

Athletes' Openness to Sexuality

Tereza Melicharkova⁵

There are several studies that suggest a biological indicator linked to homosexuality among men (see for example, LeVay & Hamer, 1994); however, such a finding is lacking among women. The studies that were focused on homosexuality among women were focused only on the prevailing stereotypes (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Morandini Blaszczyński, Costa, Godwin, & Dar-Nimrod, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out whether the proportion of lesbians among athletes does differ from the general population and if there is any difference between individual sports and team sports. Several researchers mentioned that female athletes who compete in traditionally masculine team sports are more likely to be homosexual (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Mereish & Poteat, 2015) and I wanted to see whether this is true or not. Therefore, I created five questions that addressed women's sexual orientation and their openness to sexuality. This study was composed of 51 female adult participants who took my survey. The collected data were analyzed by descriptive statistics. Finally, the findings showed that there are fewer lesbian women in the general population than in sports, and that there was significant difference between lesbian women in individual sports and team sports.

Keywords: homosexuality, female athletes, prevailing stereotypes, sexual orientation

Although there are several studies that suggest a biological indicator linked to homosexuality among men such findings are lacking among women (see for example, LeVay & Hamer, 1994). Knowing that there is not enough research about homosexuality among women and knowing that studies focused primarily on prevailing stereotypes in our society made me realize that more research has to be done. In other words, I want to see whether there are any correlates of homosexuality among women. The primary purpose of this study was to find out

⁵Tereza Melicharkova, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tereza Melicharkova, Department of Psychology, Lindenwood University, 209 South Kingshighway, Saint Charles, MO 63301. Email: tm787@lindenwood.edu

interested to see if there are any differences between team sports and individual sports.

Many of the studies that are focused on women's sexuality present one of the prevailing stereotypes that female athletes who compete in traditionally masculine team sports are homosexual (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Blinde and Taub (1992) examined how devaluation and stigmatization impact Division I women athletes. They interviewed 24 female athletes over the phone. This study found out that many athletes were aware of the false beliefs that most female athletes are lesbian; however, the majority of the athletes who were interviewed were heterosexual. Blinde and Taub (1992) mentioned that many of athletes try to identify themselves differently (e.g. student); therefore, they cannot be labeled as lesbian as a female athlete. Some of the athletes also mentioned who they are specifically dating; that way they make it clear that they are not homosexual. This study provided a better understanding of how the women athletes cope with the knowledge of the prevailing stereotypes, as well as how they respond to it.

Knight and Giuliano (2003) were also aware of the stigma among women's sports; therefore, they created fictitious newspaper profiles about Olympic athletes and gave it to 91 participants (40 men and 51 women) to see how they will label the athletes. The purpose of this study was to see how the participants would perceive the athletes; for instance, if the athlete was masculine, athletic, feminine, homosexual, heterosexual, and how physically attracted they were to that athlete (Knight & Giuliano, 2003). Knight and Giuliano (2003) found out that both female and male athletes that were clearly described as heterosexual were perceived more positively than the athletes with a different sexual orientation.

Mereish and Poteat (2015) were focused on the differences among sexual orientation in physical activity, sports involvement, and body mass index among female and male adolescents.

They found out that male adolescents who identified themselves in a sexual minority group did not participate in any team sports; they were less likely to be physically active than the heterosexual male adolescents. However, this study found out that this is not the case among female adolescents. In other words, female adolescents who identified themselves as homosexual or as a sexual minority do participate in team sports and they are also physically active. However, Mereish and Peteat (2015) also pointed out that heterosexual females (57%) participated in team sports more frequently than the sexual minority females (35%). Mereish and Peteat (2015) also mentioned that the reason why some of the adolescents do not participate in any physical activities or team sports could be because they are trying to avoid the potential stigma or victimization that they often experienced.

Morandini, Blaszczyński, Costa, Godwin, and Dar-Nimrod (2017) among all of the interests, they wanted to see if women believe that their sexual orientation is inborn/natural or as existing in discrete categories. They found out that women who identify themselves as inborn lesbians feel more comfortable and open about their sexual orientation than women who reported their sexual orientation changed over time.

Finally, all of these studies mentioned some of the prevailing stereotypes and stigmas that our society still hold. As mentioned before, there have been a lot of studies that were focused on the male homosexual population; however, there is not enough research about the female homosexual population. Therefore, I conducted this study to find out whether the proportion of lesbians among athletes differs from the general population, as well as if there is any difference among individual sports and team sports. I was also interested to see if the sexual orientation of my participants changed over their lifetime or not. Finally, I also wanted to find out if women

agree with some of the most common stereotypical statements that are being said about female athletes.

I created an online survey that was addressed only for adult female participants. Another study done by Mark, Toland, Rosenkrantz, Brown, and Hong (2018) used the Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI) to measure the dyadic (an interest to engage in sexual activity with another person) and solitary (an interest in engaging in sexual behavior by oneself) sexual desire of the LGBTQ population. The SDI is a 3-factor structure solution that is looking at dyadic sexual desire for partner, solitary sexual desire, and dyadic sexual desire for an attractive other (Mark et al., 2018). The main purpose of this study was to adapt the SDI for LGBTQ population because the SDI was focused only on the heterosexual population. This study was important because it brought up important wording of questions for the LGBTQ population for the current study. However, I created all of the questions that were used in my survey because I did not find any questionnaires that would be useful for this particular study.

Method

Participants

The women who took my survey were recruited from Facebook and the Psi Chi study recruitment site. The survey link was posted on Facebook, as well as on the Psi Chi website where women accessed my survey. There were 22 female who were non-athletes and 29 female who were athletes. There were also 3 female athletes in team sports, and 22 women athletes in individual sports. From these participants, there were 33 participants in group of 18-22 years old, 14 participants in group of 23-27 years old, 2 participants in group of 28-32 years old, and 2 participants who were 33 years old or older. In my study, there were 20 non-athlete women who reported to identified themselves as heterosexual, 1 homosexual, and 1 bisexual. Finally, there

were also 25 athlete women who reported to identified themselves as heterosexual, 3 homosexual, and 1 bisexual.

Materials and Procedure

To create my survey, I had to log in to Qualtrics where I wrote the informed consent statement where I asked the participants to verify their gender. I also familiarized the women with the study in accordance with questions about their age and gender. For my survey I created five questions that addressed the women's sexual orientation and their openness to sexuality (see Appendix A). After this section, the participants were asked six demographic questions.

I created my online survey on Qualtrics. Participants first read the informed consent statement where I informed them of my study, the purpose of my study, and the type of questions they would be asked. I also made sure that they clearly understood that this survey was anonymous, and therefore, there will be full confidentiality. After that, I mentioned that this topic is sensitive; therefore, it could happen that a woman may not always feel comfortable answering some of the questions. Nevertheless, I assured them that they can stop the survey at any time they would want and that they can also skip any questions they would like. At the end of the informed consent statement, my contact information, as well as the contact information for my faculty supervisor, were provided to the participants in case they wanted to contact us with any questions they may have. I included only female participants in my study. Those who identified their gender to be male or other were taken to the end of the survey. My survey proceeded further with questions about openness to sexuality, as well as about sexual orientation. I wanted to find through these questions how open women are about their sexuality, if there was any change in relation to their sexual orientation over the course of their life, how open the woman is to experience sexual interactions with people of different genders, and to whom they are

attracted to. After a woman answered these questions, she moved to the demographic questions (e.g. age, athlete vs. non-athlete, individual sport vs. team sport, or a type of sport). I asked these questions at the end of my survey because I did not want the participants to answer the questions with feminine or masculine bias in a relation to sports.

Finally, I closed my survey with a debriefing statement where I thanked the women for taking the time to take my survey and acquainted them with the information that I cannot provide them any individual finding because this survey was completely anonymous; however, that I could provide them with the final results upon request.

Results

I analyzed my data using descriptive statistics on Microsoft Excel. Firstly, I wanted to see whether the proportion of lesbians among athletes differs from the general population. Therefore, I asked the questions: “How do you identify your sexual orientation?” and “Are you an athlete?” Based on these questions I found out that 29 females identified themselves as an athlete and 22 of females identified themselves as a non-athlete.

Next, I was interested to see if there were any differences between team sports and individual sports. Therefore, I asked the following questions to athletes only: “Which of the following best describes your sport?” and “What sport(s) do you currently play?” Based on these questions I found out that of the 29 athletes in this study who actually answered these questions, 3 engaged in team sports whereas 22 engaged in individual sport. There was only one athlete in the team sport who identified herself in the sexual minority group compared to three athletes in the individual sports. The most common individual sport that female athletes participated in was tennis. Swimming, wrestling, and horse riding were the team sports the athletes participated in.

Further, I was also interested to see to whom the participants are attracted to today. I found out that 3 women were attracted to the same gender, 44 women were attracted to the other gender, 3 women were attracted to both genders, and only 2 women who reported that they do not know. Next, I asked the question: "How open are you to experience any kind of sexual interaction with a woman?" There were 19 women who answered "not at all," 16 women who answered "slightly," 9 women who answered "moderately," 7 women who answered "very," and only 1 woman who answered "extremely." I also asked: "How open are you to experience any kind of sexual interaction with a man?" There was 1 woman who answered "not at all," 3 women who answered "slightly," 6 women who answered "moderately," 16 women who answered "very," and 26 women who answered "extremely."

Since, I was interested to see if the sexual orientation of my participants changed over their life time or not, I asked the participants, "Looking back at your life time, to whom have you been attracted to?" The results are summarized in Table 1; however, the findings should be taken with caution because this question was misunderstood or misread by many participants.

I also wanted to see if women agree with some of the prevailing stereotypes; therefore, I asked the questions: "How much do you agree with the statement that there are more lesbians in team sports (e.g. rugby, soccer, ice-hockey, basketball)" and "How much do you agree with the statement that there are more lesbians among people who play sports than among the general population?" For the first question, there were 28 women who agreed, 13 women who did not agree nor disagree, and 10 women who disagreed with the statement. For the second question, there were 12 women who agreed, 16 women who did not agree nor disagree, and 23 women who disagreed with the statement.

Finally, this study showed that our society is still not moving away from the prevailing stereotypes. However, I hope that this study could be the beginning for our society to move away from the prevailing stereotypes. Next, this study also showed that today's women still do not feel confident, open, and proud about their sexual orientation. However, the purpose and hope of this study was to show women that it is alright to identify one's self in a sexual minority group.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the proportion among athletes differ from the general population. The findings showed that there are proportionately more women who identified themselves in the sexual minority group than in the general population; there were 4 out of 29 athletes who identified themselves as a sexual minority compare to only 2 out of 22 non-athletes. The second focused was on the difference between individual sports and team sports. The results indicated that the proportion among athletes in individual sports are higher than in team sports. As mentioned before, there were 3 out of 22 athletes from individual sports who identified themselves as a sexual minority whereas only 1 out of 3 athletes from team sports who identified herself as a sexual minority.

It is important to realize that there is not enough research about homosexuality among women. That is why it is critical to put more importance on this topic, so society can move away from the prevailing stereotypes that may hurt women who identify themselves as sexual minorities. Unfortunately, I found out that today's women still do believe in the prevailing stereotypes that our society still holds. I also found out that there are fewer lesbian women in the general population than in sports and that there was a difference between lesbian women in individual sports and team sports.

The previous studies were mainly focused on the prevailing stereotypes, physical activity among sexual minorities, and the sexual identity outcome. However, Blind and Taub (1992) also showed that these prevailing stereotypes do not always apply to today's women. My study did support the preceding studies. Most of the preceding studies mentioned that female athletes who compete in team sports are more likely to be lesbians; however, the findings showed that this is not true.

As it was seen from the findings it is clear that today's women still believe in some of the prevailing stereotypes about women's sexual orientation in sports. The majority of the participants believed that there are more lesbians in team sport than in individual sports. My findings supported this stereotype. On the other hand, many of the participants did not agree that there are more lesbians among people who play sport than among the general population. However, my findings showed the stereotype to be true. Also, the reason why there are more women who identify themselves as sexual minorities may be because of the environment they live in. In other words, women athletes spend most of their time in contact with other women; therefore, it may be more comfortable for them to establish an intimate relationship with a woman.

One of the biggest limitations that I found out after collecting my data was that many participants misunderstood or misread the question about their lifetime attraction. Participants were asked to report on their past; however, many participants thought that they need to respond about their future sexual orientation as well. Therefore, they guessed or selected "I do not know." I would recommend to clarify how to answer this question; the misunderstanding could be reduced. I found out that a few participants did not have a clear understanding of the meanings of the terms that I used for the sexual orientations; therefore, I would suggest to provide a clear

definition of each term. Finally, there was some ambiguity about the definitions of team and individual sports. For instance, one participant indicated that wrestling is a team sport; however, additional four participants who competed in wrestling reported that wrestling is an individual sport. In that case, I would suggest to provide a definition of what team or individual sport means (e.g. team sports can only be played with other teammates; however, individual sports can be played by one person).

Another limitation of my study was that I attempt to recruit the participants through Facebook, Reddit, and Psi Chi; however, Reddit did not allow me to post my study in any of their groups. I got an email from them that they deleted my survey from their pages because I did not have enough credits to share my study. For future reference I recommend to create a profile on Reddit at least a month earlier and try to be active on it.

Future research should be focused more on contact sports, as well as take a look at the reasons why there are more women who identify themselves as sexual minorities in sports than in the general population. Future studies should also focus on the biological indicators linked to homosexuality among women. The importance of the mental state of these women should be taken into a consideration too. My hope is that by participating in my study, women could be more comfortable with the fact that it is alright to be open about their sexuality and sexual orientation. Further studies in this area could help our society to gain more knowledge about women's sexuality and sexual orientation.

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Table 1

Summarized results from Question #16 “Looking back at your life time, to whom have you been attracted to?”

Age group	Same gender		Other gender		Both		Neither		I do not know		Total
	%	# *	%	# *	%	# *	%	# *	%	# *	
13-18 years old	11.76	6	70.59	36	15.69	8	1.96	1	0.00	0	51
19-26 years old	14.58	7	68.75	33	10.42	5	2.08	1	4.17	2	48
27-32 years old	7.69	2	42.31	11	7.69	2	3.85	1	38.46	10	26
33-38 years old	4.76	1	28.57	6	0.00	0	4.76	1	61.90	13	21

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Old											
er	0.00	0	26.32	5	0.00	0	15.79	3	57.89	11	19

Note: The participants were asked to report on their past. #* refers to # of participants.

Appendix A

Online Survey

Athletes' Openness to Sexuality

Start of Block: Informed Consent Statement

Q5 Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Introduction

My name is Tereza Melicharkova and I am conducting this project at Lindenwood University, I am also enrolled in the PSY48000 Psychology Research Lab. The primary purpose of this study is to find out whether the proportion of lesbians among athletes differs from the general population.

Procedures

This survey focuses only on female participants. This survey asks you to respond to a few demographic items, as well as questions asking about your openness to sexuality, as well as about your sexual orientation. This questionnaire will be conducted with an online Qualtrics-created survey, and should not take any more 5 minutes of your time.

Risks/Discomforts

You may not feel comfortable about some of the questions I will ask. However, you can stop the survey at any time you would like to and skip any questions you wish not to answer.

Compensation and Benefits

You will gain experience taking part in a psychological survey project and potentially learn more about

the field. By taking this survey you could have better knowledge about women's sexuality and sexual orientation. By participating in my study, you could also feel more comfortable with the fact that it is alright to be open about your sexuality and sexual orientation.

Confidentiality

No personally identifying information will be collected, including your IP Address. All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the researcher listed below and her course professor, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me, Tereza Melicharkova at tm787@lindenwood.edu or (636)288-9653 or direct your inquiries to the course professor, Dr. Nohara-LeClair at mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu or (636)949-4371.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "Agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age.
- You identify your gender as female.

Q6 I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Agree (1)

Do Not Agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free... = Do Not Agree

Display This Question:

If I have read, understood, and printed a copy of, the above consent form and desire of my own free... = Agree

Q7 How old are you?

I am at least 18 years old (1)

I am younger than 18 years old (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If How old are you? = I am younger than 18 years old

Q11 My gender is?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3)

Skip To: End of Survey If My gender is? != Female

End of Block: Informed Consent Statement

Start of Block: Sexual Orientation/Openness to Sexuality

Q13 How do you identify your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual (1)
- Homosexual (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- Other (4)

Q10 To whom are you attracted today?

	Same gender (1)	Other gender (2)	Both (3)	Neither (4)	I do not know (5)
Choose one answer (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12 How open are you to experience any kind of sexual interaction with a woman?

	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Moderately (3)	Very (4)	Extremely (5)
Choose one answer (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 How open are you to experience any kind of sexual interaction with a man?

	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Moderately (3)	Very (4)	Extremely (5)
Choose one answer (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Looking back at your life time, to whom have you been attracted to?

	Same gender (1)	Other gender (2)	Both (3)	Neither (4)	I do not know (5)
13-18 years old (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19-26 years old (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27-32 years old (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33-38 years old (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Older (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Sexual Orientation/Openness to Sexuality

Start of Block: Demographic questions

Q17 How old are you?

- 18-22 years old (1)
- 23-27 years old (2)
- 28-32 years old (3)
- 33-37 years old (4)
- Older (5)

Q18 Are you an athlete?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: Q21 If Are you an athlete? = No

Q19 Which of the following best describes your sport?

Individual sport (e.g. tennis, golf, track and field) (1)

Team sport (e.g. rugby, soccer, basketball) (2)

Q20 What sport(s) do you currently play?

Q23 At what age did you start playing your sport(s)?

Q21 How much do you agree with the statement that there are more lesbians in team sports (e.g. rugby, soccer, ice-hockey, basketball) than in individual sports (e.g. tennis, golf, track and field)?

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q26 How much do you agree with the statement that there are more lesbians among people who play sports than among the general population?

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat agree (3)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly disagree (7)

Q25 What is your marital status?

Not Married (1)

Married (2)

Q14

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The primary purpose of this study was to find out whether the proportion of lesbians among athletes differ from the general population. I am also interested to see if there are any differences among the team sports between individual sports. My hope is that the results of my research would lead to further research in this field, which ultimately can lead to improve understanding of the LGBTQ population.

I cannot provide you with individual findings due to the fact that this survey was conducted anonymously. However; I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this study. Please feel free to contact me using the information below.

Thank you again for contributing data to my project!

Student Researcher:

Tereza Melichárková: tm787@lindenwood.edu

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair

636-949-4371

mnohara-leclair@lindenwood.edu