

# Social cohesion, sexuality, homophobia and women's sport in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

In the post-Apartheid era sport has been consistently celebrated as an avenue for fostering social change, curing various social ills, and uniting South Africans across the divides of race, class, gender and geography. The argument for using sport to foster social cohesion in South Africa rests on two main assumptions: firstly, that direct participation in sport and physical activity promotes sustained communication, collaboration and understanding across social divides; and secondly, that the success of national teams and athletes promotes national pride and unity. In this article we raise the question of whether sport can indeed foster social cohesion in a context where women's sports participation and symbolic embodiment of the nation give rise to regulatory schemas that enforce compulsory heterosexuality and mainstream constructs of 'feminisation'. We explore these issues by drawing on media reports of cases in which South African elite women athletes have had their gender or sexual identities questioned, challenged or regulated according to heteronormative gender regimes. By so doing we argue that efforts to increase women's sports participation or the promotion of women athletes as embodiments of the nation can contribute to facilitating social cohesion. To realise the potential of sport as

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a tool for building social cohesion, a conscious and dedicated effort must be made, we argue, to deal more directly with narrow heteronormative gender regimes and the homophobic attitudes and prejudices that these foster.

**Keywords:** Gender, sexuality, homophobia, sport, social cohesion, race, South Africa

## **Introduction**

In the post-Apartheid era sport has been consistently celebrated as an avenue for fostering social change, curing various social ills, and uniting South Africans across the divides of race, class, gender and geography. A recent example of this was when Sports Minister Fikile Mbalula on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – following former Banyana Banyana captain Portia Modise’s announcement of her retirement from international football – proclaimed that ‘it is a widely accepted fact that sport is a powerful tool to healing past wounds and creating a cohesive society’. The South African White Paper on Sports and Recreation (Sports and Recreation South Africa, henceforth SRSA, 2012:7) institutionalises this social role of sport, and defines social cohesion as:

the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression itself among individuals and communities... Within a sporting context social cohesion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life.

In the conceptual background for the South African Sports and Recreation White Paper, it is argued that ‘sport works primarily by bridging relationships across social, economic and cultural divides within society... by sharing sports experiences, sports participants from conflicting groups increasingly grow to feel that they are alike, rather than different’ (SRSA 2009:7). As such, sport is posited as an important vehicle for promoting peaceful reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to defining sports participation as a crucial element, the same document

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(*A case for sport and recreation*) posits that pride in national teams is a key indicator of social cohesion across society (SRSA 2009:32). Hence, the argument for using sport to foster social cohesion in South Africa rests on two main assumptions: firstly, that direct participation in sport and physical activity promotes sustained communication, collaboration and understanding across social divides; and secondly, that the success of national teams and athletes promotes national pride and unity. In this sense, sport is believed to promote social cohesion on both a material (direct mass participation) and symbolic level (national pride and patriotism).

The claim that sport can function to foster social change and cohesion has wide international support, and is repeated in the sport policy documents of various nation-states, inter-governmental organisations such as the United Nations, as well as numerous non-governmental organisations (cf. Saavedra 2005). An argument which has also been made internationally is that peacebuilding could be facilitated through sport or put differently sport is a driver for both development and peace and could assist in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (see Cardenas 2013; Burnett 2010).

International and grassroots organisations have made use of sport to reduce and resolve conflict, and build inter-community bridges in societies shaped by ethnical, cultural and racial divides (Schulenkorf and Sugden 2011; Lawson 2005). Schulenkorf and Sugden (2011), in their analysis of a sport and reconciliation project in Israel, argue that it was not sport *per se* but the active involvement of community leaders and change agents that contributed to cooperation and inclusive change.

Commenting on the history and future potential of sport in post-apartheid South Africa, Sugden (2010:263) has argued that while much work remains to be done, sport 'if imbued with socially progressive values and organized and managed correctly, can play a role in promoting peace and reconciliation in even the most fractured and deeply divided societies'. In South Africa, sport played an important role in the struggle against apartheid, as well as in subsequent, and ongoing, efforts to bring about reconciliation and unity (Sugden 2010). Nauright (1997:2) has argued that 'sport has served

both to unify and divide groups, it has been closely interwoven with the broader fabric of South African society and has been at the forefront of social and political change'. Yet, mass sports participation and the pride invested in national teams and athletes do not automatically contribute to building stronger, more equal and cohesive societies; to realise the potentials of sport a conscious and dedicated effort must be made. Sport does not have an intrinsic value, or effect; rather it 'is a social construction that is malleable according to the social forces that surround it' (Sugden 2010:262). Hence, we argue, policy and programmatic efforts to use sport in fostering social cohesion in South Africa, need to engage more directly with the disciplinary power of narrow heteronormative gender regimes and the homophobic attitudes and prejudices that these foster.<sup>1</sup>

A good example of the challenges associated with the facilitation of social cohesion through sport is related to issues of gender equity and women's empowerment. In South African policies on sport, it is made clear that in order to build cohesive societies and communities inequities, disparities and exclusions 'based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability' must be reduced and eliminated (SRSA 2012:7). In these sport policy frameworks, 'women' are identified as a key priority group – alongside 'youth', 'the aged' and 'people with disabilities'. In the 2009 document, *A case for sport and recreation*, it is noted that women and girls are less likely to participate in sports in South Africa, not because they do not wish to, but because of material and ideational barriers to inclusion. Moreover, it is noted that women are underrepresented in sports leadership and administration. Nevertheless, the document reasserts the opportunities for using sport to achieve women's empowerment and gender equity:

Sport helps improve female physical and mental health and offers opportunities for social interaction and friendship... sport can cause positive shifts in gender norms that afford girls and women greater safety and control over their lives (SRSA 2009:4).

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1 In this article we refer to heteronormative gender regimes and heteronormativity as the normalisation and institutionalisation of compulsory heterosexuality (Steyn and Van Zyl 2009:3).

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According to these South African policy statements, it is evident that working towards gender equity and women's empowerment falls within the purview of 'social cohesion'.

What is seldom included in policy and writing on sport, social cohesion and transformation, however, are issues related to heterosexual normativity and homophobia. Yet, in relation to sport, questions of gender performances and sexual orientation are particularly pertinent. While sport normalises and epitomises masculinity, it serves to raise questions and concerns about the 'femininity' (and sexual orientation) of women athletes (Messner 1996; Mean and Kassing 2008). Helen Lenskyj (2003) argues that for women, sports participation disrupts hegemonic expectations regarding gender and (hetero)sexuality, and frequently leads to questions being raised about their gender identities and sexual behaviours. This is also precisely the reason why scholars argue that sport may play an important role in changing restrictive gender roles and regimes (Meier and Saavedra 2009). In the South African context, research indicates that women playing football are commonly met with what is 'negative' stereotypes, which include 'masculinising' women and or putting women 'at risk' of being/becoming lesbians (Ogunniyi 2014:263–269; Ogunniyi 2015; Engh 2010c; Meier and Saavedra 2009).

While scholarship has drawn attention to the various ways that sport can facilitate social cohesion within post-conflict societies, this all too often fails to incorporate examinations of heteronormativity and sexual diversity (Carney and Chawansky 2014). In such post conflict contexts, the struggle for gender equity remains of key importance.

Sport as a driver to promote social cohesion, unity and national pride, raises a number of challenges that have not been sufficiently explored and responded to by academic work and public policy on social cohesion, sport and gender equity. What, for instance, is the impact of myths about 'lesbian sportswomen' on the experiences of women who participate in sport? What happens when the bodies of athletic women, the women we look to as symbols of our progress and achievement as a nation, disrupt our understandings of what a woman is, how she behaves, and whom she loves? What then of our desire to use sport to build cohesive communities?

## **Gender, sport, normative whiteness and (hetero)sexuality**

Historically, hegemonic discourses of femininity (and masculinity) have functioned to create an image of the ideal woman that has excluded the possibility of her being active, athletic and 'feminine' at the same time. Popular beliefs about the 'nature of woman' have served to justify inequality and have limited women's participation in sport and physical activity through the assertion that women's physical bodies were 'too weak' to withstand participating in sport (Hargreaves 1994). The development of modern competitive sport was closely linked to Victorian ideas about the frailty of women, ideals of muscular (male) Christianity and normative heterosexuality (Carrington 2010; Hargreaves 1994; Mangan and Park 2013). Sport has social and cultural significance because it has 'power to represent and reproduce beliefs about gender, physicality, race and sexuality' (Douglas and Jamieson 2006:134). As a social institution, sport perpetuates and provides justification for ideologies of gender binaries in which men are naturally masculine and athletic, and women are, and should continue to be, naturally feminine and weaker than men. Normative whiteness is an integral part of these gendered and heteronormative discourses.

Institutionalised and naturalised heterosexuality 'requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire' (Butler 1990:31). Within sports, heteronormativity is policed, and thus also made evident in two key ways: first through the historical and ongoing practice of sex/gender testing, and secondly through homophobia and the myth of the 'lesbian bogeywoman' (Griffin 1998). Sex tests (or 'gender verification' and 'femininity tests' as they are also sometimes referred to) were imposed upon female elite athletes between the 1960s and 2000 (Ritchie 2003). Ritchie, among others, has argued that although never explicitly stated in policy documents of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), sex/gender tests were instituted to ensure that women do not have to compete with individuals who are physically superior to 'average women' (Ritchie 2003; Sullivan 2011;

Wackwitz 2003). Wackwitz (2003) refutes these claims about the necessity of sex testing female athletes for concerns of 'fair play' and argues instead that the practice functions to uphold sex/gender binaries and to enforce the incompatibility of athleticism and femininity. The labelling of women who transgress the compulsory heterosexual sex/gender/sexuality order (Butler 1990) as not being 'real women' forms part of the widespread homophobia within sports. Homophobia not only serves to keep many women away from sport, it also puts women who are labelled as 'deviant' (read: not heterosexual) at risk of homophobic prejudice and violence. As such, heteronormativity and homophobia create a situation in which many sporting women are policing their own bodies and appearances to fit with conventional femininity. The need for women in sport to 'prove' their femininity (and thus their heterosexuality) has been referred to by many as the 'feminine apologetic' (Theberge 2000). The feminine apologetic refers to the practices of adorning the body or posing for a beauty makeover (Lenskyj 2014), whereby female athletes appear acceptable and appropriate when presenting themselves as (hetero)sexually appealing.

Griffin (1998:53) has argued that myths about lesbian women in sport erase varieties in lesbian experience and contribute to the construction of a persistent 'monolithic image, a lesbian bogeywoman, [that] haunts all women, scaring young athletes and their parents, discouraging solidarity among women in sport, and keeping women's sports advocates on the defensive'. While homophobia affects most women in sport, it has a particular implication for those women who identify as homosexual/lesbian. Many sporting lesbians remain 'in the closet' for fears of discrimination, alienation or even violence (Griffin 1998).

Due to this, homosexuality within sport remains an almost invisible issue, and very little research and writing has given this issue the attention it deserves. In the South African context there is a paucity of scholarship which debunks myths regarding women's sport and lesbianism. Burnett (2001:73), in one of the few South African contributions that explores questions of sexuality, argues that 'female athletes are often stereotyped as sex symbols, while a more muscular body is perceived to be unnatural. This

also explains the negative association of female athletes with lesbianism, expressed in a particular lifestyle which is not accepted in the wider society'.<sup>2</sup>

Within the marginal field of South African sport scholarship, questions of gender and sexuality have been markedly overlooked. While research challenging the dominance of heterosexuality as an identity or lived experience has increased over the past two decades (see Naidoo and Muholi 2010; Engh 2010a and 2011; Ogunniyi 2015), there is a paucity of scholars who have cast the gendered lens challenging women's experiences in sport and even fewer challenging heteronormativity. Those who have include Jennifer Hargreaves (1994, 1997), Hargreaves and Jones (2001), Denise Jones (2001, 2003) and Cheryl Roberts (2012, 2013a, 2013b)<sup>3</sup> who has written academic articles and an ongoing blog who have all offered valuable insights into the development and state of women's sports during apartheid as well as how the legacies of segregation continue to manifest today.

Martha Saavedra (2004); Meier and Saavedra 2009), Cynthia Pelak (2005, 2006, 2009, 2010), Cassandra Clark (2011; Clark and Burnett 2010; Ogunniyi 2014, 2015) and Mari Engh (2010a, 2010b, 2011) have focussed on women's football in particular, and examined the development of the game in South Africa, the effects that lacking public and corporate support had on this development, and the question of how South African women footballers have persisted in the face of marginalisation and under-development. Cora Burnett (2001, 2002) has argued for increased attention to realities of gendered and racial inequity in South African sports today. In so doing, Burnett has highlighted the need for further critical and feminist research on sport in South Africa, as this can inform and strengthen the battle for gender equity within and beyond South African sports.

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2 See also Ogunniyi 2014, 2015; Naidoo and Muholi 2010; Engh 2011.

3 See Roberts 2012, 2013a, 2013b.



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While these accounts offer useful insights into the realities facing women in sport in South Africa, the focus has mostly overlooked and thus not deconstructed the myth of the lesbian bogeywoman. The latter is a shortcoming and unless scholarship and public policy begin to engage more meaningfully with questions of heteronormativity and homophobia, key aspects of women's experiences in sport will continue to be ignored. To date, scholarly and popular writing on women and sport in South African contexts seem so concerned with 'speaking back' to the lesbian stereotype that critical engagements with sexuality and subjectivity are almost completely absent. In an attempt to sanitise and make women's sports (and perhaps football in particular) palatable and respectable, a silence about the experiences of lesbian sportswomen is constructed. Potgieter (2006:5) argues that 'lesbians in South Africa live in a hostile world of hyper-visibility where their lives are sensationalised or made invisible'. Hence, by engaging more critically with questions of gender, sexuality and race in relation to the lives and experiences of sportswomen we may find it possible to also deal more meaningfully with homophobic attitudes, acts and violence, as well as the ways in which these attitudes affect the use of sport in building stronger and more cohesive societies. Discourses which re-inscribe and re-mystify the 'lesbian bogeywoman' of women's sport have to be 'discounted' to ensure more sophisticated and critical engagements recognising the intersectionality of heteronormativity, homophobia and racism in South African women's sports.

### **Social cohesion through sport: Athletes as symbols of the nation**

Across the world competitive and elite sports, particularly in relation to international competitions, are upheld as important avenues for building social unity and pride. However, the teams and athletes imbued with such national symbolism are mostly drawn from the 'malestream' mainstream of modern competitive sports. The continued and dominant celebration of male athletes and teams from traditionally masculine sports such as football, cricket and rugby, functions to marginalise women's sports and

female athletes (Burnett 2002). In a study conducted by Gender Links and the Media Institute of South Africa from 2003, it is noted that less than 10% of news coverage on economics, politics and sport focused on women (Mwamba 2009). Considering the relative absence of celebrations of black, female sporting role models in South African sports (Burnett 2002), it is no surprise that modern competitive sports continue to uphold white and male dominance in ideological, structural, political and economic terms (Adjepong and Carrington 2014; Travers 2008).

When athletes represent South Africa internationally, whether individually or in teams, they are not only expected to be successful, but also to appear as respectable representatives and role models for the nation. These expectations, however, affect male and female athletes quite differently. South African media outlets tend to mostly cover men's sport and tend to portray women athletes not in their professional or sporting terms, but as 'sexy', 'mothers' or 'having a feminine side' (Burnett 2001:76). This contributes to the practice of overlooking sporting achievements in favour of feminising women athletes. Moreover, women athletes are, particularly when competing outside of the country, also tasked with performing and embodying femininity – they must show that they are, in fact, women. In nationalist ideology and discourse, women tend to be represented as the symbolic reproducers of the nation (McClintock 1995; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989), meaning that the morals and values of a nation are often seen as represented on and through women's bodies.

For sportswomen these regulatory schemes combine expectations of appearing appropriately feminine (to make women's sports more popular), with a 'heterosexy' athletic look (not lesbian or 'pseudo-manly'). In the South African context, an example of this was in 2005 when Ria Ledwaba, then chairperson of the South African Football Association's (SAFA) Women's Committee, argued that the senior women's national football team, Banyana Banyana, start playing their games in tighter shirts and shorter shorts, and that they attend 'etiquette classes' to learn how to behave and appear as proper and feminine representatives of the nation. Ledwaba was quoted in national newspapers as stating:

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We don't want our girls to look, act and dress like men just because they play soccer... They need to learn how to be ladies... At the moment you sometimes can't tell if they're men or women (Molobi 2005).

While Ledwaba's statements reveal the constructed nature of gender, that is, that gender is learned and performed, they also speak to the widespread belief that (some) sports, like football, have 'masculinising effects' on women, and that this is problematic. Ledwaba's statements reassert football as a masculine game, suggesting women footballers must remain mindful of the masculinising effects of participation. Moreover, Ledwaba's comments speak to the persistent requirement that women athletes be visibly marked as women/feminine when they participate in sports, perhaps particularly when representing the nation on the international stage. By invoking the notion of 'ladies', Ledwaba also hints at an expectation of femininity that includes ideas about morality and respectability. As the national women's football team, Banyana Banyana must not merely appear as unquestionably feminine, but also as respectable and well-behaved South African 'ladies'. Women athletes must not merely present athletic and strong bodies, they must also distinguish themselves from men, and the lesbian 'bogeywoman', by displaying visible feminine markers. This signifies the burdens, beyond actual sporting performance, that elite-level women athletes are tasked with performing and displaying.

Moreover, due to the association of athletic ability and achievement with manhood and masculinity, women athletes who do not display visible feminine and heterosexual markers face suspicion as to their gender and sexuality. Women athletes continue to be confronted with claims that they are not 'real women', and subsequently have to submit to gender verification testing to 'prove' that they really are women (Wackwitz 2003). Shortly after Caster Semenya qualified for the 800 metres final in the 2009 World Championships, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) 'conducted physical tests and genital screening to try to determine the legitimacy of Semenya's sex' (Moyo 2009). The concerns that Semenya might not be a 'real' woman were primarily based on her physical appearance; 'a muscular physique for a girl her age, facial hair

and a deep-toned voice have all raised suspicions' (Moyo 2009). Despite the controversy, Semenya proceeded to win the women's 800 metres final, beating her closest competitor by over two seconds.

Despite the international debate regarding Caster Semenya's 'real' sex/gender, in South Africa Semenya was 'celebrated by the national collective' (Magubane 2014:766) and framed by the media and sporting fraternity as 'Our First Lady of Sport'. For a brief moment South Africa appeared to be expressing 'encouraging disregard for a woman's non-conforming gender performance' (Schuhmann 2010:96). Yet, this seemingly liberal attitude towards gender non-conformity was short-lived, and quickly replaced by concerted efforts to feminise Caster so as to illustrate her legitimate (heterosexual) womanhood. This was illustrated, for example, by the constant repetition of claims that Caster was South Africa's 'girl', 'child', 'lady'. Schuhmann (2010:96) argues that the 'real message' of the public endorsement and celebration of Semenya was that 'we support you for the price of reinforcing your sex as female, and as long as you play along we are willing to overlook your masculine gender performance'. In this view, the support for Caster was less an indication of a progressive attitude towards gender performance, than it was part of an effort to silence suspicions by constant reinforcement and repetition of her womanhood. A visually powerful example of this was the *YOU-Magazine* spread of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2009 wherein Caster was turned from a 'Power Girl' to a 'Glamour Girl' by wearing makeup, high heels, typically feminine clothes and long carefully styled hair. The implication of this was the transformation of 'the athlete' into 'a woman', as if the twain would not otherwise meet.

The re-invention of Caster as an indisputably feminine woman illustrates the power of the feminine apologetic: the need for athletic women to 'prove' their femininity (and thus their heterosexuality) through making themselves appear heterosexually attractive. Nyong'o (2010:96) argues that the 'feminising' treatment Caster received upon her return to South Africa was 'a transparent bid to render her a more suitable standard bearer for national femininity'. This illustrates clearly the 'double burden' of women athletes when made to symbolise the nation; they must work at being good

at their sport while also proving that they are 'real women'. Schuhmann (2010:96) suggests that this treatment of Semenya was inspired by what the public needed her to be: 'a woman; a South African woman; a black South African woman; a black, South African, heterosexual, woman; a 'normal' woman. In this, Schuhmann alludes also to the intersections and mutual imbrications of race and gender in the lives of sportswomen. Because heterosexual, white, middle-class femininity remains the norm and symbol of respectability and attractiveness (Douglas 2005, 2012; Sanger 2008), 'black sportswomen take up space as simultaneously belonging and not belonging' (Adjepong 2015:2). Meaning that while white and heterosexual women athletes are more likely to be celebrated as national cultural icons (Adjepong 2015), black women athletes are faced with racist stereotypes regarding their irresponsible and pathological gender and sexualities (Adjepong and Carrington 2010; Douglas 2012). As such, Adjepong and Carrington (2014:175) argue, black female athletes are framed as 'space invaders' in elite sports, they are celebrated and deemed acceptable only in so far as they appear and behave in ways that are in line with expectations of middle-class white femininity. Through making Caster appear as a traditionally feminine woman, by normalising her and de-emphasising her athleticism, an effort was made to 'turn her into a proper symbol of national honour and pride' (Gender DynamiX, cited in Dworkin, Swarr and Cooky 2013). Like Ria Ledwaba's attempts to regulate and emphasise the (presumed deficient) femininity of Banyana Banyana players, the public media in South Africa regulated Caster Semenya's appearance according to expectations of emphasised, heterosexual femininity.

Both of the above-mentioned cases speak to the tenuous inclusion of women into the world of sport, particularly at the highest level of sporting performance. Both Banyana Banyana and Caster Semenya were publicly reminded that regardless of their sporting exploits, they must also take care to present themselves as 'feminine', both on and off the sports field. Women who are elite-level athletes face a more intimate regulation of their appearance and behaviour than those who participate in amateur or grassroots sports. They are, in particular, faced with the challenge of

disproving crude stereotypes about the masculinising effects of sports and lesbian 'bogeywoman' within sports (Engh 2010a). The effects of this are that only certain sportswomen, who appear and behave in particular and appropriately feminine ways, are made to seem acceptable national symbols for building pride and social cohesion. Those sportswomen who do not 'fit' with being national symbols of honour and pride are excluded, made invisible, or re-presented in overly feminised terms. This does not contribute to solidarity and diversity in the name of social cohesion, but rather reinforces the strength of a narrow range of options for women's public performances of gender and sexuality.

### **Social cohesion in sport: Homophobia and exclusion**

In South African policies on sport, as in much international activism and scholarship, it is noted that sports participation offers particular advantages for girls and women. The South African White Paper on Sport and Recreation, for instance, argues that among other things participating in sports 'can also empower and promote the inclusion of marginalised groups' (SRSA 2012:22) such as women and girls. The Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (SDP-IWG) has specified the advantages of sports participation and argued that 'sport programmes can enhance the empowerment process by challenging gender norms, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development' (SDP-IWG 2008:132). These assertions, and others like them, have provided useful and important rationales for increasing funding and investment aimed at sports activities for women and girls across the world. While women's participation in sport is considered an important vehicle for promoting social inclusion and cohesion, stereotypes linking women's participation in sport to masculinisation and lesbianism prejudice women's access to and experience of participation. While this affects all women athletes, it is particularly challenging for those sportswomen who identify as lesbian. Fears of the 'lesbian bogeywoman' impact on how women athletes are seen and presented on national levels, and they

affect the relationships between and among women in sport. In this sense, homophobia can be the source of divisive and exclusionary practices. In South African women's football, for instance, homophobic attitudes have been the cause of the exclusion of self-identified lesbian women on several occasions.

Commenting on the persistent nature of homophobia in South African women's football, Phumla Masuku, a former Banyana Banyana player, has argued that the problem is that the organising body of football itself, SAFA, does not 'believe in homosexuality' (Naidoo and Muholi 2010:134). Illustrating that despite policies of 'non-discrimination' in South African sports, self-identified lesbian women, such as Phumla Masuku, Gloria Hlalele and Portia Modise, have experienced numerous incidents of homophobic prejudice and exclusion while playing at the highest level of South African football. Naidoo and Muholi (2010:132), quoting an interview with Gloria Hlalele, argue that her 'sexual orientation [was]... a reason for her exclusion from professional playing and coaching of the sport'. Further, Naidoo and Muholi (2010:133) argue that Hlalele, like many other women footballers across the country, effectively face a gendered double-bind when it comes to playing football; first for not being 'man enough' to play football as a child, and later for not being 'woman enough' to be a positive role model for women's football.

In the world of football, the pressure put on women to mark their femininity – through the feminine apologetic – appears particularly strong. Women footballers must prove their womanhood and 'do' femininity in specific ways to be accepted and acknowledged. This means that women footballers while 'playing like men', must nevertheless 'look like women'. Looking like a woman entails marking the body as heterosexually feminine and involves ways of dressing, moving, training and speaking. Being too masculine is seen to signal deviant sexuality and a lack of femininity and thus posits the woman concerned as pseudo-woman/lesbian (Cox and Thompson 2001). In African contexts, it has been noted that fears of the lesbian stereotype and accompanying threats of violence dissuade many women from participating in sport (Meier and Saavedra 2009).

Shortly after the conclusion of the African Women's Championship in October 2010, several South African newspapers published reports that the male head coach of the senior women's national football team – Augustine Makalakalane – had been accused of sexually harassing several of the national squad players. Makalakalane was also alleged to have expressed homophobic attitudes, and refused to let lesbian players be a part of his team (Baloyi 2010). Nthabiseng Matshaba, a former member of the team, was quoted as saying that Makalakalane had made sexual advances on several occasions, and that she was eventually fired from the team because she refused to sleep with him (Baloyi 2010). Another player, Lena Masebo, stated that the coach had expressed clearly homophobic attitudes and that he would only allow 'young and straight' girls to play in his team. Portia Modise, former Banyana Banyana captain, confirmed this, and said:

It is true. He treated lesbians in an abusive manner, verbally insulting us in front of our teammates. He said he didn't want us in the team (Baloyi 2010).

In response, Makalakalane denied the reports and threatened to sue the players involved. Although SAFA made no official statement regarding this case, or the allegations posed by former national team players, Makalakalane was suspended and subsequently replaced as the head coach of the South African women's senior national team in December 2010. Initial reports stated that a full investigation into the allegations would be conducted, but the findings of this were not made public by SAFA, nor has the organisation made any other official statements regarding homophobia. The failure of the organising body of football to make any official statement following this incident is indicative of a silence regarding homophobia in South African women's sport.

Moreover, this illustrates how engagements with gender and sexuality, both from coaches and sports administration in general, significantly shape women's participation in sport, as well as the ways in which women imagine their participation. Naidoo and Muholi (2010:137) argue that with regard to South African women's football, it 'has been those women who have chosen to remain silent about their sexual orientation, and to render



issues of sexuality secondary to the game and to issues of development of talent, that have maintained their positions in the game'. Hence, for women aiming to achieve their fullest potential in sport, homophobia remains a major stumbling block. On the one hand, homophobia and crude stereotyping motivate straight sportswomen to actively distance themselves from lesbians in sport, through disapproval and/or marking themselves as heterosexy-feminine. On the other hand, homophobic attitudes and prejudices cause lesbian athletes to remain in the closet and work to 'pass' as straight. Unless homophobia is directly addressed and discussed by policy makers, sport federations, media and participants, it will continue to support exclusionary and divisive practices within women's sport.

### **Conclusions and recommendations: Combating homophobia and building social cohesion**

In the South African imagination, sport is positioned as a key facilitator of social cohesion; and pride in national teams and athletes is taken as proof that a level of cohesion and unity has been achieved. In the introduction to an edited volume on social cohesion entitled *What holds us together*, Chidester, Dexter and James (2003:vii) state that 'in the glow of the South African "miracle", national identity seemed as easy as one, two, three: South Africa had one flag, two national anthems and three national sporting teams'. While theirs is a critique of simplistic notions of, and roads to, social cohesion, this assertion nevertheless reveals something about the primary role assigned to sport in the national project for cohesion. While it may be true, as Nelson Mandela suggested, that sport has the power to break down all barriers, it is no less true that sport both shapes and is shaped by inequitable gender relations and exclusionary practices. Though sport offers opportunities for a sense of belonging to an imagined community, embodied by the personas and exploits of national athletes and teams, the ways in which sportswomen are represented and consumed as 'symbols of the nation' leaves a lot to be desired.

The SDP-IWG (2008) argues that the achievements of elite sportswomen can dispel prejudices against women's sport and foster national pride and

unity. They argue that ‘when the athlete is female, she provides a visible demonstration of what is possible for women to achieve’ (SDP-IWG 2008:153). While the power of sport to disprove and dispel myths about ‘the frailty of women’ is undoubtedly a fact, our discussion above has illustrated that a simple ‘add women and stir’ approach to sport cannot alone shift gendered expectations and regimes. Rather, we have argued, the achievements of elite women athletes are not only measured on the sports-field, but also in terms of whether and how they perform femininity. Rather than challenging the assumed incompatibility between femininity and athleticism, ‘professional sports participation can further subjugate women through an intensification of feminine expectations’ (Engh 2010a:75). An indication of this is the level of discomfort and regulation that appears when our sporting heroines are ‘not quite’ in line with imaginaries of sex, gender and ‘the nation’. The response to such transgressions may involve, as was the case with the rape and murder of Eudy Simelane, extreme incidents of violence. This indicates that, despite legal protection against discrimination and violence on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, violence against women and lesbians remains rife in post-apartheid South Africa (Mkhize et al. 2010). High levels of homophobic and gender based violence, such as is the case in South Africa, ‘render notions of being “at peace” very vulnerable’ (Bennett 2010:38).

In this article, we have aimed to illustrate some of the ways in which women’s sports participation, both on elite and amateur levels, brings about heteronormative regulatory schemas that affect the ways in which women athletes are able to present and perform their gendered and sexual identities. By so doing, we have raised questions as to the potentials of using sport as a tool for building social cohesion in a context where women (1) are largely excluded from acting as sporting ‘symbols of the nation’, (2) experience (hetero)feminisation and sexualisation as elite athletes, (3) police their appearances and behaviours so as to appear ‘straight’ and distance themselves from the ‘lesbian bogeywoman’ of sport, or in the most extreme cases, (4) are excluded from sports participation on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, we agree that as an embodied and symbolic practice, sport does hold the potential to facilitate social transformation and cohesion. In order to effectively do so, however, an effort must be made to foster more inclusive participation for women, at both the material and discursive levels. The divisions and exclusions sustained by heteronormative expectations of femininity and homophobic attitudes cannot be addressed merely through bringing more women into sport. Rather, policies and strategies must be attentive also to the type and quality of participation. This requires a more sustained engagement with the nature and extent of homophobia toward and within women's sport, as well as with more general debates about femininity and athleticism in South Africa. Homophobia and heteronormative expectations of femininity affect (1) whether women decide to participate in sport, and in which sports they decide to participate, (2) the nature of relationships between and among women in different sport codes and teams, as well as (3) the experience of athletic women outside of sport, for instance, when travelling to or from training sessions or competitions. What is needed is a further de- and re-construction of feminine expectations and performances to encompass sexual and gender diversity. Disentangling suspicions of lesbianism from women's sporting prowess will make possible a qualitatively different kind of participation for women; a participation that does not enforce heteronormative femininity but one that encompasses the diversity of South African women's sexualities, self-representations and identifications. It will realise not mere mass participation in sport, but a quality of sports participation that has the potential to foster social cohesion. By expanding the forms of gender expression and performance available to women in sport, advances will also be made towards enabling women to fully be seen as symbols of the nation, and not merely as symbols of the (heterosexual) femininity of the nation. If sportswomen are to function as embodiments of the nation, cognisance must be taken of all the constituent parts of the nation, including those women, and athletes who do not seem to 'fit' with the narrow ideals of gender performances and (hetero)sexuality.

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