

Examining Homophobia in Sports

Elementary school ideas

1. **Examine the impact of gender stereotyping in sports**

Have students create drama skits addressing the impact of homophobia and gender stereotyping in sports. After students are done presenting their skits, debrief with the class using the suggested follow up conversations. Students can be split into two groups and each group can be given one of the following scenarios, or small groups of students can create skits around the same scenario. If multiple groups present around the same scenario, the class can discuss which ideas for dealing with the situation may work better than others and why or why not.

Possible scenarios

Scenario 1

While playing a game of baseball, a male student throws the ball to another player but it doesn't make it all the way. Another student on the team starts calling him a sissy and saying that he "throws like a girl." What could other students on the team do/say to stop the bullying and help the student who is being made fun of?

Follow up conversation

Exploring, defining characteristics of a supportive and inclusive team as opposed to a team that puts down its players through homophobic slurs. Discussion may follow about the damage that homophobic name-calling can have in sports when using words like wimp, nerd, fag, butch, sissy, and girl, in derogatory ways. What impact does this type of bullying have on the team's overall morale? For higher grades, you may discuss how homophobia and sexism intersect.

Scenario 2

A group of students are sitting in the cafeteria talking about what they did during spring break. A girl sitting at the table is excited to tell her friends that she went to a football camp. Another student at the table starts to laugh and make fun of her saying that "football is a boy's sport" and calling her a "tomboy." What could the other students sitting at the table do to help stand up for this student?

Follow up conversation

Why do some individual and team sports get labelled as being more for girls or for boys? What can people do to help break these traditional gender role stereotypes? How can we encourage more boys and girls to try sports that are generally perceived as being for the other gender? (For example, boys who dance or figure skate and girls who play football or hockey.)

2. Great LGBTQ athletes

Have students research great LGBTQ athletes. Once students have selected an athlete, have them create a poster to highlight their athlete's achievements in sports. Have them answer the following questions to be handed in along with their posters:

- a. Do you think your athlete may have faced additional hurdles because they are LGBTQ? (i.e., any that straight athletes wouldn't have to deal with)
- b. When choosing people you would want on your team, what characteristics would you want them to have?
- c. How can we make sure our schools/teams are inviting and safe places for everyone?

Note: The term LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer athletes. The term queer is a positive term and an example of "reclaimed language." You may need to explain this to your students.

Secondary school ideas

Gender stereotyping in sports

Discuss examples of non-stereotypical pursuits in sports (e.g., women boxers/male figure skaters). Have the class brainstorm a list of sports that they would traditionally associate with being for boys or for girls. Have students work in co-operative groups to devise lists and add some of their reasoning for why the sport is traditionally associated with that gender or the other.

Discussion questions

- What are some issues that arise when people compete in non-stereotypical gendered ways?
- Are competitive/contact sports more appropriate for one gender over the other? Why?
- Do male figure skaters/female boxers challenge our concepts of masculinity and femininity? If so, how?
- Should school sports teams be automatically arranged by gender or by skill level instead?
- What are some issues that might come up if sports were only organized by skill, not gender?

Activity

Show video clips of male and females participating in non-traditional sports. Facilitate a conversation with your class using the provided questions as a starting point. Have students write, draw, or use multimedia to create messages or a campaign that encourage males and females to participate in non-traditional sports. Their products might highlight the health benefits for all students to be active in sports and help to break down stereotypical representations of males and females participating in particular activities.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6-MAmhGKsU
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBNyNEZmzek
- How are male figure skaters redefining masculinity?
- How are female boxers redefining femininity?

Resources

1. Two Quebec reporters made homophobic comments about a US male figure skater, Johnny Weir, during the Vancouver Olympics. Why did they think Weir's performance "sets a bad example?" www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm6e5z1MzFE
2. Some people have interpreted Elvis Stoko's comments on masculinity and figure skating as homophobic. Do you agree or disagree? Why does it seem that "masculine" moves are considered a good thing for the sport, and "feminine" ones are seen as hindering the sport? www.torontosun.com/news/torontoandgta/2009/05/03/9330621-sun.html

Senior secondary discussion topics

The following section contains several ideas for classroom discussions around homophobia/transphobia in the sporting world. Depending on how much time you have, the level of student interest in the topic, and/or student ability, you may consider doing one of the following activities:

- Student presentations—have students research one of the topics below and present their research to the rest of the class.
- Write a short fictional story from the point of view of an athlete dealing with homophobia/transphobia or who is a witness to acts of homophobia/transphobia. Have them explore how it might feel to be in that person's shoes.
- Write an athlete's code of conduct that you feel all athletes should have to adhere to (i.e., one that respects diversity and encourages good sportsmanship).

1. Transgendered athletes

What issues arise when transgendered athletes participate in competitive sports? How could participating in sports (organized into male teams and female teams) affect trans-identified peoples' attitude toward sports?

Text resource

The following text resource explains the policy of the Olympics around trans athletes. This gives an overview of a Canadian trans-identified mountain biker.
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelle_Dumaresq

2. LGBTQ preference for individual sports

Some LGBTQ people show preferences for individual sports (like swimming). Why would this be so? How can sports help queer kids in developing a positive self-image? How can the prevalence of homophobia in sports be reduced?

Video resource

This YouTube clip of Olympian Greg Louganis sheds some insights on how LGBTQ youth could benefit from sports which are inclusive.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJlaMIT5_cU&feature=related

3. **Homophobia against women in college sports**

Coach Rene Portland of the Pennsylvania State University women's basketball program carried on a policy of discrimination for years based on a player's sexual orientation. Portland's policy as head coach was "No Drinking, No Drugs, No Lesbians," letting everyone on her team know that if they were found to be a lesbian or were associated with lesbians that they would be dismissed immediately.

Video resource

See this trailer for a documentary made about Portland's time as head coach of the Pennsylvania State University women's basketball team and the homophobia that occurred.

Please be patient. The trailer for this film takes a few minutes to download.

www.trainingrules.com/trailer.html

Questions

- How did the coach's homophobia have an impact upon the whole team?
- What long and short-term effects do you think her homophobia had on the lesbian players on the team?

4. **Pride House at the Vancouver 2010 Olympics**

The Vancouver 2010 Olympics were the first ones to formally recognize the importance of LGBTQ athletes. They created a Pride House in Whistler to honour LGBTQ people in sports. Here is the mission of Pride House:

"The Mission of Pride House is to provide an open and welcoming venue for the LGBT community and their allies to celebrate together diversity and inclusiveness through sport. To educate and make aware that LGBT people are still discriminated against and in some cases persecuted for being or assumed to be a homosexual. It is still illegal to be gay in over seventy countries around the world and in seven countries the punishment for being gay is death."

Questions

- Why would having an official space for LGBTQ athletes and spectators at the 2010 Olympics be viewed as important for LGBTQ equality?
- The Pride House was well covered in mainstream media. Why would it be such a big news story?

5. **Gay athletes in major league sports**

This is the original *USA Today* story (about homophobia in hockey) that motivated Brendan Burke to come out.

www.usatoday.com/sports/hockey/columnist/bourne/2009-11-02-hockey-culture_N.htm

Questions

- What was the connection made in this story between the equality rights of African Americans and the equality rights of LGBTQ people?

- Professional sports only started racial integration in 1946. Is racism still prevalent in the sports world? If so, how does it manifest itself?
- What are some similarities between racism (either historical or current day) and homophobia?
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball_color_line
- Can you think of any out players in the major leagues of popular sports like football, basketball, hockey, or soccer?
- Why aren't there more out hockey players in other major leagues?
- What actions/behaviors from coaches or other players might deter queer kids from joining organized sports?
- What factors might keep athletes in the closet once they've "made it" into the majors?

Text resources

NBA player makes homophobic comments after former NBA player comes out.
sports.espn.go.com/nba/news/story?id=2766213

Video resources

This is an MSNBC news clip of the incident.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoGTmEGtxpc

This link is of a teenager's video project on the incident. There are clips of comments from the former NBA player who came out, as well as the opinions of coaches and general public.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3BrzqYdHMw&feature=related

Other strategies to address homophobia

1. Display an antihomophobia poster in your classroom or hallway and/or facilitate a poster creation class activity. View posters and ordering information at *bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=17992*.
2. Brainstorm responses to and strategies against homophobic name-calling and use of the phrase "That's So Gay!" For a list of great comebacks to homophobic comments, go to *bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6120*.
3. For more antihomophobia lesson plans and ideas, visit *bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6106*.

Developed by the LGBTQ Action Group of the Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ).