who wrote: **"...homophobia often goes unreported at this level, in large part because few feel confident enough to state they have found the language offensive."** The language used here suggests there is awareness of anti-LGBTQ+ behaviours in sport, but the true extent of these behaviours is unclear. There are also connotations of how the term homophobia may be used as an umbrella term for all anti-LGBTQ+ behaviour. Reading further into this statement, one may question how much support there must be for the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in lower-level sport, if they do have little confidence to report it. This is a poignant issue considering statements that suggest homophobia in sport is in decline and that such environments are for more accepting.

Assuming that there is in fact still a significant problem with homophobia in sport, especially in performance levels that are lower than top level elite, bisexual athletes may perhaps find this even more challenging to articulate due to poor understandings in distinguishing the two terms. Moreover, it is perhaps the side of biphobia that focuses on the dislike of someone's choices to engage in same-sex relationships that confuses the two terms, as most people associate same-sex relationships with homosexuality rather than any form of plurisexuality (Yost & Thomas, 2012).

In continuation in focus of other incidents of biphobia that also appear to be conflated with homophobia by the media included an interview in The Mirror (24<sup>th</sup> June 2022) with former Brazil international, Richarlyson. Samuel Meade of The Mirror opens the article with **"Former Brazil star Richarlyson opened up about being bisexual as he lamented attitudes towards homosexuality."** Further through the article, a direct quote from Richarlyson reads, **"I've dated a man, I've dated a woman ... It's going to paint a headline that Richarlyson talked about on a podcast that he's bisexual. Nice. And then**

**it will rain with reports, and most importantly, which is the agenda, it will not change, which is the issue of homophobia.”** Both the author’s phrasing and the direct quote from Richarlyson himself clearly point to homophobia being inclusive of bisexuality, however an elaboration of this was not included in the article.

The quotations from each of the above sources not only highlight a known problem of homophobia (and consequently biphobia) in sport, but additionally give some insight to how bisexual men may anticipate negative reactions if they were to come out. However, this appears not to be exclusive to male bisexual athletes, as female bisexual athletes including figure skater Amber Glenn were also found to have shared similar fears (Steve Brown, Attitude, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2019): **Speaking to the publication, Glenn said: “The fear of not being accepted is a huge struggle for me.”** The way this has been worded not only feeds the narrative of bisexual individuals fearing coming out responses, but also raises questions about the attitudes of the writer towards bisexuality in addition to the issues of which they face in sport.

One thing to consider is the times at which these experiences occurred, as they may not have been recent in relation to when the articles / blogposts were published and therefore may not be representative of the current climate. However, if we consider how long anti-LGBTQ+ behaviours and language have been present in both wider society and sport – regardless of intensity – in addition to the existence of bias in sport and academia, it is still important for these experiences to be discussed. Further research into the current presence of biphobia in sport is therefore needed to make more accurate conclusions.

#### *Prejudice from other LGBTQ+ groups.*

Following the notion of homophobia remaining a significant problem, we can currently only presume that biphobia does exist to a similar degree, although is perhaps more difficult to identify. This presumption is based on the discussed connotations between homophobia and biphobia, in addition to the research that shows bisexual people are marginalised by both the straight community and other groups within the LGBTQ+ community (MacLeod *et al.*, 2015; Mulick & Wright, 2002; Ochs, 1996; Wandrey,

Mosack & Moore, 2015). However, as discussed in the review of literature, bisexual individuals can conceal their identities perhaps more easily due to what is conceptualised as ‘heterosexual privilege’ (Burlison, 2005).

The topic of prejudice towards bisexual people from other groups within the LGBTQ+ community (mainly lesbian women and gay men) came up several times in the review of literature prior to conducting this content analysis. For example, an article from Attitude (also Will Stroude, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020) briefly mentioned former swimmer Harry Needs’ experiences of prejudice from other members of the LGBTQ+ community in addition to straight people: **“Needs recalled how, like many bisexuals, he had been accused of “using bisexuality as a gateway or a stepping block to becoming gay.”**” Here, the author acknowledges there is indeed a known problem of prejudiced attitudes from non-bisexual communities and indicates that it is a common occurrence, however the solution to such an issue is unclear and complex.

One article written by Will Stroude of Attitude (31<sup>st</sup> January, 2018) covered wrestler Antony Bowens’ experiences of stigma from both straight and gay communities, with general responses questioning the legitimacy of his identity as a bisexual man. Although Bowens now identifies as a gay man, at the time of the article being written and in the interest of understanding how bisexuality is received in sport environments, it was reported that Bowens’ faced comments labelling him gay rather than bisexual. A direct quote from Bowens himself said, **“If I was with a woman — or anybody was with a woman — and they married her, and they were with her for the rest of their lives, that doesn’t change the fact that they’re still stimulated by men. That doesn’t make you straight, you’re still bi.”** This comment from Bowens highlights how bisexuality is dismissed both by straight and gay communities, the sentiment behind said dismissal being about the gender of their romantic or sexual partner rather than their identity. This idea was expanded upon in a Daily Mail article (Ian Gallagher, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) which reported on rugby player Levi Davis’ coming out story and his experiences of being a bisexual, black man in a heavily masculinised sport. Davis was quoted with: **“Even within the LGBT community, bisexuals are often misunderstood [...] some even claim that bisexuality doesn’t exist, a view often expressed by those who believe bisexuals are simply on their way to being gay.”**

Biphobia being expressed by other members of the LGBTQ+ community may be comparable to the ways in which women may emit internalised misogyny, or men may display internalised misandry. Due to the entire LGBTQ+ being a marginalised group within a hegemonically heteronormative world, it would be expected that the entire community would be supportive of each other. However, this is not always the case as there are multiple pieces of past research that have explored biphobia internally within other LGBTQ+ groups. Rust (1995) theorises that there is an element of distrust alongside misunderstanding amongst non-plurisexual identities towards bisexuality, which in turn poses a threat to cross-orientation friendships or relationships with those specific groups (Galupo, 2007).

A post on Outsports by Alex Reimer (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020), which covered a variety of bisexual athletes aiming to tackle biphobia and bierasure in sport, shared footballer Andrew Ford's experience of his bisexuality being belittled by the gay community: **"I got a lot of pressure from the gay community," Ford told me recently on the phone. "I felt like I was misunderstood, and didn't know who I was."** Further along in the article when reporting on the story of Washington State University rower Megan Duthart, who identifies as bi and queer, it was shown that she too shared similar experiences as the aforementioned athletes, **"I've struggled a little bit with being identified as an 'other' in the community with the term 'bisexuality.'"**

The notion of LG athletes (and non-athletes) marginalising bisexual athletes (and non-athletes) signifies the existence of a form of hierarchy amongst different sexualities, arguably reinforced by sport in the same way it reinforces gendered hierarchies (Anderson, 2005; Griffin, 1998; Herek, 2007; Messner, 2002). As discussed in the review of literature, sport was initially institutionalised to improve standards of masculinity amongst young boys and men due to fears of them becoming 'soft'. The idea of 'softness' was seen as a direct link to homosexuality, which at the time was far more frowned upon to the extent of being feared in western society. Meanwhile, women were discouraged and often not permitted to partake or compete in sports that were considered too physically exerting. Therefore, white heterosexual cisgender men are considered to be at the top tier of gender and sexual hierarchies in sport (Anderson, 2005; Anderson & White, 2018; Connell, 1987, 2005; English, 2017; MacDonald, 2014;

Rowe, 1998). There are arguably some grey areas afterwards, whereby it is questioned as to whether women would be positioned above men that identify as gay. This may be due to the idea of gay men being believed to be far more effeminate and therefore exhibit similar traits expected of women, however the fact they are still men may raise their position due to theories such as biological determinism – where men are considered stronger than women, perhaps regardless of their sexual orientation.

Removing gender from the picture, sexual hierarchies by themselves in sport are marginally easier to decipher. Heterosexuality precedes due to its standardisation in society, followed by homosexuality, tailed thereafter by other orientations such as bisexuality. This has been constructed through a selection of theories and social issues, including hegemonic and toxic forms of masculinity, misogyny, and heteronormativity– all of which still exist in the world of sport and worldwide society. Further, it may also be connected to beliefs of a sexual binary (straight and gay), which are considered far more concrete and legitimate identities due to aligning with monosexism (Borver, Gurevich & Mathieson, 2001; Eisner, 2013; Nelson, 2020; Roberts, Horne & Hoyt, 2015). On the other hand, a theorised binary sexual spectrum (heterosexuality – bisexuality – homosexuality) also plays its part in this ideology by positioning bisexuality as a middle ground, as though it exists as a perfect mixture of straight and gay attributes and qualities. As put by Halperin (1995), the term heterosexuality (and heteronormativity for that matter) cannot function without the existence of homosexuality. This same theory can be applied to bisexuality whereby many suggest it is a middle ground between being straight and gay (Flanders *et al.*, 2017), and so could not exist without the two.

A spectrum such as this arguably assists in the problematic attitudes that state bisexuality exists as a stepping-stone, phasal period or a mid-point between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Beliefs such as the latter have been the basis for the Kinsey scale framework. However, as previously discussed, this is not necessarily an accurate conceptualisation of human sexuality as it only takes three identities into account (Galupo *et al.*, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). As it stands, there is an unknown total number of sexualities, and therefore the concept of a sexuality spectrum – particularly one that is conceptualised



as a straight line between heterosexuality and homosexuality – is largely considered an inaccurate depiction.

A slightly different outlook regarding prejudice from LG groups was identified when analysing a post from university track and field champion Kaitlyn Long (Outsports, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2019) who feared alienating herself from her teammates, including those who were openly gay: **“Even though there were openly gay people on the team, I had become close to my teammates and didn’t want to alienate myself from the team.”** The way in which this has been phrased alludes to Long understanding that despite the LGBTQ+ community being a collectively marginalised group, the individual identities and orientations within the community are not necessarily seen as equal, reiterating a notion of a hierarchy. There is almost a sense of intimidation in this quote from Long through the use of the phrase ‘even though’. Debatably, it implies that her coming out would ruin a team dynamic even though there are already openly gay athletes present. It also suggests that even *without* comments directed at them from the gay community such as the ones mentioned prior, bisexual people may still feel inferior or different due to what has been experienced by others.

#### *Stigmatisation and stereotypes.*

It is unfortunately an expected aspect of life as a member of the LGBTQ+ community to be stigmatised and stereotyped based on their sexual identity (Anderson & Adams, 2011; Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016; Woolley, 2020). Moreover, there are those that suggest that bisexual individuals experience unique stereotyping in comparison to gay men and lesbian women. It is acknowledged that part of the problem that people identifying under differing plurisexual orientations is that they are not as widely understood as opposed to homosexuality. Additionally, it is understood that other plurisexual identities experience similarities to bisexual burden and stereotypes associated with bisexuality, including being described as ‘indecisive.’ The most common form of stigmatisation of bisexuality is that of it being called a phasal period where one resides until they decide whether they are straight or gay. As such, this was indeed further evidenced by several of the analysed texts.

A comment of this manner was addressed in an Outsports (11<sup>th</sup> October, 2020) post written by Brian Bell, in which multiple bi+ wrestlers recounted their opinions on how bisexuality is often framed by others, including those within the LGBTQ+ community. A quote from the text reads: **“Talk to any bi+ person and you’re likely to hear an anecdote about how one or more people completely disrespected their identity as a “stepping stone” to being gay or lesbian or outright had their identity invalidated.”** This quote was written following a conversation with wrestler Russell Rogue about bierasure, which is focused upon more specifically in the next subsection of this analysis. The language used here directly addresses the normalisation of comments such as this as a straightforward reaction to somebody coming out as bisexual, which in turn normalises mildly biphobic attitudes. This quote also draws direct links with Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy and the self as a performance, but from a different angle than what has been previously discussed in this section. Here, the accusation is that bisexuality is a performance that lacks authenticity instead of being accused of relying on ‘heterosexual privilege’ (Burlison, 2005). It can be deduced that regardless of how much of their identity they choose to show, bisexual people may struggle to be taken seriously due to either of the aforementioned responses being one extreme or another. As such, another quote from a separate article covering the coming out of figure skater Amber Glenn (Steve Brown, Attitude, 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2019) further reinforced this problematic stereotype: **“Being perceived as [going through] ‘just a phase’ or [being] ‘indecisive’ is a common thing for bisexual/pansexual women.”** Such comments display belittling attitudes towards bisexual people, which in turn makes it less surprising that they feel inferior to straight and LG communities as discussed in the previous subsection.

Similar discussions of bisexual dismissal were had in an article published by Gay Times (1<sup>st</sup> July, 2021), where author Sam Damshenas covers rugby player Jack Dunne’s experiences of coming out and being bisexual in what is widely understood to be a heavily masculinised sport. In the article, a quote from Dunne himself upon describing reactions to him coming out included the following comment he was met with: **“You are not bisexual, you are gay and you won’t come out.”** Although the idea of identity dismissal is not inherently exclusive to bisexual / plurisexual people, it differs from the act of dismissing somebody coming out as gay because being gay in this scenario is considered a more acceptable

identity, which is contradictory of homophobic attitudes that are still argued to be present in sport in addition to wider society. It almost gives the impression that homosexuality is a preferable identity over bisexuality, again reinforcing the notion of a hierarchy amongst sexual orientations.

The concept of denial has been acknowledged previously in studies of bisexuality and the challenges that bisexual people face. It often resides along with the ‘pick a side’ and ‘you must be gay’ mentality that has been found to exist in societal attitudes towards bisexuality and its legitimacy (Anderson, McCormack & Ripley, 2016; Barker & Landridge, 2008; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009). Denial in this instance feeds into the issues of bisexual downplaying, and further, biersure. Moreover, it invalidates a bisexual person’s identity, as the phrase “won’t come out” alludes to them not coming out ‘properly’ in the eyes of the person who has responded that way. Having referred to the work of Goffman in the review of literature, it is clear that monosexist ideas from both heterosexual and homosexual groups place emphasis on attraction fluidity as problematic, deviant and therefore markable as an aspect of spoiled identity.

It could be argued that this level of denial and invalidation is also concurrent with ignorance, however it remains to be seen if and why this is the case aside from what has already been theorised by scholars and bisexual people themselves. Bisexuality has been known about for a long time, however – like other plurisexual identities – it has been far more difficult for it to integrate properly into society as homosexuality has (Barker *et al.*, 2012; Griffin, 2014), and for general society to both understand and fully accept it has been ever harder. We are continually told that attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community are improving day by day, however there are also suggestions that this sociological narrative is on the cusp of – or has already begun – going backwards towards previous, more conservative ways of thinking. With regards to gender and women’s rights now being far better than in the previous century, there is still much gendered segregation and sexism present in modern day sport that is not addressed often enough.

Perhaps the most opinionated article in the sample, Nichi Hodgson’s report on the media’s response to Tom Daley’s sexuality in *The Guardian* (2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013) also shared their outlook on what it means

to come out as bisexual and the stereotypes that come with it: **“Declaring yourself bisexual translates as meaning that you are one of just several things: attention-seeking and performative, promiscuous, or gay in denial to appease fans.”** This quote reinforces the outside opinions of bisexuality not being legitimate, and in turn the negativity surrounding what could be in store for someone if they were to reveal that part of their identity. It also nods to how sexuality may be perceived in sports settings, and that it is better to come out as gay than bisexual due to their being arguably less stigmatisation. Further, the word ‘performative’ offers a direct link to the work of Goffman, whereby he theorises the self as a performed role (1969). As such, it could be argued that someone coming out as bisexual may be perceived to be literally performative rather than authentic, insinuating that they are either hiding their true identity or pretending to be something that they are not for attention. However, drawing upon Goffman’s theories, a person coming out as bisexual is done with conscious intent to add to their frontstage performance and their social identity. It is also clear from both the review of literature and this section of results that Goffman’s theories of stigma are very much present towards bisexuality. By attributing negative characteristics to an identity such as bisexuality in a way that serves to define and identify that group of individuals, this demonstrates that outside groups clearly associate bisexuality with an identity being tainted.

Another area of stereotyping / stigma mentioned in the review of literature was that of bisexual people being sex-crazed, similarly to comments about “greediness”. Additionally, some of the individuals included in the texts were also found to have been subjected to hypersexualisation and fetishization. As such, in the same previously mentioned Outsports article by Brian Bell in which the experiences of multiple plurisexual wrestlers were included, a quote from pro wrestler Solo Darling – who is pansexual – mentioned experiences of fetishization in the following quote: **“It is a thing where you tell people that if they’re interested in you and they look at you like, ‘Ooo, threesomes.’ How did we get there? [...] An ex of mine literally had an argument with me [saying] ‘I’m with you because you’re bi. What’s the point if I can’t [have threesomes]?’”** Despite Solo Darling’s official sexual identity residing within the orientation of pansexuality, there is evidence that pansexual individuals experience

similar stigmatisation to bisexual individuals, so much so that pansexuality and bisexuality are often confused due to what many would consider subtle differences (House, Jarvis & Burdsey, 2021).

Although the above comment is not directly linked to sport, sexualisation of athletes is very much present in the world today, especially within the media. Due to the media's power in its ability to form and shape opinions and viewpoints, portrayals of different groups and communities in sport have developed patterns across time. It is well known that one of the most significant patterns in the media's portrayals of female athletes is that of making them appear more desirable from a physical standpoint (Trolan, 2013; Dong, 2014). This has further resulted in poor representation of all body types in addition to race. There have thus been accusations and claims of fatphobia and whitewashing in the world of sports media (e.g. Nelson, 2016; Sherman, 2016), in addition to the focus of these women being more about their appearance over their sporting achievements.

Revisiting the previously cited Outsports post by Alex Reimer (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020), the topic of sexualisation and fetishization was also raised: **“Andrew Ford was questioned and fetishized when he came out as bisexual. The gay community insisted he wasn't being honest with himself; women at clubs started to excitedly fantasize about hooking up with two guys at the same time.”** Although this comment again does not appear directly linked specifically to being bisexual in sport, it remains relevant as sport is an institution in which athletes are continually sexualised. This in turn could present issues of bisexual athletes perhaps feeling more sexualised / fetishized than straight or possibly gay or lesbian athletes, but more research may be needed to confirm this.

## 2. Bivisibility.

### *Bierasure and the importance of representation.*

According to past research, much of the stigmatisation that circulates around bisexuality has resulted in it being considered a less legitimate sexual identity in comparison to homosexuality and heterosexuality. Moreover, there are significantly less openly LGBTQ+ athletes in sport, with the majority being lesbian or gay and thus not providing role models for other bisexual people. As such, in an article published

by Sky Sports (Jay Forster, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2020), ice hockey player Zac Sullivan spoke about his experiences that influenced his decisions to come out as bisexual: **"I kind of looked back over my journey and I saw times where I wasn't comfortable, times when I needed a role model."** Dutch rower Maarten Hurkmans (Josh Milton, The Pink News, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020) made a similar comment acknowledging that sport is not always the most comfortable environment to come out in: **"It can be hard to come out, especially in sports. Not many elite athletes identify as LGBTQ+ and there are few role models to look up to."**

According to an article from Advocate (Christine Linnel, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2018), ice skater Karina Manta also found coming out as bisexual to be a difficult and subsequently isolating experience due to there not being many other out bisexual people in sport. This feeling of isolation was arguably intensified by there not being any LGBTQ+ female athletes in her respective sport: **"My initial search [for *lesbian figure skater*] didn't conjure any names,"** she writes. **"I altered my search: *bisexual female figure skaters*. Still nothing. I revised again: *gay female figure skaters*. Google offered me a list of men [...]** It was sort of isolating, because there aren't really many other women, especially on a big stage, who are out [...] It was a little bit lonely, feeling like the only one who was experiencing the things that I was." Further into the article, Linnel commented **"while the figure skating world and LGBTQ+ media are now familiar with the coming out narratives of gay men [...]** the story of a **bisexual woman in figure skating is still new territory"**, highlighting the significance of Manta's story and her coming out being a source of representation in her sport.

Other athletes such as rugby player Jack Dunne (Alex Reimer, Outsports, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2022) acknowledged that role models play a significant part in the lives of younger people, particularly children. More specifically, he recognised the need for LGBTQ+ role models in his sport: **"It's definitely on my mind that people could be like, he is the bisexual rugby player, instead of - he is a bisexual who plays rugby [...]** But at the same time, maybe there are some kids across the country who could do with a role model." It is contended that the existence of role models is integral for socialisation processes, particularly at earlier stages of life (Vescio, Wilde & Crosswhite, 2005), and Dunne's goal to be a role model for young people is particularly admirable as a bisexual man in sport.

As such, there have been reports that younger generations are far more accepting of LGBTQ+ identities than previous generations.

It is understood that on a general basis, girls and boys normally choose role models based on corresponding gender in addition to the field in which they are situated that also correspond to the person's interests (Adriaanse & Crosswell, 2008; Martin *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, role models are particularly important for young and adolescent girls due to historically gendered hierarchies, whereby men have continued to uphold power over women across time – despite women's right having dramatically improved. However, it is for this very reason that, as previous studies suggest, female elite athletes may not gain the same 'heroic' status as male elite athletes (Hargreaves, 2000). Hargreaves states that this is in part due to male athletes being praised for their strength, competitiveness, and aggression; in comparison to female athletes who may display the same characteristics but in turn do not align in what traditional views of a female role model entails. Moreover, girls have been found to choose female role models from a different pool of women, such as female actors or singers rather than in sport (Young *et al.*, 2015), which exemplifies yet again there is a huge disparity when it comes to socialising boys and girls into sports.

As another bisexual male rugby player, Levi Davis' story has also been identified as an important one for the sport of rugby in addition to black LGBTQ+ people and wider society. As such post on Sport Media LGBT+ by Jon Holmes (13<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) identifies how the beginning of representation is perhaps synonymous with responsibility: **“When we begin to acknowledge who we represent – something bigger than ourselves – a sense of responsibility often follows.”** The way this has been worded signifies that the events of bisexual athletes coming out are highly significant for the future of sport inclusivity, which in turn could however a lot of pressure on said athletes.

In a posted story about wrestler Antony Bowens on The Pink News (Benjamin Butterworth, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017), the following quote was included taken from Bowens' coming out post on social media: **“I look forward to changing perceptions and breaking stereotypes as I continue on my journey. I have**

**zero patience for negativity so if this bothers you please delete me.”** Here, it appears that Bowens recognises his position as a bisexual man as part of the solution to breaking stereotypes.

Evidence shows that the percentage of people identifying as bisexual is increasing. For example, as seen in Figure 1.0, The Office for National Statistics (2023) demonstrates an increase in the bisexual population in the UK from 0.5% to 1.5% between 2017 and 2022 – an increase of 200% in the space of five years. However, there are few high-profile openly bisexual role models, both in sport and outside of sport. There appears to be a never-ending cycle whereby people do not want to come out as bisexual due to fears of bisexual burden, however this in turn means there are less role models and consequently less education on what it means to be bisexual. Biphobia and biersure therefore continue to endure. However, despite sport not always appearing to be the most accommodating environment for LGBTQ+ athletes, it does have a lot of power in facilitating social change. Therefore, theoretically, with more bisexual role models out there, the more people will feel more comfortable to come to accept themselves.

When it comes to sport initiatives and legislation, it may be questioned as to whether sport as an institution truly does enough to be properly accommodating for the visibility, safety and the mental wellbeing needs of all LGBTQ+ athletes, including those who are bisexual. As such, the following quotation taken from Rajdeep Singh (The Pink News, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) addressed this for the sport of football: **“The letter acknowledged the campaigns and measures drawn up by football authorities to bring positive representation for gay player, but stressed that they “have the capacity to do more.” This includes “Addressing LGBTQ+ mental wellbeing specifically, and the challenges faced by closeted gay and bi players; and delivering education for all stakeholders around how homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language and behaviour can make people feel unwelcome and unsafe.”**” There was no elaboration as to what these authorities could do to improve these players’ lives and experiences in the game.

If we look again at the incident of biphobia towards Jahmal Howlett-Mundle, he expressed concerns about the current standard of legislation for anti-LGBTQ+ language and behaviours following his ordeal



on the pitch: **"I don't think justice has been done. With short sentences like this how are people supposed to understand that there's a lot of pain and suffering that does happen to people like myself and other active LGBTQ+ football players."** It was then stated that **"Odedoyin was told he must complete 120 hours of unpaid work, and told to pay £1,120 in compensation and court costs."** The point Howlett-Mundle is trying to make here is that a fine and some community service is no punishment in comparison to the harm that biphobic (and homophobic) abuse can do. While phobic attitudes and hate crimes towards the LGBTQ+ community are completely unacceptable, such behaviours are based on ingrained beliefs and these won't necessarily be changed by enforced punishments such as this.

As such, pride initiatives such as the Rainbow Laces campaign and the introduction of pride flags on jerseys has been seen to be a positive introduction to working towards better LGBTQ+ inclusion. This is said with acknowledgements of improvements in inclusivity but recognition of there being more work to be done before equality is closer to being achieved.

#### *'Proving' bisexuality.*

Linked closely to previously discussed aspects of bisexual burden and stereotypes, the 'prove it' mentality adopts the view of an individual that claims to be bisexual needing to engage in multiple sexual or romantic encounters with multiple (at least two due to the meaning of the term 'bi') different genders in order to gain official status as a bisexual person (Cipriano, Nguyen & Holland, 2022; Rosenthal *et al.*, 2011). This mentality could come from the individual themselves or from outside perspectives, which in turn further supports the idea of bisexuality presenting unique challenges and experiences in comparison to gay men and lesbian women. Unlike homosexuality, where if someone bluntly claims to be gay it often goes unquestioned, this apparent 'prove it' mentality disrupts the sexual binary that still exists in the world today. It also does not take things such as preferences or feelings of the individual into account. For an individual to identify as bisexual, there is no rule to suggest that they should engage in different relationships to gain an official title or label as confirmation of that

identity. In the same way from the other side, a person's sexual identity is not so simply definable by them only choosing to engage in relationships with people of a different gender to them.

The notion of proving bisexuality also links back to the concept of social identity performances in accordance with straight-presenting relationships. As previously discussed, straight-presenting relationships or 'passing' are sometimes considered inauthentic to a bisexual person's social identity, whereby what they are choosing to show in frontstage is seen to be different to their backstage. This may be assumed despite the nature of bisexuality not being exclusive to one singular gender attraction and therefore being able to present in a variety of forms. There is little evidence to suggest that such accusations are also likely to be made towards a bisexual individual within a homosexual-presenting relationship, due to straight-presenting relationships having connotations of privilege. That said, homosexual-presenting relationships could be subjected to stigmatised attitudes towards bisexuality such as it being a phase or stepping-stone to being gay (Barker & Landridge, 2008; Erickson-Scroth & Mitchell, 2009).

The only text within the sample that includes the account of a bisexual non-athlete was written by Luke Turner for The Guardian (26<sup>th</sup> December, 2022). The article covered his experience of growing up and being involved in the football scene during some homophobic periods such as the 1990s and his discovery of an inclusive LGBTQ+ friendly group linked to his football club. Within the article, Turner gave his account of how his straight-presenting relationship affected his own perceptions of his identity in addition to worrying about how others would perceive it: **“When my son was born in late January 2022, I was surprised that for the first time in years I felt confused about my identity. I was a new dad in a monogamous relationship with a member of the opposite sex. What could be “straighter” than that? Was I letting everyone else down?”**

From here, it can be argued that there is a sense of coming out as bisexual adding a very different level of pressure in comparison to coming out as gay or lesbian, whereby a bisexual person in a straight-presenting relationships may be seen to discount the fluidity of bisexuality. This was also touched upon in another article from The BBC (Nesta McGregor, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021) which covered NFL player

Ryan Russell and his experiences following his decision to come out: **“He also wondered if coming out would be a premature action. His logic was that if he ended up marrying a woman, why would the world have needed to know he was also attracted to men?”** A similar comment was made by footballer Andrew Ford (Alex Reimer, *Outsports*, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020), which also addresses that coming out can be complex for bisexual individuals because of being attracted to multiple genders. **“We have to keep coming out to our significant others, whether it’s a man or a woman,” Ford said. “If you’re gay and you start dating a guy, you’re not going to be like, ‘I have to tell you something: I’m gay.’ They’re going to be like, ‘no shit.’”** Rugby player Levi Davis was also quoted in an interview with the *Daily Mail* (Ian Gallagher, *Daily Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020) talking about unique challenges of being in relationships as a bisexual person. In addition, the subject of bisexuality often being dismissed due to outsider assumptions being based on the gender of someone a bisexual individual is in a relationship with was also covered: **“At the same time, the woman might think that, as I’m bisexual, my focus is not going to be on her. And if I were in a relationship with a man, people would think, “He’s not bi, he is gay.”**

Unlike homosexuality, where if someone bluntly claims to be gay it often goes unquestioned, this apparent ‘prove it’ mentality disrupts the sexual binary that still exists in the world today. It also does not take things such as preferences or feelings of the individual into account. For an individual to identify as bisexual, there is no rule to suggest that they should engage in different relationships to gain an official title or label as confirmation of that identity. In the same way from the other side, a person’s sexual identity is not so simply definable by them only choosing to engage in relationships with people of a different gender to them. This is perhaps reinforced by the ways in which sport continues to uphold the heteronormative standards upon which it has been built up from. This is also where the concept of romantic attraction also comes into question and arguably is more significant. As discussed in the review of literature when looking at defining bisexuality, it was noted that sexual and romantic attraction are two separate entities.

As those last few quotations were all taken from male athletes, it was of interest to see if any female athletes also made comments of a similar nature, however no such comments were made. Whether this

is representative of gendered differences is yet to be seen and may require further exploration in future research.

### *Labelling as an issue.*

A noticeable trend in the sample was that coming out appears to draw attention away from the athlete's talent and sporting achievements. According to several quotes in several of the sample texts, bisexual athletes would prefer to be known for their involvement and accolades in their respective sports, rather than for their sexual orientation. For example, UFC fighter Jeff Molina was quoted in an Outsports post (Alex Reimer, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2023) saying: **“I wanted to be known for my skills and what I’ve dedicated the last 11 years of my life [...] and not the “bi ufc fighter” that I’m sure would just be translated to ‘gay UFC fighter.’”** A very similar comment was found in Jack Dunne's (Alex Reimer, Outsports, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2022) where he also shared similar sentiments to Molina when it came to labelling in accordance with being involved in sport: **“It’s definitely on my mind that people could be like, he is the bisexual rugby player, instead of - he is a bisexual who plays rugby.”** A third comment of the same type was also taken from Richarlyson in the article from The Mirror (Samuel Meade, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022): **“I didn’t want to be ruled out because of my sexuality, that I’m bisexual. I wanted people to see me as a mirror for everything I’ve achieved in my work. I never put my sexuality ahead of my work, and I never would.”**

It is clear from the above quotations that athletes may be reluctant to come out due to not wanting to be defined by their sexual identity, and instead would rather be remembered for their skills and achievements rather than who they choose to involve themselves with sexually and / or romantically.

In the case of Jack Dunne for example, the notion of fear of being known as a bisexual rugby player rather than a bisexual person that plays rugby argues that sexual identity shouldn't necessarily need to be pointed out as part of one's role / title in sport as it puts more of a somewhat perceptively negative spotlight on them. This links back to Goffman's work concerning stigma, by which bisexuality has traditionally been attributed to individuals as an act of deviance away from either heteronormativity or

monosexism. Contrary to his concerns, the text revealed further along that there was no mention of his sexuality when he was signed to his team which could allude to it not being seen as a revolutionary thing or something that was considered necessary to share by his teammates. Therefore, there is almost a sense of his abilities as a rugby player being much more important than his sexual identity, which arguably should be the case for every sportsperson.

Given the nature of becoming an elite athlete being a difficult venture in addition to sexuality expression being something far more prominent in most peoples' personal lives rather than professional lives, it is understandable as to why athletes would prefer to be known for their talent, as that is ultimately what their career depends on. In that sense, sexuality is arguably not a big deal, however this becomes more complex when we consider athletes in high profile sports who receive more attention from audiences. Moreover, it is difficult to ignore a bisexual athlete's sexual orientation due to the known volume of bisexual athletes in upper participation levels being so low. As such, their identities as bisexual automatically becomes far more of a big deal when they come out.

Luke Strong's own experiences of labelling was similar to Jack Dunne's whereby his abilities as an athlete became more prominent with regards to attitudes towards him (Jim Buzinski, Outsports, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020): **“Things changed when people started noticed he was talented, but he was also aware that the gay jokes and bullying made people think that being gay was wrong.”** Although there is an expression of awareness that his experiences of phobic attitudes towards him and his sport choice, the attention being drawn more to his talent cannot be discounted. Of course, that is not to dismiss his experiences of homophobic (or biphobic) abuse, but with regards to notions of representation in sport being important for bisexual people, there is a sense of Strong overcoming such experiences and being a valued athlete regardless of his sexuality and negative outside opinions. Referring back to Goffman's conceptualisation of stigma, labelling could be argued to act as a negative attribute to a particular group, as associated meanings towards said label will likely then be applied to the group. Labelling also links to Goffman's work concerning frontstage and backstage performances, whereby bisexual individuals may prefer to not label their sexuality as part of the social identity / frontstage due to the potential stigma it could encourage.

In some instances, labelling can be seen to be problematic, and this was evidenced in the analysis. For example, the following quotation from Jack Woolley (Bil Browning, LGBTQ Nation, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2020) expressed his regrets in putting a label to his sexual identity: **“I just wish I never labeled it. I still don’t like labeling it. People are just hell-bent on giving everyone labels nowadays [...] People assume a lot about you when you are given a label. They will say you are very flamboyant or whatever, but the thing is I kick people for a living.”** In the case of Woolley, his coming out experience differed from the majority of other athletes whereby the top athletes in his sport consist largely of Muslim athletes. Due to LGBTQ+ identities being illegal in countries governed by the teachings of Islam, this appears to have extended to the sport of Taekwondo whereby Woolley spoke about how some Muslim athletes refused to shake his hand now knowing his identity as a bisexual man, and therefore making him feel excluded and discriminated against. Woolley also acknowledged how his identity as a bisexual man in taekwondo is contradictory to masculine ideals. Arguably his masculine capital may not be considered as high as a straight taekwondo athlete despite whether their abilities in the sport are well-matched.

The article written by Nichi Hodgson (The Guardian, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013) also presented arguments of bisexuality being taboo. While Tom Daley has never officially disclosed his sexual identity under a specific label, he has previously confirmed that he has attractions towards both women and men – which many would consider him confirming that he is bisexual. However, the article itself focuses on the matter of him not giving his sexual orientation a label, and thus there are assumptions that the reason behind this is due to bisexuality being a taboo topic, especially in the media. This article is one that was also included in Magrath, Cleland & Anderson’s (2017) study of media articles covering Daley’s sexuality. As such, they observed the author of this article to be highly critical of how the media often responds to coming out announcements, in addition to general bisexual erasure.

There are those who would argue that labelling can be beneficial to wider communities, whereby it may be empowering, validating, and provide a sense of community and representation for some groups or individuals (McDemott, Roen & Scourfield, 2008; Rostosky *et al.*, 2010). In contrast, Lenskyj’s

outlook on minority groups needing significant role models under the guise of representation is one of rejection. In her review, she states: “I reject the idea that members of disadvantaged minority groups simply need the inspiration provided by one successful person who stands up in front of them and says, ‘I did it, you can too, follow your dream . . .’ ‘Role model’ initiatives will not succeed without systemic change, for example, mentorship programs and affirmative action policies” (2012, 144). This notion from Lenskyj emphasises that the true power in improving bvisibility in sport should not be the responsibility of elite bisexual athletes themselves; rather, National Governing Bodies have far more influence than they are perhaps taking advantage of.

### 3. Mental health.

Alongside biphobia and bisexual burden (perhaps due to being directly linked), mental health was significantly featured in the majority of the 44 texts. All articles / blogposts that covered athletes’ coming out stories presented issues concerning poor mental health prior to coming out and improved mental health after coming out and being able to accept themselves.

#### *Identity suppression.*

Having already discussed denial in the form of backlash from both the heterosexual and LGBTQ+ communities, it is also apparent that denial exists internally for many bisexual people who are yet to come out. As such, the previously discussed features of bisexual burden that were mentioned throughout the texts can have previously been attributed to poor mental health in the wider bisexual community – not just in sport (Burlison, 2005; Ripley *et al.*, 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Taylor, 2017). However, it should also be acknowledged that sport may also play a role in one’s identity suppression due to reinforcements of heteronormativity and gender roles.

Each individual whose experiences were covered and discussed in the texts mentioned a degree of identity suppression prior their decision to come out, and how this in turn impacted their mental health. This included forms of depression and anxiety in addition to knowing others who had committed suicide

due to being LGBTQ+ and not being able to feel accepting of themselves. There were also factors related to sport that were considered reasons to hide their identities.

The following quote came from an article reporting on bisexual Israeli basketball player, Gili Mosinzon (Haaretz, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2016). Throughout the article it was discussed how rare it was for someone from his country to come out, especially in male team sports. It was also specified that coaches still used homophobic language and that managers did nothing to challenge homophobic actions. For these reasons, Mosinzon also stated that some male athletes would prefer to choose suicide over coming out as LGBTQ+ due to fear: **“In male professional sports, you can count the number of players who came out of the closet on one hand. Some killed themselves. Why? Ask the coaches, the chairmen and the audience why pro athletes don’t come out. I’ll tell you why. They’re afraid.”**

Fear appeared to be a reoccurring theme in the content sample but manifested in different ways and intensities. Having touched upon the extreme affects that homophobic sporting environments can have on bisexual / LGBTQ+ individuals, NFL’s Ryan Russell (Nesta McGregor, The BBC, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021) was found to have also considered the effect that coming out may have had on his teammates and their competitive success: **“It felt almost selfish to come out. I thought, ‘I don’t want to be a distraction to my team, I don’t want to jeopardise our success on the field, and also my personal success or financial status’. I could only think of things to lose. I could never think of things to gain.”**

Considering the feelings of other people in addition to how it may affect one’s career when it comes to accepting one’s own sexuality debatably speaks volumes of just some of the pressures that sexual minorities may feel when choosing whether to come out or not. However, it should also be considered that due to the stigmatisation of bisexuality and the existence of bisexual burden, those pressures could possibly be amplified for bisexual individuals. However, there is no concrete evidence for this as such experiences are subjective from person to person. Identity suppression is not an uncommon thing for people in the LGBTQ+ community to experience (Beagan & Hattie, 2015) for many reasons, the primary one being the existence of phobic language and behaviours directed towards LGBTQ+



individuals, both indirectly and directly. As such, not wanting to be subjected to such abuse is an understandable reason for someone of a non-conforming sexuality to keep it hidden. Problematically, this in turn has been found to do more harm than good.

An aspect of identity suppression that surfaced from the texts was the specific idea of living a double life, which highlights the ability that bisexual people can conceal the parts of their identity that deviate away from heteronormativity and thus appear straight. There is no such evidence of this occurring the other way round, whereby they may choose to appear gay rather than straight to hide their true identity. In an Outsports post (Alex Reimer, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2022) reporting on rugby player Jack Dunne's move to a new club, a quote taken from Dunne himself made notions of bisexuality having positives and negatives when it came to keeping it concealed: **“Being bisexual is almost a blessing and a curse [...] You can hide it way easier. You can go out with the lads and do all that stuff, but it is easier to not be true to yourself.”**

There may be arguments that suggest that bisexual people are better off in these instances as they are able to appear straight unlike gay men and lesbian women, however this presents an issue with bisexual people not being allowed to feel like they can be their authentic selves. As such, the previously discussed features of bisexual burden that were mentioned throughout the texts can all be assumed to be contributing factors to problems with mental health in the wider bisexual community – not just in sport. The notion of bisexuality as a blessing and a curse is based on it being a more concealable identity in comparison to homosexuality, which in turn means part of a bisexual person's identity is not shared and therefore can lead to them feeling like they aren't being their authentic selves. The issue here is that someone's romantic or sexual preferences may reflect being attracted to someone of a different gender or someone of the same gender, which – as discussed prior – gets conflated with misunderstanding or dismissing bisexuality altogether. It could also be theorised that the lack of openly bisexual people in sport is contributed to by this idea of bisexual people living a double life, through which they choose to appear straight in their respective sports and thus reinforcing heteronormative expectations while avoiding potential abuse or unwanted attention.

Levi Davis battled with his mental health prior to coming out, which was manifested through heavily drinking, and this time in his life was described as an identity crisis (Alex Reimer, Outsports, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020). It was mentioned that he began to use alcohol as a crutch and was then quoted: **“I felt, and still do, as though I’m not normal.”** This notion of Davis not feeling normal, despite him having come to accept his identity enough to be open about it, again highlights the extent of how bisexuality has been and arguably is marginalised regardless of improvements in acceptance. Additionally, sport’s reinforcement of heteronormativity and hegemonic, orthodox forms of masculinity also plays a part in bisexuality in sport not being perceived as ordinary. Being bisexual thus appears to endorse difficulties when one is either open or closeted.

Another athlete featured in the sample that was reported to have experienced intense mental health issues from suppressing their bisexuality was figure skater Karina Manta (Christine Linnel, Advocate, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2018), described her experience of being closeted with the following: **“We all know closet is much too kind a metaphor [...] Call it a prison cell; call it a lifelong panic attack; call it being buried alive. Call it the nightmares I still get sometimes, the ones where everyone who wouldn't approve suddenly shows up as I'm kissing you.”** This description of concealing one’s identity gives a clear indication of how difficult it can be to hide one’s true self despite fear of not being accepted. This is not exclusive to bisexuality alone, but we can assume that the stigmatisation of bisexuality may intensify these feelings.

College footballer Conner Mertens shared his experiences (Cyd Zeigler, Outsports, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014), where he spoke about his depression that came about from feeling guilty of being attracted to others of the same gender / sex whilst not identifying with common stereotypes that came with it: **I always felt the biggest thing that caused my depression was the feeling of being alone [...] I hate the stereotypes that go along with liking the same sex. You don't have to follow the stereotype to be this way.”** Mertens feeling alone can again be linked to the ways in which sport is less accommodating for LGBTQ+ individuals in comparison to straight people, in addition to how having significant role models in the field of sport can be highly beneficial to others when it comes to feeling able to accept oneself. University track and field athlete Kaitlyn Long (Outsports, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2019) spoke about

her journey to accepting her identity, during which she also experienced poor mental health that was contributed to by feelings of loneliness: **“I struggled heavily with depression and still was not ready to fully come to terms with my sexuality. There was no one on my team who was out, and I continued kept my feelings suppressed.”**

Despite all of these individuals being involved with sport, it is worth noting that not all of these quotes have been framed to include sport in their reasonings for suppressing their identities.

### *Self-acceptance.*

Despite mental health challenges prior to coming out, all of the bisexual individuals whose stories were covered in the textual sample were reported to have reached a point of self-acceptance either before or after sharing their identities. Interestingly, while many expressed the importance of bvisibility for other closeted individuals in sport and for future generations, there were also those who expressed that coming out was for their own personal benefit, regardless of the positive or negative responses and outcomes that may have followed, in addition to how. This was demonstrated in a quote from volleyballer Haleigh Washington (Shelby Weldon, Outsports, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021): **“I’m not trying to talk about my sexuality because I want to be brave or a trailblazer. I talk about my sexuality because I want to be myself.”**

An acknowledgement of being open about one’s sexuality being beneficial for mental health was also identified in an Outsports’ post written by Shelby Weldon (9<sup>th</sup> November, 2022) which reported on skier Breezy Johnson coming out as bisexual. Included in this text was a quote from U.S. Ski & Snowboard’s chief of sport statement following the announcement, where he stated: **“When every athlete can be their true selves, they are their best selves.”**

In Ryan Russell’s own coming out statement which was published on ESPN (29<sup>th</sup> August, 2019) also talked about how embracing all aspects of your identity should be non-negotiable regardless of your career, including if that career is in professional sports: **“Even though openly LGBTQ people are thriving in every area of public life -- politics, entertainment, the top corporations in America --**

**they are so invisible in pro sports [...] In nobody's worlds should being careful mean not being yourself. The career you choose shouldn't dictate the parts of yourself that you embrace.”**

While many of the bisexual individuals whose stories and experiences were covered seemed to go through periods of identity suppression and coming to terms with their sexuality over time, pro wrestler Toni Storm (Brian Bell, Outsports, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2021) did not appear to share in those experiences: **“I’m bi and it feels good to say it,” She continued. “It’s something I’ve been really comfortable with for a long time. I just never expressed it.”** This quote from Toni Storm is a unique one in that there is no illusion of her experiencing identity suppression in the same ways as many of the other bisexual individuals included in the sample. The way in which it has been worded suggests that announcing her sexuality isn’t something she always felt was necessary or a big deal. This in turn highlights self-acceptance due to her sexuality never being a problem for her to accept. The reasons behind this attitude were not made clear in the remaining contents of the article, however.

In the same Outsports post, Brian Bell wrote **“Outsports congratulates Toni Storm for living her truth and proving that courage is contagious”**, the language of which suggests that coming out in sports is still considered brave regardless of the athlete’s own attitudes, and that it has potential to produce a chain reaction response whereby others will follow with the same bravery. This idea was reinforced in a separate article, whereby Sky Sports writer Jay Forster (23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2020) empathised with ice hockey’s Zach Sullivan’s decision to come out being inspired by wanting to be a role model for future generations of young LGBTQ+ people, **“As someone whose coming out journey was inspired by someone else, Zach's message spoke to me.”** Forster then goes on to explain that he is a trans man who was also inspired to come out following ice hockey’s player Harrison Browne revealing their gender identity as a trans man, which links back to the importance of role models, visibility, and representation when it comes to LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of orientation, being able to accept themselves.

Another supportive comment was given following Jahmal Howlett-Mundle’s coming out announcement, which ended up going viral. A response quote from Erin Williams (Stonewall’s sport

engagement manager) was included in the article from the BBC written by Manish Pandey: **"It's always powerful to see someone share their truth, and will mean so much to all LGBTQ+ people to see someone proudly share the message that you don't have to choose between who you are and the sport that you love."** While this quote reiterates the importance of role models and their power in helping to improve LGBTQ+ inclusivity across all sports, but it could also be argued to be somewhat contradictory. There is a notion of Howlett-Mundle's sexual identity not mattering with regards to his career and abilities, however his sexual identity also does matter in the case of representation and visibility. Having already discussed the conflating opinions of role model importance and labelling being problematic or unimportant in comparison to sporting talent, it makes for an interesting discussion about finding the right balance between raising awareness of visibility whilst not distracting from the player simply being a sportsperson, regardless of their sexual orientation.

A final aspect to consider with regards to self-acceptance of being bisexual is the time frame of which the sample texts cover. The first text (by chronological date) included in the sample was published in December 2013, and the most recent publication was dated March 2023, giving an insight into a 10-year scope of bisexuality being featured in sport-related media. The most heavily congested time frame across the sample was the year of 2020, whereby 16 of the articles were published in that year alone. This was followed by 10 articles in 2021. It could be argued that there is much significance in more coming out stories being published in sport-related media during 2020 and 2021, a period with ties to the COVID-19 global pandemic that has been previously referred as a period of self-discovery (Paterson & Park, 2023).

Previous studies carried out during the pandemic – such as Banerjee & Nair (2020), Burrientos *et al.* (2020), Gonzales *et al.* (2020), and Gonzalez *et al.* (2021) – have all highlighted that the global LGBTQ+ community experienced a higher degree of vulnerability and mental health issues particularly during government-enforced lockdowns. In consideration for this, aside from the publications dated from the year 2020 onwards, there are only 11 articles and blogposts dated before that period within the sample. Having acknowledged that there may be other articles to have covered bisexuality in sport that were not accessed during the sampling process, there is reason to argue that this shift in media attention

is significant in understanding how and why bisexuality is perceived differently comparative to homosexuality.

Both identity suppression and self-acceptance mirror Goffman's theory of frontstage and backstage performances and how individuals choose which part of themselves to include depending on their or circumstances, such as the people they are performing in front of, a specific geographical location where sexuality is more policed, or the sport they are involved with. For elite athletes in the public eye, their frontstage performances have a much bigger audience, therefore it can be assumed that they are more likely to be careful about what they present to that audience due to it having a larger overall response in comparison to an individual that plays sport at a grassroots level.

#### 4. Intersectionality

##### *Gender.*

The analysis brought attention towards intersectional factors that affected perceptions of bisexuality, both for the bisexual individuals themselves in addition to those of other orientations. As explained in the review of literature, perceptions of gender and sexuality are closely linked due to traditional societal standards of masculinity and femininity (Anderson, 2005; Connell, 1990, 1995, Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990). It has also been made clear that sport adds to this narrative due to the foundations on which it was built. Therefore, it is unsurprising that bisexual people in sport may face some gender-based challenges linked to their sexual orientations. As such, there were several notions of gender playing an important part in how bisexuality is perceived both in sport and on a general basis, all of which were linked to societal and sporting standards of masculinity and femininity.

For example, Maarten Hurkmans (Josh Milton, The Pink News, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020) gave his view of how being an LGBTQ+ man is not a one-size-fits-all stereotype: **I am 2.01m, 110kgs, proud of who I am, and I row at the elite level. To many, I do not fit the stereotype, but I do want to be an example to anyone that feels like they can't be their true self [...] Identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community does not make you less masculine, or able to compete and win. In the end, we all line**

**up at the same starting line with the same anticipation as we endure those final minutes before the start.** Here, Hurkmans acknowledges how he does not fit the mould of a stereotypical bisexual man – although specific physical attributes linked to gendered bisexuality are arguably less rigid than those linked to gender homosexuality. Gender and sexuality stereotyping in the context of sport was also evidenced in writer Christine Linnel’s article in Advocate (9<sup>th</sup> November, 2018) covering Karina Manta’s coming out story. Within the text, the following quote from Linnel can be seen as a significant one as it identifies the different standards of treatment of men in women in the same sport: **“While men like Johnson (Manta’s openly gay skating partner) have to contend with the idea that all male figure skaters are gay and effeminate, Manta has to navigate the complicated perceptions of bisexuality in a sport where women are expected to be tiny, delicate ice princesses.”** The following statement from the same article from Karina Manta herself explaining that her own personal experiences of sexual stereotypes, both in sport and out, were strongly linked to gender presentation: **“Even though I'm a queer woman, I still feel very feminine and present very femininely. There are certain ideas tied up in that regarding, if you're a woman who presents femininely, are you really [queer]? I was a little bit concerned with those stereotypes.”**

Both author and athlete express how bisexuality is a complicated orientation when it comes to gender presentation. If we consider the debunked but popular theory of a sexual spectrum in which bisexuality sits at a perfect point between straight and gay, it could be argued that bisexuality is difficult to decipher by physical appearances alone due to having straight and gay qualities. However, because the sexual spectrum theory has been debunked with recognition of a multitude of orientations, this leads to an issue with ingrained stereotypes linked to sexuality and gender presentation. For example, in the case of Karina Manta, it is often thought that women who do not identify as straight will exhibit less feminine traits and appear more masculine in their appearances, such as short hair and muscular frames. However, to add further complexity to Manta’s case, she partakes in the sport of figure skating which is considered a feminine sport that reinforces heteronormativity through couples’ sequences (Adams, 2011), therefore raising her feminine capital. Like in the quotation from Manta, it almost appears that accepting

someone's non-conforming sexuality is more difficult if they do not adhere to the stereotypes associated with queerness.

In continuation of gendered aspects of being bisexual, it was acknowledged in Bri Tollie's post on Outsports (20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020) that there is privilege in coming out where one's gender is concerned, particularly for bisexual sportspeople: **"It is really sad that queer women are a lot more accepted than queer men. Who knows the reaction I would have gotten from my dad or my teammates if I was a boy. We say that men have more privileges than women, but in the queer community, it is reversed, at least when it comes to acceptance."** Not only does this reinforce the thoughts following Karina Manta's interview, but it also highlights how one detail about a person's identity can overturn patriarchal structures in certain instances. This also links to the notion of female sportswomen having a higher expectation of them to be lesbian due to sport being a masculinised institution. Therefore, it can be theorised that bisexual women may be more accepted in sport than bisexual men due to the gendered acceptance of queerness. Moreover, it raises questions about the state of inclusive masculinity both in and outside of sports settings.

Addressing this issue of potentially non-inclusive masculinity further, Ryan Russell acknowledged how, in his experience, the locker room in his sport (American Football) facilitates orthodox and hegemonic forms of masculinity by distancing itself from any form of queer connotation (Nesta McGregor, BBC, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021): **"In the locker room, we talk about everything that comes with money - fast cars, women [...] And if team-mates asked about a girlfriend, I'd say, 'I'm just not dating at the minute,' without going into details."** Another article, written for The Pink News by Rajdeep Singh (24<sup>th</sup> September 2020), also included a comment from a letter from the Sports Media LGBT network about how male football can be a challenging environment to come out in, both for gay men and bisexual men, **"The culture of the men's professional set-up can make it a particularly challenging environment for anyone who is gay or bi."** This comment has been included in this subsection due to gender being the overarching problem within the sport's culture, rather than the sport's culture as a whole. To elaborate further, it is unclear of how or if women's' football may adopt the same challenges.



Past studies have shown that different sports are strongly associated with different stereotypes, whereby individual cultures have come into fruition. For example, rugby is considered to be one of the most ‘manly’ of all sports in which people partake in if they are a certain build (large and muscular) and have certain personality traits (tough, aggressive) (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). Linking to concepts of masculinity and femininity in relation to the gender order and sexuality, masculinising sports such as football and American Football alongside rugby are considered appropriate for cisgender men that have high masculine capital, an aspect of which is that they are straight. Moreover, women who participate in sports such as these are considered to contradict these expectations of the sport, and as such have historically been assumed to be lesbians due to not adhering to what is considered acceptable and feminine (Lenskyj, 2013). As such, sports associated with hypermasculine cultures are also considered to be more likely to be homophobic.

#### *Race.*

Similarly to women and sexual minorities, racial minorities have gradually become more integrated in the world of modern sport in Western society. However, alongside their increased integration and participation rates, acts of racism followed. In addition to concerns about backwards thinking regarding gender and sexuality, racism – particularly in football for example – also remains a prominent issue despite what Farrington *et al.* (2017) describes as complacent claims that racism in sport has declined throughout in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, much academic literature has covered the experiences of black communities in sport (e.g. Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Bennett & King, 2021; Farrington *et al.*, 2012), with only a small percentage examining the intersection of sexuality. Research on black sportspeople of bisexual orientation is scarce and therefore require more attention, in addition to other bisexual sportspeople of different races and ethnic backgrounds.

Multiple black athletes’ stories were covered by some of the texts in the sample. During analysis, it was found that the intersectional aspects of being black and being bisexual in sport could make one appear more unique. In Kaitlyn Long’s coming out post (Outsports, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2019), she explained how

feeling out of place as a bisexual sportswoman was comparable to being one of a select few black athletes in her sport: **“The feeling of being out of place was familiar to me because of always being one of the only African Americans surrounded by white people, and I was scared to add bisexuality to my intersectionality.”** The way in which this is phrased suggest that Long felt that being a black person in sport was an aspect of her identity that already put her at a form of disadvantage with regards to sociological factors, highlighting that racism is still very much an issue in addition to biphobia. According to news reports, black collegiate athletes are often subjected to racist abuse from spectators and opponents (e.g. CNN, 2015; The Guardian, 2022, 2023), which could be argued to reflect the ways in which black people are treated nationwide across the US. In academia, black women have been historically subordinated in sport due to stigmatisations of being more masculine than white women (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014), which when we consider sport’s foundations of being a masculinising institution ruled by straight, white men, it is arguably unsurprising that Long did not wish to share her sexuality due to already being marginalised as a black woman amongst white athletes. Moreover, Long’s gender being female adds to intersectional marginalisation due to the existence of gendered hierarchies and hegemonic power relations.

Other athletes that also acknowledged that their being black, bisexual, and their involvement in professional sports made them a little more enigmatic, included Levi Davis (Jon Holmes, Sport Media LGBT, 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2020): **“I am a bit niche and difficult to categorise: a black, bisexual, privately educated rugby professional.”** Similarly, in an article covering NFL’s Ryan Russell’s decision to come out (BBC, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021), writer Nesta McGregor included the following points about Russell’s identity, signifying his position is of a similar stance to Davis’: **He believes he's in a unique position to play an active role. Bisexual. Black. And in an interracial relationship.** Here, two male black athletes acknowledge how their sexual identities are significant in combination with their race. However, this identifies a problem with how the world still views race, both by itself and in accordance with other intersectional factors. As such, Shelby Weldon’s Outsports post about Haleigh Washington (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021) highlighted how black athletes, particularly women, who identify as LGBTQ+ need more recognition, **‘we should consider that essential context and take time to give**

**proper recognition to the Black bisexual women and non-binary athletes, like Haleigh Washington, whose presence in the LGBTQ+ community is growing.**

Basketballer Bri Tollie did not specifically speak of how her race played a role in perceptions of her sexual identity but did touch upon how she was involved in activism for black communities. The three articles that covered the experiences of Jahmal Howlett-Mundle did not bring up any themes connecting to race.

### *Culture and religion.*

The LGBTQ+ community has made leaps and bounds in becoming more accepted on a global scale, however there are various cultures and religions that prohibit any form of sexual orientation or gender identity that extends beyond heteronormativity. Although not an overly common theme, the subject of religion and the cultures tied to it, and how it can affect one's experiences as a bisexual individual in sport was deemed of interest. As such, Kaitlyn Long spoke openly throughout her Outsports post about how her relationship with her faith (Christianity) changed as she tried to come to terms with her identity: **"As it became clear that I was bisexual, I began to distance myself from religion. I didn't like who I was and was terrified that I would be judged or misunderstood."** Another athlete who also experienced conflicts tied to religion was Ryan Russell, whereby his own internal battle was also affected by the religious culture of his home state of Texas, as put by reporter Nesta McGregor (BBC, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021): **"Russell grew up in Texas, where in his words "football and religion" were all that mattered."**

Differing from Long and Russell's experiences, Bil Browning's article for LGBTQ Nation about Jack Woolley raised important insights into how one's sexuality may affect outside perceptions of them in sport when considering religion as a factor: **"It is tough, my sport. A lot of the top athletes would be Muslim, so you can't be too open about it," he said. "I have had some opponents who wouldn't shake my hand."**

Cultural differences regarding the acceptability for LGBTQ+ identities were also highlighted in addition to religion. For example, as written in the Haaretz article (14<sup>th</sup> May, 2016), Gili Mosinzon acknowledged how sports in Israel feature anti-LGBTQ+ behaviour and language to the extent where it is part of the culture: **“Mosinzon dished out scathing criticism of sports coaches who use homophobic language, as well as managers and bosses who he said do nothing to promote tolerance of gays in Israeli sports.”**

Brazilian footballer Richarlyson also spoke of the dangers of being LGBTQ+ in his home country due to it being a place rife with homophobia: **“Do you understand why I think it's unnecessary for you to label yourself sometimes? There is a more important issue, there are people dying, Brazil is the country that kills the most homosexuals. And we are here talking about football, okay, but football is a small business.”** Richarlyson clearly states that Brazil is a dangerous country in which to be openly gay / non-heterosexual, and that this is a far bigger issue that should be addressed and reported on rather than an individual coming out in football. Throughout the entire article from which this quote was taken, there is a clear sense of him not seeing sexual fluidity as a huge problem because he sees it as a natural part of the human experience; rather, the act of people being murdered for identifying under non-conforming labels is much more unacceptable than the orientation itself. There are arguments that suggest the media should be directing more attention on the bigger picture rather than the finer details. This is despite footballers being commonly seen as role models (Dunn, 2016; Lynch, Adair & Jonson, 2014) and therefore the assumption being an openly bisexual player speaking their truth would encourage others to do the same. However, it is here that sociological and cultural factors instil many complexities for LGBTQ+ people to navigate through, that ultimately affect their decisions to come out or not. Having already discussed identity suppression, it creates a clear picture as to how much culture and religion alike can have an effect. It is due to these sociological and cultural factors that led Richarlyson to say that him coming out would not catalyse social change in both Brazil and in football. Furthermore, issues such as this could explain why many sportspeople have chosen to come out as LGBTQ+ after retiring. If change isn't guaranteed, they may see coming out as meaningless if not unfavourable.

## 5. Sporting environments

### *Sport specific cultures.*

Comparative to the formerly discussed issues concerning poor mental health, it was evidenced in some of the texts that sport has provided some bisexual athletes with the freedom to be their authentic selves, and in turn allowed them to accept themselves for who they are. These instances have been very much dependent on the responses of the subject athletes' teammates and coaches in addition to support from family and friends outside of their sports. Additionally, past research has demonstrated that different sports adopt different cultures. This was evidenced with the context of bisexuality in mind in the sample, such as an article from The Pink News (Mishti Ali, 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2021) which discussed wrestler O'Shay Edwards' decision to come out being influenced by a more welcoming culture in wrestling, despite having come to terms with his sexuality years prior and being involved in American football at the time: **“There was no way I was going to come out in a football locker room. Are you kidding me? My career would have been done [...] It wasn't until I got into wrestling and I started meeting everyone and being accepted for who I am.”**

The nature of coming out as LGBTQ+ in NFL was also highlighted by an article from The Guardian (21<sup>st</sup> July, 2022) featuring Ryan Russell: **“Establishing yourself in the NFL is hard enough if you're straight. As a former player, I know the sacrifices you have to make [...] When you're LGBTQ+, the struggle is even harder. The rigorous journey of coming out requires immense effort on top of the challenge of being an elite athlete. Image, societal norms and constructs, safety, family, friends, work and opportunities are often sacrificed for one to find the power and courage to come out.”** It is here that the notion of sacrifice comes into the picture whereby coming out as LGBTQ+ in sport is considered to be somewhat of an expense to a certain extent. This, alongside other factors, could potentially explain why there are few openly bisexual athletes in high level sport and as such why bias is so prominent in sport settings. It also raises questions about how people in positions of power off the pitch are or are not accommodating their LGBTQ+ athletes based on sexual factors.

Despite all the bisexual individuals written about in the textual sample having generally been met with support from their teammates and coaches alike, it could be suggested that it is anti-climactic when it comes to making real changes. For most societal issues, progress is slow and often feels like it isn't being made at all, which in turn could also be why there are few bisexual athletes willing to come out.

Ryan Russell also gave this comment in a separate quote from Nesta McGregor's article (BBC, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021): **"The NFL calls and I get that call from the Cowboys, and I thought: 'Well, if I was turning gay, I need to stop now.'"** Russell's mindset here was prior to coming out, where he didn't understand his sexuality fully. To say he needed to shut off his same-gender attraction to be a successful athlete could be considered to speak volumes about the culture of American Football. It also indicates that athletes may be willing to suppress their identities to have successful careers.

There appeared to be a running theme with sports that have traditionally been associated with masculinised cultures, including football. Writer for The Pink News Rajdeep Singh (24<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) wrote: **"The culture of the men's professional set-up can make it a particularly challenging environment for anyone who is gay or bi."** This was acknowledged in a similar comment from Jahmal Howlett-Mundle (Manish Pandey, BBC, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2021): **"Historically, football has not always been seen as welcoming for the LGBT community, something that Jahmal understands [...]"** **"The footballing world can be disastrous. A lot of the time it can be met with backlash."** Further, this comment from Sam Clarke (Sports Media LGBT+, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020) compared the differences in acceptance of his sexuality in both wrestling and in football: **"It was the acceptance I found in the wrestling community, and the fact I was yet to find a safe place in football, which led to me taking a step back from the latter."**

Another issue for bisexual athletes in addition to other LGBTQ+ identities is that certain sports reinforce heteronormative romance and relationships, particularly sports like figure skating or dance where the athletes are required to perform in male-female couples. This was spoken about by figure skater Karina manta in (Christine Linnell, Advocate, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2021): **"... a judge was talking about a team that are among the top-ranked in the world and said they couldn't convey romantic feelings as**

well as other teams because the male skater is gay," she said. "There are still judges that feel like anything vaguely queer or not heteronormative is a disadvantage in the sport. You sometimes get the defense of 'that's their artistic opinion,' but people don't critique that, and see that wanting to see that love story and only that love story on the ice is damaging to queer athletes, and sibling teams."

Some sport cultures, however, appeared far more inclusive. Having already spoken about professional wrestling having an inclusive culture, one other sport found to be more welcoming of bisexuality and LGBTQ+ community was ice hockey. Zach Sullivan however spoke the culture of ice hockey from his own perspective: **"In my experience, the hockey community is unlike any other. It's a culture built on affectionate headbutts, butt pats, and punches. The hockey world is a tight-knit supportive community and when something as important like this happens, the whole sport gets better."** Interestingly, having acknowledged the physical and arguably violent culture of the sport, Sullivan also goes on to say that above everything, the sport adopts a welcoming community that really comes together in moments of importance.

For the female athletes in the sample, there were few comments other than Manta's surrounding this issue.

#### *Team cultures.*

Every sport is associated with stereotypes, but within those sports exist a wide variety of subcultures that differ across different teams and clubs. Team cultures tend to consist of a range of personalities that are connected through one significant common interest – the sport in which the members partake. As such, these personalities are also malleable due to societal expectations held by the culture of the sport, in addition to a variety of other intersectional factors – the main one being gender. In other words, many athletes are led to believe they must behave in specific ways to fit into the environment and the team. Such cultures are argued to be manifestations of the stereotypes associated with sports themselves such as those discussed in the previous subsection.

Team cultures in male sports have been strongly associated with changing room banter and lad culture which adopt many behaviours that have been traditionally linked to orthodox and hegemonic forms of masculinity (Dempster, 2009) including homophobia. Lad culture has also been prominent amongst fans and spectators, especially in football. As such, LGBTQ+ football fans could feel a sense of exclusion from the sport, which is something bisexual football fan Luke Turner suffered when trying to come to terms with his sexuality. In his article for The Guardian (2022), he wrote about his experiences as a closeted bisexual West Ham fan: **“During the 1990s, it was a pillar of the homophobic lad culture that I encountered at school, in the media, on the stands when dad and I went to Upton Park, and in the brutal treatment of the gay footballer Justin Fashanu [...] I felt excluded from football [...]”** It wasn’t until Turner discovered West Ham’s LGBTQ+ fan group that he began to feel acceptance for his bisexuality and continuing his involvement in the football scene.

Something to bear in mind here is that these experiences occurred over 20 years ago and therefore cannot be considered entirely representative of team cultures now. As such, according to the following quote from Jahmal Howlett-Mundle (Sky Sports), there are signs that the nature of lad culture may be evolving: **“We still have a culture of 'boys' banter' in changing rooms but from where I started, there is a professionalism now that wasn't there before.”** The notion of banter not having the same connotations as it used to in team settings is an important one, particularly from the perspective of marginalised identities such as bisexual athletes. If we consider the ways in which laddish banter has traditionally manifested in the form of misogynistic and homophobic jokes, the second half of Howlett-Mundle’s comment indicates that those behaviours are arguably considered unprofessional, alluding to the idea that player professionalism aligns with progressive attitudes.

Context was also found to be an important factor in being able to distinguish banter from being harmful or not. Moreover, the perspective of LGBTQ+ athletes and how they perceive it is also important to consider. As such, Levi Davis (Daily Mail) also spoke of locker-room banter being context dependent with regards to how he would respond: **“I’ve had racist slights from team-mates over the years but in the context of dressing-room banter it’s different and it doesn’t bother me. If I was**



**uncomfortable with it, I'd say [...] if someone I didn't know made the remarks, then I wouldn't be happy. It's the same with homophobia. In the dressing room, someone might say, "That's gay" as a dig, but it's just done in a jokey, childish way and doesn't mean anything."** It is unclear as to where the limit is with banter such as this, as it will completely depend on the individual on the receiving end in addition to how the banter is delivered and the tone, intensity, and overall context behind it. We live in a society where humour is relative from person to person, and while some jokes may appear insulting to one individual, it does not necessarily mean it will appear that way to the next. This therefore creates a problem in distinguishing where to draw the line with any form of comment that may tap into biphobia, homophobia, misogyny, racism and so on.

Research claims that LGBTQ+ inclusivity has improved hugely in sporting environments, particularly over the last few decades. However, it is also recognised that the visibility of bisexual people, particularly in elite level sport, is hugely lacking. Having already discussed generalised attitudes towards bisexuality and how sport may affect perceptions of bisexuality, it was interesting to find that a prominent theme within the coming out stories included in the sample was the generally supportive attitudes of each athlete's teammates, sporting peers, and coaches. Continuing with discussions of Jahmal Howlett-Mundle's experience, he was quoted with the following in an article from the BBC (Manish Pandey, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2021): **"With every word, I started to feel a lot more comfortable, I started to feel everyone was engaged and listening [...] When one of the players said all the boys would support me, it was amazing to be honest."** It could be suggested that there is a sense of relief in Howlett-Mundle's words when describing his coming out to his teammates, as though he was not expecting their reactions to be so positive and so supportive. In addition, feeling as though they were actively listening to what he was saying indicates a strong team atmosphere and that he is a valued member of the team regardless of what he had to say. Further, this gives the impression that sexuality may not be so much of an issue amongst teammates as it is perhaps made out to be in sport, particularly ones like football where the problem of homophobia has previously had a strong presence. This links back to the topic of the problems of labelling and sexuality being a non-issue, however it does

necessarily give an indication as to why the LGBTQ+ community continue to be a marginalised population in sport settings.

The concept of having a community was found in the following quotation from Karina Manta (Christine Linnell, Advocate, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2021) where she found common ground with other queer female skaters: **"There's something about all of us growing up in a space where we didn't know a lot of queer skaters, and queer women who are skaters. We instantly had this shared experience and could understand each other in a lot of ways because of that."** For women, it could be suggested that finding a community is empowering due to being consistently marginalised by patriarchal structures throughout history. Moreover, the same can be said for queer athletes who have also been subordinated in sports settings.

Gymnast Luke Strong (Jim Buzinski, Outsports, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020) stated: **"It's always been fine within the sport, people are pretty understanding," he said. "But on social media you get your trolls every now and again, with homophobic abuse on comments or personal messages sometimes."** Not only does this quote from Strong highlight the power of social media, but it refers to connotations between homophobia and biphobia discussed at the beginning of this analysis. It also could suggest that a huge problem with sport's overall acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities is the attitudes of spectators. This could hold some validity whereby those more involved with the sports and the athletes themselves will know them much more personally, whereas spectators will only know a few details about that athlete in comparison. As such, it is far easier to make a judgement on a person based on a select few components of their identity without knowing them personally. Therefore, for someone who is not educated on bisexuality, or is inherently anti-LGBTQ+, the abusive backlash comes far more naturally. Moreover, there is a suggestion that abusive comments hit harder when in written word such as on social media, therefore making a much bigger impact on the outlook of LGBTQ+ marginalisation in sport settings.

## **Conclusion.**

Societal attitudes towards bisexuality have often been argued to be overwhelmingly associated with denial, erasure, and stigmatisation (Barker & Landridge, 2008). Despite generalised bisexuality research being accessible, studies that focus on bisexuality in sport are significantly lacking with huge gaps having been left in the literature. Moreover, media coverage of bisexuality in sport has also been found to be limited in comparison to other sexual groups such as lesbian women and gay men in sport.

The current state of the media in combination with academic studies paints a picture of there being very few openly bisexual elite athletes in sport in comparison to openly gay and lesbian athletes. However, where coverage of bisexual sportspeople has been made available such as the texts included in the research sample, the generalised narrative that comes across from both the mainstream and specialist sources in the sample praises bisexual sportspeople for their bravery and claim they are huge role models for future generations to come, therefore conveying an overall positive attitude towards their visibility. This narrative is arguably consistent with findings presented by academic studies such as those discussed in the review of literature. This collection of articles and blogposts clearly conveys the struggles of being bisexual prior to coming out, noting various features of biphobia, bisexual burden, mental health issues and stigmatisation. As many of the texts convey this message of overcoming biphobia through self-acceptance and the support of teammates and coaches, the general message to audiences appears to make closeted bisexuality seem undesirable, but there are also acknowledgements of being bisexual presenting unique challenges.

Many previously identified features of the bisexual experience were found to have been experienced by many of the individuals whose stories were covered in the sampled texts, in addition to features that have not yet surfaced from academic research. This therefore not only confirms both media awareness for aspects of bisexual burden but also confirms a degree of validity in past research on the subject. A key area highlighted in the results and discussion was the extent of mental health problems that bisexual sportspeople may face from suppressing their identities.

There have been many claims that homophobia in sport and society has been in significant decline since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anderson, 2005, 2011a; Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2005). However, the analysis evidenced that power dynamics amongst sexual orientations may still be present in sport. Accordingly, power dynamics and sociological theories such as hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) and stigma (Goffman, 1963), can be applied to the bisexual experience through the existence of sexual hierarchies (Brickell, 2009; Connell, 2005; Herek, 2007; Rubin, 1984) and harmful processes of stigmatisation from heterosexual and homosexual groups (Ochs, 1996), which was reinforced by quotations taken from various articles from the sample.

In addition as further established, the use of frontstage and backstage performances highlights how a bisexual individual navigates their social identity depending on their environment and circumstances, and sport plays a pivotal role whereby traditional expectations of gender and sexuality are still instilled – both intentionally and not. As such, understanding this issue through this theoretical lens gives an insight into why bivisibility remains an issue particularly in elite sport. The presence of stigma surrounding the bisexual community has the potential for bisexual individuals to either keep that aspect of themselves concealed from their frontstage / social identity, however their environment and circumstances play a pivotal part in this. The individuals who were focused on throughout the articles have all come out and revealed their sexuality in the form of self-acceptance, which would have been influenced by environmental or circumstantial factors such as their support networks including teammates, family members and friends. This is done despite knowing the risks of being stigmatised based solely on their sexuality, therefore providing a sense of rebellion against societal expectations and norms.

The theme of visibility and the importance of role models through use of labelling was an issue that came to be contested, whereby most of the athletes agreed that their positions as bisexual sportspeople were significant in a time of bierasure in sport. As such, there were arguments suggesting that labelling is problematic, and that sexuality should not overshadow one's talents. Moreover, it was also suggested that the athletes themselves should not be the driving force behind movements for equality, and that it

is the responsibility of those with higher power (i.e. National Governing Bodies) to instil and facilitate such forms of social change in sport. While the importance and benefits of role models cannot be ignored, neither can the question of who is responsible for real change and bvisibility.

#### *Limitations.*

Upon analysis of the sample texts, it is evident that there is a disparity between mainstream and LGBTQ+ specialist media outlets reporting on bisexuality in sport. During the sampling process for appropriate texts, it became evident that LGBTQ+ specialist articles and blogposts were much more accessible and higher in volume. As such, it should be acknowledged that more specialist texts were utilised for this project and therefore means the ratio of specialist to mainstream is unbalanced. Although this could be considered a limitation, it could be argued to also be reflective of the current state of bvisibility in sports media.

The texts also differed in detail, whereby some were far more descriptive and contained more direct quotations from the subjects; others were very short in comparison and did not offer as much content for discussion. It can therefore be suggested that important conversational topics may be missing from discussions surrounding bisexuality in sport settings.

As previously mentioned, media outlets tend to include specific quotations and information that will assist in the formation of certain narratives (Duncan & Messner, 2002; Messner & Soloman, 1993). Therefore, a textual analysis and the use of pre-selected quotations as evidence of bisexual individual's experiences may be considered less insightful or valuable in comparison to if they had been taken from an interview setup.

#### *Recommendations for future research.*

There are still many significant literature gaps regarding bisexuality in sport, as it is still a subject area that has only been identified as an important one for academic research in the last decade. Acknowledgements of multiple genders beyond the rigid binary of biological sex categories in addition

to sexual fluidity is an area that is lacking across all areas of academic study, however due to sport's relationship to gender and sexuality, it will be of interest to address the experiences of non-cisgender athletes that also orientate their sexuality with bisexuality, or even other forms of plurisexuality. In addition to gender, the intersections of race, culture, and religion in accordance with bisexuality should also be considered for future studies as the analysis evidenced that power relations exist between these distinct intersectional factors.

As mentioned early in the results and discussion, the distinguishment between biphobia and homophobia have the potential to be confused, or homophobia is used as an umbrella term for abuse towards the concept of same-sex attraction. It is questionable as to whether this is an accurate depiction of what homophobia is in accordance with official definitions. As such, it may be of interest to gain insights into how athletes themselves define homophobia and how biphobia differs from it.

## Appendix 1: List of texts included in the sample (date order – newest first)

Alex Reimer, Outsports (17<sup>th</sup> March, 2023) UFC fighter Jeff Molina publicly comes out as bi after being outed. <https://www.outsports.com/2023/3/17/23645279/jeff-molina-ufc-bisexual-sex-video-coming-out-twitter>

Luke Turner, The Guardian (26<sup>th</sup> December, 2022) I felt excluded by football's homophobic lad culture. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/26/bisexual-man-football-fan-west-ham>

Shelby Weldon, Outsports (9<sup>th</sup> November, 2022) Olympic skier Breezy Johnson comes out as bisexual. <https://www.outsports.com/2022/11/9/23180208/breezy-johnson-comes-out-bisexual-olympic-skier>

RK Russell, The Guardian (21<sup>st</sup> July, 2022) NFL players like me are cheered when we come out ... and are soon unemployed. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jul/21/nfl-gay-bisexual-players-carl-nassin-ryan-russell-michael-sam-football>

BBC (13<sup>th</sup> July, 2022) Kent bisexual footballer's homophobic abuser sentenced <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-62137470>

Samuel Meade, The Mirror (24<sup>th</sup> June, 2022) Former Brazil international Richarlyson announces he is bisexual in moving interview <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/brazil-richarlyson-bisexual-sexuality-interview-27321650>

Alex Reimer, Outsports (29<sup>th</sup> March, 2022) This out rugby player just signed with a club in England's top men's union division <https://www.outsports.com/2022/3/29/23001894/jack-dunne-rugby-bisexual-exte-chiefs-leicester>

Mishti Ali (26<sup>th</sup> December, 2021) Pro wrestler explains how sport helped him come out of bisexual after a lifetime of negativity <https://www.thepinknews.com/2021/12/26/o-shay-edwards-bisexual/>

Jordan Robledo (7<sup>th</sup> November, 2021) Anonymous Spanish footballer comes out as bisexual in heartfelt letter <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/anonymous-spanish-footballer-comes-out-as-bisexual-in-heartfelt-letter/>

Christine Linnell (22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2021) Skater Karina Manta on coming out, mental health in On Top of Glass <https://www.advocate.com/books/2021/10/22/skater-karina-manta-coming-out-mental-health-top-glass>

Shelby Weldon (23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021) Bi pride day salute to Olympic volleyball champ Haleigh Washington <https://www.outsports.com/2021/9/23/22687967/haleigh-washington-olympic-volleyball-champion-gold-medal-bi>

Jon Holmes (23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021) Bisexual visibility day: How Jahmal Howlett-Mundle's Sheppey United teammates helped him on his coming out journey <https://www.skysports.com/football/news/11095/12414528/bisexual-visibility-day-how-jahmal-howlett-mundles-sheppey-united-team-mates-helped-him-on-his-coming-out-journey>

Manish Pandey (3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2021) Coming out as bisexual to my football teammates <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-57994957>

Sam Damshenas (1<sup>st</sup> July 2021) Irish rugby player Jack Dunne comes out as bisexual <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/irish-rugby-player-jack-dunne-comes-out-as-bisexual/>

Brian Bell (23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2021) WWE pro wrestler Toni Storm comes out as bisexual <https://www.outsports.com/2021/6/23/22546646/toni-storm-coming-out-bi-wwe-nxt-pro-wrestling-pride>

Maggie Baska (19<sup>th</sup> February 2021) Trailblazing bisexual NFL veteran Ryan Russell admits he felt 'paralysed' by his sexuality <https://www.thepinknews.com/2021/02/19/ryan-russell-bisexual-nfl-player-sexuality/>



Nesta McGregor (18<sup>th</sup> February, 2021) LGBT+ history month: NFL player Ryan Russell on his decision to come out as bisexual <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/american-football/56100701>

Alex Reimer (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020) How a new generation of bi athletes is pushing back against bi-erasure <https://www.outsports.com/2020/12/10/22165873/bisexual-athletes-coming-out-fight-bi-erasure>

Bri Tollie (20<sup>th</sup> October, 2020) College basketball player comes out and feels a sense of liberation and pride <https://www.outsports.com/2020/10/20/21523829/bri-tollie-smu-basketball-coming-out>

Brian Bell (11<sup>th</sup> October, 2020) Coming out as bi+ carries its own set of obstacles, but they aren't insurmountable <https://www.outsports.com/2020/10/11/21510001/bisexual-pansexual-wrestling-tegan-nox-kiera-hogan-national-coming-out-day-wwe-impact-ae>

Rajdeep Singh, The Pink News (24<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) Queer football figures claim 'intense interest' in players' lives could be stopping gay and bisexual players from coming out <https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/09/24/gay-footballers-come-out-open-letter-sports-media-lgbt/>

Sam Clarke, Sports Media LGBT+ (23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020) Bi visibility day: Football, wrestling, and being bisexual <https://sportsmedialgbt.com/bi-visibility-day-football-wrestling-and-being-bisexual>

Alex Reimer (14<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) Rugby star Levi Davis comes out as bisexual: 'I want people to feel they can be who they are' <https://www.outsports.com/2020/9/14/21436131/levi-davis-rugby-bisexual>

Jon Holmes, Sports Media LGBT+ (13<sup>th</sup> September) Reactions to Levi Davis coming out show care is there <https://sportsmedialgbt.com/reactions-to-levi-davis-coming-out-as-bisexual-show-care-is-there>

Ian Gallagher, The Mail Online (12<sup>th</sup> September, 2020) Why I texted my rugby team-mates to tell them I'm bisexual: Ex-Bath and England star Levi Davis goes public after his 'sense of shame at not being normal' led him to drink and mental health issues <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8726327/Why-texted-rugby-team-mates-tell-Im-bisexual-England-star-LEVI-DAVIS-goes-public.html>

Will Stroude, Attitude (20<sup>th</sup> August, 2020) Rebecca Adlington's ex Harry Needs opens up about biphobia and first relationship with a man <https://www.attitude.co.uk/news/world/rebecca-adlingtons-ex-harry-needs-opens-up-about-biphobia-and-first-relationship-with-a-man-301572/>

Jimmy Tam, BBC (20<sup>th</sup> August, 2020) Former swimmer Harry needs comes out as bisexual <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-53827998>

Will Stroude, Attitude (6<sup>th</sup> August, 2020) Paul Gascoigne reveals what he told his son Regan when he came out as bisexual <https://www.attitude.co.uk/news/world/paul-gascoigne-reveals-what-he-told-son-regan-when-he-came-out-as-bisexual-301524/>

Jim Buzinski, Outsports (27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020) Champion trampoline gymnast Luke Strong comes out <https://www.outsports.com/2020/7/27/21339895/trampoline-gymnast-luke-strong-britain-comes-out>

John Milton, The Pink News (3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2020) Tokyo 2020 rower comes out as unapologetically bisexual in emotional post addressing how hard it is to be queer in sports <https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/07/03/maarten-hurkmans-bisexual-sexuality-gay-dutch-rower-olympics-tokyo-2020/>

Jay Forster, Sky Sports (23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2020) Zach Sullivan on coming out in ice hockey and his Manchester Storm teammates support <https://www.skysports.com/more-sports/ice-hockey/news/13997/11941739/zach-sullivan-on-coming-out-in-ice-hockey-and-his-manchester-storm-team-mates-support>

Vic Parsons, The Pink News (28<sup>th</sup> January, 2020) Zach Sullivan is the first ever pro ice hockey player to come out as bisexual <https://www.thepinknews.com/2020/01/28/zach-sullivan-first-ever-pro-ice-hockey-player-come-out-as-bisexual-manchester-storm/>

Bil Browning, LGBT+ Nation (24<sup>th</sup> January, 2020) Bisexual Olympian says some opponents won't shake his hand. He regrets coming out on TV <https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2020/01/bisexual-olympian-says-opponents-wont-shake-hand-regrets-coming-tv/>

Steve Brown, Attitude (18<sup>th</sup> December, 2019) US figure skater Amber Glenn comes out as 'bisexual/pansexual' <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/sexuality/us-figure-skater-amber-glenn-comes-out-as-bisexual-pansexual-300434/>

Steve Brown, Attitude (10<sup>th</sup> September, 2019) Ryan Russell believes the NFL is ready to support an openly LGBTQ athlete <https://www.attitude.co.uk/news/world/ryan-russell-believes-the-nfl-is-ready-to-support-an-open-lgbtq-athlete-299727/>

Neil Vigdor, New York Times (30<sup>th</sup> August, 2019) Ryan Russell, NFL free agent, comes out as bisexual: 'It's so much better than hiding' <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/us/ryan-russell-nfl-bisexual.html>

Kevin Arnovitz ESPN (29<sup>th</sup> August, 2019) No distractions: An NFL veteran opens up about his sexuality [https://www.espn.co.uk/nfl/story/\\_/id/27484719/no-distractions-nfl-veteran-opens-sexuality](https://www.espn.co.uk/nfl/story/_/id/27484719/no-distractions-nfl-veteran-opens-sexuality)

Kaitlyn Long, Outsports (7<sup>th</sup> February, 2019) Bi track and field champion found her second family at University of Minnesota <https://www.outsports.com/2019/2/7/18214393/kaitlyn-long-minnesota-track-field-coming-out>

Christine Linnell, Advocate (9<sup>th</sup> November, 2018) Karina Manta is team USA's first out female figure skater <https://www.advocate.com/sports/2018/11/09/karina-manta-team-usas-first-out-female-figure-skater>

Will Stroude, Attitude (31<sup>st</sup> January, 2018) Pro wrestler Anthony Bowens tackles the stigma around bisexuality on the cover of Attitude <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/sexuality/pro-wrestler-anthony-bowens-tackles-the-stigma-around-bisexuality-on-the-cover-of-attitude-294959/>

Benjamin Butterworth, The Pink News (15<sup>th</sup> March, 2017) This professional wrestler just came out as bisexual, introducing his boyfriend <https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/03/15/this-professional-wrestler-just-came-out-as-bisexual-introducing-his-boyfriend/>

Haaretz (14<sup>th</sup> May, 2016) Israeli pro hoops star comes out as bisexual on Independence Day <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/sports/2016-05-14/ty-article/israeli-basketball-pro-comes-out-as-bisexual/0000017f-f59c-d318-afff-f7ff7f0d0000>

Cyd Ziegler, Outsports (28<sup>th</sup> January, 2014) Conner Mertens came out to his college football team. Now he comes out publicly <https://www.outsports.com/2014/1/28/5348936/conner-mertens-willamette-football-kicker>

Nichi Hodgson, The Guardian (2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2013) We shouldn't rush to define Tom Daley's sexuality <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/02/tom-daley-bisexual-sexuality-diver-relationship-man>

## Appendix 2: Example of the initial analysis process

title	date	link	sport	category	main themes & topics	initial interpretations
UFC fighter Jeff Molina publicly comes out as bi after being outed	March 2023	<a href="https://www.ouissports.com/2023/3/17/2384573/jeff-molina-ufc-bisexual-sex-video-coming-out-white">https://www.ouissports.com/2023/3/17/2384573/jeff-molina-ufc-bisexual-sex-video-coming-out-white</a>	UFC / MMA fighting	Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coming out</li> <li>- identity suppression</li> <li>- homophobia / biphobia</li> </ul>	<p>it could be suggested that people are reluctant to come out due to not wanting to be defined by their sexual identity, it's a part of them, but they would rather be remembered for their skills and achievements rather than who they choose to involve themselves with romantically.</p>
I felt excluded by football's homophobic lad culture – until I found an LGBT fan group.	December 2022	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/26/bisexual-men-football-fan-west-team">https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/dec/26/bisexual-men-football-fan-west-team</a>	football	Mainstream - news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- homophobic lad culture during the 90s</li> <li>- LGBTQ+ exclusion</li> <li>- bi erasure</li> <li>- bisexual prejudice from LGBTQ+</li> <li>- self-acceptance</li> </ul>	<p>lad culture within football has arguably been a huge barrier for the LGBTQ+ community's integration into the world's most popular sport. football fans are arguably a very different breed compared to other sports, especially in the UK, and are perhaps considered a leading example to how the LGBTQ+ community is seen to be perceived within sport in general. in the case of this article, finding an LGBTQ+ football fans club was an important part of self-acceptance, as they had previously felt excluded by football culture due to things they had seen and experienced. this could also be an indication as to why there are still so few out footballers at elite level, which in turn means a lack of representation for lower level sport.</p>
Olympic skier Breezy Johnson comes out as bisexual	November 2022	<a href="https://www.ouissports.com/2022/11/19/23181028/breezy-johnson-comes-out-bisexual-olympic-skier">https://www.ouissports.com/2022/11/19/23181028/breezy-johnson-comes-out-bisexual-olympic-skier</a>	skiing	Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bi representation / normalisation / advocacy</li> </ul>	<p>the idea of bisexuality being a legitimate and normal identity, in society and sport. the way the instagram post is phrased suggests that it is both a big deal and not a big deal, again alluding to the idea that coming out doesn't need to be seen as such a huge thing or a problem to wider society.</p>
NFL players like me are cheered when we come out... and are soon unemployed	July 2022	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jul/27/nfl-gay-bisexual-players-geri-hassin-yan-russell-michael-sam-football">https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jul/27/nfl-gay-bisexual-players-geri-hassin-yan-russell-michael-sam-football</a>	NFL	Mainstream - news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lack of LGBTQ+ representation / advocacy</li> <li>- unique challenges of being LGBTQ+ in elite sport</li> <li>- need for better accommodation of LGBTQ+ athletes</li> </ul>	<p>deciding to come out as LGBTQ+ in sport, particularly at elite levels, requires an element of sacrifice, which perhaps explains why out athletes aren't very common particularly in popular sports. there are also questions people in positions of power high up off the pitch and how they may not properly accommodate their LGBTQ+ athletes based on sexual and racial factors. there is a suggestion that when LGBTQ+ people come out, it's celebrated and there is a lot of talk about making change and progress, however these are felt to be all false promises when there is actually no real progress being made - arguably evidenced by a continued lack of elite athletes willing to come out.</p>

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