



Education Department Resource

Reasons Why Coaches Need to Address Homophobia in Athletics

Contributed by Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

All schools include lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students, staff, and parents even if they have not made themselves known to the school community.

Coaches have a responsibility to make their teams safe for all athletes, including LGB athletes.

All athletes interact with LGB teachers, coaches, friends, or family members.

Athletes will be living in a society and world in which LGB people are present and increasingly visible. Young people need to have an opportunity to develop attitudes and beliefs not based in fear or ignorance.

Coaches are important role models in athletes' lives. Coaches are responsible for teaching more than sport skills and strategies. They are also responsible for setting examples of acceptance for difference.

A 1989 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study reported that up to 30% of suicides among young people are lesbian and gay youth who are so isolated and depressed in the face of societal condemnation that they kill themselves. College and high school coaches are working with this age group.

Statistics show that hate crimes and harassment directed at many minority groups including lesbian and gay people are

often committed by high school and college aged young men. Coaches can provide leadership to stop this violent behavior.

Discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual coaches and athletes is often not addressed because they are too afraid to protest or because there is no legal protection in place.

Because few LGB coaches or athletes feel safe enough to disclose their identities, other athletes and coaches, in the absence of accurate information, believe that destructive stereotypes of LGB people are true.

Naming LGB people in athletics as the problem, rather than homophobia, perpetuates ignorance, fear, and bigotry.

LGB athletes learn to feel shame and self-hatred and hide their identities at great psychological cost.

Heterosexual young people are defensive and fearful because their prejudices about LGB people are unchallenged. Homophobia affects heterosexual young people because they are afraid of being thought to be LGB. They restrict extracurricular interests, career choices, and friendships to avoid association with being LGB.

Homophobia is used as a way to limit and marginalize women's sports. Many women

do not choose to participate in sport because they fear being called lesbians.

Homophobia is used to make men and boys fear expressing feelings and interests that are outside rigid traditional conceptions of masculinity.

Unless coaches take action against homophobia, the next generation of young coaches and athletes will inherit the same prejudices of previous generations of coaches and athletes.

Because it is the right thing to do.