

**Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory and American Sporting Oppression:  
Examining black and gay male athletes**

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This article examines the influence of the racial categories of white and black, and the sexual categories of gay and straight, on sporting American men. The effect of the intersection of these cultural categories is discussed by investigating the exclusion of athletes who are both black and gay, as well as highlighting the culturally perceived differences of (straight) black and (white) gay men. However, the analysis accounts for more than just difference, examining the commonalities of oppression between these discrete identity groups. We use the research on black athletes to call for further empirical study on gay athletes. It is argued that Critical Race Theory and intersectionality offer complex and nuanced understandings of these oppressions which, when theorizing is left solely to the realm of poststructuralism, can otherwise be missed.

Keywords: gay athletes; race; intersectionality; CRT; sport; oppression.

## **Introduction**

Black American male athletes are culturally connected to participation in highly competitive team sports, like American football and basketball, or they are associated with individual sports that require strength and explosiveness, like athletics, sprinting and boxing (Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers, 2004). These cultural images of strength, speed, and muscularity problematically naturalize black men's abilities, thus contributing to the disempowered status of many black men in American sport. This is because they undervalue the effort, skill and determination in black sporting achievement (Carrington and McDonald, 2002). However, something less discussed in the sport literature is the relationality between stereotypes of black (heterosexual) and gay (white) male athletes, and how these stereotypes also contribute to a cultural subjugation of the gay (white or black) male athlete (Anderson and McCormack, forthcoming).

Unlike the power associated with (ostensibly heterosexual) black men's athleticism, participation for gay (presumptively white) male athletes is normally associated with feminized terrains like ice-skating, cheerleading and gymnastics; and other non-aggressive sports, such as swimming, running and diving (Adams, 1993; Anderson 2008). So whereas black men compete for faster times or harder hits, gay men are awarded points through a judge's decision over the aesthetics of their form. Whereas black athletes are often portrayed as violent men in heterosexualized sporting spaces (Majors, 1990), gay athletes are feminized by their participation (Anderson, 2005). Accordingly, black athletes are thought to sweat, fuck and fight, while gay athletes are thought to be concerned with the aesthetics of their competitive form. As such, dominant discourse pertaining to black and gay American men in sport is similar to perceptions of

them in the broader culture, which hold that they are (and have long been) incompatible categories (Boykin, 2005; Myrdal, 1944).

The bifurcation of black and gay identities is strengthened by cultural understandings of psychological models of homosexual development, which seem to maintain that homosexuality is ‘a problem’ for whites only. Freudian and post-Freudian theories (falsely) attribute male homosexuality as a product of an overbearing mother and an absent father figure (Freud, 1905; Spencer, 1995). However, this does not seem to apply to black men. For example, when the Moynihan Congressional Report (1965) discussed the deterioration of the black American family, attributing this to the absence of the black American father – something even Barrack Obama discusses today – nowhere was (or is) it assumed that these black children would ‘become’ gay. Models of pathological homosexual genesis, whatever their etiology, appear only to work for white families. Thus, despite the gains of both the civil rights movement and the progress toward gay and lesbian social inclusion, the understanding in society (and also sport) remains that black men come in only one sexuality and gay men come in just one color.

Sociologists have most commonly explored the intersectionality of gender and race and/or sexuality by holding women as the focal point of their analysis (Abes, 2007; Birrell and Cole, 1990; Douglas, 2002; Griffin, 1998; Hanson, 2005; Russell, 2007). This article, however, seeks to expand the boundaries of the sport and intersectionality literature by examining the impact of the racial categories of white and black on gay and straight athletic American men. It examines black men in sport because of the abundance of literature concerning their experience; which is then used to highlight the type of academic work that can be done on gay men in sport—where there is a lack of such

scholarship. It is because of this disparity that we analyze the select and discrete identity categories of black, white, gay, straight, and American male athletes. We keep our categorical definitions of 'black' and 'white' intentionally imprecise as this matches the cultural understandings of race in American culture.

It is argued here that Critical Race Theory and intersectionality are particularly useful in examining the complex identities that black and gay athletes maintain; how these identities are affected by and simultaneously affect sporting culture; and how these identities affect one another. Our theoretical argument is that limiting race, sexuality and gender solely to poststructuralist investigation ignores the material ways in which people experience their identities (Collins, 2000; Crawley, Foley and Sheehan, 2008; hooks, 1990).

Critical Race Theory is therefore used here alongside the heuristic concept of intersectionality, not only to theorize the partial erasures of heterosexual black male athletes and gay white male athletes, but also to focus on the interlocking categories of oppression that limit athletes who are both black and gay. Focusing on these specific intersections will contribute, at least theoretically, to the scant literature concerning homosexuality in sport. While critical race scholarship has remained grounded in the lived experiences of oppressed black people, we are concerned by a trend of inaccessible identity deconstruction in queer scholarship on sexuality and sport (Caudwell, 2006; Markula and Pringle, 2006). By applying critical race scholarship to the study of gay male athletes, we hope to encourage a model which could potentially be extrapolated to multiple intersections of other membership categories. Thus, it is hoped that this article will help scholars conceptualize and empirically investigate these observable, existing

cultural relations of inequality, and to consider other identity categories to augment this theorizing.

### **Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory**

While the origin of the term *intersectionality* is most frequently credited to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), its central tenet – that forms of oppression can intensify when combined – predates this (see Davis, 1981; Loewenberg and Bogin, 1976). The concept highlights that there are many modes of oppression that structure an individual’s identity, and that these ordering principles are mutually reinforcing.

Interest in intersectionality largely grew from the critique of gender-based and race-based research, which failed to account for the complexity of the lived experiences of people who identify as, or are labelled with, specific identity categorizations (Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005). Accordingly, it is argued that ignoring one mode of oppression weakens an analysis because an integral stratifying force is overlooked.

There exist various forms of feminist theory concerning intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Davis, 1981; Glenn, 1985; Moraga, 1983; Smith, 1983; Sandoval, 1991; Zerai, 2000). While poststructuralists are more associated with anti-categorical intersectionality theorizing, those aligned with identity politics, social constructionism and/or strategic empiricism tend to work within an intercategory model. McCall (2005) argues for an intercategory approach too, suggesting scholars “provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (p. 1773). This form accounts for the discrete and supposedly oppositional

(albeit constructed) nature of gay and black male cultures, and the experiences of those in them. Accordingly, although there remains a significant poststructural base of literature suggesting that sexual and racial identities are too fluid and numerous to be appropriately categorized, we nonetheless continue to use the binaries of black and white alongside homosexuality and heterosexuality, to make generalizations about the lived-experiences of American sporting men in a culture which assumes the independence of race and sexuality (Boykin, 2005; Luthra, 1997).

It is our position that while people are often socially marginalized by these identity categorizations, intellectually discarding them serves only to further alienate members of these groups. Accordingly, however offensive these stereotypes may be, it is important to recognize that they are reified by dominant discourse, self-segregation and self-surveillance; and they have a material impact on peoples' lives (McCarthy, Jones and Potrac, 2003; Cosgrove and Bruce, 2005). As such, central to intercategorical theorizing is the principle that regardless of how gender, race and sexuality are constructed, achieved or ascribed, discrimination and oppression are experienced as *real* (Collins, 2000; Crawley, Foley and Shehan, 2008; MacKinnon, 2006). This is not to support the cultural stereotypes that surround identity categories, but to suggest that the rejection of identity categories is not an effective political position.

While intersectionality can exist as an independent heuristic concept, it has received particular attention from black feminist scholars who use it in conjunction with Critical Race Theory (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1990; 1992; Zerai, 2000). These women share the concern of speaking for, and communicating with, oppressed groups. Their argument is that scholarship that is not based in empirical (perhaps even subjective)

research all too easily speaks for (and to) just the powerful (Collins, 2000). They argue that without an empirical base, theory risks privileging those already benefiting from existing forms of racial, sexual and other stratifications of discrimination (hooks 1984). Their work shapes and is part of the broader framework of Critical Race Theory, which challenges orthodox conceptions and cultural understandings of race, problematizing racial categories because they have been constructed in racist cultures (Bell, 1992; 1995; Birrell, 1990; Bulmer and Solomos, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Singer, 2005; Soloranzo and Yosso, 2001; Spracklen, Hylton and Long, 2006). This principle can be extended to sexual and other minority groups as well.

Critical Race Theory grew from the failure of traditional civil rights litigation to produce meaningful and lasting cultural reform, and challenges orthodox ideologies around meritocracy, color-blindness, race-neutrality, political action and equal opportunity. It is an argument for a “potent theory and praxis through a critical and self-critical melding of identity-conscious analysis, anti-essentialist politics and anti-subordination principles” (Valdes, McCristal and Harris, 2002, p. 3).

There is no attempt in this article to delineate the boundaries between CRT, intersectionality and certain other similar theoretical frameworks, such as Collins’ (2000) Black Feminist Thought. If these boundaries exist, they are tenuous and blurred. Rather, of importance is the epistemologically complementary ways that intersectionality and Critical Race Theory interact (Alexander, 2006; Bernal, 2002). Indeed, the multiplicity of identity category privileging (intersectionality) has been a focus throughout much CRT research (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1992; Valdes, McCristal and Harris, 2002), because both are grounded in individuals’ lived-experiences according to their

multiple category memberships. The unapologetic focus that intersectionality and Critical Race Theory bring to the examination of the rights and lived-experiences of marginalized groups helps develop a commitment to identity-based political action, whilst simultaneously supporting the anti-essentialism of social constructionist and poststructural ideals (Hylton, 2005).

### **The Intersection of Race and Sexuality on Sporting Men**

Although there are various purposes and outcomes of organized sporting participation for men in America, a consistent finding is that sport serves as a deeply ingrained social institution principally organized around the political project of defining acceptable forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2005; Crosset, 1990; Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 1994; Majors, 1990; Messner, 1992). Contact sports have been particularly recognized as leading markers of masculinity, where participation is made near-compulsory through youth culture (Anderson, 2005; Messner and Sabo, 1990; Pronger, 1990). As such, boys and men are structured into a desire to be associated with masculine dominance by partaking in sports that sculpt their bodies and construct their identities to align with dominant perspectives of masculinist embodiment and expression (Anderson, 2009; Pronger, 1990).

Competitive teamsports have been discussed as leading re/producers of society's gendered values, myths and prejudices about the variations between groups of men, regulating them to exhibit, value and reproduce traditional notions of masculinity (Britton and Williams, 1995; Connell, 1987, 1995; Hastings, Zahran and Cable, 2006; Messner, 1992). Of concern here, with the exception of a few hundred professional NFL and NBA

players, the men who occupy the ruling group are overwhelmingly white and straight (Anderson, 2005; Messner, 1992). Thus, whiteness and heterosexuality remain largely unmarked and unexamined identity categories (Gabriel, 1998; McIntosh, 2004), while sexual minorities and people of color are further sexualized and racialized via sport (Caudwell, 2006; Douglas, 2005).

The contemporary intersection of race, sexuality, gender and sport helps re/produce the notion that black American male athletes are necessarily heterosexual, and that gay athletes are exclusively white. It exists alongside a number of other cultural forces that also re-inscribe this narrative. One contributing factor may be found in the elevated rates of homophobia among black Americans (Froyum, 2007; Siegel and Epstein, 1996); a finding that may be intensified in sport. For example, Cindrich (1999) shows startling differences in the manner in which black athletes perceive homosexuality in the NFL, compared to white athletes; and Southall *et al* (2009) show that this division exists among Division One university athletes as well. Oppositely, black men also find that gay culture does not reflect their economic or cultural interests. Smith (1999) and King (2004) highlight that black gay men often find mainstream American gay culture ‘too white’ for their inclusion, as it is primarily created for and managed by white middle-class men.

All of this may make coming out harder for black gay male athletes because they may face elevated rates of discrimination on multiple fronts. Black openly gay athletes may find themselves rejected not only by the wider racist and homophobic culture, but they may also be marginalized in their own racial and sexual communities (Anderson, 2005). Accordingly, Griffin (1998) proposes that athletes who are both black and

gay/lesbian may privilege their (explicit) racial identity over their less visible sexual one, remaining in the closet. While this is a rational and strategic manoeuvre, it stymies most black American athletes from coming out, further reproducing the problem of the absent openly gay black American athlete.

It should be noted, however, that many black men who engage in same-sex sex do not identify as gay. Describing their behaviors as being on the ‘down low’ (King, 2004), many black men preserve their heterosexual and masculine privilege by maintaining a socially-perceived heterosexual identity. We argue that this is attributable to cultural (and perhaps individual) homophobia, and is the direct result of intersecting categories of oppression. That is, the reason the down low is predominantly the preserve of black men is because it is an effect of the combination of racism and homophobia.

It therefore seems impossible (at a cultural level) to imagine American black men as gay (or gay men as black), and this is particularly true for black gay American athletes—something evidenced by the fact that no prevalent stereotype for them exists. Perhaps this is one reason why retired, openly gay NBA basketball player John Amaechi is frequently referred to as ‘British’ in the press (Kian and Anderson, 2009).

This highlights the interdependency of black and gay oppression in sport; they are intersecting, reified, and mutually reinforcing categories. However, as different as black and gay men may seem (Lane, 1994), in analyzing their political and sporting histories – the collective experiences of denied citizenship and the cultural, political and sporting processes that black and gay American men have undergone in their mostly independent liberation projects – commonalities of oppression are also evident.

Unfortunately, the differences between these identity groupings overshadow the similarities. This is because when it comes to comparing black and gay marginalization, a persistent and erroneous mantra hampers efforts. The argument is that it is inappropriate to compare gay and black oppression, resting on the notion that while black men cannot pass as white, most gay men can choose to conceal their sexual identities—passing as heterosexual. This argument serves as an oppressive homophobic strategy. Not only because it falsely asserts individual choice in sexual desire, but because it mandates how men should act; in this case, concealing their homosexuality and acting heteromasculine instead.

The next section repudiates this argument by exploring the shared histories of black and gay (sporting) men. It elucidates the commonalities between these relational yet seemingly disparate categories, and augments the application of intersectionality and critical race theorizing. In doing so, it supports Maya Angelou's (1995) poetic declaration that "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike" (p. 225).

### **Intersecting Patterns of Historical Oppression**

For black men, slavery meant a total denial of civil liberties. Extensive persecution is also the case for gay men in American history; extreme homophobia has traditionally resulted in the near-total cultural erasure of their sexual identities, as well as severely limiting their sexual behaviors. However, despite the fact that gay men can choose to avoid phenotypical identification (and therefore physical oppression), it is important to note that hiding from oppression is not the same as escaping it. Homophobia has had a very real effect on gay men.

Homosexual acts have been illegal throughout most of contemporary American history; in many cases, punishable by castration, chemical ‘treatment,’ and execution. Because of this, and alongside extreme social and religious stigma, it is likely that most men who desired sex and love with men perceived themselves as perverts, experiencing lonely and often miserable lives of guilt and seclusion (whether in heterosexual relationships or not). For these men, the effect of institutional and cultural discrimination has been so strong that, until the modern gay liberationist movement, they almost exclusively internalized their own oppression (Spencer, 1995). Supporting this, it is well known that, even today, suicide rates of gay youth far outnumber those of straight youth (Russell and Joyner, 2001). Furthermore, as societal awareness of the existence of homosexuality grew throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gay men experienced increasing physical violence (see Herek, 1998). All of this made living either in or out of the closet unquantifiably miserable (Anderson, 2000).

It has only been in the last few decades that social attitudes and legal equality have improved enough to permit men to come out in greater numbers. For example, although homosexuality began to be decriminalized in the 1970s, it was not until 2004 that homosexual behaviors were finally legalized across America.

In dealing with each group’s oppression, identity politics has been the primary tool for gaining social inclusion and liberation. These political paths have, oftentimes, been remarkably similar. For example, gay political activism has used many of the same tactics (protest, civil disobedience, and legislative lobbying) that black activists used (Bernstein, 2005). But even as this approach succeeded, with judicial and cultural discrimination lessening over the decades (Loftus, 2001; Wilson, 1978), men (and

women) of both groups have continued to suffer discrimination. This has occurred in both overt and surreptitious ways.

For example, although slavery came to a legal conclusion in 1863, black Americans were culturally bound by Jim Crow Laws and a racist social zeitgeist. Similarly, while there are a decreasing number of laws which institutionally limit the lives of gays and lesbians in contemporary society, sexual minorities are still bound by a restrictively heterosexist and homophobic culture (Pharr, 1997).

Perhaps it is of little surprise that once each group achieved a semblance of legal equality, their oppressors continued to impede their cultural progress. This is because both blacks and gays have (largely) suffered under the rule of white heterosexual men (Jarvie, 1991; hooks, 1990; Pronger, 1990; Spencer, 1995). Thus, one reason for the similar experiences of blacks and gays is that straight white men use the same tools to preserve their ruling power, independent of the group they subordinate. Sport is one arena where these tools are made particularly visible.

Black men's sporting subjugation is long and complex. In a slave-owning society, black men were forced to participate for the pleasure of white audiences, and the profit of white owners (Wiggins, 1977; 1980a; 1980b). Likewise, gay men have been culturally compelled to avoid sport, or they have remained closeted within it (Anderson, 2005; Price and Parker, 2003; Pronger, 1990). Even with the rapidly decreasing homophobia of the previous few years (Loftus, 2001), this remains the rule today.

The discrimination that black and gay men experience in sport is not a simple artefact of the broader culture, either. Sport produces its own oppression (Anderson 2009; Burstyn 1999). Racist and homophobic attitudes have historically excluded black and gay

men from participation in sport. Yet, even when they have been allowed to play, sport has contributed to their wider cultural subordination. Thus, once members of each group gained access to this heterosexual, white-run institution, discrimination continued to operate in more insidious ways.

Indeed, sport has been active in constructing specific negative cultural images of black and gay men. As we have said before (Anderson and McCormack, forthcoming) both black and gay American men have been portrayed as being physically inferior to white heterosexual men. According to ‘race logic’ and Social Darwinism, white intellectuals largely scrutinized black American men for their faults and inabilities, including their supposed athletic inferiority (Coakley, 2002; Hoberman, 1997; Logan, 1957). Similarly, gay men were (and oftentimes still are) feminized to the extent that they were also thought unable to compete with heteromasculine men (Anderson, 2008; Pronger, 1990), a strategy that simultaneously promotes misogyny and patriarchy.

This form of sporting oppression almost necessitates that members of these groups (black and gay) fight their oppression by challenging their oppressors through athletic contestation and triumph (see Carrington, 1998). Nowhere is this more *visible* than it is with black athletes; who have been so successful in certain sports that their efforts have led to a reversal of this stereotype—black men are now portrayed as being athletically superior to white men (Entine, 2001; Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers, 2004). Likewise, Anderson (2002) has shown that (white) gay men also attempt to prove their worth on America’s sporting fields. In fact, it seems that a precondition for gay athletes come out is that they are better than their heterosexual teammates (Anderson, 2005).

The presence of these successful openly gay men has begun to affect the attitudes of heterosexuals, too. Although not as drastic a shift as with black athletes, Anderson (2008, 2009) has recently shown that today straight men see gay athletes as at least maintaining the possibility of being as masculine and as athletic as straight (white) men.

But just because black and gay athletes have gained access to sport does not mean they have unhindered access within sport. Economic and cultural determinants affect the sports and positions in which black and gay athletes focus. Historically, black American athletes began to compete and gained a considerable foothold in baseball, basketball, football, boxing, and track. Accordingly, they contested their discrimination in highly masculinized sporting arenas, where physicality, power and force are paramount for athletic success. Oppositely, openly gay men have concentrated on culturally feminized (and middle class) sports, like swimming, diving, ice-skating, body building and cheerleading. Of importance, each group of men has been socially structured into their respective sports, while heterosexual white men retain the cultural capital to play any sport.

Black/gay participation in sport has, however, been thought to help each group's quest for broader social inclusion (Carrington, 1998). Again, this is most noticeable for black athletes. Here, considerable black athletic success has inculcated the relationship between sport and the larger project of the civil rights movement. Jesse Owen's winning of four gold medals in Hitler's 1936 Olympics; Joe Louis's 1937 boxing heavyweight championship victory; and Harry Edwards' organization of the totemic black power salute at the awards ceremony of the 1968 Mexico Olympics, stand out as historically significant sporting and cultural moments. And whilst openly gay athletes do not have the

same cultural capital, role models, or equivalent historical moments, their social movement is helped by a few little-known retired sportsmen coming out: Including David Kopay (NFL), Billy Bean (MLB), Esera Tuaolo (NFL) and John Amaechi (NBA). Each of these athletes (alongside dozens of others) helps show that not only do gay men exist in all sectors of society, but that gay men can jump as high or run as fast as straight men.

However, even with athletic excellence, discrimination persists (Anderson, 2002; Bruce, 2004; Carrington & McDonald, 2002; Denison & Markula, 2005; Douglas, 2005; Walker, 2005). For black athletes, institutional racism endures. Highlighting this, sports commentators often focus on black American athletic prowess compared to white intellectual ability in explaining similar accomplishments. Although studies do point to a wider array of representations, and a decreasing reliance on the 'black athlete' metaphor (Andrews, 1996), research suggests that, for example, televised American basketball commentary still remains "heavily imbued with conventional racial stereotypes" (Eastman and Billings, 2001, p. 193). For example, black athletes are stereotyped as being unable to control their emotions and maintaining poor attitudes, while white athletes escape most of these criticisms (Douglas, 2002; Murrell and Curtis, 1994). Indeed, Carrington and McDonald (2002) suggest that a culture of racism remains deeply embedded in sport.

Bruce (2004) clarifies that the sports-media complex systematically reinforces racist ideologies, not because the media workers are active racists, but because of the discourses and current constructions of knowledge which permeate the sport-media complex. This is because those in the sport media speak through existing ideological discourses, providing a means of making sense of social relations and sports' place in

them (Hall, 1981). As such, the production and transfer of ideologies are not deliberate; instead, they are largely unintended (Bruce, 2004; Kian and Anderson, 2009).

Despite this, sport is still viewed as a level playing-field. This is problematic considering black athletes must out-perform white athletes for equal playing time (Hoberman, 2000; Shropshire, 1996), and because black athletes are also shown to be stacked away from positions that are central to the outcome of the game (such as pitching or quarter backing). This is true even in sports in which black men are well-represented (Eitzen, 2003). Continued racism is also highlighted by the lack of black American men in managerial, coaching, administrative, and ancillary sporting occupations (Walker, 2005). Accordingly, a culture of overt racism in sport has been mostly replaced with covert and institutional discrimination.

By comparison, however, much more hostility and overt prejudice toward gay athletes exists (Anderson, 2002). Openly gay men are still frequently and blatantly denied employment or playing positions. Oppression of the openly gay male athlete remains so high that, in many circles, it is still common to hear explicit homophobic language and to witness clear homophobic discrimination that, all-too-often, goes unchallenged.

It is obvious that overt, cultural and institutional oppression of gay boys and men leads to more athletes remaining closeted compared to non-athletes. This is evidenced on multiple fronts. For example, although gay boys (presumably) join sport at the same rate as straight boys (because sport is made near-compulsory in education), they do not come out in proportionate numbers compared to high school and university non-athletes. And although there is a growing number of openly gay athletes at these levels, their absence in professional sport is stark. This is particularly true in the top four American team sports

(basketball, football, baseball and hockey) where there are over 3500 positions. Yet, no professional athlete has *ever* come out while playing in the United States.

Even at the recreational, less institutionalized level of adult sport, homophobia often compels men to self-segregate into LGBT sporting leagues (Hekma, 1998). While these teams might help develop a sense of community free from the homophobia of mainstream sporting organizations (Anderson, 2005; Waitt, 2003), also offering dating opportunities, they are also evidence of continuing practices of homophobic oppression—as self-segregation is often evidence of discrimination (see hooks, 1992).

Much of sport's homophobic culture remains so because of its highly competitive structure, the exceptionally low probability of reaching the professional levels, and the subservience to authority required to matriculate through sport. This, combined with the orthodox masculinity expected in sport, makes it a particularly resilient institution to cultural progress (Anderson, 2005). Consider, for example, the U.S. military (another masculinized institution), where higher rates of coming out suggest that service members are more willing to come out and contest overt and institutionalized homophobia than athletes in professional sports. The U.S. military expels around 1000 soldiers a year for violating their 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. This means that every year approximately 1 in 1500 soldiers comes out, compared to 0 in 3500 professional team sport athletes.

Yet there is hope. Social attitudes are rapidly changing, both in the broader culture (Loftus, 2001; McCormack forthcoming) and in sport: An increasing number of gay male athletes are coming out at high school and university levels of play (Anderson, 2005, 2009); heterosexual university athletes appear to (increasingly) accept gay men (Adams, Anderson and McCormack, forthcoming; Anderson, 2009; Anderson and

McGuire forthcoming), there is less homophobic discourse in sports radio commentary (Nylund, 2007), and other forms of sport media (Kian and Anderson, 2009).

A further sign of increased gay inclusion is that sporting owners and profiteers are also finding financial incentives for catering to gay and lesbian fans. For example, many professional teams host an annual “gay day.” This suggests that the wealth and class status of many gay men carries with it the implication that oppression is expensive to those in power. These trends imply that the number of openly gay men at the high school and university levels of sport will continue to rise. Perhaps someday gay male athletes will even come out in the top four professional sports, too.

However, there remains one pertinent and crucial factor for academics to consider: While oppression of black American athletes is heavily scrutinized by academic research (see Carrington, 2007; Coakley, 2002; Douglas, 2005; Harris, 2000; Hastings, Zahran, and Cable, 2006; Jarvie, 1991; Smith, 2000), very little academic scrutiny has been applied to gay sporting men (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Bridel and Rail, 2007; Pronger, 1990). Accordingly, while we are fortunate to have so much research on black American athletes to inform our understanding of oppression, more empirical scholarship on gay men is crucial if we are to better understand the nuance, processes underlying, and varied experiences of oppression.

For example, just as self-segregation and institutional influences have resulted in black American athletes being proportionally or overly represented in just certain sports (Coakley, 2002; Eitzen, 2003), scholars could examine whether gay athletes are also more likely to self-segregate and/or be structured into a restricted set of particular sports. And, where it is currently shown that in order for a black American man to make the

team he must be better than a white athlete, we may similarly find that that in order for an openly gay athlete to be picked by the professional or collegiate leagues, he will need to be better than his heterosexual teammates.

Moreover, whereas black American men were once thought to lower team morale and cohesion in white-run competitive teamsports, scholars might examine how gay men are viewed by their heterosexual teammates today. And, whereas scholars have shown that black American athletes are stacked into certain positions less important to the outcome of the game (Eitzen, 2003; Schneider and Eitzen, 1986), it may also be worthwhile to examine how gay athletes might be stacked. One might, for example, find that because they are feminized (and mostly white), gay men will be stacked into positions that require less physical aggression, as well as into positions more central to the outcome of the game (Anderson and McCormack forthcoming). We suggest this is one way that the oppression of gay and black athletes is mutually re-enforcing.

Finally, just as black athletes still have a difficult time making it to the ranks of coaches, managers, media members, and referees (Rasmussen, Esgate and Turner, 2005; Rimer, 1996; Walker, 2005), we may also find that openly gay athletes have a hard time making it to these positions (Anderson, 2005). In other words, as sport moves from being explicitly homophobic to a more covert and institutionalized form, it will be interesting to see the extent and manner in which oppression in sport operates. Will it manifest in the same way as racism? Investigating the experiences of openly gay men in sport should be a worthy academic undertaking.

## **Conclusion**

The tenets of intersectionality and critical race theory have been frequently used to explore the relationship between gender, race, sexuality and sport. However, most of this research on athletes has held women as the focal point of analysis. This article expands the boundaries of the sport and intersectionality literature by examining the impact of the specific and limiting racial categories of white and black on gay and straight athletic American men. The intersection of these groups has received very little academic attention in the literature (Anderson and McCormack, forthcoming), so examining these specific intersections contributes (at least theoretically) to the scant literature concerning homosexuality, race, sport and men.

The argument is that it is necessary to have a framework based on intersectionality and the ideals of critical race theory because, when gender, sexuality and race are limited solely to the realm of poststructuralism, the contextual ways in which people experience the material realities of their identities can be ignored; as intersecting identity categories can result in intensified modes of oppression (Collins, 2000; Crawley, Foley and Sheehan, 2008; hooks, 1990). Yet, intersectionality is not simply an additive model (Hancock, 2007); nor does it presume that all oppressions are radically different. Thus, when making categorical comparisons, it is important to analyze both the distinct institutional and cultural oppressions, as well as the similarities of oppression across identity groups. By comparing the histories of these oppressed groups, potential pathways for future research are highlighted.

It is our hope that a new generation of scholars concerned with equality in sport will make these empirical comparisons. Moreover, we desire scholars to extend the analysis to the experience of the black gay male athlete. By applying and extending the

existing scholarship of intersectionality and critical race theory in sport, the impact of intersecting categories of oppression should be recognized, analyzed and compared. In doing this, scholars will make their contribution to positive social action through identity movement inclusion. Hopefully, this article will provide a theoretical grounding from which scholars might work.

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