



Canadian Association  
for the Advancement  
of Women and Sport  
and Physical Activity

# 'Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken'

A workshop presented by:  
Dr. Guylaine Demers and Jennifer Birch-Jones  
at the Petro-Canada Sport Leadership Conference  
October 12, 2007  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

## DESIRED OUTCOME

Increased awareness and understanding of homophobia so that participants can use their influence to help change the sport environment

## AGENDA

2.0 hours

- Introductions
- Understanding Homophobia
- Strategies for Addressing Homophobia in Sport and in Your Organizations
- Workshop Evaluation

## PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS

- Tour de Table: name, organization, role, and why you wanted to come to this workshop

## WORKSHOP NORMS

What should be the “rules of the pool” or norms that will help with our workshop today?

e.g., don't worry about Politically Correct (PC) language and questions

□ 'Seeing the Invisible,  
Speaking about the Unspoken'



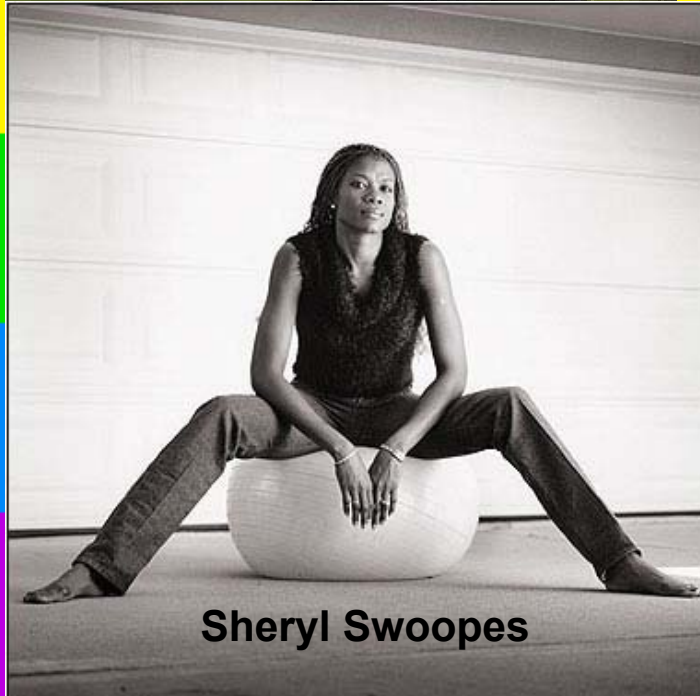
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**Rosie Jones**



**Martina  
Navratilova** **Mark  
Tewksbury**



**Sheryl Swoopes**



**Martina Navratilova**

## WHY IS CAAWS HOSTING THESE WORKSHOPS?

- CAAWS believes that sport should be accessible to all girls and women, legally and morally.
- CAAWS believes that sexuality is, or should be, entirely irrelevant to sport and sport performance.

## WHY IS CAAWS ADDRESSING HOMOPHOBIA?

The fear of homosexuality is used to scare both homosexual and heterosexual women away from sport. By implying that women who play sports are lesbian, women may avoid sports entirely thus denying themselves opportunities for positive and healthy experiences.

## BENEFITS OF ADDRESSING HOMOPHOBIA

- Performance
  - All perform better when treated with respect
  - Reducing fear has a positive impact on performance and the coaching environment
- Inclusiveness
  - Reduces barriers to sport participation
  - Enhances social and psychological well-being

## WHY SHOULD SPORT ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESS HOMOPHOBIA?

An environment without discrimination:

- Avoids the indirect costs of harassment that include turnover of staff and volunteers, diminished performances, high levels of stress, and low productivity;
- Ensures the best athletes are attracted and retained;
- Ensures all perform better without fear of what could happen if they reveal their sexual orientation;
- Avoids anti-discrimination cases that are costly and damaging to an organization's reputation.



**MARK TEWKSBURY**  
OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST



## ON BECOMING WHOLE

It finally occurred to Olympic swimming champion **Mark Tewksbury** he had nothing to lose - even if he had everything to lose.

"I had a shell of a life," he recalled. "I was pretending to be something I wasn't."

"I no longer wake up with the weight of the world on my shoulders, feeling like a fraud. Inner peace is an ongoing thing, and I feel good."



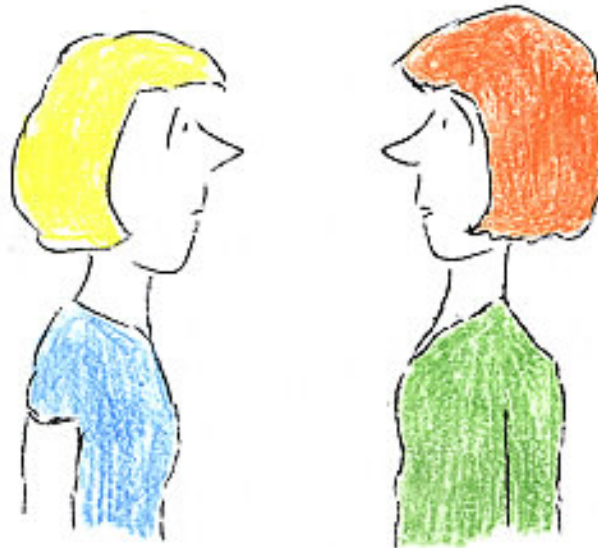
## ON BECOMING WHOLE

“I’m nervous. I’m anxious. I’m excited. I’m *relieved*. For so long now I just feel like I’ve been in this little shell, and there’s only a few people that I’m OK with, that I’ll talk to.”

“I feel like there’s a huge weight that’s been taken off my shoulders, and I can inhale, I can exhale. “

WNBA superstar Sheryl Swoopes

## SOME TRUE STORIES



**"When I told my mother that you're my domestic partner,  
she thought that I had hired a maid."**

## WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIA?

Homophobia is the conscious or unconscious hatred and/or fear of lesbians and gay men.

Homophobia implicitly asserts heterosexuality as “normal” and superior and that lesbians and gay men are deviant, abnormal, criminal, or immoral.

## LGBTQ

- Lesbians - used to describe a women whose primary emotional and sexual attractions and connections are with other women
- Gays – a term used for homosexuals in general, but most often associated with gay men
- Bisexuals - a term that describes an individual whose emotional and sexual attractions and connections are with persons of both sexes
- Transgendered - an umbrella term used to describe a wide array of persons whose gender identity does not conform to stereotypical gender norms of male or female
- Questioning – It refers to someone who is in the process of questioning or exploring their sexual orientation as they are not yet sure what it is.
- Ally – refers to a heterosexual person who supports and honours sexual diversity

## HETEROSEXUALISM AND PRIVILEGE

- 'Heterosexism' is the widely held assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual.
- 'Heterosexual privilege' bestows unearned and unchallenged advantages and rewards on heterosexuals solely as a result of their sexual orientation. These benefits are not automatically granted to LGBTQ persons.

## **HOMOPHOBIA HURTS US ALL**

- Any label wrongly stereotypes every member of the group. Labels and stereotypes are frequently inaccurate and full of negative bias.
- The experience of homophobia is extremely painful, isolating and often impacts an individual's ability to cope.

## HOMOPHOBIA TAKES MANY FORMS

- Rejection by team-mates and coaches
- Insults, teasing, and potential violence
- Discriminatory practices in recruitment, employment, time played, public visibility
- Non-inclusive organizational policies & practices.

## HOMOPHOBIA IS DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN AND MEN

### For Women

- Athletic = Lesbian;  
Feminine = Heterosexual
- There is greater openness toward lesbian team members but this acceptance is conditional; knowledge of being lesbian must not go beyond the locker room in order to protect the team's image and reputation

### For Men

- Playing sport is normal for boys, and suspicions are raised for those who don't
- Sport allows boys to develop their manliness, competitive spirit and strength of character, and become "one of the boys"
- Male sport team locker rooms are often extremely homophobic and sexist statements from male athletes and coaches

## MYTH 1

Lesbians are sexual predators who force their sexual attentions on young and innocent girls.

**There is NO evidence to support this claim!**

Females are no more at risk with a lesbian coach than with a male heterosexual coach.

## MYTH 2: Confusing Homophobia and Sexual Harassment

When an individual makes accusations of sexual harassment based on her discomfort with a lesbian presence, the problem is **homophobia**.

When an individual makes accusations based on unwanted sexual behavior by another, the problem is **sexual harassment**.

## REALITIES

- Low self-esteem, social isolation, and depression are often a consequence of feeling forced to hide one's sexual orientation.
- Suicide rates are 6-times higher for lesbians and gay men.
- LBGTQ youth are often stigmatized or experience violence at the hands of their peers.

## REALITIES

- More lesbian and gay persons would their lives “out of the closet” if sport were more welcoming and respectful
- Many athletes and coaches do not “come out” until after they retire; some are publicly “outed”, and others do so to address the rumours and innuendoes
  - Billie Jean King, Martina Navritolova and Amelie Maesmo (tennis)
  - Rosie Jones (golf)
  - Sheryl Swoopes (basketball)
  - Mark Tewksbury (swimming)
  - Brian Orser (figure skating)
  - Greg Louganis (diving)
  - John Amaechi (basketball)

## REALITIES

- Coming out can have a huge impact on the sponsorship opportunities for athletes

## REALITIES

- A 2006 survey confirms homophobia continues to exist in Canadian workplaces (Leger Marketing):
  - Over 60% of respondents believe that if gays and lesbians reveal their sexual orientation in the workplace, it can be harmful to their professional career.
  - Over half of Canadians surveyed feel that for people who openly state being gay or lesbian, it is difficult to gain acceptance by management and colleagues as well as by clients with whom they do business.

## REALITIES

- Being a lesbian has a significant impact on one's coaching career:

“Being a lesbian dramatically limits career options and adversely affects hiring opportunities at the assistant coach and head coach levels. Taking on a coach who has been labelled as a lesbian is a major concern for an organization intent on protecting the image of its sport program.” (Pat Griffin, 1998)

## REALITIES

- Being a coach who is a lesbian impacts on her ability to recruit athletes:  
  
“Often, prospective athletes, their parents, and their current coaches will try to find out whether there are any lesbians on the team or among the coaching staff. Insinuating that there are lesbians on opposing teams, especially as coaches, is a common recruitment practice” (known as negative recruiting). (Pat Griffin, 1998)

## REALITIES

Pat Griffin (1998), author of “Strong Women, Deep Closets”, identifies a range of strategies used in sport by women who are lesbians:

- o Completely closeted
- o Passing as heterosexual
- o Covering lesbian identity
- o Being implicitly out
- o Being explicitly out

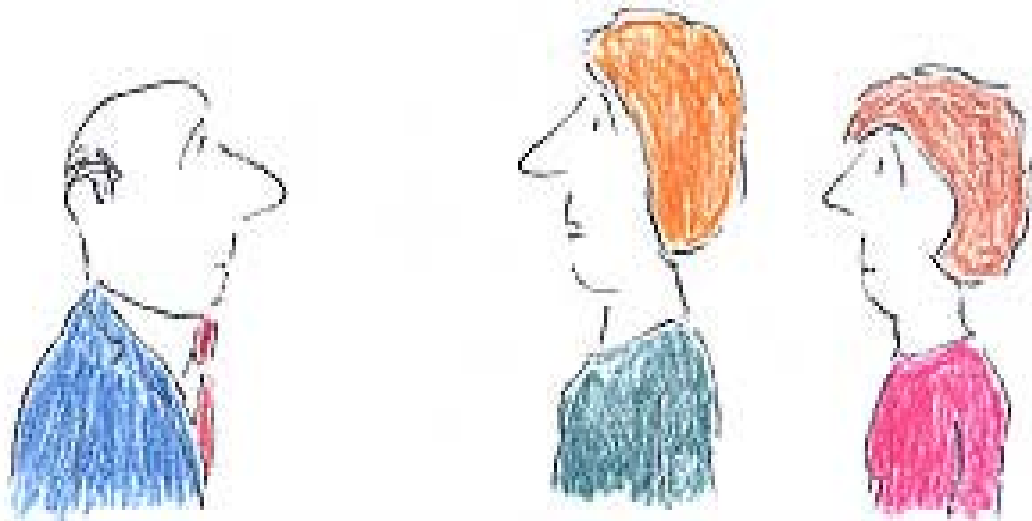
## REALITIES

- Athletes often choose to come out to their coaches first
- Those that do come out of the closet recognize significant benefits

□ **‘Seeing** the Invisible,  
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**“Howard, Maria would like you to stop referring to her girlfriend as her ‘insignificant other’”**

## SMALL GROUP CASE STUDY – COMING OUT

You are the coach of a varsity team at a Canadian university. You have just successfully recruited a “top” player to your team, with practices due to start in 4 weeks, once school starts back up. Whilst in the midst of finalizing your plans for the new season, your “star” recruit calls you long distance, sounding very anxious she tells you that she is lesbian, and feels it is necessary to come out to the team at the start of the season. She is somewhat willing to work with you in finding ways to approach the team and the season.

1. What are some of the considerations for the coach(es)? What do you imagine are some of hopes and concerns the athlete may have? For the team if any?
2. What would be some strategies in supporting the athlete? What would support look like for the team?
3. If the athlete was male, would there be other considerations? If so, what would they be?
4. What elements are at play for the athlete and coach if the coach is heterosexual? If the coach is LGBTQ identified?

## SMALL GROUP CASE STUDY – SAME SEX TEAMMATE ROMANTIC AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

You are the coach of a national women's team, and have just completed the first month of a three month centralization, prior to your World Championships. You have noticed that two of your athletes are spending a lot of time together, and seem to be quite close and affectionate. Some of your staff think they are a couple but you aren't going there. But you do know that two of your coaching staff are not great about these "sorts" of things.

1. What's are the issues emerging?
2. What are some of the considerations for you as the coach? For the other staff? For the team travelling to international settings?
3. Would any of the considerations change for an individual vs. team sport?
4. What are the risks and benefits in raising the question of the suspected relationship with the athletes?

## HOW CAN WE AS INDIVIDUALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Treat everyone fairly and with respect.
- Learn about homophobia and homosexuality.
- Do not assume everyone is heterosexual.
- Monitor your own stereotyped beliefs and challenge them.

## HOW CAN WE AS INDIVIDUALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Do not tolerate disparaging remarks.
- Use inclusive language.
- Make it clear that you are open to diversity.
- Question the presumed heterosexual norm of sport.

## HOW CAN WE AS INDIVIDUALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Consider coming out as an ally.
- Be a positive role model.
- If you are lesbian or gay, consider taking steps to live more openly.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Education:
  - On challenges faced by lesbian and gay people.
  - Educate staff and volunteers on support and care for your lesbian & gay team members.
  - Use inclusive & gender-neutral language
  - Ensure your media strategy is inclusive of *all* your athletes & coaches.
  - Share the CAAWS Homophobia material with your board, staff, volunteers, & coaches.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Policies and Procedures
  - Include sexual orientation in anti-harassment and other equity policies
  - Ensure same sex partners are offered the status and benefits offered to heterosexual partners
  - Be aware and address the risks associated with out-of-country travel for lesbians and gay men - other countries may have strict laws about homosexuality.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Encourage your coaches, athletes & other leaders in sport to pursue individual actions.
- Develop a plan to ensure a welcoming and respectful environment.
- Australia already has a resource for NSOs that we can use:
  - Harassment-free sport: Guidelines to address homophobia and sexuality discrimination in sport:  
[www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/docs/homo\\_sexuality.pdf](http://www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/docs/homo_sexuality.pdf)

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**CREATE A POSITIVE SPACE**

*lesbian gay  
transgendered  
bisexual queer*



**POSITIVE  
SPACE  
IN SPORT**

## What is Positive Space?

- An initiative to address invisibility and widespread reluctance to speak out about sexual and gender diversity.
- Positive Space challenges the patterns of silence that continue to marginalize lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, transsexual and queer people even in environments with anti-discriminatory and inclusive policies.
- The most visible symbol is an inverted rainbow triangle sticker that you will see in many places.
- For more information <[www.positivespace.utoronto.ca](http://www.positivespace.utoronto.ca)>.

## **Commonwealth Games Canada** - creating a positive space for Team Canada at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

- Raised awareness among mission staff & team leaders
- Made sure that the host city was a safe place for Team members
- Provided information of interest to LGBTQ members in 'Guide to Melbourne' Handbook
- Posted positive space stickers in Team Canada areas of Athletes' Village
- Provided positive space pins for mission staff volunteers who wanted to be identified as an "ally"

## HOW CAAWS WILL HELP ...

- Downloadable bilingual copies of '***Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken***' documents (Full & Executive Summary)
- Positive Space signs & buttons available
- Homophobia Executive Presentation (45 minutes)
- Homophobia Workshop (3.5 hours) that can be adapted to target groups for delivery at AGMs, conferences, coaches & officials workshops, training camps, meetings, etc. (in both official languages)
- CAAWS website has additional information and links to resources, including a list of countries with laws against homosexuality for use by NSOs and Coaches [www.caaws.ca/homophobia/](http://www.caaws.ca/homophobia/)

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## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION & UPDATES

Check the CAAWS website [www.caaws.ca](http://www.caaws.ca)

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