Women's Experiences of Sexuality Within Football Contexts: A Particular and Located Footballing Epistemology

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Abstract
This article documents and explores women's experiences within football (soccer) contexts in England and Wales. It draws upon questionnaire (470 completed postal questionnaires returned from 870) and interview (14 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women aged between 21 and 42). The research was carried out during the seasons 1997-1998 and 1998-1999. In particular, the research material is used to support discussions that take account of women's experiences of sexuality. Through a feminist poststructuralist analysis of social [sexual] relations a particular and located footballing epistemology is offered. I use the research to argue that football's sexual imperative is shifting and dynamic. And through a detailed analysis of the functioning of footballing sexualities, I suggest that the peremptory-compulsory heterosexuality, is in fact 'leaky'.

Introduction

This paper offers a particular analysis of women's active involvement in football making use of research findings from my PhD,[1] which reflects an engagement with feminist poststructuralism. This theoretical position is explained more fully below. In addition, the discussions that follow are influenced by my own location within the social relations network and, from a feminist perspective, it is important that this position is made transparent. Therefore, I provide a brief autobiography and this is followed by an introduction to feminist poststructuralism and a brief overview of the history and contemporary form of women's participation in football.

Through women's testimonies I focus on the local operation of power within sexual relations. I show, through an analysis of stereotypes of women who play, how lesbian sexuality has real currency within football contexts. Moving on from the stereotypes, I make use of research material that indicates there is a lesbian presence in football. Sport can provide safe sporting and social spaces for lesbians, and some players have challenged and transgressed the heterosexual 'norm' by risking being 'out'.[2] I consider the extent to which players can display and disclose their sexuality and highlight how some players and teams create 'dykescapes'. This term reflects how space can be infused with lesbianism. The idea that dykescapes can be created fits a queer political analysis of sexuality and space that is an 'in your face' approach to challenging

notions of [hetero]sexuality. Finally, I consider heterosexual subjectivity and illustrate through engagement with 'compulsory heterosexuality' how the heterosexual peremptory both exists and is inverted.

The following account represents a particular football epistemology. By focusing on the local it supports Donna Haraway's (1997) poststructuralist notion of 'situated knowledges' and therefore cannot support universal or grand theories about women's participation in football. Nevertheless, it provides valuable insights into women's different and dynamic experiences of sexuality in football contexts in England and Wales and contributes further to existing literature within the field of sports sociology on sexuality (Cahn, 1994; Clarke, 1995; 1997; Griffin, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Lenskyj, 1986; 1990; Sykes, 1996; 1998; Veri, 1999).

A Brief Autobiography

As a girl I loved playing out and was defined by others as a tomboy partly because of my constant involvement in physical activity. This passion for physical activity was later formalised by sports participation. I lived not far from the River Severn in southwest England and took up sculling at age fourteen. I had already become a member of the local hockey club and spent weekends sculling in the mornings and playing hockey in the afternoons.

During my years at home and later at university (West London Institute and Loughborough University), I learned more about sport and implicitly about gender and sexuality. The corollary of this immersion in sports culture was that I understood heterosexual femininity as compulsory and remained largely uncritical of sport's gendered discourse. I struggled to conform to hegemonic femininity and it was some years later when I decided not to struggle and not to conform. I moved to East London to teach and it was here that I first became aware of football. I started to play when I was 26. Some ten years on, I have played in the Greater London League, the National League for a team in the West Midlands and more recently, in the Northern Division of the National League for a Yorkshire side.

My involvement in football is significant since it was the first time I became aware of 'out' lesbian sexuality. Unlike hockey and rowing, the cultural arena of football seemed to provide a safe social space for players who also chose or were unable to conform to compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual femininity. Until this specific sporting moment I understood lesbianism as belonging in the 'closet', or the 'glass closet', as Pat Griffin (1998) describes the environment facing those who have come out but must not flaunt their sexuality.

It is this journey from the monolith of compulsory heterosexual femininity to a celebration of the diversity of gender and sexuality that informs arguments presented here. Moreover, it is my lived experiences of sport, in particular football, that have underpinned my theoretical engagement with

sexuality. The inclusion of the personal reflects an approach that is axiomatic to feminist politics and it is important that this experience and my social location as white, middle class, lesbian, academic and footballer are made visible.

Feminist Poststructuralism: An Introduction

Poststructuralists work from the premise that power is 'an invisible web of interrelated effects, a persistent and all-pervading circulation of effects' (Braidotti, 1992: 188). Power relations are viewed as unstable, changeable, unfixed, fluid and reversible (Kenway & Willis, 1998). Reference to networks of power relations and power as a dynamic effect appears eminently in the work of Michel Foucault. Such an approach signals the point of departure from structuralist accounts of power. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1975) exposes the intricate operation of power and argues that networks of power or power matrices can produce regimes of power, and these function to regulate and discipline individual action. Since power is exercised and not possessed, however, individuals are invested with and are transmitters of power. Therefore, Foucault posits that we are both objects and subjects of power and that power can be viewed as productive and positive rather than purely negative and repressive.

Jana Sawicki (1991: 20) argues that poststructuralists seek to understand power on a local level with a focus on the 'myriad of power relations at the micro level of society'. More specifically, feminist poststructuralists are interested in how individuals contribute to and fit into wider power relations (Kenway & Willis, 1998). This relationship between power's operation and individual action is the focus for the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993a), who explores the boundaries of individual choice through her concept of the 'terrain of signification'. For Butler, the 'terrain of signification' represents discursive practices within power matrices that produce cultural intelligibility. She supports Foucault's claim that individuals are immanent of power and as such can exercise power. Yet, she remains mindful of the limits of freedom and her reference to cultural intelligibility makes links with Foucault's concepts of self-surveillance, panopticism (197.5) and his later work on care of the self (1984).

Foucault's (1975) concepts of self-surveillance and panopticism illustrate the complex functioning of power whereby the individual contributes to the operation of disciplinary power. Through self-surveillance the macro and micro aspects of power's effects are drawn together and serve to regulate individual action. Foucault went on to develop the notion of practices or technologies of the self and acknowledged that individuals adopt various practices to actively fashion their own existence. Through the concept of the 'terrain of signification' Butler (1993a) brings together the notion of disciplinary power and the idea that individuals can modify and change existing structures of domination. She argues that the individual can act in her own interests, though this choice usually occurs within the limits of intelligibility (Butler 1993a). In

this way, Butler problematises the notion of absolute freedom within power networks: 'the "I" that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they already have' (Butler, 1990: 148). That said, Butler argues that there is a space for individual action to contest existing power regimes. Individual action occurs, however, within a wider matrix of power and this location provides the context for the operation of power at a micro level. That is, individual action is set up within and reflects wider social relations, therefore, agency is described as a re-articulation of macro configurations of power. In short, Butler supports me Foucauldian notion that power is exercised and considers the implications of this for the contestation and transformation of existing social relations and power regimes.

The poststructuralist and more specifically feminist poststructuralist analysis of power's operation within social relations are relevant to the discussions that follow for two reasons. Firstly, such an approach attends to women's experiential diversity. That is, through an emphasis on the micro functioning of power it is possible to focus on women's different everyday lived experiences. And secondly, feminist poststructuralist advocacy that power is exercised and not possessed provides the opportunity to consider the contestation and transformation of power regimes. This allows a consideration of social relations as shifting and dynamic.

The Playing Fields

The Past and Present State of Play

Women's active involvement in football in England has been traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century (Fletcher, 1993; McCrone, 1991; Parratt 1989) and speculatively plotted to the early eighteenth century (Williamson, 1991). Sheila Fletcher (1993) documents records of girls playing in private schools in Brighton and Nottingham in 1870 and *The Sketch* (6 February, p. 60) newspaper provides photographic evidence of women playing in 1895. Writers have also mapped a more recent history focusing on the twentieth century (Duke & Crolley, 1996; Lopez, 1997; Newsham, 1997; Williams & Woodhouse, 1991). For example, Gail Newsham (1997) offers an account of football in the lives of women who played for Dick Kerr in the 1920s-50s period, while Sue Lopez (1997) concentrates on women playing nationwide and abroad between the 1960s and 1990s.

'Women's football' is often cited as the fastest growing sport in England (Lee, 2001; Chaudhary, 2001). In relation to players registered with the Football Association (FA) the increase in numbers is easy to plot. In 1990, there were 9,000 players and 314 clubs (Gibbs, 1995), in 1998, 14,000 women players, 15,000 girl players and a total of 1,700 clubs (Crinnion, 1998), and more recently it is argued that 'there are now 55,000 playing the game' (Chaudhary, 2001). There is even a FA hotline number telling girls how

and where to get involved in the game. These increases in participation rates reflect improvements and developments in opportunities to play.

Teams are now organised within a league structure, which includes ten regional leagues, four combination leagues, three national leagues and two national reserve team leagues. At international level there is a senior squad, an under 16 squad and an under 18 squad. As a way to encourage elite performance 'The FA Talent Development Plan' was launched in March 1998. The result of this strategy includes the development of centres of excellence. The first centre was opened in Southampton for girls under 12, under 14 and under 16, and an academy of excellence was opened in Durham in September 1998. There are now eighteen academies of excellence and the FA has plans for a further 45 by 2006 (Lee, 2001). The academies combine education and football, therefore offering the players aged between sixteen and nineteen intensive coaching and training opportunities. In addition, the FA plans a professional league for women by 2004. The only professional team at the time of writing is Fulham, where women receive salaries via private sponsorship.

The Social and Cultural Analysis of Football Within the Academy

Within academic sports literature, football has been marked as male. Male sports historians and sociologists have effectively positioned the game as an integral part of men's lives and male working class culture (Finn & Giulianotti, 2000; Fishwick, 1989; Giulianotti & Williams, 1994; Glanville, 1969; Mason, 1996; Moorhouse, 1996; Sugden & Tomlinson, 1994; Tomlinson, 1983; Walvin, 1975; 1994; Young, 1968). This extensive documentation has largely ignored and/or omitted women's involvement and experiences of playing. By omitting women from analysis it may be argued that football, sport and culture are all defined and marked as male.

Elizabeth Grosz's arguments are pertinent. Through a critique of knowledge as sexist, androcentric and phallocentric, she exposes male hegemony in knowledge production and argues for a positioning of the female in epistemological debate to subvert, dislocate and transform traditional epistemologies (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Such critical feminist engagement with academic literature on football exposes how some writers have constructed football as a male phenomenon through an approach that positions men as both subject and object of inquiry. This has resulted in particular footballing epistemologies having currency within academic discourse. That said, more recent analysis seeks to make visible women's experiences of playing and goes some way in producing new footballing knowledges (Caudwell, 1999; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Henry & Comeaux, 1999; Pfister, Scraton & Fasting, 1999; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister & Bunuel, 1999).

Football and the Research Participants

This study involved postal questionnaires and in-depth interviews of women who play football in England and Wales. In total, 870 questionnaires were sent out to all clubs registered in the FA regional league between October 1997 and March 1998. Two questionnaires were sent via the club secretary to all the teams registered in the ten leagues in England and Wales (Scotland has its own league system). A total of 473 questionnaires were returned. This preliminary research was followed by fourteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with women players aged between 21 and 42. For the women who responded to the questionnaire, five to ten years is the most common length of time they had been playing football. A significant proportion had been playing for ten to fifteen years and as many as fifteen years or more. In all, nearly two-thirds of the respondents had been playing for over five years. Just over one-fifth of the respondents cited the 'playground' as the site where they were introduced to football. The second most common answer to how they were introduced to the game was 'by a female friend' and thirdly by their 'dad'. The influence of the informal setting of the playground and the large numbers of women taking part in the quantitative research playing for over five, ten, and fifteen years were themes that emerged. Of the fourteen women interviewed, eleven started playing as girls (under 14 years). For many of these women this was during the 1970s. Nine of these women describe playing on a regular basis. For all eleven, their reasons for playing are diverse and include the influence of female friends, fathers and brothers as well as informal playground experiences and/or informal play on the housing estates where they lived. For the three women who started playing as adults, the influence of a local or university team was cited as the main reason for playing.

Football and Sexual Relations

'Dykes Basically Innit' -Sexual Stereotypes

Both the questionnaire and interview material provides evidence that demonstrates sexual stereotyping of women who play football. Here, some common questionnaire responses on prevailing stereotypes highlight the strong connection made between football and lesbianism.

> Branded as a lesbian because I play women's football (no. 107).
>
> you are kind of typecast as being a dyke for playing men's sport (no. 128).
>
> women footballers have stereotypes attached to them e.g. butch, gay and it seems to roller coaster tarnishing all players (no. 149).

Similarly some of the interview participants report comments being shouted while they play. For example, 'when you're training up the park, wherever you are training. The lads will come along - "dykes"' (Bev, age 43). Tracy (age 23) believes the main stereotype is; 'dykes basically innit'. Sam (age 28) has a similar view; 'they think they're all bloody dykes' as does Shirley (age 33) 'you feel that people probably just assume you're gay as soon as you say you play women's football'. Kaz (age 31) acknowledges this stereotype and in addition she makes reference to another misconception: 'big, butch, lesbians basically playing football and running around . . . also girls screaming when the ball hits them'.

The questionnaire and interview findings indicate that the lesbian stereotype has real currency and may work to displace notions of dominant heterosexuality. It may seem that a lesbian peremptory exists. Further analysis indicates, however, that the sexual imperative in football is shifting and dynamic. This point is made more fully during the following discussions on the 'closet' and being 'out', dykescapes and compulsory heterosexuality.

While I accept that stereotypes are used as a way to control women's sporting bodies, it is evident from the research and my own involvement in the game, that there is an actual lesbian presence in football. Tamsin (age 29) is also clear about the real links between football and lesbianism. She asserts, however, that not all players are lesbian. 'It's sometimes a way to identify yourself as [erm] as a lesbian, because you know sometimes if I, sort of like, if I'd been talking to someone who I thought was maybe a lesbian, but I'm not quite sure, I would often mention the fact that I played football [erm] because I think it gives the impression that [erm] that you could be a lesbian [laughs], if you see what I mean. Its a bit of a strange way to say it'.

The next section discusses lesbian presence as it relates to the notion of the 'closet' and explores the women's experiences of 'out' lesbian sexuality. The women's testimonies suggest an actual lesbian presence. The 'closet' and being 'out', however, exist as major features of these narratives. The terms 'closet' and 'coming out' indicate the position of heterosexuality as the dominant. Being in the 'closet' and being 'out' must be understood in relation to heterosexuality as the 'norm'. In this way visibility can reflect the sexual relations to power. Although the stereotypes appear to illuminate the ubiquity of lesbianism in football, the extent to which players disclose their sexuality varies. I argue that these degrees of visibility reflect Butler's concept of a 'terrain of signification'. That is, individuals act in ways that are affected by dominant sexual structures of power, namely heterosexuality. To be intelligible, that is to be read as a real woman, can often mean staying in the closet.

Lesbian (non)Presence and (non)Visibility in Football

During the interviews many of the women acknowledged the lesbian presence in football. The twelve women who were able and willing to offer personal accounts, talked about the situation on their teams. Of the six women who identified as heterosexual, five play for teams that are predominantly lesbian. For example, Laura (age 33) describes her experience here: 'Well there are a lot of gay women in women's football, I mean, there's no doubt about that. . . . There are gay women in all the teams that I've played in'. Of the six women who identified as gay, lesbian and/or dyke, three play for 'out' lesbian teams and three play in teams that are predominantly lesbian. Di (age 29) describes the team she plays for; 'there are thirteen players, of which there are three who would not describe themselves as lesbian'. These comments suggest that there is a lesbian presence in football. The issue here is not to settle a distributive proposition, instead it is to offer a starting point from which to discuss lesbian visibility in football. In other words, how easy is it for lesbian players to disclose and display their sexuality?

Two comments taken from questionnaire responses open the way for a discussion of lesbian visibility. Both of the following responses acknowledge the numbers of lesbian players, linking lesbian presence to the process of stereotyping women who play. It is the second response that interestingly positions lesbian visibility as a significant issue:

> males and females assume that if you play a male sport you are a lesbian because there are so many of them that do play (no. 379).
>
> Other women tend to label all females wanting to play a traditional male sport as gay. I find that gay women, particularly in football, to be overt about their sexuality, which portrays an unnecessary image (no. 358).

This player's view that overt lesbian sexuality 'portrays an unnecessary image' may be read as a homophobic response. Griffin (1998) identifies three climates for lesbians in athletics: hostile, conditionally tolerant, and open and inclusive (p.92). With reference to conditionally tolerant, she introduces the concept of the glass closet. This is the idea that lesbian sexuality is tolerated on condition that it is not overt. Therefore, to be accepted and avoid harassment and abuse, lesbians either conceal their sexuality or behave in certain ways. The 'closet' and coming 'out' positions heterosexuality as dominant and the norm since non-conformity to heterosexuality is hidden and silent. In addition, the process of coming 'out' places responsibility for challenging dominant heterosexuality with 'non-heterosexual'/queer individuals.

Many of the women interviewed talked about situations particular to their teams and/or clubs and it is these testimonies that provide evidence of the

extent to which lesbianism is overt and normalised. Here Helen (age 23) offers her views as a self-defined heterosexual:

> [T]here are quite a high percentage of lesbians that I know of in football. I mean there's me and about 2 other straight people in our team, everybody else is gay . . . a lot more women who play football are a lot more open with their feelings, and quite sort of happy in the way they are, so they come out more. I think football enables them to come out, rather than football attracting . . . do you know what I'm saying?

Di (age 29) alludes to this openness and visibility when she responds to the question 'when you are with the rest of the team do you mention or talk about sexuality?': 'the dominant language is a "lesbian language" because ten out of the thirteen players are lesbian'. In both cases dominant heterosexuality is challenged simply because there are fewer heterosexual players. Although majority status erodes notions of the 'closet' and reduces lesbian silence, the accounts do not refer to the intricacies of lesbian visibility. The women who identify as lesbian, gay and/or dyke offer differing accounts of the extent to which other people are aware of their sexuality. For instance Sam's (age 28) comments: 'gay and out and not going back' and 'they don't have much choice really . . . if they don't know, then they soon do', suggest she is very overt about her sexuality and intends to remain visible as a lesbian. In comparison some of the women foster a less conspicuous approach, here Di (age 29) appears to be decentering her sexuality (Seidman, Meeks & Traschen, 1999): 'I'm me . . . If somebody asks me - yes, I'll say I'm gay. I don't cover my sexuality, but I don't promote it either'. Unlike Sam, Di does not assert her sexuality instead she positions it as a part of her. Although she does not adopt the same approach she does not frame her sexuality with shame and secrecy.

Some of the women talk about being 'out' in certain situations and not in others. This suggests a stepping in and out of the 'closet'. For example:

> JC - Does the rest of your team know about your sexuality?
>
> Kaz - Er, I should think so. I don't know we don't really speak about it. . . all the ones who are gay know. . . . The new girls, now I don't usually make it quite obvious to new people who are there, because I don't really want to scare them away . . . they'll think we're all a bunch of butch lesbians, you know, out to get them or something.

Here Kaz (age 31) talks about deliberately staying in the 'closet' she censors her sexuality so as not to intimidate new players. This is interesting, as it is

their safety she positions as important, not her own safety, which is often the case when individuals conceal their true sexuality. Kaz is prepared to be 'out' to other lesbians in the team although this is somewhat assumed since they 'don't really speak about it', however, her fear of being read as a butch lesbian demonstrates her own anxieties surrounding lesbian sexuality. She takes on the tensions the butch appears to invoke and uses the 'closet' as a way to avoid upsetting new players. Kaz's decisions reflect the functioning of heterosexuality. That is, Kaz practises self-surveillance to be intelligible and in many ways situates herself in the 'glass closet' (Griffin, 1998). Her sexuality is neither central nor decentered, it is largely hidden.

Kaz continues to talk about her sexuality when she mentions work colleagues and family members: 'people at work, I'm sure they know, I'm sure my family know, but they haven't asked'. Here she suggests that her sexuality is in fact transparent. She continues to explain why she is not 'out' to these groups: 'I wouldn't go round saying "oh, by the way, I'm straight", so I wouldn't go "by the way, I'm gay"'. Although Kaz is not 'out' she indicates that she feels people around her must have some idea. In comparison Tamsin (age 29) is definitely 'out' to her family, friends and work colleagues, although there is still some reliance on others reading her as lesbian: 'I've always been out at work. I've always taken the approach that I always assume people will know that I'm gay because . . . I look like I am and I act like I am. So I don't hide it. I don't rush around declaring it - I just would not hide it'.

Tamsin assumes that people will figure out her sexuality. As with Kaz, the assumption is that if Tamsin's work colleagues cannot recognise the signs then not being seen as lesbian is not her responsibility. In this vein, Ruth Holliday (1999: 485) argues 'in this way responsibility for being "out" is shifted from herself (the author of her bodily text) to colleagues (her readers)'. Tamsin clearly believes she performs her sexuality: 'I look like I am and I act like I am'. This kind of display challenges and disturbs conventional discourses of outness. That is, is it solely the responsibility of 'non-heterosexuals'/queers to pursue sexual politics by providing public declarations to contend notions of 'compulsory heterosexuality'? By performing sexuality at certain times in certain situations lesbians not only dislocate assumed heterosexuality, in addition they challenge dominant discourses on 'out'.

Sam Di, Kaz and Tamsin offer four different testimonies of their experiences of sexuality. Sam promotes her sexuality explicitly; Di and Tamsin mostly rely on being read as lesbian and thus offer signs for interpretation; whereas Kaz decides not to be overt about her sexuality. All the accounts demonstrate the power of heteronormitivity since the women are forced to negotiate various strategies in dealing with how their lesbianism is positioned in relation to the dominant, the norm. As Eve Sedgwick (1990: 68) notes:

> [F]or many gay people it [the closet] is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is still not a shaping presence.

For the women who identified as heterosexual, the same question: 'are people aware of your sexuality as you have described it?' engendered some interesting responses. For example, Collette's (age 32) reply: 'oh yeah - well I'm getting married [laughter] so there's a public announcement for you . . . that's the largest public display of heterosexuality', and similarly Shirley's (age 33) reply: 'yeah, because I'm married with children . . . you're kind of wearing it on your sleeve'. Both make reference to marriage as a significant component of 'out' heterosexuality. After a long pause Laura (age 33) also comes to the same conclusion: 'I mean they don't know, they make an assumption that I am, because I am married to a man who is there and they've seen him'. Here marriage is positioned as marking women in a way that is intelligible.[3] Their sexuality is made transparent via the institution of marriage. In this way heterosexuals do not always have to negotiate the process of being 'out'.

Marked and unmarked sexuality are interesting issues for women who play football since it is evident through the stereotypes in circulation that the game has a sexual marking, namely lesbian. For the heterosexual players this causes tension. Donna (age 30), who plays in a team that has many lesbian players, is not active in marking herself as heterosexual. In many ways she adopts a similar strategy to Di and Tamsin. That said, she contends that being seen as gay is not an issue, whereas Di and Tamsin do not refer to how they feel if they were read as heterosexual:

> Yeah, definitely, Everyone knows I think . . . not that I go round making a big thing of it . . . I mean it doesn't bother me if people don't know . . . it doesn't bother me if people think of me as gay or heterosexual, I don't give a toss . . . I'd never go walking in 'oh, by the way, I'm not. . . I'm heterosexual, I'm not gay'.

In contrast, Helen (age 23) is active in marking her sexuality, commenting 'I go out of my way to tell them, because I get pissed off with being called a lesbian that I'm like "Hi, I'm Helen, I'm straight"'. Like Donna she plays in a side that is predominantly lesbian, but unlike Donna she is not prepared to be mistaken as lesbian. She continues to talk about how and why she is so active in marking her sexuality: 'I make my boyfriend go to most games, so I throw it in their face as much as they throw their sexuality in my face'. Here it is heterosexuality that is used to disturb and challenge the inverted norm of lesbianism. Helen and her boyfriend ensure heterosexual desire is made visible.

In effect, she is 'out' about her heterosexuality and performs her difference by taking her boyfriend to games.

Some of the women's accounts suggest that at times dominant heterosexuality is dislocated and transformed as a result of deliberate and overt lesbian visibility. It is evident that display and disclosure of lesbian sexuality varies and there are layers of 'outness'. The accounts also indicate that to discuss the processes of being 'out' as complete is inaccurate. Lesbian visibility within football culture is non-fixed. Players step in and out of the 'closet' and disclosure can vary according to the individual. This dynamic process of being 'out' and/or visible contrasts sharply with the seemingly obdurate prevailing lesbian stereotype.

Football's Dykescapes

Feminist geographers (Duncan, 1996; Massey, 1994) have established that space is gendered. This argument is particularly relevant to any discussion of women football players. For example, there is considerable evidence that the 'football fields', that is both the sport and the space available for its display, are controlled and dominated by men (Caudwell, 2001; Scraton et al, 1999). In addition to this gender analysis of space there also exists a critical analysis of space as sexualised (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Ingram, Bouthillette & Retter, 1997; Johnson & Valentine, 199.5; Moyer, 1997; Munt, 1995; Nestle, 1997; Rothenberg, 1995; Taylor, 1998). The above discussion on lesbian visibility provides evidence that some of the women destabilise, subvert and resist the construction of heterosexual space.

Both lesbian and gay groups, to symbolise a political strategy that embraces the otherness and pluralism of sexual styles, have appropriated the term 'queer'. Queer has been used by activists since the late 1980s to assert and promote an 'in your face' attitude to lesbian and gay sexuality. Queer activism relies on a sexual politics that centralises a myriad of 'non-heterosexual' possibilities. Visibility and penetration of public space by queer subjects, such as the use of public space for mass kiss-ins and mock weddings, are strategies adopted by the queer movement. Here I make use of the concept 'dykescapes' as a way to focus on lesbian 'space invaders' (Massey, 1994: 185).

Carrie Moyer (1997) through discussion on the Dyke Action Machine (DAM) provides an example of creation of dykescapes. DAM represents a working group concerned with providing 'lesbians on the street with the pleasure of seeing their own images in professional, well designed public art' (Moyer, 1997: 440). During 'Stonewall 25' DAM hijacked public advertising space and plastered a series of posters aimed at 'articulat[ing] and represent[ing] a lesbian reality that dominating visual images ignore, deny, and repress' (Moyer, 1997: 443). By using space and images to subvert and destabilise the heterosexual norm DAM's strategy fits with what Sally Munt (1995) refers to as a 'politics of dislocation'.

The interview material provides some evidence that lesbian players challenge the conspicuous 'heterosexing' of spaces they use. The two women who play for different 'out' lesbian teams in the Greater London League provide the most coherent examples. Hackney and Phoenix have been particularly active in their campaign to be visible. For example, Hackney appeared in the National press: 'Hackney Women's Football Club has blown the whistle on the whole game by coming out en masse' (Davies, 1991: 34). The utilisation by the team of signs and signifiers of lesbian sexuality supports this public coming out. Players openly adorn symbols of lesbianism with the labris and triangle as part of the club logo, and the freedom rainbow colours as part of the summer tournament kit. Freedom flags, blankets and towels are also displayed to mark communal social space the team uses at venues. In addition, Tamsin refers to other ways the team establishes themselves and their space: 'We sing gay songs and, you know, get funny looks from some people. Everyone knows we are an out team. All the other lesbians in other teams will go past and, sort of like, smile at us . . . they know we are gay so they can join in a bit. It's a really positive feeling'. Here Tamsin describes achieving the recognition from lesbian players in other teams. This is significant as Moyer (1997) argues one of the important aspects of DAM was to accomplish the pleasure of recognition. In many ways, playing for an out team promotes the pleasure of recognition. Sam (age 28) makes reference to how women in her publicly 'out' team manifest lesbian desire: 'We talk about sexuality, like, who were we shagging at the weekend, who did you pick up, . . . most of the team are single . . . one of the girls plays right back and she never tackles the opposition, she just chats them up. Here, the talk between members of the team reflects open displays of lesbian lust on the 'football field'. Desire suffuses the sporting landscape and momentarily marks the terrain as lesbian/dyke.

The creation and carving of lesbian space by teams like Hackney and Phoenix involves a variety of strategies that serve to brand sporting space. Bev Skeggs (2000) identifies such a process as 'symbolic presence and recognition politics'. Her work on the visibility of 'gayness' in Manchester's gay village illustrates how lesbians and gays, through entitlement and ownership, occupy territory within commercial city space. She also argues, however, that commodification and capitalist exploitation of gay and lesbian culture regulate this branding. Unlike this city space, dykescapes constructed by out players and out teams tend to be transient; they exist when the team plays and are more prevalent at one or two day tournaments. Although footballing dykescapes tend to be transitory, overt displays of lesbian sexuality dislocate the heterosexing of sporting space. The commercial market and processes of consumption do not regulate these moments of lesbian occupation of space. Instead, I argue, they represent 'authentic presence and recognition politics' within footballing space.

Compulsory Heterosexuality?

This final section focuses on heterosexual subjectivity and the analysis exposes the intricacies of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Firstly, I demonstrate how heterosexuality is protected and maintained via regulatory practices, thus establishing it as compulsory. Secondly, I consider testimonies of marginalised heterosexual players and the impact of this location on heterosexual subjectivity and compulsory heterosexuality. As Jeffrey Weeks (1998: 144) argues, it is important to take account of heterosexuality:

> [I]t was becoming very clear that to understand homosexuality we had to understand the construction of sexuality as a whole - hence the appeal of Foucault's own introductory essay on *The History of Sexuality* to many of us interested in exploring the history of homosexuality. If the homosexual condition was an invention of history, so too was heterosexuality and 'sexuality' itself.

As a way to explore the intricacies of compulsory heterosexuality I make use of Butler's poststructuralist analysis of gender and her (1990; 1993a; 1993b; 1998) approach to understanding gender positions sex, gender, sexual practice and desire, within a matrix of intelligibility. This matrix is regulated according to a heterosexual logic. In this way, sex, gender and sexuality are defined by hegemonic heterosexuality (Butler, 1990). Butler argues that the heterosexual matrix supports and sustains 'identities' that are otherwise fragile. For example, it is the repeated stylisation of masculinity and femininity that gives sex and [hetero] sexuality meaning.

From the research material it is evident that discursive practices, such as comments made by non-players, position lesbianism as a coherent sexual identity within football culture. That said, homophobic response to lesbian presence and visibility monitors and controls what we understand as unequivocal sexuality, namely heterosexuality. This player demonstrates such a response: 'I am not homophobic in the slightest. I have many lesbian friends. However, I feel that these players do give "the sport a bad name", as many males assume that all women footballers are gay' (no. 266, age 21-23). This player claims she is 'not homophobic', yet argues that lesbians give football 'a bad name', thereby revealing herself to be homophobic. Her contradiction can be understood in relation to the dominant discourse on sexuality that is, as Butler argues, hegemonic heterosexuality. Since heterosexuality is centrally naturalised via hegemonic practices, it appears as dominant in the sexual imaginary. Therefore, 'other' sexualities are automatically positioned in relation to the dominant as problematic. As with notions of popular racism (Back, 2000), everyday or popular homophobia functions at the core of the heterosexual imaginary. The ease of this player's assault on lesbian footballers demonstrates the point, thus illuminating homophobia as taken for granted or

everyday. For example, she admits to having lesbian friends and yet she believes it is their sexuality that brings the sport into disrepute. There is no engagement with displays of heterosexuality as problematic since heterosexuality is positioned as dominant and thus 'naturalised'.

Stereotyping of players as reported by the women taking part in my research alludes to practices that function to regulate women's [hetero] sexuality. One woman mentions 'the obvious single minded lesbian comments, I have even had male partners being given a hard time for their involvement with me' (no. 77). It would seem that football clearly marks women as the 'other' in relation to notions of heterosexual femininity. This is then positioned as incoherent within the heterosexual matrix of intelligibility.

Another regulatory practice, which protects heterosexuality is the positioning of lesbianism as licentious and lascivious. Some of the women interviewed provide images of unbridled lesbian sexuality. For example Julie (age 20) suggests that:

> I think it [football] can influence your sexuality (JC - how do you mean?). As I say a lot of people I've seen have gone from being heterosexual to bisexual, I think football has a lot to do with it [erm] mainly because of a lot of lesbian players influence them in some way. I definitely think it can affect you if you allow it to.

Similarly Helen (age 23) discusses her first impressions of lesbianism within a football context:

> My best friend at home, she was straight about 4-5 years ago, and then she started seeing a woman, the woman played for City . . . I was just coming back from college . . . I really wanted to play for a team, and she [best friend] was like 'Yeah, yeah come and train for City', and I was like 'oh, are they scary? I mean, you know . . . you can get some really butch women that are just like, are complete, you know, and just make a beeline for you because you're new, and I was like 'oh, I'm really scared about going'.

The notion of the predatory lesbian disturbing heterosexuality highlights Butler's argument that gender and sexual 'identity' are in fact fragile. The fear of conversion, without consent, from heterosexual to bisexual or lesbian, challenges the construct of obdurate and unyielding heterosexuality. Here it is the threat of unrestrained lesbian sexuality that destablises heterosexuality. This woman previously remarked that she 'make[s] her boyfriend go to most games'. Butler (1990) argues that it is this visible repetition of heterosexual desire that marks heterosexuality as vulnerable. Thus, heterosexuality only becomes discernible through hyperbole and repetition. In this way she argues

that 'naturalised' gender and sexual identity are copies of copies. In addition, to protect heterosexuality, lesbianism is marked as unintelligible. For example, as illustrated above, lesbianism is viewed as sexually immoral.

As evidenced by the research material, lesbians who play are often positioned as abject. This positioning functions as regulatory practice and serves to attempt to firmly locate 'compulsory heterosexuality' on the 'terrain of signification' (Butler, 1990), so that anything other than heterosexuality fails to exist as coherent on the gender/sexuality landscape. Heather Sykes (1998: 156) discusses this process as heterocentrism, that is 'our ways of speaking, seeing, experiencing sexuality - presumes that heterosexuality is the most normal, natural form of sexuality'.

Some heterosexual women taking part in the research mention how their marginalised location within particular football cultures has impacted on their sexual subjectivity. These testimonies offer further evidence of the lesbian challenge to heterocentrism and expose the actual fragility of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. In contexts talked about by the women, heterosexuality is challenged and at times excluded. On these occasions, as with the creation of dykescapes, lesbian visibility interrupts the functioning of dominant heterosexuality and 'heterovisuality' (Veri, 1999).

When asked 'do you think football affects how you feel about your sexuality?', some of the heterosexual women interviewed allude to a re-thinking of the position of heterosexuality. For example, Donna talks about being referred to as 'the heterosexual . . . it doesn't bother me, but it's just like a total new terminology, until I started playing football I never really . . . I would never have used it [heterosexual]'. For Donna, the privileged positioning of heterosexuality is exposed as 'taken for granted' and her sexual location within the team becomes marginalised. She suggests that playing football has made her 'more aware . . . I suppose I do think about it [sexuality] more now', and goes on to mention her experiences of being marginalised. She talks about feeling excluded when the team she plays for had a particularly strong and visible lesbian presence, commenting 'at one time in the club I was . . . it was a big problem for me because I thought. . . I felt I was being alienated'. Similarly Collette talks about her status as a heterosexual playing for an 'out' lesbian team. She identifies specific occasions when she also feels excluded, however, this exclusion does not engender the same discomfort.

> Like there's terms I don't feel at liberty to use, I don't call any of the team 'dykes'. . . . As a 'non dyke' I don't think it is my prerogative. . . . I mean there is a lesbian language that I'm not necessarily au fait with. . . it's not uncomfortable, only in the sense that the team often talk about either lesbian fiction, films - casually, that they assume I know and obviously I don't . . . it's reference more than language.

In the contexts talked about by Donna and Collette, the notion of 'compulsory heterosexuality' becomes fragile. Exclusion and marginalisation impact on heterosexual subjectivity. In a more detailed way, Shirley describes her experience: 'I think it [football] makes you confront it [sexuality], . . . I think it does make you aware of it [sexuality] . . . in some ways it makes you more frightened of it and less frightened of it . . . it [football] makes you think about it [sexuality]'. Whilst it is not easy to establish exactly what Shirley means by 'confront', she is suggesting that within football, unlike other aspects of life, 'compulsory heterosexuality' is called into question. All three women cite their experiences of heterosexuality as it relates to an inverted sexual norm, namely lesbianism. Collette extends this discussion through her frank review of the impact of 'non heterosexuality' on her own heterosexuality and how her and her partner's heterosexual subjectivity have been destabilised by her involvement with an 'out' lesbian team.

> [I]t's made me re-examine, if I'm perfectly honest with myself, it's made me re-examine myself. . . . I knew it was an out team before I joined, I didn't realise that I possibly was the only heterosexual. . . . It hasn't been a problem for me, it's been a problem for my partner sometimes. I mean, he's needed reassuring [laughs] he doesn't understand why I want to play for an out lesbian team. But that wasn't my motivation, it just happened that way. (JC: what bits didn't he understand?) Well we've had to confront his prejudices. He thinks, he thinks I might be converted . . . you know the reverse of straightening me out.

As with Donna and Shirley, Collette's experiences confront her heterosexual subjectivity. Her involvement with an out team affords her the experience of both a dislocation and reification of heterosexuality. Collette's experience and reflection demonstrate how overt lesbianism can break 'compulsory heterosexuality', as evidenced in her re-examination of her understanding of sexuality. That said, the testimony also exposes the workings of 'compulsory heterosexuality' through assumptions made by Collette's partner, His inferences reflect male homophobia and return to a positioning of the lesbian as predator, as detailed above and the notion of 'straightening me out'. Butler would argue that the challenges of patent lesbian sexuality, and the ways this is read by heterosexuals, highlight the fragility of prevailing 'compulsory heterosexuality'. In addition, the responses to lesbian visibility and presence demonstrate ways by which heterosexuality is protected and maintained.

Conclusion

This article details the functioning of sexuality in football contexts and highlights sexual relations as shifting. It is evident that lesbianism has currency and this can work to displace heterosexual dominance. Heterosexuality is usually protected, maintained and reproduced, however. This is achieved via complex workings of homophobia and heterosexism. In this way heterosexuality assumes a position of dominance and permanence, whereas lesbian presence, visibility and dykescapes represent challenges that are negotiated and transient.

Lesbian players disclose and iterate their sexuality to varying degrees - there are layers and intricacies of disclosure. The very existence of the 'closet' reflects sexual relations to power. Lesbians negotiate and are largely responsible for disclosure of their sexual identity. In comparison heterosexual women often assume an 'out' [hetero] sexuality. That said, there is evidence of conscious marking of self and space as heterosexual. Butler (1990) argues that such a strategy alludes to the fragility of [hetero]sexual identity, and therefore exposes heterosexuality as delicate and vulnerable.

Dykescapes offer lesbians the pleasure of recognition largely denied elsewhere. This subversion and transformation of space represents moments when regulatory practices used to protect heterosexuality and reinforce heteronormitivity are neutralised. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' in football is reified, however, through homophobic positioning of the figure of the lesbian as 'predator' and 'converter'. In this way lesbianism is positioned as abject and unintelligible. Such a strategy can be read from a Butlerian perspective as a manifestation of ailing heterosexuality. That is, heterosexuality is reinforced and protected by positioning lesbianism outside intelligible sexuality in order to maintain and reproduce heterosexuality as 'natural'. There is evidence that at specific times and within particular teams an inverting of the sexual 'norm' exists. Despite this, the structures of heteronormitivity prevail and it may be more useful to refer to 'leaky compulsory heterosexuality' as a way to register normalised lesbianism in this research on football.

NOTES

1. My PhD research involved postal questionnaires and in-depth interviews. 870 questionnaires were sent out to all clubs registered in the FA regional league between October 1997 and March 1998. Two questionnaires were sent via the club secretary to all the teams registered in the 10 leagues in England and Wales (Scotland has its own league system). 473 questionnaires were returned. This preliminary research was followed by 14 in-depth semi-structure interviews with women players aged between 21 and 42 years.

2. I make use of the term 'out' as a way to indicate players' disclosure and display of [lesbian]sexuality. In the same way I make use of the notion— being in the 'closet'.

However I recognise the complexities of being 'out' or being in the 'closet' and later I interrogate the concepts in relation to the responsibility placed on the individual. That is I question why queer subjects are positioned as responsible for the disclosing of their own sexuality whilst heterosexual subjects are not.

3. It is worth noting that in contemporary culture marriage is not always a marker of heterosexuality, for example marriage for immigration purposes and marriages of convenience between lesbian and gays.

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