

**Conditions of Acceptance: A Sociological Analysis  
of the Growing Acceptance of Gay, Bisexual and  
Queer Men in Sport**

by  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the assertion that acceptance for gay, bisexual and queer men is growing within the context of men's sports in Canada and interrogates the ways in which this acceptance is being achieved. A critical analysis of the experiences of five GBQ men in university sport and the mission statements of two LGBTQ acceptance organizations provide context for a form of conditional acceptance being granted to certain GBQ men in Canada.

Eric Anderson's (2009) *Inclusive Masculinity Theory* (IMT) is examined alongside Necropower, Whitestream, Homonormativity and Homonationalism. Although *IMT* argues that acceptance is growing for GBQ athletes in sport, it ignores the power structures interacting with this acceptance, which lead to uneven access to acceptance. Using Queer Theoretical perspectives, this thesis critically analyzes the uneven access to acceptance in sport for GBQ men.

**Keywords:** Sport, LGBTQ Acceptance, Inclusive Masculinity, Necropower, Homonationalism, Whitestream

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## List of Acronyms

IMT                      Inclusive Masculinity Theory

# Chapter 1. Introduction

The impetus for this project came from my own experience as a closeted queer man playing elite university team sports. While playing on the varsity football and rugby teams at the University of Regina, I undertook an ethnographic study of the football team for which I was playing as the basis for my honours thesis. This study began as I engaged with Anderson's (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) because the reality that I existed in seemed so far from the steadily improving situation that he described regarding masculinities and homophobia. If homophobia was decreasing, then why were it and homophobia such a central part of the culture of my football team? If men were able to come out as gay easier than ever before, then why did I find myself so terrified to come out? Why did the men who were perceived to be gay, without exception, always end up quitting the team?

My undergraduate honors thesis examines the construction of masculinity on my football team, which confirmed my critique of Anderson's IMT, but my thesis, like IMT itself, ignored the other interacting structures of power comingling to produce an ever-changing social field. My goal for this master's thesis is to investigate these missing pieces and to hopefully provide context at the micro level of social experience. I argue that although acceptance for gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men in sport is increasing, the acceptance is conditional and is part of the wider context of settler citizenship in Canada and the U.S., whereby citizens marked as white, cisgender and male are granted fuller citizenship than non-white, transgender, and non-male citizens. Sport is but one site where this type of conditional acceptance is being rolled out. Sport's role is to ensure that its resources go to those deemed worthy and that the citizens produced through this process do not question the state's necropower or Canada's colonial project.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) emerged from research that found more inclusive behaviours in heterosexual men and a change in the dynamics of male group cultures in the US and UK (Anderson and McCormack 2018). This research demonstrates that many young straight men: critical of homophobia; include gay peers in friendship networks; are emotionally intimate with male peers; are willing to engage in physical touch with other men; recognize bisexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation; engage in and even embrace activities once perceived as feminine; and reject violence and bullying (Anderson and McCormack 2018; 2016).

IMT rests on a concept that Anderson coined in 2009, homophobia, which is defined as the fear of being socially perceived as gay. This is different than homophobia in that it takes aim at an individual's, or culture's, own identity rather than the identity of others. Whereas homophobia would result in the fear or dislike of others who are gay, homophobia refers to a fear of oneself being perceived as gay by others. Anderson argues that homophobia has a far greater impact on individual identities because it forces individuals to critically evaluate their own actions, opinions, clothing, and relationships rather than those of others. Homophobic cultures exist if three key factors are met: (i) the culture is averse to gay men, (ii) there is awareness that gay men exist in significant numbers within the culture, and (iii) gender and sexuality are believed to be conflated (Anderson and McCormack 2018). The existence of these three factors allows a culture, and those within it, to successfully use homophobia as a means of policing gendered behaviours. If people do not fear the idea of being perceived as gay, then homophobia has little to no impact on their behaviour. Anderson's distinction between homophobia and homophobia is an important one because even he acknowledges that despite a decrease in homophobia, homophobia seems to exist at large. Without this distinction, it would be difficult to explain the change in masculinities despite the survival of homophobic discourse.

The central argument of IMT is that when homophobia is decreasing, it is more socially acceptable to be gay, which allows even straight men access to a wider array of gendered behaviours. In periods of decreased homophobia, men are free to express



themselves in ways that were historically seen as gay or feminine, which allows for a proliferation in the types of masculinities that are socially esteemed.

Anderson and McCormack have recently conceded that IMT does not necessarily explain the persistence of covert homophobia and heteronormativity (2018). The basis of their claims that more inclusive forms of masculinity have taken root and are displacing less inclusive forms rests on the assumption that overt homophobia has been decreasing over the past several decades in Western societies. They are also aware of the fact that other factors, like class, location, ethnicity, and religion play a major role in the development and maintenance of identities, however IMT does little to address how these factors play into the phenomena that they document. IMT focuses solely on the inclusivity of gay men into mainstream society and so misses the nuances associated with other types of inclusion. More specifically, IMT does not speak to growing inclusion, or lack thereof, of other intersecting marginalized groups. This leaves a major hole in the theory as the interconnectedness of these categories of identity makes it impossible to separate them from one another. However, that is exactly what IMT attempts to do. This completely ignores the basis upon which gay men are able to gain acceptance and inclusion, by differentiating the types of gay men that are and are not gaining acceptance. It is those men who are able, and willing, to contribute to the forms of power like heteronormativity, sexism, racism, nationalism and colonialism that sport is interested in reproducing who gain acceptance. By giving these men the opportunity for acceptance, sport is able to continue its central function of cultural reproduction.

Modern sport is a central institution in the reproduction of multiple domains of power in Canadian society. Collins (2013) describes the historical role of sport in advancing the ideas of white European “exceptionalism” during the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the media continued to leverage communication technologies, first with newspaper and radio and eventually TV, sport began to develop a powerful relationship with the media. This both affected the nature of sport – it developed as a microcosm of the wider society in which it was situated – and allowed it to affect the development and reproduction of the culture in that society. A major part of this period of capitalism was the development of an educated middle-class, which no doubt factored heavily in the structuring of sport and its intended audience (Collins 2013). The education movement

at the time began to signify the importance of physical well-being for boys and young men, which further bolstered sport's importance to white European societies.

This historical context provided by Collins (2013) highlights the fact that sport was not just a fun new pastime, but rather an economically, socially and politically beneficial social structure that would, in part, ensure the well-being of capitalism for boys and young men. Sport became an important part of the education system for boys and young men and was thus provided ample opportunity to shape citizens. Sport's role was to produce citizens that could withstand the demands of capitalism and survive a newly emerging urban lifestyle. It demanded that these citizens be white, male and middle and upper class. In today's society, sport's cultural importance is massive. Its effect is seen on everything from the socio-political-economic structures down to the family structure, including gendered differences (Caudwell 2006; Collins 2013; Gemar 2018).

Travers (2008) reveals the role of sport in normalizing the unequal distribution of resources at the expense of women and queer folks. These are the resources that straight, white, cis-gendered men are perceived to be entitled to. Travers (2008) argues that for a society to be democratic, women and queer folks must be granted cultural and economic inclusion. By granting straight, cis-gendered men most of the financial opportunities in sport, especially economically and culturally fruitful opportunities like university and college scholarships and professional sports, women and those who don't fit normative citizenship are politically, culturally and economically marginalized. Not only does sport unevenly distribute its own resources, it also plays a role in normalizing the marginalization of particular groups in wider society by performing hegemonic systems of hierarchy and shaping citizens that are deeply entangled within Canada's project as a white settler nation (Travers 2011). Consider as an example the structure of men's and women's sport in general: throughout all levels of sport, they are differentiated, especially in the most socially, politically and economically fruitful sports like the big four (American/Canadian football, hockey, basketball and baseball). Sex segregation is a key feature of sports at all levels and differences in access to resources for boys and girls is stark. At the micro-level, as athletes come into contact with these power structures, they become normalized. Athletes learn early on that roles within sport are drawn across gendered lines.

Several key scholars (Anderson 2009; 2011; Anderson and McCormack 2016; de Boise 2014; McCormack and Anderson 2014; O’Neil 2015; Parent et al. 2014) within masculinities, sexualities, and sport literature have documented the changing nature of sexuality and gender in western sport and society. Eric Anderson’s IMT posits that homophobia, the fear of being socially perceived as gay, has decreased in recent decades, resulting in a proliferation of inclusive, less homophobic forms of masculinity (Anderson and McCormack 2016). Critiques of IMT point to its inability to explain the persistence of heteronormativity during periods of decreased homophobia, the existence of biased opportunity structures in society and sport, and the relentless centrality of homophobic discourse in the construction of masculinities in all-male homosocial sporting environments (de Boise, 2015; O’Neill 2015; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Parent, Batura and Crooks 2014). IMT has also largely ignored the perpetuation of other systems of inequality through the conditional acceptance of gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men in sport. The documentation of the effect of the historical shift in societal attitudes on the lived experiences of GBQ men in sport does little to critique the wider role of sport in producing normative citizenship (Travers 2011). It also fails to address the relative non-existence of openly gay elite professional and college athletes in men’s sports (Ogawa 2014). Despite the focus on a relative decrease in overt societal homophobia (Anderson 2009), modern Western sport and society remain deeply heteronormative, colonial, capitalistic, racist, sexist, and nationalist. Anderson’s (2009) claim that coming out publicly in sport is easier now than in the past completely ignores what is asked of GBQ athletes who are to receive so-called “acceptance”. IMT ignores the major resistance to acceptance in the big four professional leagues (NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB) as evidenced by the lack of openly gay players and a continued commitment to toxic versions of masculinity (Ogawa 2014). The focus on this shift in cultural realities ignores the persistence of interconnected systems of power that operate locally and globally to marginalize particular groups. To be clear, IMT’s claims that homophobia and homophobia have decreased are not inaccurate, but it ignores important nuances and diverts attention away from the need for continued political action where inequalities in sport and wider society are concerned.

I draw on the framework of queer/trans necropolitics to explore the limited ways that GBQ men are being included in sport. Necropolitics, as articulated by Mbembé (2003), refers to the power of the state to decide who lives or dies. The process of

deciding who lives or dies involves creating citizens who do not question the right of the state to mark certain populations for death. Queer/Trans necropolitics interrogates the everyday death worlds created with necropower in obvious sites like war and imperial invasion and in less obvious sites like the market and sport (Haritaworn et al. 2014). It is in these sites that particular subjects are marked as valuable, and thus worthy of life, and others are marked as immoral and thus unworthy of life, for example, queer and trans people of colour. Although this thesis does not examine the experience of trans men in sport, it is an area for further investigation as there are likely key similarities and differences to their experience when compared to gay, bisexual and queer men.

In elite competitive sport, men's bodies are transformed into objects of desire and desirability (Pronger 1999). This necessitates the shaping of one's body into a more desirable object to be sold on a global capitalist marketplace that demands attractive, heteronormative bodies that correspond to dominant racial stereotypes. This is seen in the commodification of black male bodies; on the one hand, black men are still very much feared in Canada and the U.S. but are valued in the context of mass entertainment (Hill Collins 2004). Take the National Football League (NFL) draft combine as an example. A collective of mostly black men are taken to a football stadium where they are paraded through like cattle at an auction in front of mostly older white men who are to assess their physical prowess and make decisions about which bodies will bring value to their organization. This crew of mostly older white men critique the mostly non-white bodies against a commodified standard that has been set through years of watching these types of bodies compete in the NFL. The NFL draft combine draws eerie parallels to slave trade auctions (Dufur and Feinberg 2009). Those GBQ men who are willing to conform their bodies and identities to such standards can gain acceptance. Therefore, the acceptance of GBQ men in sport is significantly dependent on their ability to conform to these standards. This is but one example of how sport shapes citizens through conditional acceptance, amongst other strategies. Those who cannot conform are not granted access to the life giving resources that sport has to offer. Black football and basketball players reinforce the controlling image of Black men as violent.

Modern sport acts as one vehicle for the normalization of the necessary conditions to support the acceptability of the state's right to decide who lives or dies. Sport is a site where those conditions are performed and reproduced. The conditions necessary for this right to be realized include a state of exception. Modern competitive

sports operate within a constant state of emergency. Discourses of winning and losing are often framed as life and death. Although it is a metaphor within the context of sport, it prepares the athlete for the wider context of society where it is literally life and death. The athlete must conform to normative citizenship “for the team”, which means “to win/live”. Sport is not only about preserving one’s own life through the performance of winning, but it is also about ending the enemy’s, because their very existence supposedly threatens yours. This parallels homophobic discourses that focus on the necessity – as a man – to avoid penetration of one’s own anus, but to impose penetration with one’s phallus on others (Pronger 1999). Although this may seem to be an exaggeration of the stakes, consider that sport participation can lead to life giving resources. With this in mind, it becomes understandable that men often feel protecting their heterosexual identity within the context of all male sport feels like an absolute necessity. Within the context of sport’s constant state of the exception, the stakes are raised for participants. Athletes are valorized if they are willing to put the need to win above their own safety – it also normalizes abusive and marginalizing behaviour for the sake of the team. Mbembé (2003) argues that power works to reproduce the state of exception/emergency and the enemy who has purportedly caused it. Sport is engaged in creating the necessary conditions for the acceptability of the state’s necropower by normalizing this state of exception within the context of sport participation. Playoffs are the culmination of a year’s worth of hard work and sacrifice and is the single avenue through which a team can be perceived to have had success. A loss in the playoffs means failure, while a win allows the season to continue – this breeds a situation where players, coaches and administration will ignore the normal decencies of daily life and enter the state of exception. An example of this is the bounty scandal in the NFL where a coach was caught offering up bonuses to players who were able to injure their opponents. A rivalry game – a situation where a team is competing against its sworn enemy – also induces exception. These experiences in sport reproduce the state’s necropower both literally and metaphorically as it normalizes the state of exception for athletes. It prepares the athlete for life as a citizen of a white settler nation and dulls the shock that often comes with the horrors that occur during states of exception. It is in these moments that anything becomes acceptable because the end justifies the means. For example, an athlete who has been conditioned to believe that physically and emotionally attacking their perceived enemy is acceptable, likely won’t question state practices that do the same. Owton (2016) note the connection between sport

participation and violence supportive attitudes. There is a strong link between athletic participation, especially at the elite level, and male violence against women (Finn, Gardiner & Bruijns 2018). The normalization of violence in sport prepares citizens for a world where violence is acceptable, especially against those who are deemed to be less or an enemy.

Queer/Trans Necropolitic's perspective is a powerful lens for making sense of the limited ways in which some GBQ athletes find "acceptance" in sport while others do not because it allows the researcher to discover which athletes are marked as valuable and what conditions must exist for this to happen. As a important institution within capitalism, sport defines value along similar lines, and thus reinforces the legitimacy of power structures like race, gender and sexuality that support capitalism. Competitiveness, materialism, accumulation of capital, – think about the way individuals accumulate social, political, gender and other, non-economic, forms of capital within social environments like sport teams – conspicuous consumption, individuality and, paradoxically, conformity. It is often along these lines that value, and thus worthiness for life, is defined in both sport and life.

Modern all-male competitive sport place value in white leadership, masculinity, colonialism, and a liberal-capitalist construction of the self as valuable, if not central, to all aspects of Canadian society and nationhood (Krebs 2012). The Canadian nation was built upon the above-mentioned principals and as such continues to promote and normalize those values through its social, political and economic institutions, including sport. These normative categories define difference but allow for those subjects who do not meet all aspects to remain committed to the nation and thus the Whitestream (Krebs 2012). The concept of the Whitestream was first put forth by Denis (1997) and has since been elaborated upon by Krebs (2012). The Whitestream refers to a mainstream culture that centers whiteness as normative to citizenship, thus positioning all other citizenships as the other. Those who do not meet the standards are given the 'opportunity' to 'gain acceptance' for their non-normative attributes by remaining committed to the Whitestream in as many ways as is possible; by being 'white adjacent' (Krebs 2012). The popularity of racialized sports stars is evidence of the Whitestream's commitment to multiple power structures as opposed to evidence of a weakening of the Whitestream. One does not have to be white to uphold the Whitestream.

Krebs (2012) argues that despite a move toward outspoken multiculturalism, there remains a racialized hierarchy in Canada. White, male citizens are still disproportionately afforded access to life-giving resources. The shift in ideology of multiculturalism in Canada, marked by the development of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, enabled the Whitestream to position itself as tolerant and open-minded. However, the focus became about a perceived open-mindedness and serves only to mask the on-going processes of colonialism and white supremacy in Canada. This points to the relevance of the Whitestream as a social force that determines “acceptance” of certain GBQ men by “folding them into life” (Puar 2007: p 36).

The Whitestream serves to reproduce a “normative complex” that positions the white male as the default citizen, while valorizing a masculinity that bases its identity on the ability to use violence to dominate the “other”. This construction of citizenship creates an interlocking system of race and gender that discriminately dispenses resources to those citizens who are willing to aggrandize the Whitestream, which serves to further reinforce the legitimacy of distributing most resources to white, cis-gender, straight men vis-à-vis citizens with intersecting group memberships like women, queer folks, and racialized minorities (Krebs 2012).

Modern competitive all-male sports are sites where hierarchy is performed and normalized. Recent examples from the NFL show just how powerful this necropower is. Greg Hardy, a defensive lineman charged with sexual and physical assault against his girlfriend, was quickly allowed back into the league after a short suspension by way of a multi-million-dollar contract (Benson 2015). Conversely, Colin Kaepernick has been chased out of the NFL for protesting racial conditions in the USA by kneeling during the national anthem before all of his games in 2016 (Rorke and Copeland 2017). Valuing the national anthem – a symbol of national identity – over and above the safety of women and queer folks and the need to change the way men are socialized to be violent and oppressive, is just one example of how elite sports normalize and reproduce Necropower.

The Whitestream acts in a very similar way to homonationalism. It is aimed at creating demobilized minority groups by offering conditional acceptance and socially, economically and politically fruitful opportunities. According to Lisa Duggan (2003: 50), homonormativity is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative

assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption”. Homonormativity seeks to pacify gay and queer people by rooting their cultures in activities that augment the Whitestream and homonormativity in Canada and the USA, rather than disrupt it. It is true that large portions of the gay rights movement have made this their goal, but critical queer scholars, such as Jasbir Puar (2007), have argued that this grants access to mainstream society to some LGBTQ people at the expense of racialized and/or poor people, LGBTQ people among them, and anyone who refuses to contribute to the mainstream. Homonormativity participates in the ongoing marginalization of queer people based on class, race, immigration status, and commitment to the nation. Certain LGBTQ rights groups are – whether consciously or unconsciously – leveraging their position as white, middle-class, and committed to the nation vis-à-vis those LGBTQ people who are not.

Homonormative nationalism, or what Puar (2007) refers to as homonationalism, is reflected in the inclusion of some LGBQ athletes as a strategy that enables the West to position itself as tolerant (Travers and Sherman 2017). Wendy Brown (2006) characterizes the West’s tolerance as implying a conditional acceptance of that which is unwanted rather than full inclusion. By accepting certain LGBTQ people and groups rather than others – and while masking this conditional acceptance – the West positions itself as a champion of gay rights without having to critically examine the unequal power structures that combine to characterize Canadian and U.S. society. Homonationalism is about LGBTQ inclusion in ways that reinforce the social, moral and economic supremacy of the West (Morgensen 2010; Sykes 2016). By positioning itself as the world leader in human rights, the West does not have to face its own position in the reproduction of inequality at all levels.

Sykes (2016), Travers and Shearman (2017), and Morgensen (2010) emphasize the extent to which the gay rights movement has engaged in normalizing and masking state violence through colonialism and the displacement of Indigenous populations to the benefit of white settlers in Canada and the USA. Beyond a commitment to mainstream power structures like race, gender and heteronormativity, “settler homonationalism” (Morgensen 2010) also necessitates a commitment from LGBTQ people to the maintenance of colonialism.



In settler nations like Canada and the USA, the Whitestream includes a commitment to ongoing colonialism. Sport acts as a site where colonialism is performed. Canadian critical race scholar Sherene Razack (2002) argues that the specific context of all-male sporting environments reproduces a form of masculinity that positions itself based on its propensity for, and ability to carry out, violence against women; especially against racially “othered” women. Razack presents the case of Pamela George as an example. Pamela George, an Indigenous woman, was sexually assaulted and beaten to death by two varsity athletes from the University of Regina. Razack outlines how Canadian masculinity has been constructed around the colonial project and how that construction led to the murder of Pamela George and the overly lenient sentencing of the two athletes. To justify, and ignore the existence of, a colonial settler society in Canada and the USA, a configuration of race and gender that legitimizes white men’s ownership of the land and everything on it – including the bodies of women – must be normalized (Krebs 2012; Razack 2002; Pronger 1999). If the Canadian state is exposed as the white settler state that it is, it can no longer make claims about its multiculturalism and championship for human rights. That is why ownership of the land must be normalized within gendered and racialized meanings, so that the Canadian state can simultaneously reproduce colonial violence against Indigenous people, while positioning itself as progressive. This thesis examines the role of GBQ “acceptance” in sport in reproducing settler identities and the normalization of settler land ownership as natural and right. Sport, and the fields, courts and arenas that it takes place on, are sites of competition where colonialism is performed and reproduced. Young men learn to dominate the other on these lands, which inevitably reflect and leak into the wider Canadian context. This leads to a situation where Canadian citizenship is defined by an ability to, at minimum ignore, and at maximum take part in, the activity of marking Indigenous people in general, and Indigenous women, in particular, as disposable.

Modern competitive sport in Canada and the U.S. is a site where social inequalities are performed and reproduced. Sport in this way ensures the existence of the necessary conditions for the state to actively exercise its necropower. Through sport, and other social institutions, a gendered, racialized, neoliberal, capitalistic and colonial construction of the self, the individual, and private property is reproduced to create citizens who do not question the state’s necropower. This framing of citizenship produces athletes, officials, administrators and fans who are vehemently committed to

territorial domination and colonial logic. By the time boys and men in Canada and the U.S. have made it beyond the realm of youth sport and into adult sports, which is when they gain voting rights, colonial logic has been normalized. To this day Indigenous people are pushed from their land violently in the name of “the greater good of the nation” for economic, cultural and political megaprojects like the Site C Dam, the Olympics, and pipelines. Sport is deeply entangled in the production of citizens who don’t see this as a problem. This thesis examines how these types of citizens are reproduced in the context of decreasing homophobia and the increase in more inclusive forms of masculinity.

## Chapter 3. Research Questions

I focus on the interconnected social structures of modern sport and white settler masculine hegemony in the current historical context of Canada and the U.S. to sociologically situate the experiences of gay, bisexual and queer men in elite competitive sports. I ask: how are gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men gaining conditional “acceptance” in elite competitive sports and how do they experience these power structures as they engage with and reproduce them? This thesis examines the role of sport in perpetuating ongoing inequalities based in colonialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism.

I begin by critically analyzing IMT in the context of the experiences of my participants to understand what it misses in terms of other power structures that affect the changing nature of masculinities and sexualities. Then, I examine how theories like Queer/Trans Necropolitics and the concept of Homonationalism can provide an explanation free from the normalizing forces of capitalism, patriarchy and nationalism.

## Chapter 4. Methods

I use an interpretive paradigm to develop data collection methods through which to examine the lived experiences of GBQ men in sport. Interpretivism takes the social actor's understanding of their own social experiences as constitutive of a version of reality. Interpretivism thus allows the researcher to access social realities and structures through the perspectives of participants. In an interpretivist interview, the researcher and the participant co-create knowledge about the social world through discourse (Bryman 1984; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Prus 1996). This approach, although philosophically at odds with Queer Theories, allows access to the lived experiences of GBQ athletes. It provides me the opportunity to discuss these experiences while still employing a critical analysis. It is employed as a method of data collection, rather than a method of analysis. McCann (2016) describes the ways in which Queer Theory can be used in conjunction with other Sociological approaches in ways that strengthen research. McCann (2016: 239) argues that "rather than prescribing specific methods that are "more queer" than others, queer theory provides a way of orienting method". It can be used in cooperation with other methods.

Following Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) and Prus' (1996) approaches, I view reality as socially constructed and materially meaningful. According to these theorists, there are multiple realities and worldviews. Social actors rely on their interpretations of these realities to create their own understandings of their social worlds. However, these understandings are not stable and static; they are dynamic. Furthermore, the realities of social actors are not waiting to be uncovered through interviewing but are rather re-created through the interview process. The participant and researcher literally engage in re-constructing life worlds in discussion with one another. It becomes particularly important to interrogate the ways that realities are presented to social actors through intersubjectivity. In modern competitive sport, social actors are asked to buy into an intersubjective construction of reality that positions particular normative categories as right and meaningful while disposing of others by marking them as immoral and meaningless with necropolitical consequences like access to life-giving resources. The approach offered by Prus (1996) and Holstein and Gubrium (1995) allow me to investigate the manifestation of such an intersubjective reality in interview participant's constructions/interpretations of their own realities, while Queer Theories allow me to

critically examine these realities in the wider context of homonationalism and necropower.

Using chain-referral sampling (Penrod et. al. 2003), I recruited 5 GBQ men who played, or are currently playing, all-male, competitive university or college sports. At the time of the interviews, all participants lived in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview of approximately one to two hours in duration, which focused on their experiences as GBQ boys/men in sport. In particular, the interviews centered around how they have experienced and engaged with gender, race, colonialism, capitalism and sexuality in sport. This process enabled me to assess my participants' experiences, or lack thereof, with sport as a site where the Whiteman, settler homonationalism and necropolitics are performed and reproduced. Furthermore, it allowed me to investigate to what extent these men experienced the reality that IMT describes. That is, the acceptance of gay, bisexual and queer men in sport.

I critically examine the mission statements and discourses of two GBQ inclusion organizations in sport, "You Can Play" and "Athlete Ally", which facilitates another level for understanding the framing of GBQ "acceptance" in sport. Through analysis of the mission statements and other communications by these organizations, I explore the ways in which they contribute to the hegemonic role of sport in Canadian society. Data for this analysis consisted of both print and internet communications of these GBQ "inclusion/acceptance" organizations to examine to what extent they are participating in the ongoing reproduction of the Whiteman, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism in Canada and the U.S..

Privileging the stories of GBQ athletes offers an access point for understanding the overlaps between historical/institutional forces and contexts and individual experience and consciousness. This follows Mills (1959) approach to the Sociological Imagination whereby social structure, history and biography are central in understanding the experiences of individuals. Questions that aided in the co-creation of this knowledge related to the participant's conception of the individual and the self, their commitment to the Canadian nation, and their attitudes towards Indigenous Canadians, especially regarding Truth and Reconciliation and the debate relating to land and self-governance. This was possible by using a life history approach (Cole and Knowles 2001) to

understanding participants' experiences in sport and their conceptions of key issues in Canada and the U.S. and the world.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and performed analysis using Nvivo 11 software for both the interview transcripts and the textual analyses. Data collection began in the fall of 2017 and concluded in the summer of 2018. Data was analyzed and collected concurrently. Using an open coding method (Williams and Moser 2019), I found themes within the data that has influenced the discussion portion of this thesis.

## Chapter 5. Findings

### 5.1. Introduction

After analyzing data collected from five in-depth interviews with ex-university athletes and the mission statements of two acceptance organizations in sport, I found that while IMT is well equipped to explain macro-level changes to gendered patterns of behaviour amongst men, it has major limitations in illuminating the nuanced, and often ambivalent, experiences of GBQ men participating in elite team sports. Although some of the trends discussed in IMT seem to hold true, specifically, it has limited applicability regarding the patterns of behaviour that are required to gain acceptance.

I place the participants at the center of my discussion. My discussion of each of the participants follows a similar path to the interviews themselves. I begin with an introduction to them as people, which is followed by a discussion of the course of their lives and ultimately how their experiences inform this thesis. My hope is that this creates a narrative that is as close to what surfaced in the interviews as possible, while also discussing the theoretical implications of the findings.

Before beginning with the participant biographies, it is important to note that four of my five participants played university volleyball, which, when compared to its contact sport counterparts, is not considered a hypermasculine sport. All five participants are white. Anderson's (2009) IMT seems to be rooted in the experiences of men and boys in less hypermasculine sports. Although some of Anderson's research focused on hockey, which is a decidedly hypermasculine sport, most of his research was conducted on groups of men and boys playing sports like basketball and volleyball, which are perceived as less masculine. So, it is possible that IMT is more applicable to less hypermasculine sports, which could explain why I had great difficulty in finding ex-university hockey, football and rugby players and little difficulty in finding several volleyball players. This was at least due in part because of my use of chain referral sampling as well as my own position in this research as a white, middle-class cis-gender man. My first two participants were a volleyball player and a basketball player, and their contacts filled the rest of the participant pool. Interestingly, and despite my asking, neither knew of anyone who played a more hypermasculine sport. This is not to say that the data from this project is invalid, but rather to point out a reality that has significantly

shaped the data collected. It would be mere speculation, but if I were to have succeeded in finding GBQ men who played more hypermasculine sports, there may have been a difference in participant experiences. Furthermore, a participant pool with people from other racial groups, socio-economic statuses and genders likely would have a significant impact on findings.

An international study on homophobia and the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer athletes (LGBTQ) found that GBQ men in particular were more likely to participate in soccer and volleyball (Denison and Kitchen 2015) – neither of which are perceived as hypermasculine sports when compared to rugby, hockey and Canadian football. Interestingly, basketball was not far behind for gay youth, whereas volleyball is more popular amongst adults. Despite the above, the experiences of my participants revealed that there are more similarities in less hypermasculine sports when it comes to cultural reproduction than differences when compared to their more hypermasculine counterparts. Although violence is not a central part of volleyball, there were still instances of violent discourse both on and off the court. Despite a lack of physical contact, volleyball often glamorizes those athletes who are able to physically impose themselves on their opponents by knocking them down, and sometimes injuring, with the ball itself. This is seen as a sign of physical prowess and power.

Football and hockey are particularly well-known for their adherence to hypermasculinity, homophobia and homophobia. The most hypermasculine sports appear slowest, understandably, to move towards the acceptance of GBQ men. This is likely because of the perceived link between gender and sexuality, as well as gender and sport performance. This belief leads to the centrality of hypermasculinity in sport discourse. GBQ men in hypermasculine sports threaten the idea that one must be a straight to be a man, be a man to be an elite athlete and therefore must also be straight to be an elite athlete. It is for this reason that hypermasculine sports continue to exclude GBQ men at higher rates than less hypermasculine sports (Denison and Kitchen 2015). Interestingly, as these sports drift further from wider society's stance on GBQ athletes, they risk losing cultural importance. For example, socially perceived concussion risk has been cited as a major contributing factor to the decline of youth participation in football (Murphy, Askew and Sumner 2017). As social norms continue to look more unfavorably on homophobia and homophobia, it stands to reason that participating in a sport that fosters environments where homophobia and homophobia proliferate will lead to



decreasing sport participation because of the negative social consequences. It will be interesting to see if football and hockey continue to act as the last bastions for hypermasculinity and homophobia in Canada and slowly lose cultural relevance or if they will begin to follow the path of other sports like volleyball. Non-contact and low-contact sports like volleyball, baseball, soccer and basketball are leading the way in the acceptance of GBQ men and boys in sport.

The desire for this project was to find men who were still actively playing sport as either out or closeted gay men. Especially those playing a sport like the one I had played, football. However, these men proved extremely difficult to find, which is an interesting finding in and of itself. As it is important to this research to use participants who are insiders; in the absence of true insiders I looked for those who had been insiders in the past. Interestingly, I was also an insider in the same sense as I had played university football as a closeted queer man. During my undergraduate research, this offered me perspectives that I can no longer gain as an outsider. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) note the ambiguous impact of being an insider and outsider in social research. They argue that neither can be said to be “good or bad”, but that both certainly impact the nature of the research and the resulting findings. My position as an ex-insider, like my participants, may have caused me to ask questions that an outsider wouldn’t know to ask, but it may also lead to me, as researcher, shaping the narrative with my own experiences. Lozano-Neira and Marchbank (2016) discuss the access that sharing an identity with research participants can grant to a researcher, but caution that this access is rarely unproblematic and does not automatically make the findings meaningful. For example, my participants were often able to convey things to me without fully explaining them because of our shared experiences, but this leaves something to be desired in the data because participants wouldn’t elaborate as much as they would if they were explaining to an outsider.

## **5.2. Participant Biographies**

All five of my participants took part in competitive University team sports within the last ten years. To provide context for my findings, I present a brief biography of each participant. Since this project investigates the context of Canada and the U.S., it is important to understand the geographical, political, social, economic, racial, religious, and historical contexts of the participants.

Each of the interviews followed a similar structure, although I allowed them to deviate as needed based on the direction of the conversation. I began by getting to know each participant's background. Where they were born and raised, who their parents are/were, any group affiliations and about their experiences with sport. Each interview concluded with a discussion of culturally relevant topics that I use to gauge each of their levels of commitment to white settler society in Canada. At the time, the Trans-Mountain Pipeline and the Site C Dam Projects were all over the news, so I used those as touchstones to understand their stance on issues that are deeply connected to Canada's present as a white settler nation.

Most of my participants followed a very similar path where their sexual orientation and their identity is concerned: first, they assumed that they were straight (typically at a young age before puberty); second, they were in active denial and took steps to try to convince themselves that they were straight; third, they admitted to themselves that they were not straight, but actively hid it from others and, in most cases, took steps to ensure they were perceived by others as straight; and finally, they began admitting to others before eventually coming out of the closet fully – this last step happened after they had finished playing university sports with the exception of Taylor, who came out before his final season.

To protect the identities of my participants I have changed identifying information about them, but none of the changes affect their experiences as they relate to this project.

### **5.2.1. Matt**

Matt is a tall, and I mean tall, 6'6", slender person with an athletic frame. He was born in Vancouver in the late 80's and played all of his youth sports on Vancouver Island after moving there as a toddler with his family. Matt identifies as a gay man. Although he acknowledges that sexuality exists on a spectrum, he is firm in his identity as a gay man. He is not religious, nor is he particularly political in nature, however, he says that he votes in every election. Provincially, he voted for the NDP and federally for the Liberals in the last elections. Matt is a white, cis-gender man. He says that he started to realize that he was gay as a pre-teen but didn't come out to anyone until he was in his mid-twenties.

As a young child, Matt's family was middle class. He was able to play as many sports as he desired but couldn't always play on the travelling "rep" teams because of the high cost involved. Growing up, Matt very much experienced the perceived link between gender and sexuality. He cited experiencing a need to "over-compensate" because of his realization that he might be gay: "especially after elementary school when I started having some questions about my sexuality, I would say I definitely over-compensated, even though I wouldn't have admitted it at the time. I would compensate by doing things like trying to be extra masculine, playing sports, or the way that I talked and the tone of my voice". He believes that part of his reason for taking part in so many sports was the perception that it offered easy access to masculinity, which he felt he needed given his questions about his sexuality.

Matt played basketball for five years at a university in British Columbia. During this period, he successful and served as a team captain for his final three seasons. When asked about if he would have been accepted had he come out he said:

I would like to think so, but I think my experience and my teammates' experiences, and our success would have been very different. Comfort level for me and my teammates would've been different. It's a contact sport and I played forward, which is a body-to-body post position and I don't think I would've felt completely comfortable playing defence and I don't think they [teammates] would have felt comfortable playing offense against me. There probably would've been comments like "oh, you're going to enjoy this too much" or "I'm not guarding him". But that's all speculation. I also would've loved to be that leader, as a captain for three years, who came out and provided that role in college sports because I think it's important.

Throughout university Matt dated several women as a way to avoid questions about his sexuality. He would engage in conversations with his teammates about women in a manner consistent with toxic masculinity (Anderson 2002). Matt was one of the most popular men on his team and within the athletic community at his university. Knowing that his sexuality threatened his social capital, he hid it.

Now, Matt works in the Lower Mainland as a youth programmer with a city parks department. He doesn't enjoy organized competitive sports anymore, but still plays in recreational leagues. However, Matt hasn't played basketball since university. He has since come out to his old teammates and hasn't faced any kind of negative feedback. When asked about his thoughts on social acceptance of GBQ men in Canada, he said: "people might still have a problem with gay men, but they aren't likely to say anything

because it's not socially allowable to be intolerant. I'd like to think that people don't have a problem with it at all though." It's clear that the GBQ experience in Canada has improved over the last 50 years as Anderson (2009) suggests, but Matt's comments insinuate a commitment to the Whitestream. Here is his response to being asked if the Canadian government ought to provide social assistance:

I would put them [people who are homeless] on the same level as the immigrants. I don't think tax is the most important factor though. I think hard-work and effort are most important. If you're a Canadian making an effort to make a better life for yourself, then I think you deserve help first over groups who aren't Canadian or groups who aren't trying, I'll put it that way. Or that are performing in an illegal manner.

Matt's answer focuses entirely on the individual and ignores the historical, political and economic context of Canada and the U.S. over the past several hundred years. He did not speak to the role of white settler society in causing mass poverty and homelessness amongst gendered and racialized groups. Matt's attitude toward government-provided, life-giving resources fit with a wider set of beliefs that characterize white settler citizenship. It is this type of citizenship that offers access to acceptance in sport for GBQ men. It is also this citizenship that augments the Whitestream and allows the Canadian state to position themselves as morally superior and thus justify their necropower. Matt did not discuss whether the Canadian state ought to hold the necropower that it does, he merely stated one of the key markers for those who are to be marked as worthy of life. A marker that is widely held as important in white settler society. None of this is to say that sport is the only institution involved in this project. Sport is but one site where this type of conditional acceptance is being rolled out. Sport's role is to ensure that its resources go to those deemed worthy and that the citizens produced through this process do not question the state's necropower or Canada's colonial project. In this sense, sport serves as a tool for wider society to carry out its aim. It could be argued that even those Canadians who do not participate in sport are likely to end up with the same beliefs and attitudes. However, the point isn't that sport is the only institution involved in the processes described herein, but that it is engaged in those processes in a meaningful way. Sport is deeply rooted in social, economic and political contexts which makes it impossible to remove it from the Whitestream.

Matt's stance on the Trans-Mountain Pipeline project was as follows: "It shouldn't go through; the environmental risks are too dangerous". His response to the Site C Dam Project was more nuanced, but followed a similar theme:

I think providing more environmentally friendly energy is key. There's a thing with big projects, it comes down to my favorite acronym, NIMBY – Not in my Back Yard. I don't think I have as strong a reaction over something happening far away and I would I'm sure if it happened on my doorstep. To build Site C, you're flooding agricultural land and displacing people, that's not environmentally friendly, what gives? How are people compensated? Is compensation enough? I don't have a set answer, but I do think deep down, to further our position, or to prevent too much climate change by providing more environmentally friendly energy, is going to come at a cost. And that's to people, the economy, the environment. But what's the end cost if we don't do anything?

His answer is indicative of his position in Canada. His main concern over both projects is over the role they play in climate change. On the one hand, the pipeline project is a perceived threat to further climate change and, on the other, the dam project is perceived to provide a form of energy that, at the very least, is not contributing directly to climate change. Although Matt contemplated the impact that both projects have on Indigenous people in those areas, it was far from his main concern and by the end had decided that it was a cost that would have to be paid – convenient that he would not be the one paying it. In Matt's mind, the cost to Indigenous people is worth the perceived benefit of "clean energy", a trade-off that is keeping with Canada's history of marginalizing and impoverishing Indigenous people to the benefit of white settler citizens.

### **5.2.2. Brendan**

Brendan is a white man who was born in the central interior of British Columbia in the late 80's. He grew up in a white, upper-middle class family in a working-class town. He isn't religious now but grew up in a Catholic family. Brendan played youth sports in his hometown and eventually went to the local college where he played volleyball. After two years of college, he moved to Vancouver Island to play university volleyball. Brendan's family was always able to afford the costs associated with his sports participation and paid for his tuition and living expenses while at university.

Brendan isn't particularly political but votes in every election. He voted for the Liberals in the last federal election and the NDP in the recent provincial election.

Brendan is tall at 6'2" but was one of the shorter players on his university volleyball team. He played setter and libero but did not see much playing time. Now, Brendan is an openly gay man working as a teacher in the Lower Mainland. He coaches several middle and high school volleyball teams in his spare time and still plays volleyball recreationally. When asked what it means to him to be a man he said:

Umm, I would say growing up it meant something totally different than it does now. Like growing up I thought it meant being like a rustic, hard-working family man, and like fix cars, ummm, that you were in relationships with females and you listened to manly music, like country and rock, but now, as I grow older, and become more comfortable with my own sexuality, being a man definitely is more of a spectrum or range where if you identify as a man you can do whatever you want and that becomes what being a man is.

Brendan's explanation of his perception of gender was similar to the other participants in that he describes a stereotypical "man" as his ideal as a child but has since had to confront that definition because of it conflicting with his feelings about his own gender and the fact that he is gay. Despite his awareness that his sexuality excludes him from hegemonic masculinity, he knows that his expression of masculinity is actively redefining what it means to be a man more generally.

Brendan, like Matt and Jamie, is adamant that he is gay, despite also conceding that he believes sexuality exists on a spectrum. He has had sexual experiences with women, but, according to him, only to hide his sexuality. He no longer sees his sexuality as an impediment to his gender identity.

Brendan's response to the pipeline and dam project questions were quite blunt: "It [pipeline project] shouldn't go through. There have been so many instances of leaks and spills, so that's my main concern is environmental impact. I'm not too concerned about the Indigenous land issue." In response to questions about the dam he said: "Part of me thinks that it should happen because it's a cleaner source of energy and more of a renewable source, but I do know that it will have a major impact on the environment, but in my mind it's a better solution than the pipeline." When asked what he thought about the Canadian government's right to remove Indigenous people from their land to facilitate a project like Site C, he said "It should be a negotiation. They should get paid, but ya they should be able to move them." Supporting the Canadian government's power of expropriation is perhaps the most blatant example of a participant's belief that the state's necropower is just and right.

### 5.2.3. Jaime

Jamie was born in a small city outside of Calgary, Alberta. His father was a surgeon, and he describes his family as upper-middle-class, especially when compared to the working class ranchers and farmers that populated his hometown. He and his family are white and non-religious. Although he believes his family was somewhat out of the norm in terms of gender roles and expectations, he says that his hometown very much bought into the typical values and beliefs that surround masculinity, femininity and family in Canada, especially rural Alberta.

Eventually, Jamie moved to Vancouver to play volleyball for a university in the area. He played for two years and received a scholarship that covered about 25% of his tuition. The rest of his expenses were covered by his parents. Unlike the previous two participants, Jamie is not reticent about his political side. When asked why he considers himself political he said:

Because I'm a gay man, so just by existing that makes you kind of political; like as a minority and I'm not necessarily a silent minority. Since I've come out and mostly since I've lived in Vancouver, I've never gone back in the closet for anything. I do amateur drag here and there. Umm, I try to advocate for a bunch of different social issues... So, now that I know it's out there, I try to fight for that, not that I'm out there picketing, although I have gone to some protests.

Jaime described the experience of attending a protest against Sons of Odin:

This was right after Trump came into power and I really felt that because of the amount of privilege that I have. Coming from an upper-middle-class family, living in the prairies and being very much a white man [laughs] even though I have a little bit of that minority, there is still an immense amount of privilege that I have compared to other people. There have been other protests happening in the states, like the one where the truck was driven through the crowd. I felt that it was time that people with privilege to be on the front lines. It doesn't make any impact to have another Black person assaulted when they're protesting for BLM, that doesn't make as much impact; it's unfortunately clear that people of colour don't have as much weight as white people. By having more people of privilege and white people out being advocates and allies it has a bigger impact. It's like no it's not just this little minority group that's saying we want rights, it's everyone saying we want this. I went with a couple of friends and it was awesome because thousands of people showed up. The Sons of Odin didn't even really show up. They got there in the morning and there was maybe ten of them and they left right away. It became this huge kind of love-in, there was music and speeches. All of the signs, there was no anger, it was just like talking about spreading love and equality and this positive thing. And that's where I think we can make a better impact, especially with some of those hate groups. If you have conversations with people who are part of them

and are no longer a part of them, they've kind of been indoctrinated and essentially can't function while they have that, they felt that they were totally isolated, so they have this scapegoat who the hate group tells them is the scapegoat and so they get on board and their whole support group is people from that hate group. There was a really interesting article published called "Life after Hate" and it was all about people who were part of hate groups and now they're out. They talked about ways to approach those hate groups. You're not supposed to get angry or throw things at them. You should approach them with love and openness and show them that there's a different way.

Despite explicitly admitting to his privilege, Jamie didn't talk much about how he confronts it in his daily life other than stories like the one above. The Sons of Odin anti-rally discussion also unearthed the fact that Jamie's entrance to the world of social justice came from his job with a for-profit financial institution. This financial institution's use of moral supremacy and tolerance is reminiscent of Puar's (2007) critique of gay rights movements' commitment to the moral, social, political and economic supremacy of the West. By folding Jamie into the mainstream, despite his identity as an openly gay man who does drag – to Anderson's point about IMT, it is unlikely that they would have hired him thirty years ago – while simultaneously using tolerance and acceptance as a tool for corporate gain, Jamie's employer is engaging in the reproduction of homonationalism.

Jamie, unlike the other participants, brought up Indigenous rights without being prompted when we discussed the pipeline and dam projects. However, it was seen as just one factor among many in what seemed to be a difficult decision for Jamie. After some more discussion, Jamie decided that Indigenous land rights should trump economic and environmental needs where these projects are concerned.

#### **5.2.4. Morris**

Morris is a white, gay, cisgender man born in the early 90's in British Columbia's interior. He grew up in a middle-class family and was baptized Catholic but his family stopped attending church when he was five years old. He played four years of volleyball in BC and earned a social sciences degree. His family was always able to afford the costs associated with his sports participation, but he also received a scholarship that covered his tuition while playing volleyball. This illustrates how Morris' family's access to the resources necessary to allow for sport participation, led to additional resources being granted to Morris through scholarship.



Growing up, Morris very much noticed the hierarchy within masculinities. Normative behaviours linked to masculinity, and their perceived social values, were very prevalent in his life. He has dated and had sexual interactions with women, explaining that it started out when he was actively trying to convince himself that he was straight. Later, he dated women as a way to hide his sexuality from others.

When asked about his reasons for choosing volleyball – despite playing a number of other sports growing up – he said it was because he was best at volleyball, had more friends on the team and generally didn't feel as comfortable within the cultures of other teams. As time has gone on, Morris has been able to see beyond the value that society and sport places on certain versions of masculinity and sees it as more of a general category with many possibilities, none better or worse than others, where he feels comfortable identifying himself: "well I think for anyone who's been in the closet, there needs to be some level of acceptance with themselves. And ya I've come to terms with the fact that there's [makes his voice higher pitched] feminine things that I like. Or like anything along those lines and it's just a matter of owning it."

Despite a more open view of masculinity that allows for multiple, more feminine, versions, Morris was still very clearly affected by heteronormativity: "Of course. Yeah, no totally. I remember thinking in high school. The goal is still white picket fence, two kids and a wife. I remember thinking that was what I needed to do and that you could just repress something into submission and just not have that in your life." His conception of being Canadian is in line with that of homonationalism: "I guess being Canadian to me means someone who is open minded, welcoming, I guess adaptable, works hard. Those would probably be the key traits for it."

Morris seemed disappointed with his varsity sport experience: "I was still in the closet in that stage [varsity sport] and a part of the reason that I left that kind of macho mentality was that I wasn't totally comfortable in that and it wasn't with my group of friends who I had built trust with so it was very much a detached thing. So that really did drive me to going back to a comfortable place and getting comfortable again in schools near my friends before coming out years later." Despite IMT's claims of a more accepting sport culture, there are still experiences that don't quite fit its narrative. Although Morris didn't experience the threat of physical violence, he also didn't feel comfortable coming out while playing sport. On the one hand, Morris' experience

supports IMT's notion that homophobia and homophobia are decreasing, but it also illustrates the need for a more nuanced understanding of the changing nature of social beliefs about gender and sexuality: "I would say it [not coming out] was more for social reasons. I haven't felt particularly threatened in the past, but it was just easier [to be seen as straight]. Where I grew up it was a smaller town, so everyone knows everyone and it's the same idea, like I don't want to be the token." This is perhaps unsurprising as Canada's heteronormative cultural leaning is no secret, but this illustrates the identity and behaviour bending power of social norms. When they were moving through high school, most of my participants were actively hiding their sexual identities, but as spent time in less restrictive environments than their hometowns, they no longer hid them. All of my participants were actively hiding their sexual identity at a time when they knew they were not straight. The assertion that social norms affect individual behaviour is hardly up for debate, but the examples from these men illustrate how significant social power is. If the social attitude towards one's sexual identity can lead a person to actively hide and, in most cases deliberately mislead, then it becomes easier to understand how sport can impact one's attitudes and behaviours towards groups that are otherwise othered. Ironically, as the sporting climate in Canada became more friendly to GBQ men – allowing most of them to come out near the end of their careers – it was in the process of redefining the whitestream to include GBQ men at the expense of other historically marginalized groups.

When asked about the Trans Mountain Pipeline project, Morris focussed mostly on the environmental and economic factors involved: "Yeah, it seems very short sighted from my understanding. Like you create the work now which gives a little boom for now, but at the end of the day it's still a resource that we should be shifting away from and transitioning from while it's still accessible easily, rather than waiting for some crisis."

Now, Morris lives in Vancouver where he works as a salesperson in the tech industry. He sees himself as political where social movements like Black Lives Matter are concerned. He votes for the NDP provincially, but the Liberals federally and always makes a point of voting.

### 5.2.5. Taylor

Taylor grew up in the Interior of British Columbia in the late 80's/early 90's. After playing for a year at a community college in the Interior, Taylor received a scholarship to play volleyball at a university on Vancouver Island. He grew up in a white, lower-middle-class family that was not particularly religious.

He identifies as a gay man and currently lives in Abbotsford where he is a medical resident. Taylor says that he is middle-class but joked that his middle-class lifestyle was mostly supported by a mounting debt load. Although he has never considered himself an overly political person, he does vote in provincial and federal elections. In the past elections he voted Green both federally and provincially.

His experience in sport was mostly a positive one according to Taylor, but he remained closeted until the final season of his elite sport career. His decision to remain closeted was ultimately a function of a perceived complication that coming out would add to his experience in college sports. This is an indication that a heteronormative, straight culture persisted during his time. Taylor's stories sounded a lot like the stories of my other participants: he didn't talk about a fear for his own life or safety, he didn't have stories of extreme homophobia or social exclusion; rather, he simply spoke about the challenges that being openly gay would bring him in a small city and a tight knit sport community.

Unlike my other participants, Taylor had the experience of playing closeted and playing out:

I think sports were probably the driver behind staying in the closet because to me it felt like they were mutually exclusive. I decided to play sports and that meant putting that part of my life aside for a time umm, knowing that I would eventually stop playing and could come out at that point or that I could stop playing and come out sooner. I went to a different school to play my last year after I was out, and it was a different experience. When I was first playing university sports, I was the same age as everyone on my team, but I was older by then, so I was a bit more on the outside. The team knew I was out. It wasn't a negative experience. I don't think I ever had any negative experiences because of it. I think I was a little bit socially excluded, but there were other factors involved with that. There were a couple of very conservative religious guys on the team, so they were a bit uncomfortable with me.

Again, his stories are not about physical assaults or aggressive homophobia, but rather a more insidious social exclusion that is more difficult to identify. Although he was not certain if the social exclusion was a result of his age or his sexuality. Although his view of his own sexuality is quite static and fixed, he acknowledges that sexuality likely exists on a spectrum, not only within populations, but within individuals as well:

I grew up around the belief that there were basically three sexual orientations, you were either gay, bisexual or straight. In reality, the spectrum of identification is much broader. There's so much nuance that it's difficult to categorize the spectrum. I think identification can vary at any given moment, but I also think it varies over time. I think people can vary their identification over time as they become exposed to new things.

Taylor believes his team bought into a culture of hyper-masculinity, but less so than other sports he had experienced:

Umm, I feel like volleyball doesn't really, like its different than soccer, basketball or football, there's less of a macho culture I'd say. There's certainly the culture of masculinity, but I played other sports in high school and it always felt more in your face in those sport. Volleyball players probably identify a bit differently on the gender spectrum. There were more hyper masculine guys on the volleyball team when I was younger versus when I went back a few years later.

Where the pipeline and dam projects were concerned, Taylor generally seemed against the idea of further impeding on Indigenous rights for the purpose of an energy project: "I think the differentiation between Indigenous land rights and BC's economy as well as environmental concerns makes it a bit murkier, but at the end of the day it's still taking away the rights of an already marginalized group of people does not seem like the right course of action." However, Taylor was still very much weighing it as one factor amongst many which means that, at best, Taylor may have interest in confronting Canada's history of marginalizing Indigenous people, but he did not discuss it as something of great importance to him other than when it was brought up in the discussion about the energy projects.

### **5.3. Acceptance Organizations**

As momentum in the gay rights movement has picked up, it has inevitably spilled into sport. Non-profit organizations are popping up with the intention of improving the experience of gay, bisexual and queer athletes in sport. Despite their good intentions, these organizations often uphold some of the most socially damaging tenets of sport. In

their pursuit of acceptance for GBQ people, they often ignore other groups that are marginalized from sport – and in some cases perpetuate the necessary conditions for the exclusion of those groups.

Such organizations are consistent with the Canadian state's marketing of itself as a leader in human rights. It offers easy access to the social capital available to those who purport to defend human rights while maintaining the political, economic and social status quo in all other ways. Focussing on the acceptance of those who, apart from their queerness, fit neatly into the Whitestream, serves to fold these people into life while leaving behind those who have other traits, identities and memberships that exclude them from the mainstream.

As a means of triangulating the data collected for this thesis, I have undertaken an analysis of the mission statements, as well as other key publications or communications, of two acceptance organizations in Canada and the U.S. The first, Athlete Ally, is based in Seattle and focusses on the acceptance of gay athletes competing at all levels of sport, but mainly on college, professional and international levels. The second, the You Can Play Project, focuses more on minor levels of sport. It is difficult to neatly separate the USA from Canada in an analysis of sport and culture as Canada is profoundly influenced by the USA. Of the big four professional leagues in Canada and the U.S., only the National Football League doesn't have a Canadian team, but even the NFL plays at least one game a year in Canada and has significant cultural relevance in Canada. I have purposefully chosen Athlete Ally because it is both an American-based organization and it is in the Pacific Northwest of North America. You Can Play is based in Denver, Colorado, but has significance in Canada as it was founded in Toronto, Ontario. Despite their head office locations, both organizations are active in Canada and the USA.

### **5.3.1. Athlete Ally**

Athlete Ally is an LGBTQ acceptance organization based in Seattle, Washington. I first came across it when its founder, Hudson Taylor, came to speak at the University of Regina during the last year of my college football career and undergraduate education. Hudson is a vocal straight, white man who founded Athlete Ally shortly after his senior season as a college wrestler in the USA. In addition to being a wrestler, Hudson was a

theatre major and had classmates who were openly gay and accepted. Hudson experienced a much different attitude towards LGBTQ people in his team's locker room when compared to the theatre department. As a result, Hudson decided to wear a sticker in support of LGBTQ people on his head gear for his final matches in college. This ultimately inspired him to found Athlete Ally. On its "What We Believe" page, Athlete Ally says:

Sports remains one of the greatest socialization mechanisms in the world — it communicates values without relying on any one language, and its most successful participants are known and respected globally. And yet, an entire community of people remain systematically excluded from sport.

Athlete Ally believes that everyone should have equal access, opportunity, and experience in sports — regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Our mission is to end the rampant homophobia and transphobia in sport and to activate the athletic community to exercise their leadership to champion LGBTQ equality.

I begin my research on Athlete Ally by examining the Founder and CEO, Hudson Taylor. In 2013, he was paid \$125,500 USD by Athlete Ally, which was nearly a quarter of its revenue for the year. A lot of the company's work revolves around 'sensitivity training' style workshops for professional sport leagues. Hudson delivers a workshop on locker room homophobia once a year to all NBA rookies, for example. The workshop focuses on being an ally to LGBTQ people, but there are still no out NBA athletes (Newton 2014).

Next, I examined the mission statement of Athlete Ally. It describes sport as a generally positive institution with a homophobia and transphobia problem. In essence, their mission is to uphold sport while eliminating discrimination against gay and trans people. They in no way examine other forms of discrimination and exclusion that are also rampant in sport. This approach to social justice is described well by Krebs' (2012) idea of the Whiteman, Puar's (2007) Homonationalism and Morgensen's (2010) Settler Homonationalism. Athlete Ally's approach is an example of how GBQ men's acceptance is happening in a way that ignores wider social inequalities and power structures. Its focus on "sensitivity" style training, rather than a focus on the power structures that are perpetuating widespread inequality, does little to disrupt the structural issues underpinning discrimination and inequality in sport. This style allows Canada and the USA to appear as bastions for human rights. Take the NBA's commitment to Athlete

Ally's annual training as an example. Rookie players are required to attend the workshop before each season. The content of the workshop focuses heavily on the impact that bullying has on LGBTQ people. It relies on building empathy in straight athletes in the hopes that they will become allies to LGBTQ people, or at the very least to prevent them from bullying. This ignores the structural issues that lead to homophobia like hypermasculinity. These structural issues have links to other major social issues like gender-based violence that also tends to be a major issue amongst college and professional athletes (Owton 2016). It also ignores the major role that sport plays in perpetuating economic and racial inequality (Krebs 2012) and continues to legitimize inequality on any basis other than sexual orientation.

### **5.3.2. You Can Play**

The You Can Play Project was founded by Patrick Burke, the son of NHL General Manager, Brian Burke. Patrick is a scout for the Philadelphia Flyers. His impetus for founding the You Can Play Project was his brother, Brendan's death in a car accident shortly after he came out. At the time of coming out, Brendan was in a support role to a U.S. university hockey team. Patrick's belief is that if a person can help the team, then their sexual orientation shouldn't matter: "Talent, work ethic, and character are all that matters when evaluating a player". You Can Play's mission, as explained on their website, is:

You Can Play is dedicated to ensuring equality, respect and safety for all athletes, without regard to sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

You Can Play works to guarantee that athletes are given a fair opportunity to compete, judged by other athletes and fans alike, and only by what they contribute to the sport or their team's success.

You Can Play seeks to challenge the culture of locker rooms and spectator areas by focusing only on an athlete's skills, work ethic and competitive spirit.

The focus of the organization is firmly on ending homophobia in sport and, like Athlete Ally, does little to bring awareness to other forms of discrimination and marginalization in sport. The organization believes that, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, a player's worth should be judged based on what they can give to their teams and the game. Their focus is reminiscent of Krebs' characterization of being a team player in a White settler nation. As long as athletes are supporting the status quo

in all ways other than their sexuality, they will be accepted as a contributing member of the team. The status quo, in the case of hockey specifically, but all-male sports generally, is toxic masculinity. Laura Robinson (1998) characterizes the status quo of hockey as a state of normalized violence where boys and men are first initiated by way of being victims of violence and later perpetuate similar violence on others, particularly girls and women.

You Can Play cites gender identity as one of the grounds on which people ought not to be excluded but does not interrogate the outright exclusion of women from the NHL. The focus remains solely on the well-being of the team at the expense of the individual – especially those individuals who are not perceived to be of value to the team. In this case, athletic ability and a selfless attitude grant access to life-giving and life-improving resources, while those without athletic ability are left to fend for themselves.

One of the biggest issues with hockey specifically is the economic barrier to participation. Like gay, bisexual and queer athletes, poor people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in hockey. The You Can Play Project does nothing to combat this. It also leaves the sexist ordering of hockey organizations untouched. The persistence of sexism in hockey is due in large part to the vehement segregation of boy's and girl's hockey. Travers (2008) lays out the myriad ways in which this segregation serves to marginalize girls and women in sport and beyond, which results in a lack of access to the economically, politically and socially fruitful opportunities – like college, professional and international opportunities – in sport.

Popular sports in Canada and the U.S. are predicated on a colonial, capitalistic way of being and viewing the world and acceptance organizations like the You Can Play Project and Athlete Ally serve to reproduce these normative structures. Sport is no doubt a powerful socializing institution and will continue to play a major role in the normalization and perpetuation of marginalization, injustice and exclusion in all realms of life. Sport shapes the athletes that move through its systems and organizations and spits out citizens who are deeply entangled in Canada and the U.S.'s settler colonial projects.



## Chapter 6. Theoretical Discussion

A proper theoretical discussion that supports this argument will come in turn, but the simple answer to my research question is as follows: GBQ men are gaining conditional acceptance in elite competitive sports and the condition is a willingness to ignore, or at the very least adopt an unquestioning attitude toward, power structures that have been present in Canada throughout its colonial history. These men, despite their sexualities which, at one point in history, would have marked them as unworthy of life-giving resources, are gaining access to those resources at the expense of those marked as unworthy. The need for unworthy groups in capitalism is structural. For some to benefit, others must be deprived. Sport supports this project by offering up resources to anyone who is able to opt-in to the colonial project in Canada via their economic, political and social resources, choices, beliefs and behaviours. As GBQ people gain political, social and economic power in Canada and the U.S., the mainstream is forced to absorb them both as a means of preventing an accumulation of power amongst marginalized groups and to position itself ideologically as the foremost countries in the world where human rights are concerned – which is important because it legitimizes the belief that Canada and the U.S.'s necropower is just and right as a result of its perceived multiculturalism and commitment to human rights.

The experiences of the participants that took part in this research do show a trend towards acceptance for gay, bisexual and queer men in sport, but they also provide a glimpse of what type of men are gaining acceptance. All but one participant remained closeted for the entirety of their post-secondary sport careers and all came out shortly after. Most of them told positive coming out stories – they were sometimes surprised by the level of support they received from ex-teammates and coaches. Although the pool was small, the demographic make-up of my participants raises questions for me about the types of men that are gaining acceptance. All of my participants were visibly white, and all verbally identified and presented themselves as cisgender men. Most were raised in middle to upper-middle class families and had easy access to life giving resources throughout childhood and early adulthood. In previous decades, they may have remained closeted altogether to avoid having those resources withdrawn. This supports Anderson's (2009) assertions that acceptance is growing, but

the difficulty I had in finding a pool of participants from diverse backgrounds and sports suggests that it isn't growing in a linear or equal way.

## **6.1. Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

IMT attempts to explain the decrease in homophobic and homophobic behaviour amongst men and boys in the context of a changing attitude towards gender and sexuality. Anderson's main argument is that decreasing homophobia and increasing acceptance of gay and bisexual men cannot be explained simply through the lens of people becoming less homophobic. Instead, he contends that we must look to a legitimate shift in individual men and boy's gender and sexual identities. He posits that throughout the last few decades there has actually been a decrease in homophobia, which is how the decrease in homophobia can be explained. Anderson does not argue that homophobia has disappeared altogether, but rather that there has been a decrease which seems to be accelerating with the passage of time. Almost a decade after the introduction of IMT, Anderson and McCormack (2018) confirm that the trend of decreasing homophobia has continued and even accelerated. My participants may not have experienced physical violence – although if they had been out in high school or university the outcome may have been different – but they did report homophobic language from teammates and coaches – a sign that decreasing homophobia and homophobia is neither linear nor consistent across geographies. The lingering homophobia in the discourses of all-male sport contexts may be more the use of homophobia to question one's masculinity. C.J. Pascoe (2012) explains the use of the term "fag" as an indicator of masculinity as opposed to a reference towards someone's actual sexual preferences. Although this obviously began because of the belief that to be a man one must be straight, as heterosexuality becomes less culturally important, the term "fag" lingers as a means to police gender outside of the context of sexual orientation.

Discourses of winning and losing in sport are almost always framed as life and death. The athlete must conform to normative citizenship 'for the team', which means 'to win/live'. Sport isn't only about preserving one's own life through the performance of winning, but it is also about ending the enemy's, because their very existence supposedly threatens yours; see Pronger 1999. Matt described his reasons for remaining closeted while playing university sport as mostly a function of not wanting to

be a distraction to the team. Matt might have been accepted on the team; his sexual orientation would have very much factored into their shared experiences. His being gay may not have been an impediment to his participation – a notion that Anderson explicitly argues for – but it would have been a shaping force in his relationships and his position on the team in general, a nuance that isn't captured in the macro-level claims of IMT. Examples like Matt's commitment to the team's success isn't something that IMT considers, but it illuminates a concerning function that sport plays in our society: it is directly involved in shaping citizens by way of normative and ideal citizenship types. Sport's power is in its ability to shape behaviour and attitudes without direct coercion (Gemar 2018). Matt's decision to remain closeted was his decision, but there is no doubt that it was shaped by his participation in sport.

Brendan's discussion of the evolution of his gender and sexual identity uncovers a major gap in IMT's theoretical contribution. He described believing that being a man meant something very particular when he was growing up: rustic, good with cars, attracted to women and emotionally stoic. This suggests that IMT is missing a valuable piece from the experience of GBQ athletes. Brendan's experience illuminates the power that normative forces play in Canadian sport and society. Whereas IMT focusses on fear-based aversions to gay and bisexual identities, Brendan's experience suggests that heteronormativity and normative gender roles had far more of a shaping force in his life. In the absence of physical violence, Brendan's decisions seemed to be affected more by his desire to fit a "normal" role, which may have been impacted by the access to resources that the role provides. There is no doubt that homophobia was a reality for all of my participants, but there are nuances that IMT misses. As Brendan got older, he stopped seeing his sexuality as an impediment to his gender identity. This suggests that although IMT is correct in suggesting that societal views of gender and sexuality are changing in a way that has reduced homophobia, it ignores the other ways in which Brendan gained acceptance. For example, Matt and Brendan are both deeply aligned with Canada's devotion to materialism and colonialism. When asked about social assistance, Brendan said: "It depends on the people who are receiving social assistance. People who are trying or are willing to use it to actually improve their state of being wherever they're at deserve it. If they want to be elevated and they're not just using it as a crutch to get by." This illustrates Brendan's belief that the state, and thus him as a voting citizen, ought to have the power to decide who receives life giving

resources and who does not. IMT's limited ability to explain growing acceptance for gay and bisexual athletes beyond simply stating that gender norms are changing leaves room for other theories to fill in the gaps (Puar 2007). Mbembé's (2003) Necropolitics can assist in providing a more critical analysis of the trending acceptance of gay and bisexual athletes.

## **6.2. Necropower**

The crux of Necropolitics is the state's right to mark certain citizens for death – which is done mostly via abandonment in Canada and the U.S. as directly marking citizens for death would undermine the West's position as a morally superior society – while providing others with life giving resources. Sport in Canada and the U.S. is deeply engrained in the necropolitical power of the Canadian state. In a democratic nation, maintaining power is deeply complicated and requires cooperation from a multitude of powerful institutions. Sport is one such institution involved in Canada and the U.S.'s colonial project. Sport's structure being rooted in colonial attitudes – think domination and penetration of the other's space (Pronger 1999) – gained it an important place in Canadian culture, which has led to its role in doling out a great deal of socially, politically and economically fruitful resources. Sport participation in Canada is directly affected by social and economic class; those in the middle and upper class have far higher rates of participation than those in the lower classes (Gemar 2018). This phenomenon serves two purposes: 1. To limit the participation of those who have been marked as unworthy; and 2. To further bolster the power of those capable of participation by way of life improving resources like university scholarships, professional contracts and endorsement opportunities. This creates a self-reinforcing pattern where those who are more likely to uphold and reproduce the necropower of the Canadian state – middle- and upper-class people – are given easier access to sport and thus the cultural and material resources that come with it. This also serves to homogenize the cultural pool within sport, further strengthening the normative citizenship demanded by it.

The participants in my research project were all white, middle- to upper-middle class cis-gender men. Finding participants outside of their demography came with great difficulty. Cisgender gay white men were among the first to begin gaining acceptance in sport because of their compatibility with the Whitestream. Their only transgression against the Whitestream is their gay identity, but, in the context of acceptance in sport,

they are being folded into the mainstream. My participants were all quite 'straight-acting', too, which points to sport and society's ability to effectively police the gender identity of those GBQ men gaining acceptance, despite its inability to police sexual identity as it has done in the past.

### **6.3. Whitestream**

The Whitestream serves to maintain a normative complex within Canadian society that positions the straight white male as the default citizen. This is not to say that those who are not white men are cast out entirely from society. Those who are able and willing to uphold the power of the Whitestream can still find a place within it. The Whitestream is a social force that in support of the "acceptance" of certain GBQ men because it allows access to a group of people who can further the power of it. Similarly, to Puar's (2007) characterization of how certain others become "folded into life", the Whitestream acts to pull in those who are willing to further its position. This does not mean that people have to be vocal proponents of the Whitestream. It simply means that their everyday actions must, at the very least, not undermine it. This happens in ways that most people wouldn't even notice. It is through small daily actions and 'normal' happenings that this occurs. It is working every day for an institution that has been deeply entrenched in Canada's colonial project like Jamie, or the willingness to support political parties that continue to push Indigenous rights to the side like Matt and Brendan.

I asked each of my participants about their opinions on the Trans Mountain Pipeline, an issue that, at the time, was making headlines and was culturally salient in Canada. Although an upbringing in Canada was likely enough, a childhood and early adulthood in sport trained these men for when they became voting citizens. It's impossible to say that sport was the single factor contributing to the creation of these types of citizens, but it is easy to see how sport contributes to the process of creating citizens who not question the Canadian state's necropower. The movement towards acceptance for gay and bisexual men produced satisfied, unquestioning citizens rather than angry, disenfranchised ones who were ready to rage against the political, economic and social elite in Canada. By subsuming GBQ men, the Whitestream does not have to worry about them as a threat. Sport's role in this was to allow them access to fruitful opportunities and an accepting social group. They were not forced to experience what it feels like to be on the outside because, despite them all remaining in the closet until after

their sport careers, they all found acceptance from their teammates once they came out. And they are all finding success in their careers and personal lives while the colonial project pushes on. The theory of the Whitestream clarifies the micropolitics present in Canada that led to men like my participants being brought into the mainstream. Homonormativity is helpful in understanding how the Whitestream leads to an entire gay constituency that is politically tamed and redirected towards activities that further bolster the power of the Whitestream.

## **6.4. Homonormativity**

Consider the Gay Pride Parade. The event, which began in the 1970's, started with political goals, but, in parallel with the growing acceptance of gay people over time, the parade has morphed into something entirely different. In recent years the parade has turned into a celebration deeply rooted in Canada's materialistic culture. It is an opportunity for businesses large and small to show their forward-thinking nature to an economically fruitful pool of consumers. The gay constituency has been politically tamed and re-aimed at material life. It is hard to feel that the Pride Parade is anything more than a celebration of the acceptance of gay people and an opportunity for the corporate elite to pander to their newest consumer group. Justin Trudeau's presence at several Pride Parades in Canada gained notoriety and celebration but is merely a sign of the growing movement toward what Duggan (2003) characterizes as a gay culture focused on consumption rather than political action against a heteronormative and otherwise unjust society. The beginnings of the gay rights movement were radical in nature and were pushed by a group of people who, regardless of their other group memberships, were actively excluded from the Whitestream. They focused on granting basic rights – those that had already been granted to heteronormative citizens – to LGBTQ people, but as time has moved forward, these movements have been slowly consumed by the Whitestream and now act as a vehicle through which angry, disenfranchised LGBTQ people are transformed into materialistic white settler citizens at the expense of those who are excluded because of some other criteria. Huebenthal (2017) illustrates the changing focus of gay rights politics before and after the homonormative turn.

I see a similar occurrence within my participants. None of them discussed heteronormativity in any great detail and certainly not as a major issue in Canada. In fact, when asked what the most important challenges facing Canada today are, most

focused on climate change, housing affordability and lowering taxes for the middle class. Only one participant discussed Indigenous land rights or reconciliation – other than when I explicitly asked – as being important to Canada’s future. Although it is interesting that one participant questioned and resisted it in their life. My participants generally seemed pleased by the fact that they are very much a part of Canada’s middle-class. Their comfortable lives preclude them from the necessity of challenging the status quo in Canada. Like other Whiteman Canadians, their position within it has led to their unquestioning support of it.

## **6.5. Homonationalism**

Homonationalism is about LGBTQ inclusion in ways that reinforce the social, moral and economic supremacy of the West (Sykes 2016; Morgensen 2010). By positioning itself as the world leader in human rights, the West does not have to face its own position in the reproduction of inequality at all levels. The founder of Athlete Ally is a representation of how this occurs. Despite his repeated assertions that he is a straight man, Hudson Taylor has dedicated his career to gay acceptance in sport. At the surface he markets this as a selfless endeavor to improve the lives of others, but in reality, he makes well over \$100,000 USD per year while being given adoration and respect for his ‘heroism’. His view is that sport is good at its core but has been poisoned by certain bad people via homophobia. He does nothing to unpack sport’s role in wider inequalities and has little to no interest in questioning other forms of discrimination in sport and society. Hudson Taylor and Athlete Ally, like the West in general, are committed to homonationalism. The You Can Play initiative is similarly committed as it preaches the tag line “If you can play, then you can play”, suggesting that those with athletic ability are worthy, but those without are not. Neither groups do anything to confront the major issues with access to participation in sport in Canada, but rather focus all of their attention on the acceptance of those who have already managed to gain access, or those for whom economic access is not the problem.

Groups like Athlete Ally and You Can Play are perfect examples of homonationalism because they highlight the West’s willingness to accept certain LGBTQ people while masking the ways in which it prevents certain others from accessing sport and the associated benefits. My participants are similarly involved in this as none of them are politically opposed to homonationalism in general. Their lives support the

notion that the West is morally superior because they are examples of gay men who have gained acceptance and success. Stories like theirs mask the reality that there are a great number of people still excluded from mainstream life by virtue of certain group memberships. Rather than examine the role of colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism as sources of discrimination, poverty and premature death, my participants, like the majority of privileged Canadians, appear to focus on the ways in which they can gain more resources for themselves. Being a part of the mainstream means that you don't have to question its structure; you can simply enjoy the comfort that comes with it. One participant made a comment that really stuck with me throughout this project. He said, "I would say it's more socially unacceptable to not be accepting of gay people than it is to be gay." His comment makes it clear that Anderson's assertions were at least partially correct. It also makes it clear that white, cisgender gay men in Canada are being folded into the mainstream.



## Chapter 7. Conclusion

The cultural phenomenon of gay and bisexual men gaining acceptance in mainstream sport is a reflection of the wider gay rights movement in Canada. To prevent the threat of a gay constituency that is critical of Canada's colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal and capitalistic structure, it is being accepted into the mainstream, as long as those within it meet certain citizenship criteria. Gay and bisexual men in Canada have more access to politically, economically and socially valuable resources than ever before and institutions like sport ensure that those men use their resources to support, rather than disrupt, the mainstream. Sport, like most institutions in the West, is actively involved in the reproduction of citizens who support the Whitestream. The relative non-existence of openly GBQ athletes in the big four professional sports leagues raise questions about why this conditional acceptance is not rolling out evenly.

In this thesis, I ask: how are gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men gaining conditional "acceptance" in elite competitive sports and how do they experience these power structures as they engage with and reproduce them? Although my participant group was small and decidedly not diverse in terms of both demographics and the sport they participated in, my participant's experiences suggest that the growing acceptance of GBQ men in sport is consistent with Canada's national identity as a democratic nation that upholds human rights in spite of the reality of its ongoing colonial project and racialized and gendered measures of social inequality. Sport is an institution through which Canada is able to shape citizens, both GBQ and straight, who do not question the role of the state in generating and upholding unequal patterns of morbidity and mortality via colonial, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal institutions. By conditionally accepting GBQ men in sport, Canada is able to appear as an example of how to protect human rights while also maintaining the status quo in Canada in regard to economic, racial, and gendered inequality. The acceptance of GBQ men is a small cost for the whitestream to pay in order to protect its wider power structures. However, the fact that there are still no openly gay men in Canada's prized professional league, the NHL, points to the fact that this acceptance is not unfolding evenly across all contexts and geographies. A more nuanced approach that differentiates the experience of athletes in different sports would help in identifying the cause of uneven acceptance.

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