



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

‘Seeing the Invisible,
Speaking about the Unspoken’

**Addressing Homophobia in Sport:
The Canadian Experience**

**Karin Lofstrom
Jennifer Birch-Jones**

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CAAWS AT A GLANCE

LEADERSHIP ■ PARTICIPATION ■ EDUCATION ■ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Women and Leadership
 - Aboriginal Women and Leadership
 - Youth Leadership
 - Women on Boards
 - Women and Leadership Network
- On the Move
 - Aboriginal On the Move
 - Newcomer On the Move
- Mothers in Motion
- Physical Activity for Women 55-70
- Active & Free: Young Women, Tobacco & Physical Activity
- Addressing Homophobia in Sport
- Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity
- WISE Fund
- Stacey Levitt Memorial Scholarship
- Resources and Publications
- Monthly "In the Loop" Newsletter
- Consultation and Support to Partners

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WHY CAAWS IS ADDRESSING HOMOPHOBIA

- The fear of homosexuality is used to scare both homosexuals and heterosexuals away from sport.
- Homophobic attitudes and actions are hurtful and damaging to lesbians (and gay men) involved in sport.
- By implying that women (and men) who play sport (or certain sports) are lesbian (or gay), individuals may avoid sports entirely, thus denying themselves opportunities for positive and healthy experiences.

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Background / Context for the Homophobia Initiative

- **CAAWS level of credibility**
- **CAAWS Chair willing to lead initiative**
- **No other “takers”**
- **Canadian cultural climate ready**
- **Focus groups confirmed need - sport lags behind Canadian society**

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Desired Outcome

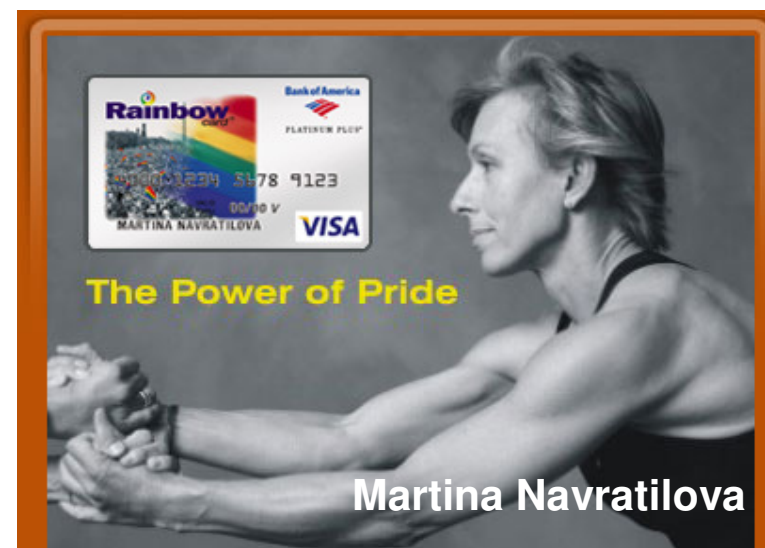
Increased awareness and understanding of homophobia so that participants can use their influence to help change the sport environment.



Sheryl Swoopes



Rosie Jones



Martina Navratilova

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Framework for addressing homophobia in sport

1) Performance

- All perform better when treated with respect**
- Reducing fear has a positive impact on performance and the coaching environment**

2) Inclusiveness

- Reduces barriers to sport participation**
- Enhances social and psychological well-being**

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Overview of CAAWS's Homophobia Initiative

- **Lots of discussion and sharing of resources from Pat Griffin in the U.S. and It Takes a Team**
- ***Seeing the Invisible, Speaking about the Unspoken* position paper**
- **Developed workshop for the Canadian sport community: coaches, administrators, board members, athletes**
- **Trained Facilitators to conduct workshops**
- **Lots of resources gathered, website developed**

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Overview of Homophobia in Sport Workshop

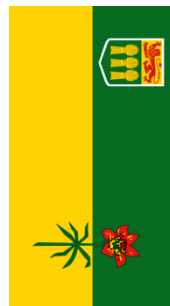
- **Focus first on understanding homophobia and then learning about strategies for addressing**
- **Small group work / case studies essential for real learning**
 - **Same Sex Romantic Relationship**
 - **Lesbian Coach**
 - **Coming Out to the Team**
 - **In the Locker Room**

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CONVERSATIONS ARE TAKING PLACE



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Early Successes - Workshops

- **Coaching Association of Canada's Sport Leadership Conference**
- **Coaching Association of Ontario, Alberta Sport and Recreation, Sport British Columbia**
- **Canada Games Chefs de Mission 2009**
- **Sask Sport (interest from Aboriginal coaches – two spirited)**
- **Canadian Olympic Committee 2010 Mission Staff Leads**

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Early Successes - Workshops

- **2009 educational session with National Team athletes at their annual conference (AthletesCAN)**
- **Entire staff (approximately 40) at the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (2011)**
- **Sport BC outreach with OutGames and CAAWS; signing of declaration**
- **Coaches and others seeing the value of the workshop and promoting it to others, as well as opening doors to more opportunities to present**

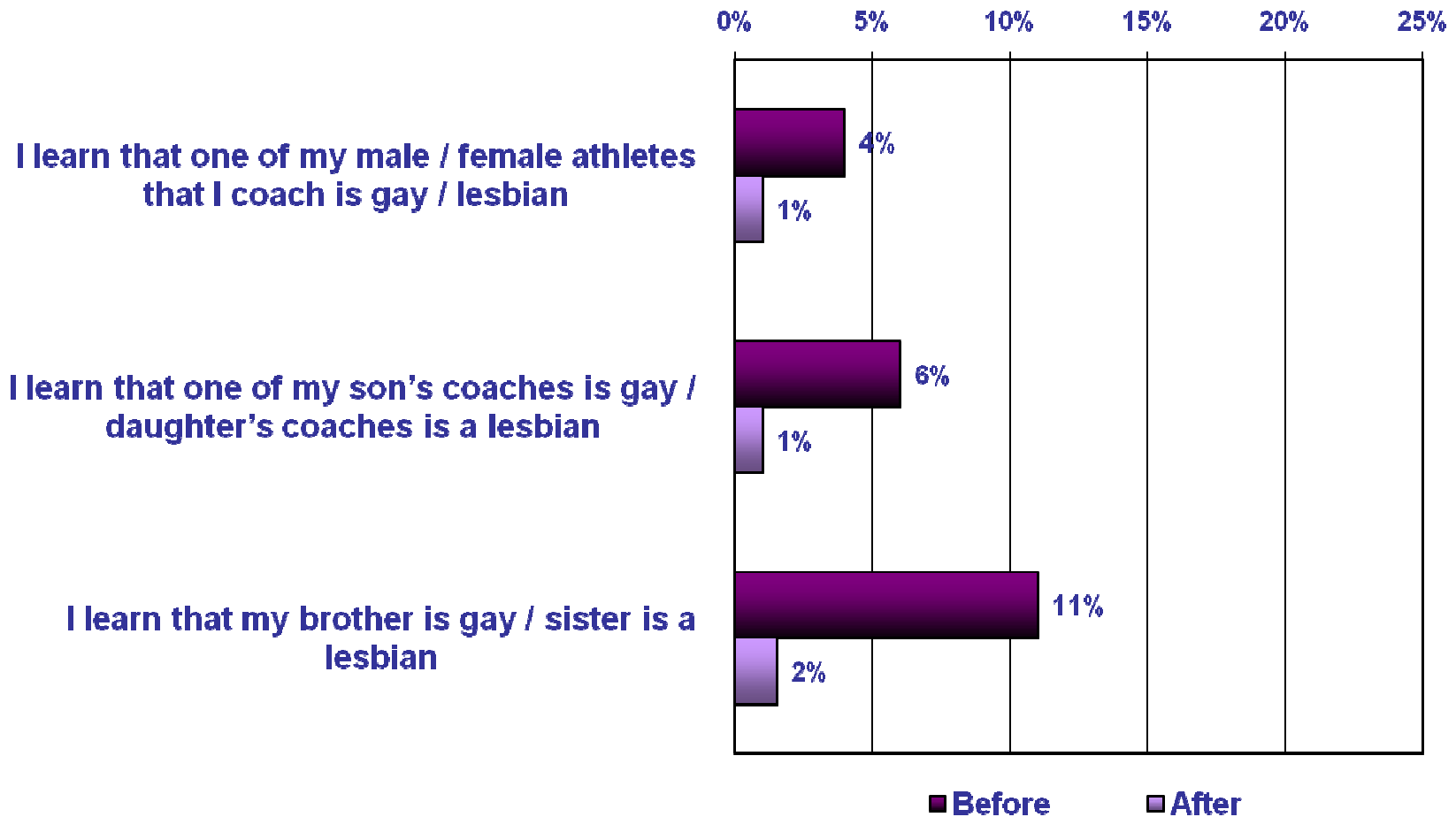
Early Successes - Workshops

- **Recognize that the workshop participants to date likely reflect “early leaders” who may already have a comfort level with lesbians and gays**
- **Even amongst the early leaders, evidence that workshop is changing attitudes**
- **Based on a “before and after” analysis of comfort to discomfort with varying situations involving lesbian or gay individuals, ranging from those outside their family to those within their own families**

Impact of Workshop - Levels of discomfort before and after (n=142)



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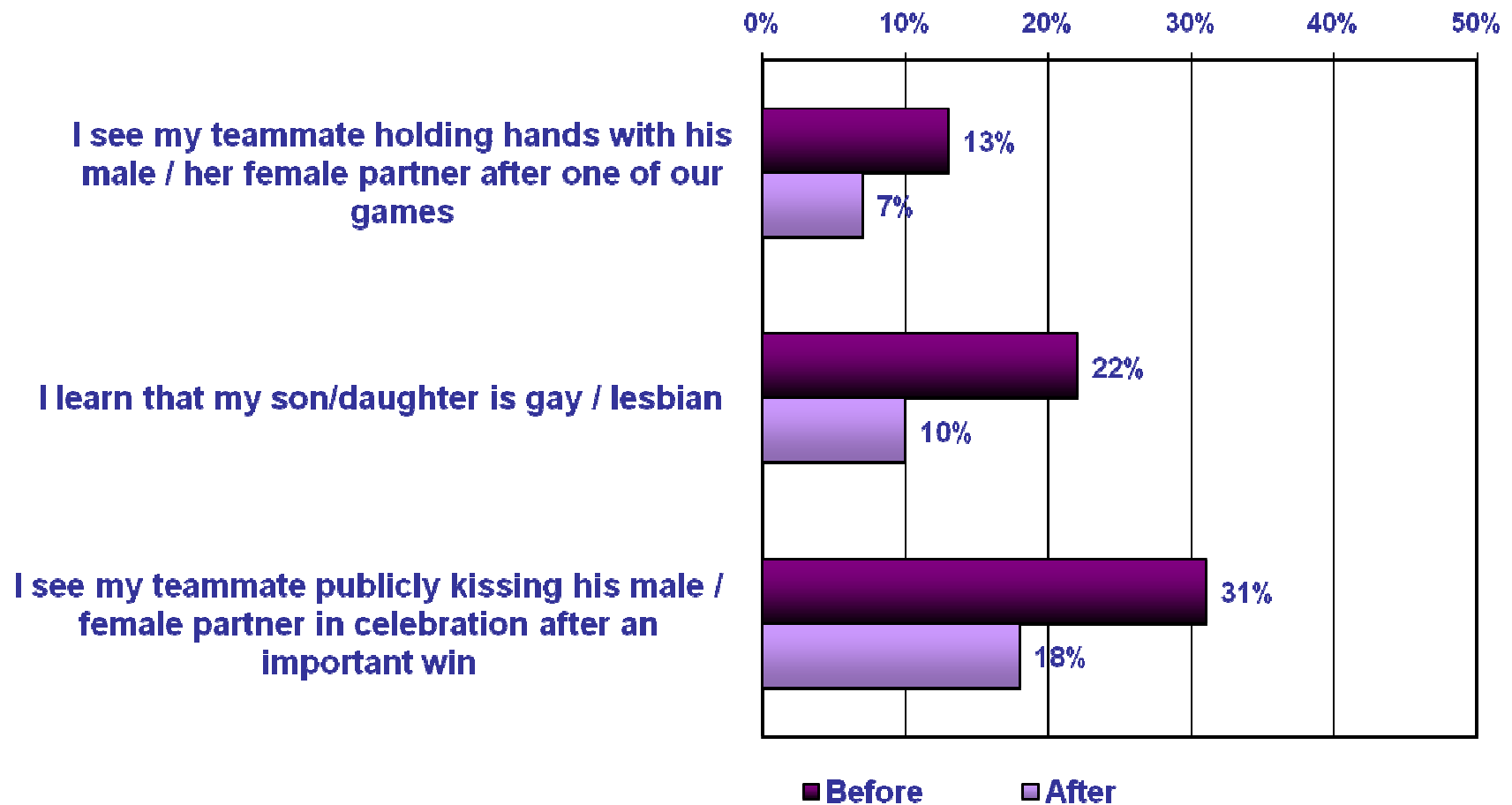


percentage of participants who were uncomfortable

Impact of Workshop - Levels of discomfort before and after (n=142) (cont'd)



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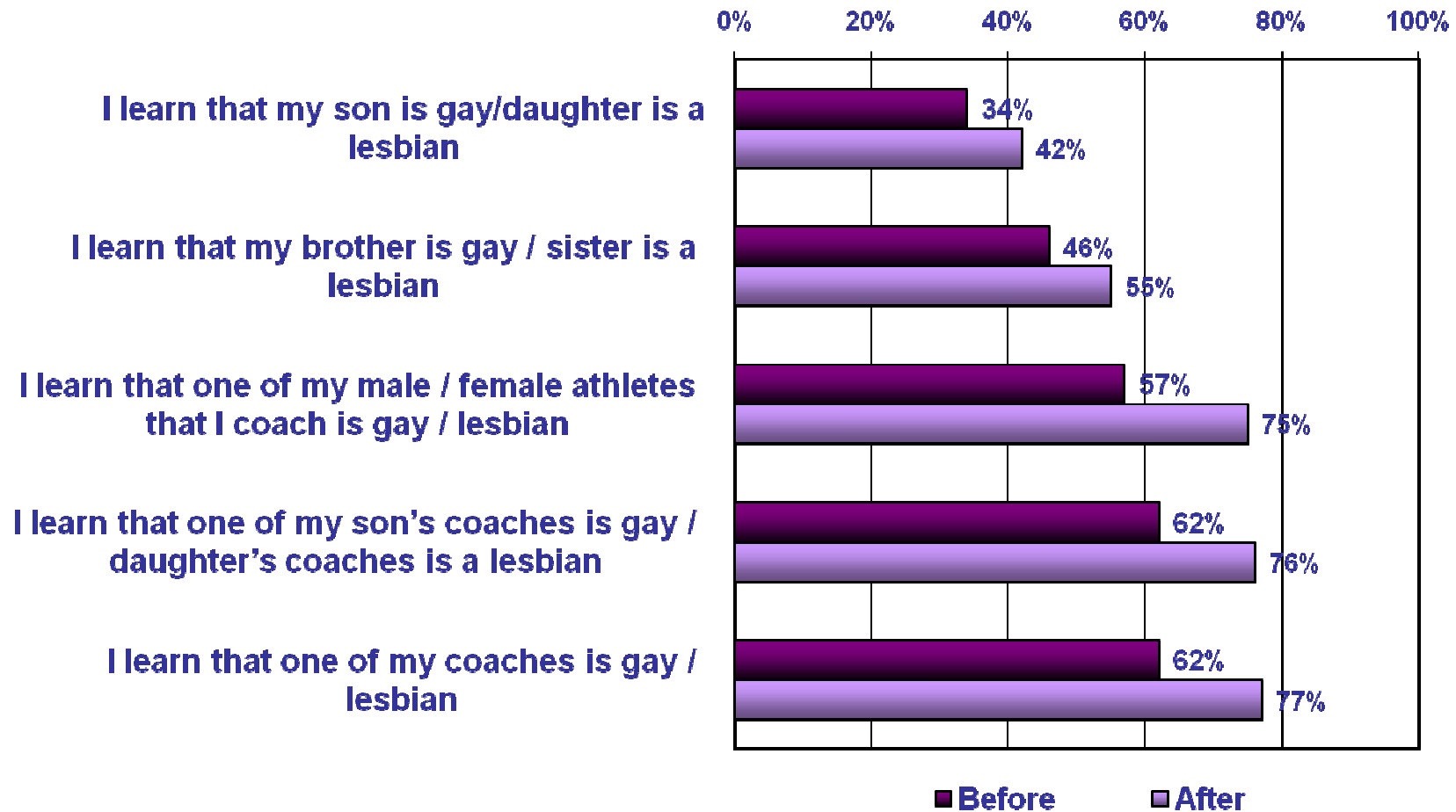


percentage of participants who were uncomfortable

Impact of Workshop – Changes in feeling “very comfortable” before and after (n=142)



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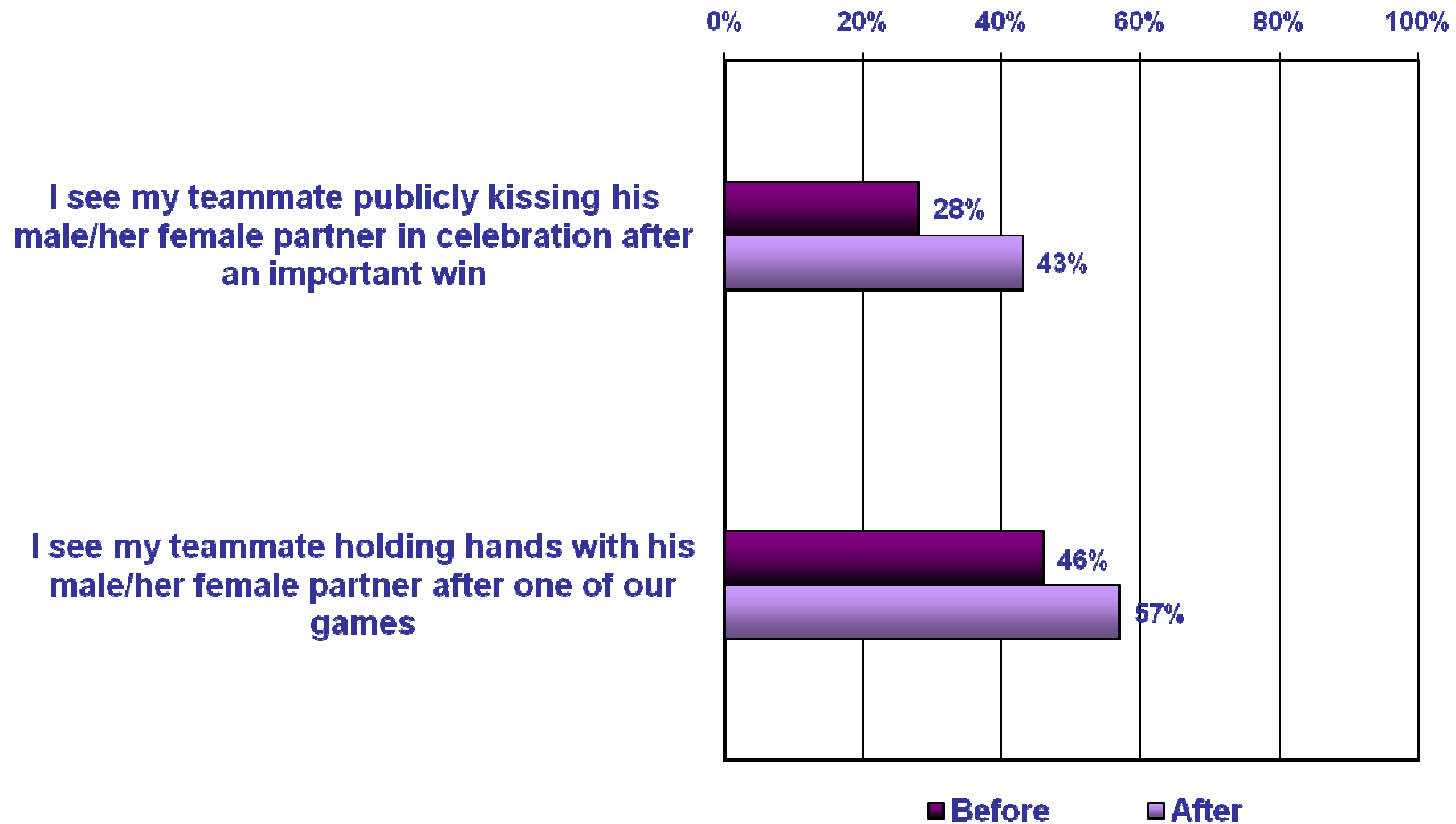


percentage of participants who were very comfortable

Impact of Workshop – Changes in feeling “very comfortable” before and after (n=142) (cont’d)



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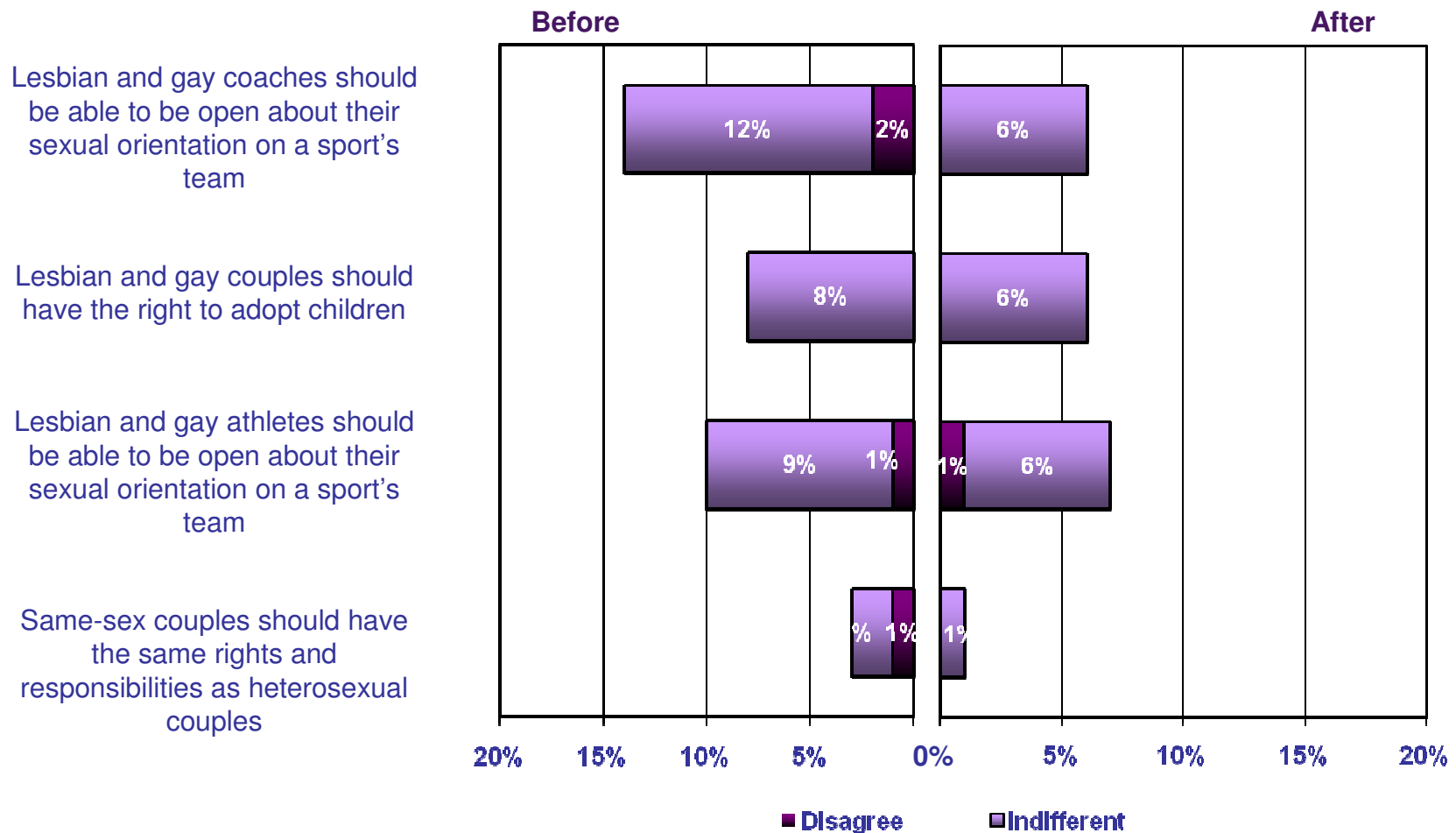


percentage of participants who were very comfortable

Workshop Impact – Levels of disagreement before and after with statements reflecting attitudes (n=145)



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Key Workshop Findings and Impacts

- **The attitudes for which the workshops produced the greatest change, as measured by increases in the proportion of participants who feel “very comfortable” with the situation, are:**
 - a parent learning that a son’s or daughter’s coach is gay or a lesbian
 - a coach learning that a male or female athlete is gay or a lesbian
 - an athlete learning that a coach is gay or a lesbian
 - seeing a teammate publicly kissing a partner in celebration after a win

Key Workshop Findings and Impacts (cont'd)

- With the exception of learning that a family member is gay or a lesbian, particularly a son or daughter, higher levels of discomfort are associated with public expressions and behaviours (e.g., kissing in celebration after a win, holding hands with a partner after a game) than with learning that a co-worker, teammate, coach, athlete coached, or son's/daughter's coach is gay or a lesbian.**
- These differences in the levels of comfort and discomfort with an individual being a gay or a lesbian and with public expressions remain following the workshops, even when attitudes have changed with participation.**

Workshop Impact – Gender Differences

- More males than females (19M/39F) indicated discomfort in almost every before and after situation**
- Greatest M/F “before” gaps in discomfort are for situations involving gay sons and daughters, and gay (male) coaches**
- Greatest M/F “after” gap in discomfort concerned “a male teammate publicly kissing his male partner in celebration after an important win”**
- M/F differences eliminated around having gay and lesbian coaches and athletes – both near zero “after”**

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ACCOMMODATION BUT AT WHAT COST?

“The effort of the LGB[T] athlete to conceal his or her sexual orientation also diverts their attention away from their training and the sport, ultimately leading to a decrease in performance”.¹³



Daniel Kowalski

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HOW WELCOMING IS CDN. ELITE SPORT TO LGBT PERSONS?

Athletes noted a perceived “culture of silence”:

“The environment did not appear to have any prejudice against LGBT people, however there did not appear to be any effort to make it a ‘welcoming’ environment.”

“Although I didn’t really feel discriminated against, there was still this feeling that nobody really wanted to acknowledge the presence of gay or lesbian athletes.”

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MORE VOICES OF CANADIAN NATIONAL ATHLETES

"I am out at home, in training people know who I am and who my girlfriend is, as she is also in [my sport]. Internationally, I am not out. I just don't feel comfortable with being out around people that I don't know what their reaction may be. I also know that in some countries, homosexuality is a serious offense."

"It was a process, but yes I am able to be out in my sport environment. There's a number of reasons for this, and I think the main one is because of the number of people on our team that were in the same position. Being on a team where you don't feel like such a minority anymore makes it a lot easier to just concentrate more on the sport itself, rather than know that you're hiding something from your teammates."

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Early Successes - Positive Spaces in Sport

- **An initiative to address invisibility and widespread reluctance to speak out about sexual and gender diversity in sport**
- **Based on University of Toronto's Positive Space initiative (www.positivespace.utoronto.ca)**
- **Workshop participants are offered the opportunity to become allies and create their own Positive Space**

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Creating Positive Spaces in Sport

- **Regardless of sexual orientation, an ally who displays a PS symbol (button or sticker) indicates their active support of an organization that welcomes sexual diversity**
- **Displaying the Positive Space symbol requires a commitment by the individual to respond favourably to those who may feel marginalized because of their sexual orientation, or who may themselves feel hesitant to speak out positively**
- **An ally must be prepared to challenge discriminatory language and stereotypical talk, even if said in jest**

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*lesbian gay
transgender
bisexual queer*



**POSITIVE
SPACE
IN SPORT**

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Commonwealth Games Canada - created a positive space for Team Canada at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

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

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WELCOMING SPACES ARE BEING CREATED



Legacy report prepared for
future Pride Houses.

First ever PRIDE houses at 2010 Winter
Games in Whistler and Vancouver.

The PRIDE houses
provided a
celebratory and
welcoming
environment for the
LGBT community to
come together,
connect , seek
support and have
fun.



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CAMPAIGNS ARE TAKING PLACE

- 2010’s International Day Against Homophobia focused on combating homophobia in the amateur and professional sports worlds.
- Step Up! Speak Out! Ally Campaign for Inclusive Sport launched in 2011 in partnership with key sport and LGBT organizations

Speaking about Silence

Homophobia in the Sports World



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Partner campaign to encourage members of the Canadian sport community to respect all individuals involved in sport, regardless of perceived or actual sexual orientation.

How to support the **Step Up! Speak Out! Ally Campaign for Inclusive Sport**:

1. Commit to being a Step Up! Speak Out! Ally and make sport more welcoming to sexual diversity.
2. Become a Step Up! Speak Out! Champion.
3. Post the web button, tell others in the sport community about the campaign, and encourage others to become Allies and Champions.

www.stepupspeakout.ca

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COC SUPPORT FOR THE ALLY CAMPAIGN



***Mark Tewksbury,
Canada's Chef de
Mission for London
2012, was the first
and most visible
Campaign
Champion.***



CANADIAN OLYMPIC COMMITTEE
For the fire within



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A MESSAGE FROM A STEP UP! SPEAK OUT CHAMPION



Sarah Vaillancourt

Canadian Women's National Ice Hockey
Team, two-time Olympic Gold Medalist

"The sexual orientation of an individual is not a choice and it is not something that should ever be questioned by others. I also believe that as successful LGBTQ athletes we have an obligation to be role models to others. It is only when we are true to ourselves that we can really lead the way forward in overcoming the negative attitudes and beliefs that persist in sport about those who are LGBTQ. I look forward to the day where we have many more LGBTQ role models in sport."

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Challenges in Addressing Homophobia in Sport

- **Lack of uptake by National Coaching Association of Canada (NCCP and National Coaching Conference), National / Multi Sport Organizations, and Universities and Colleges**
- **Low numbers in some sessions – hesitation / reluctance, and pressure to reduce time in workshop - less time for critical small group case study work and discussion on substantive issues**

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Challenges in Addressing Homophobia in Sport

- **One off initiatives (the workshop or education session) rather than sustained systemic changes, e.g., sexual diversity part of policies, orientation, and standard operating procedures**
- **Lack of Canadian research focusing specifically on homophobia in sport**
- **Not enough Canadian voices and stories yet**
- **Lack of practical resources (made in Canada) for coaches and administrators**

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Challenges in Addressing Homophobia in Sport

- **Almost exclusive media focus on homophobia around professional male sports**
- **Lack of an organizational champion for gay men**
- **Reluctance of heterosexual allies to “step up and speak out”, especially men**
- **Emerging trans and intersex issues add to complexity**
- **Multi-jurisdictional needs but limited resources**

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Looking Ahead

- **Continue delivering workshop that can be adapted to target groups at AGMs, conferences, coaches and officials workshops, training camps, meetings, etc.**
- **Develop practical resources for use by coaches in Canada**
- **Focus on the next generation - Provincial Team coaches, Canadian University and College Coaches**

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Looking Ahead (Cont'd)

- **2015 Toronto Pan Para/Pan Am Games – Pride House**
- **Out athletes as spokespersons and stories**



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Promising Practices: Working with Transitioning/Transitioned Athletes in Sport Project

- AthletesCAN
- Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES)
- Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport & Physical Activity (CAAWS)

Project focus: to identify and help address barriers that inhibit participation



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Two literature reviews commissioned

- social science
- biological science

Discussion Paper written

Including Transitioning and Transitioned Athletes in Sport: Issues, Facts and Perspectives

- explain the terms and concepts
- outline of key issues and a summary of relevant facts
- what we can learn from past parallels in sport and society
- recommendations for promoting dialogue, consultation and action within the Canadian sport community

Available at www.caaws.ca under Publications



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- **CCES** recently led an ethical discussion on Gender Diversity initially looking at transgender and intersex athletes inclusion in sport.
- **Struggles** around which national organization is willing to take the lead on these issues.
- **Discussions** are not yet at a practical level, e.g., policies for addressing inclusion.

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For further information and updates

Check the CAAWS website

www.caaws.ca/homophobia

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