Creative Work Environments in Sport Organizations: The Influence of Sexual Orientation Diversity and Commitment to Diversity

George B. Cunningham PhD

Laboratory for Diversity in Sport, Department of Health and Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA

Available online: 08 Sep 2011

To cite this article: George B. Cunningham PhD (2011): Creative Work Environments in Sport Organizations: The Influence of Sexual Orientation Diversity and Commitment to Diversity, Journal of Homosexuality, 58:8, 1041-1057

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.598413
Creative Work Environments in Sport Organizations: The Influence of Sexual Orientation Diversity and Commitment to Diversity

GEORGE B. CUNNINGHAM, PhD
Laboratory for Diversity in Sport, Department of Health and Kinesiology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA

Drawing from creative capital theory, the purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity were predictive of workplaces that fostered creativity. Data were collected from 653 senior level athletic administrators and aggregated to the athletic department level of analysis (n = 199). Moderated regression indicated that sexual orientation diversity did not influence the presence of a creative work environment. There was however, a significant sexual orientation diversity × commitment to diversity interaction. When commitment to diversity was high, there was a positive association between sexual orientation diversity and a creative work environment; on the other hand, when commitment to diversity was low, the aforementioned relationship was negative. Results provide support for the notion that all diversity forms can be a source of enrichment and understanding, thereby benefiting the workplace.

KEYWORDS LGBT, creativity, sport, homosexuality, diversity

Sport is a meaningful institution in American society and around the world. From an economic standpoint, the gross domestic sport product (i.e., the size of the sport industry in the United States) is $207 billion (Milano & Chelladurai, 2011), making it one of the largest industries in the country.
Sport also provides opportunities for economic and community development (Chalip, 2006). The former is often espoused when offering a justification for hosting large scale sporting events, such as the World Cup or Olympics, while the latter occurs when communities realize increases in collective conscience or self esteem (see also Crompton, 2004). Indeed, university presidents and administrators will frequently use intercollegiate athletics as a means to increase the prestige and notoriety of their educational institution, in this way coming to see athletics as the “front porch” of the institution (Suggs, 2009). Finally, the number of fans (estimated at 200 million in the United States alone; as cited in Milano & Chelladurai, 2009) and the notable expanse of sport media forms (Melton, 2010) also serve as testaments to sport’s reach and influence in society.

Despite its substantial economic reach and cultural significance, there is also evidence that sport is a context where lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) persons routinely face prejudice and discrimination. The negative attitudes toward sexual minorities are prevalent among persons training to enter the field (Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006), current and former players (E. Anderson, 2002; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009a), parents of players (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009a), and administrators (Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005). As a result, sport is characterized as a heteronormative context where dominant forms of masculinity and a norm of heterosexuality are continually reproduced and institutionalized (E. D. Anderson, 2009; Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Plummer, 2006). These dynamics serve to exclude lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) individuals from employment opportunities (Cunningham, Sartore, & McCullough, 2010), make LGBT coaches and players fearful of negative reprisals when others become aware of their sexual orientation (Freeman, 2003; Krane & Barber, 2005), and cast LGBT individuals, or persons presumed to fall into that category, as “others” (Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009b). As a collective, this research suggests that sexual minorities often face exclusionary and hostile environments within the sport and physical activity context.

Interestingly, however, the exclusion of sexual minorities, while commonplace, might actually serve to hurt the organization’s processes and performance. That is, researchers have recently demonstrated that organizations with diverse and inclusive cultures are better able to attract talented workers (Fink, Pastore, and Riemer, 2001, 2003), retain valued employees (McKay et al., 2007), and engender goodwill among consumers (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). The purpose of this study was to explore these possibilities further by investigating the linkage among an organization’s sexual orientation diversity, its collective commitment to diversity, and a creative work environment. The convincing research evidence linking creativity and various measures of effectiveness (see Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) spurred the focus on a creative work environment. In drawing from Florida’s (2003, 2004) creative capital theory, I argue that sexual orientation diversity is
positively associated with the presence of a creative work environment, and that this relationship is strengthened when there is a strong commitment to diversity within the organization.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Creative capital theory holds that creative people are the key to regional economic growth and activity. As Florida (2004) notes, “Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource. The ability to come up with new ideas and better ways of doing things is ultimately what raises productivity and thus living standards” (p. xiii). These sentiments are largely consistent with human capital explanations for economic growth. However, Florida extends on human capital theory by also identifying the factors that are associated with the clustering of highly creative people in a community, or what he refers to as creative centers. He suggests that that creative people seek out particular locations based on those locale’s technology, talent, and tolerance. That is, creativity is likely to thrive in, and creative people are attracted to, places (a) where there is a elevated concentration of innovation and high technology (i.e., technology); (b) that have a large concentration of educated individuals (i.e., talent); and (c) that are characterized by diversity and inclusion (i.e., tolerance).

Of particular interest in the current analysis is the influence of tolerance. Florida (2003, 2004) maintains that a high concentration of LGB individuals is a powerful indicator of how open and inclusive a particular locale is. After all, though they have improved, Americans’ attitudes toward LGB individuals still lags behind other groups (see Herek, 2009), and in some ways, sexual prejudice is still socially acceptable. As such, if a region is open to LGB individuals and communities, then they are likely accepting of all persons. Florida (2003) provides the following rationale:

As a group, gays have been subject to a particularly high level of discrimination. Attempts by gays to integrate into the mainstream of society have met substantial opposition. To some extent, homosexuality represents the last frontier of diversity in our society, and thus a place that welcomes the gay community welcomes all kinds of people. (p. 13)

While Florida’s (2003, 2004) work focused on regions in the United States, his theory is also applicable to organizations. Specifically, perspective employees are likely to associate high levels of sexual orientation diversity with a broader organizational culture of diversity and inclusion. Indeed, Pugh, Dietz, Brief, and Wiley (2008) made similar arguments, suggesting that employee diversity can serve as an “extracted cue in which people develop a larger sense of what is occurring” (p. 1424). From a creative capital
theory perspective, this cue of diversity and inclusion should be appealing to creative individuals, and as such, the workplace should be one where the potential for creative action is high (see also Florida, 2002). Therefore, I hypothesized:

H1: Sexual orientation diversity will be positively associated with a creative work environment.

Of course, sexual orientation diversity’s effects in the workplace might vary depending on the nature of the workplace. For instance, Ely and Thomas (2001) highlighted how, even among organizations that all seemingly value diversity, the specific diversity cultures can differ, and these differences impact the benefits of diversity in those settings. Jayne and Dipboye (2004), in their analysis of the diversity literature, arrived at similar conclusions. As Kochan et al. (2003) note, “context is crucial in determining the nature of diversity’s impact on performance” (p. 17). One such contextual factor is the organization’s commitment to diversity.

In drawing from Meyer and Herscovitch’s (2001) framework, Cunningham (2008) defined commitment to diversity as “a force or mindset that binds an individual to support diversity” (p. 178). He further suggested that people could express one of three mindsets: (a) affective, or the desire to support diversity because of the benefits it brings to the workplace; (b) continuance, or the support of diversity because of the costs associated with not doing so; and (c) normative, or the sense of obligation or duty to support diversity. Through three studies across a variety of samples, Cunningham demonstrated validity evidence for the new construct (Study 1), illustrated the equivalency of the measure across race and gender (Study 2), and showed that commitment to diversity interacts with employee diversity to predict organizational outcomes (Study 3). Of particular interest to the current investigation, results indicated that organizations that coupled a high overall commitment to diversity (i.e., high on all three mindsets) with high employee diversity (i.e., race and gender diversity) were also likely to attract a diverse fan base, have satisfied employees, and have a creative work environment.

In drawing from these studies, I expected that sexual orientation diversity would interact with commitment to diversity to predict a creative work environment. In such workplaces, LGBT employees are likely to feel welcomed, comfortable in disclosing their sexual identity, and confident in sharing their diverse perspectives during the decision making process (Ragins, 2004; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). These dynamics are unlikely to materialize in workplaces where commitment to diversity is low. In addition to Cunningham’s (2008) work, there is some empirical support for these linkages. In an experimental study, Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, and De Drue (2007) found that pro-diversity
beliefs (similar to a commitment to diversity) were associated with performance gains among diverse groups. In addition, Cunningham (2009, in press), in separate studies of intercollegiate athletic departments, found that the positive effects of diversity on objective measures of performance were strongest when the department had a pro-diversity strategy in place. Collectively, this literature suggests that the benefits of diversity are most likely to be realized when there is a strong commitment to diversity. Thus, I hypothesized:

H2: The relationship between sexual orientation diversity and a creative work environment will be moderated by the organization’s commitment to diversity, such that the effects are stronger when commitment is strong relative to when it is weak.

METHOD

Participants
Data were collected from senior level (i.e., athletic director, assistant athletic director, associate athletic director, senior women’s administrator) National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic administrators ($N = 653$). The athletic departments vary in size with respect to the number of athletes ($M = 368.27, SD = 177.94$), number of coaches ($M = 15.51, SD = 4.53$), and operating budget ($M = $1,203,200, $SD = $718,645). The athletic director serves as the chief executive officer of the athletic department and (most frequently) reports directly to the university President. The other senior administrators engage in a number of activities, including overseeing specific sports (including the sports’ coaches), directing marketing efforts, ensuring gender equity, overseeing compliance with university and NCAA rules, directing media affairs, and the like.

Men comprised most of the sample ($n = 385, 59.0\%$). White was the most frequent race listed ($n = 599, 91.7\%$), followed by African-American ($n = 27, 4.1\%$), Hispanic ($n = 6, .9\%$), Asian ($n = 5, .8\%$), Native American ($n = 5, .8\%$), persons who listed “other” ($n = 2, .3\%$), and persons who did not provide their race ($n = 9, 1.4\%$). There was a wide age distribution: 18–30 years ($n = 110, 16.8\%$), 31–40 years ($n = 176, 27.0\%$), 41–50 years ($n = 178, 27.3\%$), 51–60 years ($n = 148, 22.7\%$), 61 years or older ($n = 36, 5.5\%$), and persons who did not provide their age ($n = 5, .8\%$). Finally, the mean organizational tenure was 11.52 years ($SD = 9.92$), while the mean occupational tenure was 18.30 years ($SD = 10.92$ years).

Measures
Data were collected using archival data sources and questionnaires.
SEXUAL ORIENTATION DIVERSITY

In drawing from Harrison and colleagues (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002), I measured sexual orientation diversity using a single item: “As a whole, how different are members of your athletic department with respect to sexual orientation.” Responses were made on a 7-point scale from 1 (very similar) to 7 (very different). Harrison et al. (1998, 2002) provided validity evidence for the measure, and other researchers (e.g., Cunningham, 2006, 2007) have demonstrated the efficacy of using this approach.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

I measured commitment to diversity by using a modified version of Cunningham’s (2008) 18-item instrument. Original items focused on the individual’s commitment to diversity, but in this study, the items were adapted to reflect the department’s overall commitment. The following stem, “members of this athletic department . . .” preceded the items. Sample items include “believe in the value of diversity for this athletic department” and “have a lot to lose by not supporting diversity.” Participants made their responses on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale (α = .82) was acceptable.

CREATIVITY

Following Fink, Pastore, and Riemer (2001, 2003), I measured the presence of a creative work environment with a single item: “My athletic department provides opportunities to be creative.” Fink et al. provided the validity evidence for the measure, and Cunningham (2008) has also used it to assess creativity in the workplace.

CONTROLS

I used four controls in the study: the number of head coaches, the natural log of the operating budget, the department’s gender diversity, and the department’s racial diversity. These were included because of past research showing that the size and diversity of a group can impact the creativity of solutions (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996; Thompson, 2003).

Following Cunningham (2008), I assessed gender diversity by asking administrators to indicate the proportion of women and men working in the department. Response options for each category ranged from 1 (0–10%) to 10 (91–100%). I then computed the standard deviation for each department and used that value’s distance from zero (which would represent
complete diversity) as the final diversity score. By way of example, suppose Department A has 51–60% women (which would be a value of 6) and 41–50% men (which would be a value of 5). The diversity score for this department is $-0.71$ ($0-.71$). On the other hand, Department B has 91–100% men (which would be a value of 10) and 0–10% women (which would be a value of 1), for a diversity score of $-6.36$. Thus, larger values are representative of greater department diversity.

I took similar steps to measure racial diversity by asking administrators to provide the proportion of athletic department personnel who were categorized into six different racial groups: African American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, White, and other. I used the same formula previously described to compute the racial diversity score. By way of example, a department with 0–10% African Americans (value of 1), 0–10% Asian Americans (value of 1), 0–10% Hispanics (value of 1), 71–80% Whites (value of 8), 0–10% Native Americans (value of 1), and 0–10% persons listed as other (value of 1) would have a diversity score of $-2.86$.

Finally, I gathered data concerning the operating budget and number of head coaches from the Equity in Athletics Report (www.ope.ed.gov/athletics/).

**Procedures**

This is part of a larger, ongoing study examining diversity in intercollegiate athletics. For this part of the examination, I sought to collect data from all senior level administrators ($n = 1376$) from NCAA Division III athletic departments ($n = 444$). Following Dillman’s (2000) advice for making multiple contacts with potential participants, I mailed administrators the following material, with a week’s separation between each contact: (a) a prenotification postcard alerting them to the upcoming study; (b) a questionnaire packet containing a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, questionnaire, and postage-paid return envelope; (c) a reminder postcard; and (d) another copy of the questionnaire packet, with the cover letter thanking those who had already completed the questionnaire for their participation and encouraging non-respondents to participate. After the first round of data collection, 455 persons responded, and an additional 198 responded after the second round, bringing the total sample to 653 (47.94% response rate).

I compared early and late respondents to check for non-response bias, as late responders are considered to have similar characteristics as non-respondents (Rogelberg & Luong, 1998). A multivariate analysis of variance indicated that early and late respondents did not differ in their ratings of any variables, $F(5, 579) = 1.82, p > .05$. Thus, while late respondents “are not ‘pure’ nonrespondents” (Rogelberg & Luong, 1998, p. 63), non-response bias may not be a substantial concern (see also Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007).
RESULTS

Data Aggregation

As the hypotheses were concerned with athletic departments’ sexual orientation diversity, commitment to diversity, and creativity, I first aggregated the data from the individual to the department level. I only retained departments that had at least two administrators respond (Dixon & Cunningham, 2006), and the average number of responses per department was 2.50. I then calculated the interrater agreement (r_wg) values and eta square (\( \eta^2 \)) values. Interrater agreement values provide information about the extent to which members of a particular group consistently rate a construct, while eta square values illustrate whether there is sufficient variance between groups (for additional information, see Bleise, 2000; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006). The r_wg values were all above or close to the traditional .70 cutoff (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1993): sexual orientation diversity r_wg = .75, commitment to diversity r_wg = .80, creative work environment r_wg = .63. Further, all eta square values were above the traditional cutoff of .20 (Florin, Giamartino, Kenny, & Wandersman, 1990): sexual orientation diversity \( \eta^2 = .67 \), commitment to diversity \( \eta^2 = .44 \), creative work environment \( \eta^2 = .51 \). These results provide statistical support for aggregating the data from the individual to the group level. As such, the athletic department served as the unit of analysis, and the sample size decreased to 199 departments.

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. Results indicate that the mean score for sexual orientation diversity was low (\( M = 2.88, SD = 1.43 \)) and significantly lower than the midpoint of the scale (4), \( t(197) = -10.97, p < .001 \). It was also significantly associated with both gender diversity (\( r = .35, p < .001 \)) and racial diversity (\( r = .21, p < .01 \)), thereby suggesting that departments diverse in one area are also diverse in another.

**Table 1** Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender diversity</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial diversity</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total coaches</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total budget</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.67***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation diversity</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to diversity</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative workplace</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M )</td>
<td>-2.66</td>
<td>-3.37</td>
<td>15.89</td>
<td>1203200</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( SD )</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>718645</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
likely to be diverse in another. Finally, the presence of a creative work environment held a significant association with commitment to diversity ($r = .37, p < .001$) but not the other variables in the study.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that sexual orientation diversity would be positively associated with a creative work environment, while Hypothesis 2 predicted that the aforementioned relationship would be moderated by commitment to diversity. I tested these hypotheses through moderated regression analysis (see Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Specifically, I entered the controls (i.e., number of head coaches, the natural log of the budget, gender diversity, and racial diversity in the first step), the standardized scores for sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity in the second step, and the sexual orientation diversity × commitment to diversity interaction term in the third step. A creative work environment served as the dependent variable. Research has consistently demonstrated the difficulty in detecting interactions in field research because of the loss in statistical power (Aguinis, 1995; Cohen et al., 2003; McClelland & Judd, 1993). As such, researchers (e.g., Harrison et al., 1998) generally increase the alpha level to .10—a technique also prescribed by statisticians (e.g., Aguinis, 1995) and one followed in the current study. Variance inflation factor values and the condition index were all under the recommended levels (10 and 30, respectively; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006), suggesting multicollinearity was not a concern.

Results are presented in Table 2. As seen in Model 1, the controls accounted for 3% ($p = .29$) of the variance. After accounting for these effects, the first order effects contributed an additional 14% ($p < .001$) unique variance (see Model 2). Results indicate that sexual orientation diversity was negatively related to a creative work environment ($\beta = -.12, p = .11$); thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2 Results of Moderated Regression Testing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation diversity (SOD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to diversity (CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOD × CD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. †$p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .001$. 

Downloaded by [Institutional Subscription Access] at 08:57 08 September 2011
FIGURE 1 Interactive effects of sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity on creativity in the workplace.

These results were qualified by a significant sexual orientation diversity × commitment to diversity interaction ($\beta = .12$, $p = .08$), as seen in Model 3 of the regression analysis (Table 2). I plotted the interactions by following Cohen et al.’s (2003) guidelines. As seen in Figure 1, the relationship between sexual orientation diversity and a creative work environment was positive when commitment to diversity was high, but it was negative when commitment to diversity was low. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

DISCUSSION

Creative capital theory (Florida, 2003, 2004) holds that creative individuals are attracted to regions where there is a high concentration of sexual minorities. This is not to suggest that being gay-friendly drives economic growth (although there are certainly persuasive arguments for as much, see Cunningham & Melton, 2011); rather, because sexual minorities face such extreme forms of prejudice and discrimination, their acceptance signals an inclusive environment for all persons. His qualitative and empirical work lend strong credence to these notions (Florida, 2002, 2003, 2004). Seeking to extend these ideas into the workplace setting, I argued that people might associate high levels of employee sexual orientation diversity with a broader
organizational culture of diversity and inclusion (see also Pugh et al., 2008). This extracted cue should be appealing to creative individuals, and consequently, the work environment should be one where the potential for creative action is high. Furthermore, in drawing from the diversity literature (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Kochan et al., 2003), I argued that these dynamics would manifest when the sport organization’s commitment to diversity was high. While direct effects were not present, there was a significant sexual orientation diversity-by-commitment to diversity interaction. Specifically, results illustrate that, when coupled with a strong commitment to diversity, sexual orientation diversity is positively associated with a creative work environment. In the following space, I outline the contributions and implications of the research, potential limitations, and directions for future inquiry.

Contributions and Implications

In only examining the main effects, sexual orientation diversity was not associated with a creative work environment; however, these findings only tell part of the story. Importantly, results from this study indicate that a creative work environment was most likely to be present when both sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity are high. These findings point to the significance of considering context in diversity research. Past research supports this position. Consider, for instance, Kochan et al.’s (2003) multi-study analysis. These authors found that diversity generally did not have a direct, positive impact on performance; instead, the benefits of diversity were observed under certain circumstances, such as when the workplace had a culture of diversity and inclusion. Ely and Thomas (2001) observed a similar pattern in their extensive qualitative investigation of multiple firms. Given these findings, Kochan et al. suggested that, as opposed to believing that diversity will naturally result in improved performance, “managers might do better to focus on building an organizational culture, human resource practices, and the managerial and group process skills needed to translate diversity into positive organizational, group, and individual results” (p. 18).

Another important finding from this study is the realization that, given a supportive environment, sexual orientation diversity can bring value to the workplace (for similar arguments, see Cunningham, in press; Cunningham & Melton, 2011). While this argument is conceptually in line with Florida’s (2003, 2004) creative capital theory, it differs from the prevailing line of thinking among many organizational diversity scholars. Past theories (Pelled, 1996) and research (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999) hailing the business case for diversity has focused on “task-related” diversity forms, such as tenure, education, and functional background. The perspective that only certain diversity forms are associated with performance gains is consistent with what Ely and Thomas (2001) termed a discrimination and fairness perspective. Persons holding this view argue
that non-task-related diversity forms, such as sexual orientation diversity, “are relevant only insofar as they trigger others’ negative reactions; they are therefore a potential source of negative intergroup conflict to be avoided in the service of a task” (p. 268). Sufficiently different from this is what Ely and Thomas called the integration and learning perspective, which recognizes that all diversity forms, including sexual orientation, can be a source of enrichment and understanding. Note, too, the parallel with van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan’s (2004) categorization-elaboration model, which suggests that all diversity forms can improve group processes and outcomes, so long as the conditions are right to do so. And, in addition to this study, there is growing empirical support for this notion (Cunningham, 2009; Homan et al., 2007; Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002).

From a practical perspective, the findings from this study, when coupled with the aforementioned literature, suggests that efforts are needed to improve attitudes toward diversity. In drawing from Meyer and Herscovitch’s (2001) theory, Cunningham (2008) outlined several ways to foster commitment to diversity. He argued that athletic administrators should (a) highlight the benefits of diversity to their workforce, (b) behaviorally demonstrate their support for a diverse workplace, and (c) clearly establish an organizational culture of diversity and inclusion. Other researchers have pointed to the importance organizational policies that affirm diversity (Button, 2001; Human Rights Campaign, 2009), establishing a cooperative workplace environment (Kochan et al., 2003), and providing diversity training (Homan et al., 2007). With respect to training, Homan et al. persuasively argued for alerting people to the value that diversity brings to the workplace, thereby helping to improve and shape their diversity beliefs. Athletic administrators could use all of these techniques to engender a strong commitment to diversity in their workplace.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although there are many strengths of the study, there are also some limitations. First, data were only collected from a single division in the NCAA; thus, caution should be advanced when generalizing the findings beyond this context. Second, some might view the response rate (47.94% of the administrators; 44.82% of the athletic departments) as low. However, such response rates are not uncommon in survey research, especially for studies dealing with sensitive material, such as this. In fact, Berdahl and Aquino (2009) have suggested that response rates lower than this are “good” (p. 37 and 41). Further, subsequent statistical tests indicated that non-response bias was likely not an issue (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). Furthermore, the predictor and outcome variables were all collected on a single questionnaire, raising the potential for method variance. It should be noted, however, that this threat is decreased when testing for moderation (McClelland & Judd, 1993).
In addition, some might view the use of single-item instruments (such as those used to measure a creative work environment and sexual orientation diversity) as a limitation. However, this measure has been used in other research projects (e.g., Fink et al., 2001), and a number of researchers have shown the efficacy of using single-item measures to assess constructs such as job satisfaction (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997) and quality of life (de Boer et al., 2004). Thus, this measure does not likely serve as a major limitation. Related to this concern, the aforementioned items also assessed administrators’ perceptions rather than objective measures. It should be noted, though, that perceptual and objective measures of diversity are closely related (Cunningham, 2006; Harrison et al., 1998, 2002). Finally, some might see the sport context as too unique to make generalizations to other settings. However, as Wolfe and colleagues (2005) note, sport is often an ideal context for organizational studies. This is particularly the case in the current context, given the level of heterosexism and sexual prejudice prevalent in sport organizations.

Finally, there are several avenues for future research. First, in drawing from one of the study limitations, further examination of the benefits of sexual orientation diversity is needed in different sport contexts (e.g., professional teams, fitness clubs). Second, researchers might also consider investigating the impact of other diversity forms (e.g., religion, attitudes) on group processes and outcomes. Finally, additional research is needed to understand the antecedents of sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity. That is, what factors, at the micro-, meso-, or macro-level, are associated with increases in the proportion of LGBT employees and a commitment to diversity and inclusion? Given the benefits of sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity to desired organizational outcomes, gaining such an understanding is critical.

REFERENCES


