



Game to Play?

Exploring the experiences and attitudes towards sport, exercise and physical activity amongst same sex attracted and gender diverse young people.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Research highlights that same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people (SSAGD) are at significantly greater risk of mental ill-health than their heterosexual and cisgender peers. This is largely due to discrimination, bullying and prejudice based on homophobia and transphobia they experience on a daily basis in families, in schools, at work, in the health care system, in sports, and in the broader community more generally (Robinson, Bansel, Denson Robinson, Ovenden & Davies, 2013; Beyond Blue, 2014; Smith, Jones, Ward et.al, 2014; Byron, Rasmussen, Toussaint et.al, 2016; Strauss, Cook, Winter et.al, 2017; Kang, Robards, Luscombe, Sancı, Hawke, Steinbeck, Jan, Kong, Usherwood, 2018).

Involvement in sport and physical activity has been identified as having positive outcomes for young people, such as increased social skills, a sense of belonging, and improved mental and physical health and wellbeing, as well as playing a wider role in addressing social exclusion (Bailey, 2005; 2006; Coalter, 2007; Armour and Sandford, 2013). However, club sport and school sports, especially Physical Education (PE) in schools, have been acknowledged as critical sites of homophobia and transphobia leading to discrimination and bullying of SSAGD young people in these contexts. This has resulted in many young SSAGD people feeling unwelcome and withdrawing from sports and other physical activities. As a consequence, many SSAGD young people are missing out on the numerous benefits that have been associated with participating in sports and physical activities (Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010).

This pilot study, conducted with same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people (SSAGD) aged 17-21 in NSW was conducted in order to contribute to positively addressing the increased inclusion of SSAGD young people in sport and physical activities. The research was undertaken by several members of Sexualities and Genders Research (SaGR) Western Sydney University (WSU) in collaboration with Twenty10 incorporating the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service (GLCS) NSW (Twenty10). Twenty10 is a NSW based non-government organisation that works with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more (LGBTIQ+) people and others of diverse genders and sexualities, their families and communities. Twenty10 provides a broad range of specialised services for young people 12-25 including housing, mental health, counselling and social support. Twenty10 is the NSW partner for QLife, a national tele-web peer support service for LGBTIQ+ people including young people. The pilot research was funded by the School of Science and Health, at Western Sydney University (WSU). The term Same-Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse (SSAGD) is used throughout this report to refer to young people of diverse sexualities and gender identities, also commonly referred to by the LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) acronym. We use the plus in the LGBT+ acronym to include all the different identities within the umbrella term associated with sexual orientation and gender identity, including queer and asexual.

Aims of the Research

The specific aims of the research were to: (i) increase SSAGD young people's inclusion in sport; (ii) to gain a better understanding of how SSAGD young people can be supported to increase their involvement in sport and physical activity; (iii) to promote greater involvement in physical activity of SSAGD young people, which has been shown to be beneficial for the overall health of young people; and (iv) inform policy and practice in sporting organisations to promote inclusion of SSAGD young people.

The following key research questions were addressed:

1. What are SSAGD young people's attitudes towards sport, exercise and active recreation?
2. What are the experiences of SSAGD young people in sport, exercise and active recreation?
3. How can sport organisations be more inclusive of SSAGD young people?

Methodology

Thirteen (13) SSAGD young people participated in this pilot study. The majority of the young people (N=10) identified as gender diverse. Participants were asked to partake in a 30-60 minute, semi-structured interview to discuss their experiences of engaging in sport and physical activity and what they believed sporting organisations could do to be more inclusive of SSAGD young people.

We use a range of terms through out the report around sport/ physical activity/exercise/recreation. These reflect the range of activities the young people spoke about

Main Findings

The following points highlight the main findings from this research:

(i) Sporting Culture

- The culture around sport and physical exercise was considered hostile and unwelcoming to SSAGD young people;
- Negative and often traumatic early experiences in PE and school sports were common, impacting on SSAGD young people's attitudes about participating in sports and physical activities, especially team sports and physical activities;
- Negative media attention and debates around sexuality and gender diverse people also impacted SSAGD young people's participation in sports;
- Some participants did not feel safe in public sporting venues, including gyms;
- Negative experiences intensified for gender diverse and transgender young people, who encountered additional issues associated with gender dysphoria about their bodies, and a lack of access to appropriate facilities, such as change rooms and toilets; and
- Some participants felt that the greater emphasis on competition in sport rather than inclusion, fun and enjoyment, was alienating for them.

(ii) SSAGD Experiences of Discrimination

- Experiences of homophobic and transphobic discrimination in sporting environments, especially in PE classes, were common across the participants;
- Change rooms were a common site of stress, harassment and bullying for SSAGD young people;
- A lack of positive PE teacher role models who were trained in LGBTQ issues was considered a barrier to inclusion for SSAGD young people;
- Transgender and gender diverse young people in particular found sport and exercise activities discriminatory as they were often excluded from participating as themselves – that is, as their affirmed gender;
- Organisational and sports practices and environments framed within binary gender were problematic for trans and gender diverse young people (e.g. lack of mixed gender teams; separate male and female toilets, rather than unisex toilets; lack of unisex change-rooms);
- Traditional male sports were seen as unwelcome and toxic spaces for SSAGD young men; and
- The exclusion and discrimination faced by SSAGD young people was particularly intense when living in rural or regional areas.

(iii) The Gender Binary

- In this research a number of issues associated with binary gender emerged, including: gendered sporting facilities (e.g. toilets and change rooms), gendered activities and lack of choice (e.g. boys encouraged to pursue sports associated with hegemonic masculinity), single sex teams, and individual versus team sport;
- The gendered nature of sports and activities in PE was a concern raised by many SSAGD young people, who questioned why PE activities and sport had to be structured around sex and gender; and
- There is a need for the sport industry to increase their efforts to include gender diverse people by providing more opportunities for young people to engage with sport which are not rigidly structured around binary gender.

(iii) SSAGD Young People's Desire to be Involved in Sport and Physical Activity

- There was a strong desire amongst SSAGD young people to be included and to engage in sport and physical exercise;
- The benefits of participation in sports and physical exercise acknowledged by SSAGD young people were: a sense of belonging; improved mental and physical health; sporting opportunities; peer support and friendships;
- SSAGD young people often lacked the support, guidance, confidence and finances to engage in sport and physical exercise; and
- Some SSAGD young people, although not a common occurrence, spoke about the sense of community associated with being involved in supportive team sports, which could bridge the gender, sexuality and cultural differences that exist amongst young people.



Key Recommendations to Improve SSAGD Youth Involvement in Sport, PE and other physical activities

What do young people want?

1. For organisations to provide non-binary options on sporting and leisure organisation registration forms instead of just male and female options;
2. Gender neutral facilities in sporting clubs and leisure facilities and access to safe facilities;
3. Mixed teams that are grouped on different categories, such as ability, rather than sex/gender;
4. SSAGD outreach programs from accepting and non-discriminatory sporting organisations, in order to create safe spaces;
5. Casual sports that are not based on competition but based on social networking, inclusion and fun; and
6. Staff, coaches and other people who provide and manage sport provision to take necessary action against public homophobia and transphobia and not allow perpetrators to go unpunished.

What can sport organisations do?

1. Leadership in sport clubs and organisations can go a long way in reducing homophobia and transphobia in sport, especially if clear policy and guidelines are established;
2. Draft clear anti-homophobia/ transphobia/ biphobia discrimination policies that involve consultation with SSAGD-identifying athletes and community members;
3. Ensure that policies are enforced and are not tokenistic, which includes actively addressing incidences of discrimination when they arise and punishing perpetrators in accordance with respective policies;
4. Provide SSAGD sensitivity and ally training for management staff and players in club sport and leisure organisations. Training must highlight the discriminatory experiences of young SSAGD people, how such incidents can be prevented and mitigated, and information on how to be a good ally;
5. Ensure appropriate facilities are made available for SSAGD-identifying athletes and team staff who may wish to use them, including unisex bathroom and changing room options; and
6. Provide athletes with diverse uniform options, especially when there is only one style of the uniform available. For example, in netball, providing players with the option to wear shorts, not just skirts.

Conclusion

Young SSAGD people in this research expressed a strong desire to participate in sport and physical exercise, and an awareness of the benefits, however most had experienced numerous forms of discrimination in sport and exercise, especially in PE at school. It is critical that steps are taken to address the violence and discrimination that SSAGD young people experience in sport and exercise environments, including tackling homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism.

The sporting sector can help make a difference to the health and wellbeing of SSAGD young people by providing equitable and safe access for every young person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If young people have positive and affirming experiences in exercise, sport and PE, this can lead to healthy lifelong habits around sport and exercise, and can inspire a new generation of people to play sport.

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This report has been prepared by Ryan Storr, Kerry Robinson, Cristyn Davies, Lucy Nicholas and Anneke Collison who are affiliated with Sexualities and Gender Research (SaGR) at Western Sydney University.

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The information contained in this report is intended for specific use by sporting organisations and may not be used by any other organisation for any other project without the permission of Western Sydney University.

All recommendations identified by the research team are based on data collected during the research, and this information is known to be correct at the time this report was prepared.

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Glossary of Terms

Same sex attracted: when a person's sexual desire includes those of the same gender.

Sexuality: is the way people experience and express themselves sexually. Sexuality encompasses who a person may be attracted to romantically and sexually.

Cisgender: when a person's gender identity and gender expression aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender diverse: is an umbrella term that includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans/transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, gender non-conforming, agender (having no gender) and other such terms.

Non-binary: refers to when a person's gender identity does not align with binary gender, male/female. Non-binary people may identify as gender fluid, trans masculine, trans feminine, agender, bigender, gender queer and a multitude of other such terms.

Homophobia: is the prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against those who are same-sex attracted (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, MSM [men who have sex with men]); or are perceived to be by others, based on their sexuality.

Transgender: (often abbreviated as trans) refers to people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Sistergirls are First Nations women assigned male at birth, and brotherboys are First Nations men assigned female at birth. In some regions, sistergirls (sometimes Yimpininni in the Tiwi Islands) and brotherboys have distinct cultural identities and roles (National LGBTI Health Alliance 2013).

Transphobia: refers to a range of negative, stereotypes, feelings or behaviours towards anyone who is transgender or gender diverse, which often leads to prejudice or discriminatory actions or abuse.

Heteronormativity: refers to the ways in which everyday interactions, practices and policies constitute heterosexuality as 'normal' and 'natural', whilst rendering non-heterosexuals as abnormal and unnatural.

Descriptions of key terms are based on the following references:

Davies, C., Robinson, K.H., Metcalf, A., Ivory, K., Mooney-Somers, J., Race, K., Skinner, R.S. (2020). Australians of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, in T. Dune, K. McLeod, R. Williams (Eds.), Culture, Diversity and Health in Australia: towards Culturally Safe Health Care, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, Australia.

National LGBTI Health Alliance (2013). "Inclusive Language Guide: Respecting people of intersex, trans and gender diverse experience." Retrieved 1 February 2020, https://lgbtihealth.org.au/sites/default/files/Alliance%20Health%20Information%20Sheet%20Inclusive%20Language%20Guide%20on%20Intersex%2C%20Trans%20and%20Gender%20Diversity_0.pdf.

Robinson, K. H. and C. Jones Diaz (2016). Diversity and Difference in Early Childhoods: Implication for Theory and Practice. Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

A photograph of three men standing on a grassy field, likely a soccer field. They are all wearing blue short-sleeved polo shirts with a crest on the chest and blue shorts. The man on the left has a dark beard and hair. The man in the center is older, with a grey beard and hair. The man on the right is younger, with a light beard and hair. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a clear sky. The word "Introduction" is overlaid in white text in the center of the image.

Introduction

Study Overview

This study was led by Western Sydney University in partnership with Twenty10 to develop a better understanding of how Same-Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse (SSAGD) youth can be supported to increase their involvement in sport and physical activity. We use the term Same-Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse (SSAGD) to refer to young people of diverse sexualities and gender identities, also commonly referred to by the LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) acronym. This pilot research investigated the current experiences of SSAGD youth through qualitative research methods including interviews with young people.

These findings will be foundational to a larger study. Through direct engagement with SSAGD youth, this report provides evidence-based research to inform best practices and support to sport and leisure organisations, so they are more informed and better supported to provide for the needs of SSAGD young people.

The ultimate aim of this study is to increase SSAGD youth inclusion within sport, and to promote greater involvement in physical activity for this population, which has been shown to be beneficial for the overall health of our youth population. Such research can inform policy and practice to promote SSAGD inclusion across all sport and exercise, with applicability to other aspects of diversity also, such as gender equality.

The following key research questions were specifically addressed:

1. What are the attitudes towards sport, exercise and active recreation amongst SSAGD young people?
2. What are the experiences of SSAGD young people in sport, exercise and active recreation?
3. How can sport organisations be more inclusive towards SSAGD young people?

Why SSAGD Youth?

There has been much media attention and debate about Same Sex Attracted and Gender Diverse (SSAGD) young people in Australia in recent times (Nicholas 2019). The Growing Up Queer research (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden & Davies, 2014), an exploration of the issues facing LGBTI young people aged 16-27 in Australia, highlighted that they were one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of young Australians. This is supported by previous studies (e.g. Hillier et al. 2010). The Growing Up Queer research showed that SSAGD young people experience discrimination and exclusion in physical education in school settings. This pilot study builds on that research, contributing to the gap in the literature about SSAGD young people's experiences in sport and physical activity in order to increase awareness and understandings that will benefit policy and practice.

Australian and international research demonstrates significant concern regarding mental health outcomes and suicidal behaviours among LGBTI people, however significant gaps remain. As highlighted by the National LGBTI Health Alliance (2020), these gaps are primarily due to the lack of inclusion of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status in population research and data collection in mental health services. From the studies available that target SSAGD young people, findings show that those aged 16-27 years are five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Robinson et al. 2014).

Transgender people aged 18 years and over are nearly eleven times more likely to attempt suicide (National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2020), and 48.1% of transgender and gender diverse people aged 14-25 years have attempted suicide in their lifetime (Strauss et al. 2017).

Researchers Noto, Leonard & Mitchell explain that, 'there is a substantial body of research on the lives of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people in Australia, and the effects of heterosexist discrimination on their health and wellbeing' (2014: 8). The Access 3 study (Kang, Robards, Sanci, Steinbeck, Jan, Hawke, Luscombe, Kong & Usherwood, 2018), which explored the ways in which young people in NSW access, navigate and experience the health system, demonstrated that sexuality and/or gender diverse participants reported significantly more barriers compared to other groups. In addition, the 'You Learn From Each Other' study (Byron, Rasmussen, Toussaint, Lobo, Robinson & Paradise, 2016) highlighted that LGBTIQ young people are subject to a range of socio-cultural inequities that impact on their health and wellbeing and are particularly at a higher risk of mental ill-health. This study found that homophobia, transphobia, (non)disclosure of gender and sexuality identities, and fears of not being understood and/or being judged can prevent LGBTIQ young people from seeking mental health support. An innovative way to combat these multiple health inequalities is to increase SSAGD youth participation in sport, a past-time that has been shown to improve physical, mental and social health (Bailey, 2005).

Why Sport and Physical Activity?

Benefits of Positive Experiences in Sport and Physical Activity

Increasing physical activity within disadvantaged social groups is a key aim for many government organisations. For example, 'Sport 2030' is a new Commonwealth government sport policy in Australia, whereby increasing participation amongst people of diverse backgrounds is a core policy imperative (Sport Australia, 2018). If a young person does not have early positive socialisation experiences in sport and physical activity, it can have detrimental effects on their health and wellbeing, and lead to physical inactivity and the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle in later life (Bailey, 2005). If SSAGD young people experience barriers to accessing public services providing sport and exercise opportunities they will miss out on a multitude of benefits that regular participation in sport and physical activities can provide. Research in the UK (Bailey, Armour, Kirk, Jess, Pickup and Sandford, 2009) assessing evidence for the educational benefits from physical education and school sport (PESS) grouped positive outcomes from these areas into four categories: social, affective, physical and cognitive benefits. Other research has documented a wide range of positive outcomes associated with involvement in sport and physical activity, such as increased social skills and positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes in young people (Armour and Sandford, 2013). Sport and physical education also play a wider role in addressing social exclusion (Bailey, 2005; 2006; Coalter, 2007).

Negative Experiences in Sport

Club sport and school sport, particularly PE, have been identified as spaces of concern for SSAGD young people (Landi, 2019). Australian SSAGD young people face barriers to healthy and equitable access to sport participation. Australian research has found that young people do not perceive sport as a safe and welcoming environment, and many have been subjected to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Denison and Kitchen, 2015; Robinson et.al 2014; Symons et al., 2014; Symons et al 2010; Hemphill and Symons, 2014; Fletcher, 2013; 2014). PE has been found to be one of the most discriminatory and abusive areas for SSAGD young people (Robinson et.al, 2014; Symons et al., 2010; 2014). In the study, Equal Play (Symons et.al, 2014), funded by Beyond Blue, PE was identified as the site of most frequent experiences of overt homophobic verbal abuse experienced by SSAGD young people aged 14-23 years, impacting their mental health and wellbeing.

The more frequently SSAGD young people experienced verbal homophobic abuse in PE and sport settings, the higher their levels of depression, anxiety and stress.

The authors also found that participating SSAGD young people reported significantly higher mental health and wellbeing concerns than participating heterosexual youth (Symons et al., 2014: 2). Moreover, Robinson, et al, (2014), found experiences of homophobia and transphobia resulted in 13.6% of participants dropping out of sport or extra-curricular activities altogether. This has led Greenspan, Griddith and Murtagh (2017: 190) to argue that "School-based athletic settings, such as physical education and after school sports, are frequently cited as prominent hot spots for bullying, harassment and ostracization of youth identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer".

Lower Rates of Participation

Symons et.al's (2014) Equal Play research also found that homophobia and transphobia communicated to the students that 'they are not welcome here,' forming a life-long barrier to participation in sport. If SSAGD youth face negative experiences of physical activity in sport and PE, this can be detrimental to their mental health, as well as decrease their future participation, thereby affecting their physical health (Symons et al., 2014). A decrease in sporting participation in adolescence generally occurs in young people aged between fourteen to eighteen years (Vic Health, 2018). This is also the period in which SSAGD young people become more disengaged with sport in comparison to their heterosexual, cisgender peers (Symons et al, 2010; 2014; CDCP, 2018). A recent American study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) was able to capture SSAGD inclusive population data that revealed that lesbian, gay and bisexual youth team sport participation is almost half that of heterosexual youth (CDCP, 2018). Using a nationally representative large sample of high school students, the research found that a total of 60.7% of heterosexual students played at least one team sport, whereas only 36.9% of gay, lesbian and bisexual students played a team sport, and only 37.4% of those unsure about their sexual identity played in one team sport (CDCP, 2018). Furthermore, a US report by Doull, Watson, Smith, Homma, Saewyc (2018) highlights the numbers of young people engaging in physical activity is declining overall. It also stated, based on statistical evidence over the past 15 years, that young people who are from segregated minorities, for example those identifying as SSAGD, show worse sporting participation rates than their heterosexual peers.



Limited Research

Literature on the sporting experiences of SSAGD youth in Australia is very limited. In addition to this, although there is data collected on experiences of homophobia and discrimination experienced by SSAGD individuals when participating in sport, little data exists on the experiences and attitudes of those who choose not to participate, and what might enable their participation. There is therefore no conclusive Australian data that can estimate the prevalence of sport participation of SSAGD Australians of any age. Two studies have explored the experiences of SSAGD Victorians who have engaged in sport (Fletcher, 2014; Symons et al 2010), though neither could provide data pertaining to the prevalence of SSAGD participation and had little or no representation from those who had no engagement in sport. Furthermore, sport participation data from the ABS does not ask participant's sexuality or gender identity, so exact figures are unknown.

There is some evidence to suggest that beyond PE, SSAGD young people's participation in community sport is lower than the wider population (Symons et al., 2014; CDCP, 2018). Our research is therefore needed to provide accounts of SSAGD youth, discussing both experiences of participation, and their reasons for not engaging with sport and physical activity.

Kulik, Wernick, Espinoza, Newman, & Dessel (2018:2) posit that 'the lack of an inclusive and safe environment has been identified as a primary barrier to participation for LGBTQ youth in sports, even when sport organizations implement transgender sport policies'. As discussed above, research from the US indicates that SSAGD youth participation in sport and physical activity is lower than the general population, but in Australia it is hard to make such claims when there is a substantial lack of data on the area.

A significant gap exists in the literature around trans and gender diverse people's experiences of sport. As Caudwell (2014: 411) argues, 'To date, much of the work on sport, gender and sexualities privileges accounts of lesbian and gay men's participation in sport and PE. The general ignorance surrounding transgender participation propels layers of prejudice at both institutional and individual levels'. The research on which this report is based provides constructive recommendations as to what young SSAGD people want to see in sporting environments to facilitate their participation, and, given the high representation of trans and gender diverse participants in our study, to provide new insights into young trans and gender diverse people's perspectives on their participation in sport.

Creating inclusive sporting spaces

Young SSAGD people experience disproportionate mental ill-health as a result of discrimination, homophobia and transphobia, which also impacts their physical health (Davies, Robinson, Metcalf, Ivory, Mooney-Somers, Race, Skinner, 2020; Robinson et al. 2014). The potential of using sport as an opportunity to contribute to improving the health outcomes for SSAGD young people has not been explored in-depth in Australia. However, in order to begin to create successful inclusive environments for SSAGD young people in sport, PE and other physical activities, it is critical to address sexual prejudice, which is commonplace and part of the culture, as pointed out by Cunningham (2012). Cunningham explains that macro (e.g. cultural norms, institutionalised practices), meso (e.g. leader behaviours, organisational culture, group support) and micro (e.g. sexual identity, salient identities, sex, gender) level factors influence attitudes towards and experiences and behaviours of sexual minorities within the sport context. Thus, each of these must be addressed in order to foster truly inclusive spaces and reduce prejudice. Cunningham argues that to improve SSAGD people's experiences in sport, there are a multitude of levels to consider including looking at how changes that can be implemented at each level will impact on the whole organisation.

Cunningham (2012) also argues that leaders have a substantial impact, both positive and negative, on diversity-related activities within organisations—they set strategic objectives related to diversity, allocate time and resources to diversity related initiatives and provide behavioural and attitudinal cues for others to model.

When a leader actively supports diversity, it is likely that others in the organisation will too. Furthermore, Cunningham states when trying to implement change in major sporting culture, many different people need to be involved and multiple elements need to be considered— one solution will not necessarily produce positive outcomes across the board. Further to this, Hillier, Jones, Monagle, Overton, Gahan, Blackman and Mitchell (2010) highlight that social support plays a vital component in influencing young SSAGD people's self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and overall health outcomes. Sport and team members can play an important role in making SSAGD youth feel welcomed and supported (Fletcher, 2014). As well as the different levels and people in the process, research from VicHealth (2018) identifies that in terms of sporting culture, developing the social aspects of being involved in sports and sporting teams and reducing the competitive elements, will be more enticing for teenagers.

Finally, it is important to recognise that there are variations between gay, lesbian, bisexual males' and bisexual females' experiences of discrimination in sport, which should be considered when it comes to community education. In addition, young trans and gender diverse youth are a heterogeneous group, and can also experience variations in discriminations and stigma, as well as share some overlapping concerns with same-sex attracted youth.

The Research Project

Research Rationale

An innovative way to combat the mental health and other health inequalities experienced by SSAGD young people is to increase youth participation in sport, a past-time that has been shown to improve physical, mental and social health (Bailey, 2005). Young SSAGD people's voices have been absent from research in this area, so giving voice to young people to hear what inclusion within sport means to them is vital. This will help move beyond the barriers to participation and look to greater facilitation of engagement. Sport organisations have not adequately engaged young SSAGD people in sport and exercise, and this research provides some context in which to explore how organisations might best work to include these marginalised young people.

Research Questions

The following key research questions are specifically addressed:

1. What are the attitudes towards sport, exercise and active recreation amongst SSAGD young people?
2. What are the experiences of SSAGD young people in sport, exercise and active recreation?
3. How can sport organisations be more inclusive towards SSAGD young people?

Research Methodology

Recruitment and Consent

The project information was sent to Twenty10, incorporating Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service, NSW (Twenty10 inc. GLCS, NSW) a SSAGD support organisation, which was the key recruitment avenue in the project. Twenty10 is a NSW based non-government organisation that works with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more (LGBTIQ+) people and others of diverse genders and sexualities, their families and communities. Twenty10 provides a broad range of specialised services for young people 12-25 including housing, mental health, counselling and social support. Twenty10 is the NSW partner for QLife, a national tele-web peer support service for LGBTIQ+ people including young people. Potential participants in the research were made aware of the project during the organisation’s youth social drop-in sessions at two sites (inner Sydney and Western Sydney). Screening of participants took place, with age and SSAGD status of participants being noted prior to interview with the aim to recruit participants from different genders, ages, and sexual identities to collect data on a range of lived experiences.

Interviews

Participants were asked to partake in a 30-60 minute, semi-structured interview to discuss experiences of engaging in sport and physical activity. The interview questions covered the following areas: engagement in PE and sport at school and any extra-curricular sport; being fans of or following different sport teams or individual sport figures; attitudes to sport; relationship between their gender identity and/or sexuality and their experiences in sporting environments; reasons for participation or non-participation in sport; and what changes could be made to increase their participation in PE and sport in schools and sporting organisations.

The interviews were audio recorded with permission of participants and later transcribed verbatim, with any identifying features removed. For example, a named suburb was replaced with the term ‘Home Suburb’. Pseudonyms were used for the participant’s names.

Analysis

Data were coded using the qualitative software program NVivo. A cyclical process with open, axial and major order theme coding was applied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research team was involved in the data analysis process, having regular meetings to discuss the coding being used, to analyse the issues, and to provide multiple perspectives on the main ideas arising from the data. A major finding from our analysis of the data was anti-LGBT+ discrimination in sport settings and young people not being able to access sporting environments. Underlying this was several themes that will now be discussed in the Findings.

Participant Demographics

Thirteen SSAGD young people living in NSW participated in this study, with ages ranging from 17-21. Young people identified across the spectrum of sexuality and gender identity, but the majority (n=10) identified as trans/ gender diverse, with two young people identifying as queer, and one male identifying as gay and cisgender. Two young people within the sample identified as non-binary. Two participants identified as culturally diverse (both from south Asian heritage), with the remainder identifying as white Caucasian.

Due to the nature of the drop in interviews at Twenty10, some participants gave demographic data and specified how they identified (for example within the LGBTQ+ spectrum), but some did not, and used queer as an identity marker to represent both gender identity and sexual orientation. We have not included sexual orientation in the table below, for several reasons. Not every young person disclosed their sexuality, and some had not yet affirmed their sexuality or had yet to fully address it.

Right: Table 1 represents the participants and their demographic data. Some was not provided.

Table 1 Participant demographic information.

Individual	Demographic data given (gender identity)
Participant 1	Trans man, aged 18 years
Participant 2	Gender diverse, aged 18 years
Participant 3	Gender diverse, aged 18 years
Participant 4	Non binary, aged 21 years
Participant 5	Gender diverse, aged 21 years
Participant 6	Trans-woman, gender queer, aged 18 years
Participant 7	Trans-woman, aged 18 years
Participant 8	Trans man, aged 17 years
Participant 9	Gender diverse, aged 20 years
Participant 10	Trans man, age not provided
Participant 11	Trans man, aged 19 years
Participant 12	Trans man, aged 20 years
Participant 13	Gender diverse, aged 17 years

Key Research Findings

Four major themes arose from the research related to SSAGD young people's experiences and attitudes towards sport and physical exercise: (i) sport culture; (ii) LGBT+ discrimination; (iii) the gender binary; and (iv) attitudinal desire. Each of the major themes are discussed in the following section.

1. Sport Culture

The culture around sport and physical exercise was a major issue identified from the interviews. There was a general acknowledgment of the culture of sport being unwelcoming to SSAGD young people. Sporting culture was considered hostile, homophobic, highly gendered and hypermasculine, with most of the young people highlighting negative and often traumatic early experiences in PE and school sports (this will be detailed more in the following section). The negativity about sexuality and gender identities often articulated in social media and other media platforms, most commonly about the inclusion of transgender women in sport, directly impacted SSAGD young people's attitudes to sport, and their sense of inclusion and participation in sport. Additionally, participants expressed that a lack of accessibility to sporting venues and facilities was a barrier to their inclusion in sport, especially around changing rooms.

General non-sporting attitudes

When asked about their general attitudes and thoughts towards sport, many respondents expressed that sport culture is not queer and that most young SSAGD people do not feel comfortable engaging in sport. For example, one respondent explained sport in a way that made their lack of engagement and understanding of the culture apparent:

“

“Oh gosh, I don't understand sport at all, especially rugby and why they get paid so much. I don't get it and I guess I learnt some of it in PDHPE why people are so crazy about their favourite teams because they feel like they are a part of something even though they are not but um. I don't know, that's another thing we talked about in PDHPE – percentages of male to female coverage in the media and how it has been slowly picking-up, I guess. And people saying, ‘oh, should female cricket teams get to play in the big bash or something’; I don't know what cricket is but sure.”

(Participant 7)

Additionally, nearly all of the young people interviewed pointed out that their first experiences of being physically active and playing sport were through school, and these were not experiences that young people spoke about positively, and often entailed discrimination as outlined in the following section. This had a significant impact on how they engaged or did not engage with sport and exercise in their teenage years. When asked what other young SSAGD young people think about sport and exercise, one respondent outlined that these experiences often mean SSAGD young people may go on to engage in individual exercise and fitness but less so in organised sport:

“

“I wouldn't say there's a consensus, again I know many queer people especially cis-queer people like gays, lesbians, bisexuals, who run, they go to the gym, they're fit and some of them play organised sport in queer and non-queer leagues especially the trans and non-conforming part of queer circle; there seems to be pretty negative attitudes towards fitness, maybe not fitness but towards sport”

(Participant 9)

Gendered sport culture

Another participant highlighted the highly gendered, and often masculine, nature of sport and sporting competitions and how this impacted on SSAGD people, especially in spaces where strict gender norms are celebrated and played out on the field:

“

“I mean sports teams are often gendered, gyms can be quite segregated metaphorically as in girls and guys – it's not the most inviting space for someone who is queer or someone who is trans, and might be a very threatening space as it comes off very masculine.”

(Participant 3)

Additionally, this masculinity is closely tied with homophobia, as supported by previous academic research in high schools (Pascoe 2007):

“

“In high school when I was going through my gender identity and my sexual orientation, I avoided sport purely because I avoided going into the guys locker rooms and that was because I didn't want to be looked at differently or I accidentally be checking out a guy and him noticing. There was a lot of fear around going into the guys locker room to get changed just to play sport. And on top of that, just sport in itself being very violent or competitive where the violence could be easily redirected into homophobia, like a tackle could be a tackle but it could be read as a whole lot of different things or used a weapon.”

(Participant 9)

A young person who identified as asexual spoke of the (gendered) sexualised nature of sport, particularly exercise, and how athletes are represented in the media and online in gendered ways, and the impact this can have on young people:

“

“I'm asexual so [...] a lot of things kind of gross me out and I hate when they make jokes on like TV shows and stuff ‘let's go to the gym and stare at hot guys or stare at hot girls and ‘look at their abs’ or ‘look at their tits’ ... people aren't working out to be sexualised men or women, like they're just there to workout. Like stop sexualising sport!”

(Participant 7)

The salience of gender in sport and fitness spaces also led to safety concerns for gender nonconforming participants who often expressed being scared to go to public sporting spaces, such as gyms:

“

“Well, I want to go to the gym, but [...] I'm scared about which bathroom to go into. Because I identify as male, but I don't think I would be able to walk into a gym into the bathroom, like the male bathroom and if I walked into the female bathroom, I'd be kicked out either way.”

(Participant 9)

For many gender diverse young people, especially those who were non-binary, the lack of gender-neutral spaces, particularly changing facilities in gyms and sport organisations, excluded them even when there was a desire to attend.

For the gender diverse participants in this study, there were other specific barriers preventing them from participating in sport, which require consideration in fostering inclusive environments. These include experiences of gender dysphoria, young people's sense of self-worth and how they felt about their bodies, which were issues exacerbated by highly gendered sport environments. This is a key concern for gender-diverse people who are a particularly vulnerable population among young people. Two young people spoke about the impact of gender dysphoria:

“I know [...] a lot of people have dysphoria around the chest area, both female to male and male to female, cause when you're doing physical activity your chest is really obvious. Like you can feel it and feel how it moves and feel weight across your chest, so if you don't have breasts and you're wanting them it can be really difficult as well. Because you become more aware of your body and that can make dysphoria a lot worse, at least in mine and my friends' experience. Like we found that it's easier to like, I have a friend that wears fake breasts while they are exercising and they don't wear them any other time, but when they're jogging they can feel the weight and that makes it more comfortable and things like that. A lot of my friends can't pack if they're exercising, it just gets too uncomfortable because of all the movement. So visually they look like female when they're not.”

(Participant 5)

“So I have to wear 3 sports bras so I can feel okay while I'm exercising and it's such a struggle that even getting, like I get up and I'm like I can exercise and then there's the labour of putting it all on really sucks and is very discouraging. Like I do feel better afterwards, but it's so much emotional energy to get out the door that sometimes it's just not worth it.”

(Participant 12)

Dysphoria can be exacerbated in highly heteronormative spaces. This perception of sport as hyper-gendered was reinforced by the experiences of gendered and homophobic bullying and harassment experienced by young people (outlined below), as well as sport spectator culture, and sport media coverage.

Sport media discourses

For some young SSAGD people, the message that sport culture is heterosexual and gender normative, and thus that they were different and not welcome was communicated to them through media debates in sports. The recent coverage of negative comments about LGBT people made by Margert Court and Israel Falou, and the ongoing debate about transgender people in sport had a negative impact on how young people in this study were thinking about sport and engaging in sporting activities. There was consensus amongst the participants that negative media representation and debates deterred young SSAGD people from playing and engaging with sport.

Some comments below from young people demonstrate that the media portrays sport as an exclusionary culture:

“For anyone who is wanting to improve their own game and being the best at it for themselves; it is quite disheartening and doesn't really give a sense of being included and that could probably lead to being quiet, you could lose that player or in the sense that even, like talking about the sports in general; it could sort of resonate through that the entire sport might be homophobic as well.”

(Participant 4)

“It does bring me down a little bit, but at the same time, it brings me down because I hope those opinions will change in the future, but sometimes it feels like it is a never-ending battle.”

(Participant 11)

“[...] statements like that is coming from the sport area where it has media, a publication, that voice and being so negative, it really discourages people like me going into sport and stuff like that.”

(Participant 2)

One young transgender person discussed how the wider narratives about transgender inclusion in sport in particular, were filtering in to school culture:

“It did come up at school and things like that because I do go to a very masculine like school, there is a lot of talk about sport, and I mean personally with the transgender debates and what team they should play for.”

(Participant 8)

As such, several participants spoke about the need for positive role models for SSAGD or queer young people at the level of professional sport culture. When asked if visible 'out' LGBTQ athletes were important, one respondent stated:

“Absolutely, it is great to have people in the public-sphere that advocate and show that queer people are everywhere, and here are these people you look up to and they have achieved great things for their country or their team and they can be queer. Yeah, it's a good thing to have. I know Ian Thorpe's gay.”

(Participant 7)

Affirmative messaging

Young people also spoke about the positive impact that supportive public statements around LGBT+ inclusion can have on LGBT+ communities. One young person discussed the positive impact when certain sports organisations publicly backed and supported marriage equality and the 'Yes' campaign:

“It's good sporting organisations saying they support marriage equality like the more publicity we can get and voice we can get for this, great.”

(Participant 8)

These kinds of visible signs of affirmation could easily be addressed by sport programs and organisations to emphasise a commitment to cultural change. There were often perceptions amongst SSAGD young people that some organisations could be inclusive, but they did not know that this was the case. Having stickers, signs, or the rainbow flag as signifiers of support was seen as a way to let young people know they are welcome and affirmed in these spaces. Furthermore, allies or other visible LGBT+ people were seen as a positive influence, and as making a culture visibly more inclusive and affirmative, as one young person explained:

“I guess. I guess one other thing can be like employing more people from the community [...] Like, you walk into a café and it's full of LGBT people the staff are, so you would feel more welcome to go in there, rather than into a pub full of old guys and tradies, something like that [...] like I wouldn't say put the gay flag up on top of the gym or something, someone would be like why don't you just put the Aussie flag up there. Or I guess you could if there was a place for hanging like country flags or stuff like that, you could put that flag up there or put up posters and stickers just everywhere or wherever things go. Like equality and just little messages, so that the community and people who are LGBT can see that and recognise it and also the general public and people that work there can recognise it and it might flesh out some of the bad ones that hang around there.”

(Participant 10)

This is evidence that sport programs and organisations who aim to be inclusive of SSAGD young people and adopt inclusive practices, need to consider how best to foster more affirmative and less heteronormative and gendered cultures and settings, and communicate this message to young people so that inclusive cultural change is visible.

Financial barriers

Finally, as a community, SSAGD young people are at increased risk of ostracization, due to family instability and rejection which can lead to increased risk of poverty (Robinson, 2018). This highlights the need for positive social outlets outside of the home. Several respondents spoke of the perceived or actual costs of playing sport, and there was a general consensus that sport was expensive:

“Well, I want to go to the gym, but I can't afford it.”
(Participant 9)

“Interviewer: “And what would you say some of the reasons why you didn't do much club sport or why you didn't engage too much?”

Respondent: “It would have been in the past, I guess either the financial cost of doing it. So like going to the club and getting gear...”

Interviewer: “That's come up a few times about the financial aspect of it...”

Respondent: “Yeah maybe the financial barrier is a massive factor because a lot of queer people are working class or poor and while sport is not the most expensive thing in the world, it can be very expensive especially when you are not still a child. Sport as a teenager or adult can be very expensive.”
(Participant 4)

Costs associated with sport and exercise were an influential factor on young people's participation. Sporting organisations and providers need to consider costs when designing sport programs for all young people.

Conclusion

In summary, SSAGD young people's perceptions around the culture of sport was characterised by hostility, negative experiences and exclusion in a climate which was not accepting or affirming of LGBT+ identities. These experiences were intensified for gender diverse and transgender young people, who experienced additional issues associated with gender dysphoria, and a lack of access to appropriate facilities, such as change rooms and toilets. Creating visibly inclusive sport environments and culture is a key strategy for fostering greater participation of young SSAGD people.



2. SSAGD Experiences of Discrimination

In addition to young SSAGD people's perception of contemporary sporting culture as exclusionary, they also highlighted the exclusion they experienced within school settings. Almost every SSAGD young person in this study spoke about the discrimination they had experienced through participation or engagement in sport and exercise, whereby PE was of particular concern. Narratives around LGBT+ discrimination were common throughout the interviews, and included homophobia, transphobia, and exclusion more broadly, often based on gender presentation or ability.

Bullying and harassment

Reflecting previous literature about school and homophobia (Pascoe 2007; Robinson et al. 2014), many participants recounted PE as a key site of bullying and harassment. One observation from the interviews with young people was the uneasiness they expressed in their body language when talking about their experiences in PE. A range of factors affected their experiences, but change rooms and the process of simply changing into their PE clothes was a distressing time:

“PE was a really shitty thing for me, especially at the Catholic school [...] I was out and doing my bit as part of the community to ensure other people were safe. So changing into our PE uniforms was the worst. I had to either go in an hour before everyone else or I had to wait for everyone else to be done because I was beat up when I tried to change with the other girls. They were like calling me ‘fag’ or ‘dyke’ and they just beat me up. It was horrible. The school did nothing about it and like it was constantly that fear from Year 8 onwards. Like Year 7 was okay like it was so fun we had double periods of it and so I would get 2 hours of getting to run and getting to be active, like I loved it and then I came out and school changed the schedules so I got like 50 minutes and 20 minutes of that was me worrying about changing and time in between that I was constantly worried about what was going to happen at the end of the session, so I really didn't get to enjoy it much.”

(Participant 1)

Change rooms, as sites of exaggerated gender performance and policing, were particularly challenging and led to discriminatory and unpleasant experiences. This finding is similar to other research on SSAGD young people's experience in sport and in schools (Robinson et al. 2014), and is depicted by the following young person:

“But one of the things that sucked in high school was the change rooms, because in high school I was known as a lesbian in my year [...] so bullying in change rooms. Like gender neutral change rooms would be nice.”

(Participant 9)

One young trans man shared a distressing experience of being bullied at school, in the classroom and in PE and sport and the impact this had on his mental wellbeing. He pursued martial arts and kickboxing in order to be able to defend himself. He recalls negotiating the bullying he experienced:

“I've been bullied since, not severely, but bullied since day-care [...] It's mainly my Dad, my Dad kind of like bottled things up, like low self-esteem from abuse and I think that's what turned me from like, from being, from not wanting to fight to just being so angry. You want an excuse to do something. Yeah that's the main reason, and I went through adolescence, I forget the name, it's sometimes when you go through puberty you can because of the chemicals, like changing and everything. You can actually get temporary mental issues, so I started getting that anxiety until high school and it started and then the depression and over-thinking the delusions.”

(Participant 10)

Traditional male sports were seen as an unwelcome and toxic space for young people who identified as gay. In the dynamics and culture of male team sports, homophobia was used to police gender and those who did conform to dominant forms of masculinity:

“Participant 1: ‘But my younger brother, he found that whenever he would try to do a sport it was like ‘oh look at the fat faggot’ like things like that or ‘don't come near me you're gross’ stuff like that, like it's not his fault.’”

Interviewer: “So what aspects of his participation led to him being called a faggot?”

Participant 1: “He's also gay, so he is openly gay like me which I kind of told him not to do. Because of my family, it would have been safer for him to stay in the closet and like I don't wish that on anyone, but with my experience with my family, like I went through conversion therapy, I had an exorcism performed on me when I was quite young and like I just didn't want him to experience that, so I was like stay in the closet and he was like no I'm not going to do that. He hasn't experienced anything like what I went through, which is good. Like he dated someone on his sports team. He was doing cricket as well and he did wrestling. He dated someone on his sports team and not the same situation as me, but the other guy left which left that void. So when they were together no one would approach them to bully them, but like when they were apart there was a lot of horrible things said to both of them and my brother's boyfriend had to move because it got so bad and they had to break up and he is still at the same school, so people remember and whenever he tries to get involved in new sports it's like ‘stay away faggot’.”

Being ‘out’ about sexual orientation or gender identity in some family settings can be dangerous for young people who may be subjected to harmful practices. Conversion practices violate the right to health enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and harm the health and wellbeing of LGBT people, can cause significant psychological distress and stigmatisation (Jones, Brown, Carnie, Fletcher, Leonard 2018). The experience above demonstrates that many young SSAGD people negotiate stigma, discrimination and harmful practices at home, on the sporting field and in PE in school settings, with little or no reprieve. Negative experiences raised by young people in this research, highlighted the role other boys had in promoting and policing exclusive and unwelcoming spaces for SSAGD young people. This reinforces other research in the area that identifies teenage boys as the key perpetrators of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Hillier et al., 2010; Slaatten & Gabrys, 2014; Fulcher, 2017). For example, one young gay/queer male participant explained:

“Yeah I was at one of my AFL games once [...] I got the ball thrown at me once and I just held it and didn’t know what to do, so I ended up just throwing it up in the air and one of the other kids from the other team got the ball or something, then one of my teammates came up in my face and was like ‘why can’t you just grab the ball you retard?’ and ‘stop playing the sport you idiot’ and stuff and I ended up crying the whole way back to school and when I actually told the teacher what had happened and he had called me these names and she was like ‘sticks and stones may break your bones, but words don’t hurt’ and that I just had to toughen up and get used to it and stuff.”

(Participant 8)

The impact of bullying behaviours by cisgender males in sporting environments was also raised as a concern by another young trans person. Having to negotiate these behaviours deterred SSAGD young people from disclosing their identities in these spaces, and from playing sport, especially in club environments. One young trans male stated:

“I am super uncomfortable around cis-dudes especially [...] in a sports environment, it would just be bad so I wouldn’t even consider it. I guess the experience is just that you have to hide that you’re trans. You just have to explain to every single person that your identity over and over and it’s just... it is a lot of thinking about a lot of the things you can’t say. Especially in terms of trans people, we are expected to be more attractive to mean something. We often think we don’t have much going for us so we need to look good to find love or whatever just as an example. Even just for society to accept us, we need to be a typical dude; we can’t be fat or too short or too tall – we just have to fit in the right shape. I think, like, if you join a men’s team you have to constantly be stealth and hiding your identity; but you also don’t want to be ‘the trans guy’ on the team.”

(Participant 12)

This quote highlights the challenges and burdens experienced by young trans men. Participating in a men’s team for this young trans man reinforced negative self-esteem and feelings of shame, resulting in self-exclusion from sports.

The role of shame in deterring SSAGD young men from participating in PE, sport and other physical exercise requires further research.

When young people did participate in sport, they felt pushed into individual rather than team activities. For many this was a positive move, as they did not have to deal with the expectations other team members would have of their performance, or to compare their own performance against others in the team. Previous research has identified that gay men in particular, distance themselves from team based sports in favour of more individual pursuits like attending the gym, yoga, and running (Dennison & Kitchin, 2014). One young person addressed this point:

“I enjoyed doing gymnastics because that kind of allowed me to go back to... I missed doing it but I could not manage to do those hours. Um... also the more, the things where we had to do more testing on ourselves, like we had to test our physical health like by doing the beep test, stuff like that. Just because it was me versing myself and trying to better myself – not have to try and worry about um... meet the expectations of others around me.”

(Participant 11)

Role of PE teachers

The lack of positive role models and support from PE staff was also a significant concern, highlighting the need for training and education for those working with SSAGD young people in this field. Common among PE teachers and community sports clubs is that because they are not aware of any ‘out’ SSAGD young people in their classes or clubs, they have the misconception that SSAGD people are not present. Discrimination prevents many young SSAGD young people from being ‘out’ and they often try to ‘pass’ in order to not draw attention to themselves. Some young people are also questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity, so do not identify as SSAGD or heterosexual. Whether they affirm their sexual orientation or gender identity in their later years, young people need safe and affirming spaces if they are to have early positive experiences in PE and school sport. Some comments below highlight the negative impact teachers had on the young people interviewed:

“Horrible, like I will tell you that now. I hated every PE teacher I met. They were just like, they always treated it as if it were the Olympics and not that it was supposed to be fun to play and just like you’re there for fun and a lot of my PE teachers had favourites, so the more sportier, louder, rowdy kids were more favoured than people like me, and me and my friends were always singled out because we weren’t sporty and stuff. Like we would participate, but wouldn’t be as sporty or enthusiastic as the other kids, because they would always be winning medals and trophies for the school, while we were just kind of like doing our own thing.”

(Participant 8)



“Yeah and just like every PE teacher I meet has just been horrible to me personally too. Like in primary school we had this PE substitute teacher that took us out onto the playground and it was a really hot day, like probably like 35 or something degrees, like high 30s and like our basketball court was made of asphalt and he made us do push ups and all that on it and bear crawled and we told him it was too hot to do it and we all came out with like burnt hands and stuff and he kept making us do it, even though we were crying and all that. And it was horrible and I think he got suspended or something from the school.”

(Participant 1)

As much of the sport socialisation literature identifies, young people need early positive experiences and positive role models who provide encouragement and space for young people to be themselves (Armour, & Sandford, 2013a). When this is not provided, it can have long lasting consequences and impact young people's relationships and how they engage with sport and exercise (Armour & Sandford, 2013b).

Exclusion based on gender or ability

Exclusion was a common theme, based mostly on gendered segregation, or ability. An over-emphasis on competition and winning was considered a deterrent to participation by several respondents. As one young person mentioned, PE was treated 'like the Olympics' in their school and the quotation above emphasised the positive affirmation sports teachers offered to 'sportier' students. Young people often perceived they lacked ability in PE and sport and felt out of place and marginalised. Physical capital, that is, being good at PE and sport, was valued by other young people, teachers and the school more generally. Three young people reflected on this:

“I was never a fan of PE... so in primary school I wouldn't have a bar of it and in high school... um we sort of started to do more [of a] range of stuff so there were parts of it that I really enjoyed but other parts that I was just like... nah, I hated it. So, a lot of team sports I wasn't a fan of just because it tended to be the same kind of people at the front of it and doing everything and people like me who were here but nobodies giving the ball to me. It was always the people who always did like team sports outside of school... um like the sporting superstars of the school who always seemed to be in every single team, getting awards all the time.”

(Participant 3)

“So, well when I was playing sport in primary [and] high school I wasn't great with ball flying in my face and it was always happening. So that for me was one of the worst things you know, but for me when you're bad at sport it sucks, if you wanna do it, you can't.”

(Participant 9)

“In high school, as a kid I just hated sport; I wasn't competitive and sport was very competitive to me back in the day.”

(Participant 7)

Additionally, participants discussed the gendered nature of PE and how they were often not allowed to engage in certain sports, because of their gender. The following quote summarises this:

“A friend of mine does wrestling but she's trans and I think she was in the newspaper a while ago in the States. She has fully transitioned now and she was doing wrestling on her school team and she won a match in the female category, but there was a huge up roar from the parents about it because she was born a male and were like it's not fair. It's very annoying and actually quite upsetting, I considered dropping out of my sports when things started popping up around me. Like I did cricket when I was younger and I wanted so badly to be on a team and tried out. So when my school found out I was trans they wouldn't let me on the girl's team.”

(Participant 2)

Being able to play and engage with PE and sport in school was a challenge for young transgender and gender diverse people in particular, as they often felt they could not participate as themselves. The following quote from a young trans masculine person highlights the difficulty of being active and playing sports as a transgender person, when family and personal circumstances served as barriers to participation:

“Participant 1: “Yep, I went to a Catholic school and they wouldn't let me participate in any sports.”

Interviewer: “Would they let you participate in boy's teams?”

Participant 1: “No, they wouldn't let me participate in any, because they were like ‘oh you will get hurt if you are on the guy's teams, but will hurt someone else on the girl's teams’. And all I really wanted to do was play sport.”

Interviewer: “What did your parents think of that?”

Participant 1: “My parents are fundamentalist Christians so they were on the side of the school, like they were completely against me being gay at all and trans on top of that was like... we don't talk about that. As long as I look like a female I could live at home.”

Interviewer: “So were they happy for you not to participate in sport at school?”

Participant 1: “They wanted me to be active, but, it's difficult for me to understand where they're coming from really.”

Similarly, another young transgender person spoke of the challenges of navigating an identity that was not supported or affirmed by those close to them. The message they were getting was that their identity was wrong. For many young transgender and gender diverse people, playing sport was a world away from their current circumstances and the significant challenges they faced daily:

“It’s like just tell them you were wrong and you’re not trans and that will make everyone happy, except me and so there were a lot of problems with that and my family and I was homeless for a while and I came back and was like okay I will just be a girl for now.”
(Participant 10)

Not being allowed to participate or being discouraged to participate in PE and/or sport was a reoccurring story. The policing of gender, especially in PE and sporting environments, was prevalent in many young people lives. One young trans person commented:

“Participant 8: “I was on the cricket team for Year 7 then stuff happened as I said before and I got asked to not try out, like I still tried out and they were like you were told not to, then I got detentions and things and they would find excuses to make it so I couldn’t try out. So instead of saying ‘don’t try out’ or ‘you’re not allowed on the team’ because you’re gay or trans, it was like ‘oh you’ve had too many detentions this year to try out’ and it was very thinly veiled...like it was very obvious that I’d get detentions for the littlest things and it was always off the same teachers that were running PE, they were like ‘oh your tie is slightly crooked’ or ‘oh you’re 10 minutes late and have note, but I didn’t see the note’ like lots of things like that.”

Interviewer: “So what did you end up doing in sport time then?”

Participant 8: “I ended up studying, I wasn’t allowed to join in with anyone else.”

Conclusion

Being excluded from activities that many young people associate with fun and enjoyment resulted in young people developing negative attitudes towards sport early in their lives and switching off from sport and exercise because they were excluded or told they were not welcome to participate.

A challenge for the sporting sector is how best to challenge the discrimination and exclusion that many SSAGD young people experience in Australian sporting culture. This is particularly the case where traditional dominant forms of masculinity and competitiveness are considered integral to the ideal successful male sporting figure. How can SSAGD young people be successfully included and reengaged in sport, which has health and wellbeing benefits for them, in addition to being fun and enjoyable? Sport is one important area in which young people can find a sense of belonging, critical to both mental and physical health. The following section expands on the gender-based exclusion outlined above by exploring the impact of binary gender in sport, which was problematic for the young people interviewed.

3. Binary Gender

Sport, like many other aspects of life, has been structured around rigid categories of binary gender, that is, male or a female; and sporting teams have traditionally been divided into men's and women's teams. In recent years, the participation of trans women athletes in elite competitions has resulted in revisiting traditional understandings of what it means to be a man and a woman. At the community and grassroots level, sport is also generally organised around binary gender. For many young people who are trans or gender diverse, this results in an untenable position in which they are often sidelined and excluded from participating in sports. In this research a number of issues associated with binary gender emerged including: gendered sporting facilities (e.g. toilets and change rooms), gendered activities and lack of choice (e.g. boys encouraged to pursue sports associated with hegemonic masculinity), single sex teams, and individual versus team sport.

The gendered nature of sports and activities in PE was a concern raised by many SSAGD young people, who questioned why PE activities and sport had to be structured around sex and gender. As outlined above, change rooms are key sites for gender surveillance and can be precarious spaces where harassment and other forms of transphobic and homophobic violence can prevail. Trans and gender diverse young people's lack of access to change-room facilities was an issue raised generally by study participants, with one participant making the following point:

“Just bathrooms for one, change rooms etc. Like not having to do specific things for a binary gender, we could do something else, there has to be something out there that we can do.”
(Participant 9)

Another participant emphasised the extent to which choice of sport and physical activity in school was restricted by gender stereotypes of sport:

“I went to a girl's school and the sport options were a bit wet so we could choose between dance and gymnastics or aerobics was an option and Zumba and I got a little bit bullied for being masculine and enjoying sports. We did all the generic things like netball and soccer and basketball, cross country but the things we could also chose from were quite female oriented things like Zumba, dancing and things like that. The dancing they made us do was horrible with ribbons and hoops [laughs]. I mean I never had something to compare it against, I also went to a girl's high school and there was no boy's high school around us it was just like 'this is what you are supposed to be doing'. I remember being so jealous like all I wanted to do was play football. it just looked a lot more interesting than waving a ribbon about.”
(Participant 11)

Several of the young people interviewed spoke about taking up sport or physical activities that were perceived to challenge or deviate from those aligned with traditional understandings of masculinity or femininity. In some cases, participation in these sports became too difficult and troublesome to negotiate so young people ceased participating. One young gender diverse person explained:

“Yeah, I did kick boxing for a while because with the 10 weeks at school I found out I loved it and I did wrestling from Year 4 to Year 6 and then my parents were like 'oh you're becoming a bit too masculine we're going to stop that' so they put me in figure skating.”
(Participant 10)

Furthermore, an example from a young person highlights that when young people, regardless of their gender identity, challenge traditional notions of gender, this is seen as problematic and the policing of the inclusion of young people in sporting spaces is enforced. One young person recounts an experience which highlights this:

“When we were young and playing one of the girls in my team had short hair and a parent on the opposition's team said 'oh they have a boy on their team'; so first of all, they are saying oh it's not fair that they have a boy and it's like dude we are 10 years old, it doesn't matter? Honestly the parents are some of the most toxic parts of sports and also with not all areas being as accepting, I feel like it wouldn't be as safe for people.”
(Participant 2)

Related to this, a key point highlighted by several of the SSAGD young people in this research was the need to encourage sporting environments that are inclusive of young people who are gender diverse or non-binary. As most sports are organised around men's and women's or girls' and boys' sports, there is a lack of mixed gender sports available to provide opportunities for non-binary and gender diverse young people to play and engage in sport. A gender diverse young person spoke about this point in depth:

“If I could pick one thing across the board it would be probably that the industry[...] have a lot of work to do in terms of setting up the space for gender diverse people to participate in. It could be as simple as a sports wear or a sports shoe that has the capacity to include gender diverse people and not just having men's things and women's things; it could be simple as that. In terms of clubs and leagues, it isn't easy to have all those resources to set up a separate league or team but maybe with the teams we have we could have a mixed round anyway.”
(Participant 6)

There is a need for the sport industry to increase their efforts to include gender diverse people by providing more opportunities for young people to engage with sports which are not rigidly structured around binary gender (male and female / men and women).

Participants also highlighted the damaging impact of misogyny that can exist in sporting environments. From an early age, young people were aware of how boys, and men in particular, reinforce patriarchal discourses. A young trans man who played hockey explained how from an early age, he was socialised to think that women and women's sports were inferior to men and men's sports:

“*I guess it is always uncomfortable because you are always a part of women's teams so when you become part of the men's team there is a lot of stuff that happens in a men's team that you don't want to be a part of. I used to play in girls' hockey teams' and I would train with the boys just because they were the only ones who would train. I remember that even though I didn't identify as male then, it would be really uncomfortable being the token girl on the team, and like I don't know if that is a common experience for a lot of trans guys, but it was really uncomfortable being treated like a girl and hearing things they would say. Like I know in other sports but especially in hockey, they would say nobody watches the women's and the women's team were inferior, and I knew sure, there wasn't as much money or resources or coaching that goes into the women's team, and hearing things like "women's hockey is like watching grass grow" is not that fun and I think that stops me from going back into hockey now even to play in the men's. I just don't want to hear about that.*”

(Participant 12)

This comment highlights the work still needed to address gender equality and attitudes towards women amongst young people, especially in sport, and the need to promote respectful gender-based relationships.

Conclusion

Despite the negative and unwelcoming experiences many of the SSAGD young people recalled, there was a desire to be actively involved in sport and other physical activities. Similar to the reasons all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity engage in sports and other physical activities, young people in this study saw these activities as opportunities to initiate and build meaningful connections and relationships, to get support, and a means to having fun. This final point, a desire to engage in sport and physical activities, is addressed in the following section.

4. SSAGD Young People's Desire to be Involved in Sport and Exercise

Another significant theme to emerge from this research was the desire amongst young people to engage in sport and other physical exercise. Most interviewees were acutely aware of the benefits of participating in sport and physical exercise. The benefits of participation that were acknowledged by the participants were: a sense of belonging; mental and physical health benefits; sporting opportunities; and peer support and friendships. They often acknowledged that their access to these benefits was hindered by obstacles such as lack of support, guidance, confidence or finances to engage in sport and physical exercise. Other young people interviewed also spoke about the fear of embarrassing themselves, not knowing what to do, or where to find out information about inclusive sporting opportunities. One participant summarised how the benefits of sport are hindered by exclusion:

“It kind of hits home a bit because I play sport where the aim of it just to play a game, to bond, to enjoy each other's company while challenging each other with competition [... which is] corrupted by people judging each other based on their sexuality or their gender or anything even down to the colour of their skin; that should not be.”

(Participant 5)

Belonging through sport

The majority of young people were aware that participating in sport and physical exercise could bring a sense of belonging, which they often felt was lacking in their lives in broader society. They spoke of times when they had experienced a sense of community and when others benefitted from participating, as one young person commented:

“Yeah, yeah there was sort of a sense of like just good friends, like you're a team. Like I find that you like get stronger bonds with hardships, like even in sport everyone eventually pulls together no matter what their religion or their background is.”

(Participant 10)

A sense of community gained from being involved in team sports, as pointed out in the above comment, can bridge gaps across the differences that may exist amongst young people, including cultural and religious differences. Another young person stated: I love the community that you get when you join a sporting team. Although not a common scenario amongst the participants in this research, there were occasions when young people felt connected and supported through participating in sport. Sport provided opportunities to find social supports and to establish peer networks and friendships through which young people can develop and accrue social capital (Spaaij, 2009). The quotes below speak to these points:

“If we're talking about team sports, you can make strong bonds with your teammates and like really good friendships and people that you can rely on and while they can support you, you can support them and it can be a really great environment to be around.”

(Participant 6)

“And that's what I love about sport, like knowing that when I get into a group sport that, even in my aerial class I ended up in hospital and they all came to visit me and that's the first time that that happened, even my family didn't visit me and I was in tears, I was so moved, like I actually have a community and like having the queer community is great, but it's kind of a forced community. It's kind of like we're all here, cause we're all gay and we've all got problems at home and we're all being kind of pushed to be somewhere safe. With sports it's more like, oh I'm choosing to be here and these people are choosing to love me, because I'm part of their teams. So that's what I really love about it.”

(Participant 1)

The young person in the second quote above highlights the lack of support from their family, a point articulated by many young people in this research. Interestingly, this young person also stressed how important it was to them to be included and accepted for who they are beyond their queer communities, by those peers in the sporting teams in which they participated. SSAGD young people are often confined to finding safety and support from queer communities to escape abuse and homophobia often encountered in the broader community. Inclusion and acceptance in broader society, in this case through sport, brings this young person an unprecedented sense of love, joy and confidence.

A gender diverse, queer young person was passionate about martial arts and spoke about how the sport was inclusive of gender diverse people, organising people according to ability rather than gender. Their desire and enthusiasm for participating in this sport is expressed in the following comment which also demonstrates the mindful aspects of physical activity that many of the participants also found through individual exercise and physical activity:

“I kind of look at the art of fighting like a piece of art, it's just everything about it. It's just very technical and specific ways you move your body and you have to use your mind [...]. Like the positioning of your foot, the timing, you're moving your hand, you're moving your body in a particular way, you're breathing a particular way. Yeah it kind of felt like I kind of feel in love with the technical aspect of it [...]. And like the people who created these martial arts they don't go out fighting anymore, so they don't have that use for it like they would use it in self-defence. I guess for me that's like a good moral, don't use it for bad, just use it when you need it, if you do yeah.”

(Participant 10)

Individual exercise and wellbeing

More often, young people highlighted the differences between sport and exercise, and how exercise is often more appealing for SSAGD young people to stay fit. One young person outlines this below:

“My perception of sport is bonding, competition and people running around chasing a ball or doing an activity. I never quite clicked with it, it is just not for me. Exercise I see as people trying to stay healthy, fit and on top of the game; whether it just be people trying to get fitter, toner or trying to get a 6-pack or the ideal body, or whether people just want to be able to climb up a couple of flights of stairs without being out of breath. To me, exercise is health, sport is recreation.”

(Participant 6)

Inclusion and engagement in sport and physical exercise can improve SSAGD young people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, especially young people's confidence, resilience, and self-esteem. One participant stated:

“Like recently I was up north with family and I just got to go down to the local sports field and just run and dance and I felt so much better and it saved my life a couple of times knowing that I had that option just to be active and I just feel so good after it.”
(Participant 1)

With disproportionate rates of suicide ideation, depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns amongst SSAGD young people (Robinson et.al., 2014; TransPathways, 2017; Davies et al. 2020), sport and leisure industries can play a significant role in building more inclusive and welcoming environments for these young people. As the following comments from a participant point out, exercise, regardless of what it is, can be uplifting:

“At the moment dancing is pretty not structured, like it's kind of like I will listen to music and throw myself how the music tells me to. I haven't really had a chance in the past couple of months to do it in a class, but I actually like it a lot more, because my body can move how I want it to instead of forcing it to do things it's not meant to do. But apart from that like I'll go out on my bike whenever I feel like it or I will walk places, like every now and then if I'm super bored I will go out to the city and just spend a day walking around the entire city and it's absolutely fantastic. I love walking around the city; it's just such a great atmosphere.”
(Participant 11)

As with the participant interested in martial arts above, another young person emphasised how individual sports can operate as self-care and contribute to mindfulness:

“And if it's sport, like kind of your own single thing, I don't know how to say it but it can be great if it's a hobby or something you want to do to work for yourself. It's kind of like self-care in a way, because you're doing it for yourself and it's something that you enjoy and that you want to do and it can be really great, like if you do it to get away from certain stress in your life and all that stuff.”
(Participant 4)

For some trans young people, participation in team sports and exercise can be less appealing during their gender affirmation, as articulated in the following comment by one young trans person:

“Participant 12: “Yeah, I think for me like when I started on hormones it was really like a good release especially like in the early months; in the first 3 months I really struggled to sleep and I had like ridiculous amounts of energy and it was just really nice to be able to run and be okay with that... like, it was a way to help me adjust to those changes.”

Interviewer: “So, you did a lot of running around at that time? And how did that help you?”

Participant 12: “I think earlier in my transition I didn't pass that well and I played sport really competitively when I was growing up and I stopped partly because of my gender identity and like losing that was a big thing and it was really nice to run especially just because it was a thing I could do alone and in my own space and time. And I didn't need to go somewhere and have the pressure of passing; like I could go at night and yeah.”

For this young person, not passing as their affirmed gender resulted in dropping out of competitive team sports. However, exercise that could be done alone, such as running, was critical to maintaining physical and mental health while affirming their gender. It was a means through which to expend increased levels of energy and to mitigate poor sleep patterns. Importantly, it was an activity that was free from the pressure of having to ‘pass’, which was the case when participating in team sports.

Several other young people spoke of similar benefits of participating in sports and exercise to their health and wellbeing, especially with regard to maintaining positive mental health and sleep:

“Yeah, I enjoy it and have a good time. I think it is something like an activity that is inherently enjoyable for me; the rewards like better mental health and like my dog being tired and sleeping through the night [laughs]. Yeah so, that's super enjoyable it kind of sucks to have to bind and it's kind of expensive.”
(Participant 9)

“Yeah it is, I do that in the afternoon. It helps me centre myself and then I look forward to eating dinner afterwards and I get a full belly, then I want to sleep.”
(Participant 8)

“Uh well sport from a physical stand-point has, as most people are aware, has an essential part of staying healthy um also I feel as though physical activity, from a mental perspective as well, it is kind of, like for me; when I do dance in musicals and things like that – it is kind of a moment where your mind is set on what you are doing and everything else just doesn't matter. So I guess, it does free your mind and kind of... yeah.”
(Participant 3)



Ideal sporting environments

Young people identified that peer support, the ability to create friendships and be in a supportive environment and community was an enabler to their participation in sport. When asked what type of sports and activities they would like to participate in, a young person reflected earlier discussions about hyper-competitive environments, as well as the centrality of the social aspects of sport and physical activity:

“Probably some more, it comes down to your social groups and people you’re around but for me personally, I would probably like to do a bit more sport that isn’t competitive or that is not necessarily dependent on my competitive ability in terms of how good I am compared to others. If I was to join some team today, I probably wouldn’t make it through or be selected so I would like it to be a casual sport with friends or with a few people that I know. I guess one of the other things that links with that is that I would be a lot more open to running or fitness training if it was in a group or with some friends; that comes down to my particular social situation but I would like to, yes.”

Fundamentally, however, young people strongly desired sporting environments where they could safely be open about their gender and/or sexuality:

“But I do feel like if it comes to exercise and sport and that sort of thing, it would probably be a really, really nice thing if I could go to some club, group or sport and be able to go there and know I will be accepted with exposing ‘this is how I feel in terms of my gender and sexuality’. In my current situation; I wouldn’t be able to go to my local clubs and expose that.”

This corroborates with the Out in The Fields report (Denison and Kitchin, 2015) which identified that many LGBT+ people hide their sexuality in sporting environments. Another young trans person reinforced the need for supportive and affirming spaces, and for this to go beyond symbolic inclusion to enforced policies:

“It comes a lot out of knowing, like for me, knowing I could go to a team sport and know that organisation and their coaches or members there; it really comes down to those people will be supportive. I mean you could have the organisation that is willing to include these people and be accepting but maybe come down to one player – for example in tennis or coach that isn’t quite supportive and it could be hard to single that person out but at the same time if that’s what you want in your club but you want to be inclusive, it comes down to standing up to those rights and making sure LGBTI young people get those rights because ultimately people who are trying to block that or be a barrier to that inclusivity, are the people who are going to be the problem when it comes down to players not feeling supported.” (Participant 6)

Participants also discussed opportunities for the sport and leisure industry and other providers to engage in more inclusive practices. The use of inclusive language and registration forms were specifically mentioned by young people, as epitomised by the following participant’s comments:

“Sometimes for a lot of us, it could come down to how things are done registration wise like on a registration form; not being constricted to a certain box so you have to fit in or tick. Or just in a way coaches and players talk to each other; what sort of words they use when they are talking to a bunch of people, what labels you use to talk to them. It could just come down to marketing and getting the message out there outside of sport being played or having some community awareness scheme.” (Participant 7)

Despite the desire to engage in and play sports, young people who are trans or gender diverse encounter specific challenges. ‘Treating everybody the same’ is often the mantra presented by sports clubs, but SSAGD young people have unique circumstances related to gender affirmation, which need to be considered by sport providers and organisations. These circumstances are raised below and include issues associated with ‘passing’, having their affirmed gender recognised and supported, and tailoring specific programs for those trans young people:

Interviewer: “Would you like to participate in team sports?”

Participant 11: “Yeah for sure.”

Interviewer: “Are there any particular reasons as to why you don’t?”

Participant 11: “There are so many reasons [laughs]. I think, I don’t want to go into any sports in the past that I have done when I was presenting as female because I don’t want to be recognised and have to deal with that. And with the binding and having to pass all the time is difficult.”

“I think there should be after transitions in particular, better support for getting active, cause essentially a lot of people end up having a double mastectomy and you have to recover from that and if you are active you stop being active while you are recovering so it is really hard to get back into it. So like programs that would help people get back into exercise and sports after transitioning things like that.” (Participant 1)

In light of the findings in this research, in the executive summary we presented some key recommendations that the sports sector can consider to be more inclusive of LGBT+ young people and to provide more safe and welcoming environments. In summary, it is vital for the sport and fitness/health sector to understand the needs of SSAGD young people and that they want to engage and experience the benefits of participation. But more importantly, the sector must understand the damaging health consequences that exclusion and discrimination can have on SSAGD young people, which can result in longterm ill-health. Every young person deserves access to safe and inclusive opportunities in sport and to be active, and opportunities to lead healthy lives.

Conclusion

SSAGD young people in this research experienced numerous forms of discrimination in sport and exercise, but especially in PE at school. This is concerning and reflects similar findings to those in: *Come out to Play* (Symons et al. 2014), the *Equal Play* study (Symons et al. 2015), and *Growing Up Queer* (Robinson et al., 2014) all of which found that PE and youth sport settings were key sites for bullying and discrimination for SSAGD young people. It is critical that steps are taken to address violence and discrimination, including the provision of inclusive, safe sporting spaces for young people, in which transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism are actively addressed.

Although SSAGD young people view sport generally as a space in which toxic forms of masculinity are reinforced, they do desire to play and engage with sport and exercise. However, they generally held more positive attitudes towards individual exercise, and its associated physical and mental health benefits, rather than competitive sport. Exercise has many benefits, but if young people do not participate in sport, especially team based sports or sporting activities that can connect them with other people, they miss out on critical social support, social capital, the opportunities that can arise for peer acceptance, and the creation of meaningful connections. These are key reasons that people participate in sport.

There were three key factors or drivers influencing SSAGD young people's participation in sport in this research. First, safe spaces were critical. Safe spaces are characterised as environments offering safe and inclusive facilities, especially bathrooms and change rooms, and are free from homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Second, these safe spaces need to be maintained and reinforced by those operating and managing the spaces, for example, sport providers, volunteers, and administrators. This is characterised by active participation, inclusion and equity policies. Finally, sporting opportunities must offer a chance to connect with peers, to create a sense of community and support, where young SSAGD people can be themselves. Peer rejection is a primary contributor to young SSAGD people's poor mental health, therefore peer acceptance and connection in sport are key to challenging this and improving young people's health and wellbeing.

Like other research in the field, young trans and gender diverse people in this research wanted to play and engage with sport and exercise. According to the *Trans Pathway* study (2017), 81.7% of young trans and gender diverse people would like to exercise more, but do not feel they can due to financial barriers, discomfort while exercising (e.g. due to wearing binders) and fear of, or unwillingness to, exercise in public. Although young people generally hold negative attitudes and have experienced systemic discrimination through heterosexism, transphobia and homophobia, they want to have the same access to sport as their heterosexual and cisgender peers. The exclusion of young SSAGD people from sporting environments denies them meaningful opportunities for connection, acceptance, and much needed support, which they can accrue through participation. The sporting sector can help make a difference to the health and wellbeing of SSAGD young people by providing equitable and safe access for every young person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If young people have positive and affirming experiences in exercise, sport and PE, this can lead to healthy lifelong habits around sport and exercise, and can inspire a new generation of people to play sport.

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“ It is great to have people in the public-sphere that advocate and show that queer people are everywhere, and here are these people you look up to and they have achieved great things for their country or their team and they can be queer. ”

Study Participant

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to Play?**



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