



**GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL,
AND TRANSGENDER**

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Whitepaper
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The goal of the Whitepaper is to share current and cutting-edge research about issues related to the status of the GLBT community in higher education that will prompt discussion, further research and showcase scholarship being conducted by students and professionals in the field. Higher education and student affairs professionals can consider these recent findings/results when tailoring programmatic and pedagogical efforts on their campus. All scholars, researchers and professionals are welcome to submit summaries or briefs about their scholarship to the whitepaper; membership in NASPA is not a prerequisite.

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Exploring the discrimination of lesbian student-athletes in intercollegiate athletics

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Introduction

Over the last two centuries the promotion of a heterosexist image for female athletes has emerged. Females who participate in sport are often questioned about their sexual identity from coaches, reporters, parents, teammates, fans and the general public (Griffin, 1992). Women who participate in sports often are labeled as a lesbian. Those who participate in intercollegiate athletics have been cautioned about their “masculinizing effects” such as deeper voices and overdeveloped arms and legs (Griffin, 1992). Although, we have moved to the 21st century, lesbians in intercollegiate athletics still face discrimination.

Gender Norms

Athletics has typically been a heterosexist environment, coupled with traditional gender norms expected in sport, presenting a unique challenge to all women athletes (Stoelting, 2011). In early years, higher education women’s college and sports teams became the target of discrimination. Many believe that women who participated in sport and physical education were lesbians. Many believed that women chose to be in groups that lacked men, and they participated in activities that wouldn’t enhance their abilities to become good wives or mothers. These so called “lesbians” were strange masculine individuals who rejected their female identity and roles as wives and mothers. In result, athletic women became highly suspected as lesbians. Unfortunately, today in 2014 this image has yet to change.

Intercollegiate Athletics

Homophobia has taken control of intercollegiate athletics. Over the years, college athletics have responded with silence to address the issues of homophobia in college athletics. Collegiate athletics is more hostile to lesbians than other areas of campus (Vargas-Tonsing, 2009). They have encouraged student athletes to stay quiet and hide at the cost of their education:

Lesbians in sport are treated like nasty secrets that must be kept locked tightly in the closet. Lesbians, of course, are expected to maintain cover at all times. Not surprisingly, most lesbians in sport choose to remain hidden rather than face potential public condemnation (Griffin, 1992).

College athletes who identify live in fear of being “outed” by teammates and coaches. They try to maintain a heterosexist status quo in order to blend in with society. They feel pressured to stay quiet as women in sports are fighting a two-prong battle: social acceptance for athletics and athletics doesn’t dictate sexuality.

Intercollegiate athletes are the home for negative recruiting processes. Coaches and athletic directors try to reassure athletes that their program is “free” of lesbians and that the rival program is full of them. The recruiting process forces questions based on sexuality of players and coaches to luster. Coaches throughout the sport will speculate rumors about opposing coaches addressing the sexuality in hopes of winning over recruits.

We know from feminist learnings that women are the first to apologize. In athletics, female athletes try to compensate by promoting a feminine image and as a society we focus our attention on

those who meet white heterosexual standards of beauty. Athletes are constantly told to dress more feminine. In the journal *Changing the Game*, Pat Griffin states "...college teams are told to wear dresses or attend seminars to learn how to apply makeup, style hair, and select clothes. Athletes are encouraged to be seen with boyfriends and reminded to act like ladies when away from the gym" (Griffin, 1992.) Female athletes are spending more time fighting the norm athletic stereotypes, rather than being embraced for who they are.

Off The Court

The personal lives of female athletes are constantly under attacked. Those who are single are assumed to be closeted. At some institutions athletic directors prohibit lesbian coaches and athletes (Griffin, 1992). At Penn State, Rene Portland Head Coach of Women's Basketball had a "no drug, no alcohol, no lesbian" policy. Many institutions followed her dropping lesbians from the team, benching them, or becoming ostracized (Griffin, 1992). Women who participate in sports are constantly watching themselves and obeying by the cultural norm. Rumors have shown that in a NCAA women's basketball championship, male coaches went to the local lesbian bar to spy on lesbian coaches who may have been there (Griffin, 1992).

Over the years female athletes have spoken out about pressures and stressed they experienced. Pat Griffin (Griffin, 1992) recalled those discussions stating:

- Lesbian image that women's sport portray
- Shame affiliated with being a female athlete
- Discomfort with the topic and inability to say the word "lesbian"
- Importance of projecting a feminine image
- Discomforted by female athletes who didn't look or act feminine.

Those who risk being stereotyped try to overexert themselves into a heterosexual identity. These women do everything in the power to fit into the standards that have been set in hopes of not upsetting the general norm. At Penn State, Coach Renee Portland recruited Jennifer Harris and offered her a full scholarship as long as she abided by team rules. Portland continued to attack Harris and accused her of not abiding her "no lesbian policy" (Osborne, 2007). Osborne states that Portland continued to see Harris as a "bad influence" and forced Harris to dress in more feminine clothing and wear her hair in a more feminine style instead of cornrows. Harris was later released from the team by Portland.

Effects of Labeling

Women who are athletic and appear unfeminine become a target to the label "lesbian". This label is harmful for athletes as it detracts from their ability to succeed. We develop stereotypes focusing on inadequacy and deviance rather than talent and capability (Biard, 2002). Intercollegiate athletics is an area of big business often controlled by men. Donna Lopiano, Executive Director of the Women's Sports Foundation stated that "homophobia is a political tool used by men to keep women in their place, to maintain the power of economic structure, to maintain control of the money where (men) want it to be, namely in football and men's basketball." The athletic world is one ginormous harmful Catch-22. In athletics, we look for athletes, who show characteristics of aggression. However, these are the same characteristics that lead to discrimination (Biard, 2002).

Sexual orientation discrimination has a direct impact on athletics. Homosexual athletes who participate in athletics suffer fear, humiliation, isolation, and sometimes physical violence (Osborne, 2007). These intercollegiate athletes who face discrimination are prohibited from participating in the educational benefits of intercollegiate sports. Female athletes live in fear of being "outed" and ostracized by their teammates and coaches. Athletes who wish to come out are often told to be silent so they can "protect" the programs image. Those who are scholarship athletes are left at a crossroads.

They're unable to transfer as they will lose eligibility or may suffer financial problems due to scholarships that could be revoked. The effect of homophobia effects both lesbian and straight athletes.

Conclusion

We are at a time where intercollegiate athletes everywhere are struggling with their sexual orientation. In higher education we are encouraging these athletes to come out and embrace who they're. The time has come where athletics must do the same. Intercollegiate athletics must end their discrimination towards lesbian athletes. It is the responsibility of each institution to ensure that homosexual student-athletes enjoy the same intercollegiate athletic experience, free from discrimination that heterosexual student-athletes enjoy.

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Exploring the intersections of mental health and lesbian/gay college students

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The increase of mental health issues on campus has become a nationwide conversation. Significant research (King, Semlyen, See Tai, Killaspy, Osborn, Popelyuk, & Nazareth, 2008; King, McKeown, Warner, Ramsay, Johnson, Cort, Wright, Blizard, & Davidson, 2003; McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, Xuan, & Conron, 2012; Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011) has shown that lesbians and gays (LG) are at a higher risk for mental health issues, but how does this play out while they are in college? This white paper will explore the link between mental health and LG college students.

This study sought to gather qualitative information about the experiences of LG college students in relation to mental health and campus resources. Stone University, a private university in a metropolitan area in the southwest that is largely residential, was the research site. Three research questions were addressed. First, what are additional stressors LG college students face while attending university? Second, what are common attitudes, beliefs, or stigmas of mental health held by LG people? Finally, what can campus mental health services do to provide a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for LG students?

Participants were undergraduates at Stone University, and participated in one interview. Two were male-identified, and two were female-identified. All identified as gay or lesbian, while two had a diagnosed mental illness. In the data analysis, several themes developed that begin to address the main research questions. First, participants reported particular concerns with “on-campus/off-campus” sexuality. Second, participants reported significant disconnects in many social situations. The third theme that arose from the data was the positive view that participants had towards mental health. Finally, participants reported their openness to seeking help – but only if they felt it needed.

Every participant spoke of their suppression of their sexual orientation when outside of school– an “on-campus” versus “off-campus” dichotomy. One participant, Kyle, explained, “basically recognizing that you’re not the same person that you’re on-campus when you’re off-campus.” Alex was by far the most “out” when outside school. The other participants had starkly different experiences and the effects to many of them have been significant. While Alex is supported and accepted, others are not out to their family and have feared being emotionally cut off or financially disconnected. Sara came from a traditional Jewish family. While her mother and siblings know her orientation, her father does not. As far as the tone with her family nowadays, “we just don’t talk about it...we get along great, we just don’t talk about it.”

Kyle came out as gay to his parents shortly after graduating high school. While he chose to reinvent himself and explore his sexuality at college, the stress and emotional divide between him and his parents have persisted. He mentioned that his coming out was very awkward with his parents. They told him, “we love you, but we’re never going to accept this” and also explained that they were “worried for me spirituality, and the fact I’m making this horrible sin.” Kyle also described an uncomfortable moment during the 2012 Presidential election season where his parents told him, “don’t you dare vote...for Obama. We’re not going to say we’re going to cut you off if you vote for Obama, but we could.” Still entirely financially dependent on his family, including tuition, Kyle has made the decision to lay low.

Tina was not out as a lesbian to anyone in her family. While she was not worried that her parents would turn their back on her, she described her Venezuelan family as embracing the “hush, hush” culture of not discussing it. When describing interactions with her sisters, she has had to stop

herself from making comments about women. “I have to go all hetero. It’s rough – I mean like, I can live with it – I’ve lived with it for a while...Being true to people sometimes is rough.” For Tina, whenever she returns home she has a little voice in the back of her head telling her to “act normal.”

Coming out to peers on-campus happened in different ways for every participant. While none are actively hiding it, they approach coming out in the present in similar ways. With each participant being out on-campus, certain stressors have arisen.

Alex, Kyle and Tina are out to their roommates, but it has been at times an uncomfortable process. Kyle explained that he now feels comfortable talking about his boyfriend and bringing him to hangout in his suite. Sara has had a different experience. Similar to her parents, her roommates – who she describes as conservative Christians - enacted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in which her sexual orientation is pretty much ignored. Much of the discomfort came when Sara decided to place an Ally placard on her door, signifying support for the LGBTQ community. Sara explained that now where she lives is the one place she feels like she cannot truly be herself.

New student orientation was also a source of stress for many. Most participants mentioned a specific point in new student orientation that impacted them. An activity, called “Stand Up, Sit Down” was facilitated in each individual residential college. The activity seeks to broaden the understanding of diversity. Students are asked to stand up when a certain phrase is read that describes them, where they feel comfortable. In these particular situations, the “I am part of the LGBTQ community” is read. During their orientations, Sara and Kyle both shared that they stood up. While they were visibly nervous to do so, they were happy to see others standing up as well. During his orientation, Alex mentioned that he did not feel comfortable at the time standing up, but started standing up when he returned the following year as an upper class orientation advisor.

Parties were another source of stress for the participants. The university oversees registration of large public events where alcohol is present. Sara described a situation in which she was approached by several intoxicated upperclassmen that pestered her about her orientation. “Three drunk guys asked me, ‘oh, you’re bisexual? Like you have a boyfriend but you stood up for the gay question – that’s hot. “This incident occurred previous to Sara identifying as a lesbian, and caused her to be very offended. Kyle described a more intimidating experience while dancing at a party. “I was dancing with a guy, and there was a couple of very large football players that came over and, like, tapped me on the shoulder and motioned for me to stop dancing.” Both Sara and Kyle mentioned that they felt physically intimidated in these situations and did nothing to confront the individuals. The third theme that came from the data concerned the participants’ beliefs and opinions towards mental health. Each person expressed positive views towards mental health, and understood the importance of taking care of themselves. Alex, who is diagnosed with anxiety, spoke to his relationship with his mother. While he does not remember learning much about mental health in his early years, he had a bonding moment when his mother revealed her struggle with depression during his freshmen year at Stone. Kyle spoke to his experiences with his older brother, as well as a peer at Stone who struggled with mental illness their first year in college. Both experiences, Kyle explained, showed him how serious situations can become, and the importance of being healthy.

Sara spoke to her experiences with both her mother and brother, who have struggled with mental illness. It was not until her mother sat her down to discuss how she was feeling that her family came to the determination that she may be depressed. Tina, who is diagnosed with anxiety and depression and has sought treatment for several years, spoke to her family history. Though she emphasized a “hush, hush” mentality regarding sexual orientation in her culture, the same seemed to go for mental health growing up. With time, she has seen her family embrace mental health, and this has given her the strength to seek help for herself. The participants also expressed similar sentiments to how they felt their peers at Stone University viewed mental health. While they all felt there was

not an overwhelming stigma, they felt the student body was “apathetic”. Sara felt that students know that mental health is important, but may be more reticent to try to solve problems themselves.

The fourth and final theme that came across to the researcher was the willingness and openness to seek help. At the time of the interview, each student had engaged the wellbeing services at Stone University in different ways. From the physical counseling services, to administrative assistance and speaking with staff in their individual residential colleges, the students were well aware of the ways they could reach out and ask for help. Each student expressed satisfaction after consulting with university wellbeing staff, and expressed confidence in peers seeking out resources. These themes challenge campus administrators to consider the multi-faceted lives that gays and lesbians lead. A better understanding of the stressors they face and their beliefs around mental health will hopefully inform practice.

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The lived experiences of gay and lesbian college athletes: A research proposal

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Statement of the Problem

Given the dearth of research, it is important to acknowledge the history of lesbian and gay (LG) student athletes in higher education and include in this study information on the development of the NCAA. However, research has not produced germinal findings related to the subject. As noted in The NCAA News, “athletics has been the last bastion of homophobia. It’s one of the few places left where homophobia is tolerated...The reality is that, for many of our gay, lesbian, and bisexual athletes, it’s not safe in intercollegiate athletics” (Hawes, 2001, p. 14).

Purpose

The purpose of the proposed study is to explore the experiences of LG college student athletes. Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphew (2001) looked to understand why homophobic and heterosexist attitudes exist and sought to understand how to change perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in college athletics. By examining the various identity development theories used to shape this research, college administrators may gain a better understanding of how LG college students navigate their sexualities. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn (2010) outlined some of the various identity development models that will be examined, including theories of gender and gender identity development; Cass’s Homosexual identity (1979; 1984); and three types of coming out process models (Evans & Broido, 1999). These models are based on self-awareness, disclosure, and a combination of both (Evans & Broido, 1999).

Research Question

This study focuses on exploring the experiences of LG college student athletes on various college campuses. The primary research question to be explored is: What are the experiences of LG college student athletes on college campuses.

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into several sections. These sections includes: Historical background, identity development, development of gay identities, perception of athletes, sources of support and counseling, and concluding with polices. Within the Historical background section, the gay rights movement is introduced, providing information on how gay rights became an issue in American society, The next section, identity development, outlines various identity theories that demonstrate the growing stages an individual may encounter, especially college students. The literature will be focused on exploring the perception of what an “athlete: is in the eyes of society, and perceptions of LG students is explored; and then a discussion on LG athletes, their feelings, with demonstration of how a gay athlete copies on the team and in life.

Historical Background

Gay rights movement. Beemyn’s (2003) work chronicles the Stonewall incident of 1969, the incident that started the gay rights movement and lead to a historical evolution of gay rights. This publication also discusses the Student Homophile League, the first gay student organization, and explores the name change from homophile to gay liberation.

Overview of athletics. The purpose of Roper and Halloran's (2007) study was to explore attitudes toward LG among 371 heterosexual male and female collegiate student-athletes in the USA. Attitudes were assessed in relationship to the student-athletes' gender, sport, and contact. Findings concluded male student-athletes were significantly more negative in their attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than females.

Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphew (2001) explored how much difference is too much difference? The article outlines the lack of acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual athletes at five NCAA Division 1 college campuses. The article is also a guide that discusses the attitudes amongst coaches, administrators, and other athletes as it relates to the gay, lesbian, and bisexual student. The article also explores accepting attitudes of female athletes and the stigma for male gay athletes.

Identity development. Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keilig (2004) assessed the campus climate for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students using a multiple perspectives approach. The authors researched campus climate for LGBT students. Eighty students completed surveys with questions relating to residence life, treatment from faculty and staff, and campus environment in general. Using random sampling the authors discovered that differences exist within the LGBT population and gave suggestions for student affairs practitioner to assist in a more friendly and engaging environment for gay students.

Methodology

This section will discuss the methodological approach that will be used to explore the experiences of LG college athletes. I will begin with a description of the qualitative research approach, followed by a discussion about case study and narrative analysis as the specific tradition selected for this research. Specifically, how this marginalized group makes sense of their experiences, by giving LG college student athletes a voice, who have attended any college or university (Merriam, 2009). The primary research question that will influence this study is what are the experiences of LG college student athletes?

Rationale for Design

The overall purpose of conducting qualitative research is, "to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p.23). Qualitative research is used when the researcher has a topic that needs to be explored in more detail; wants the writing to be more personal and emphasizes the role of the researcher as an active listener (Creswell, 2007). In conducting qualitative research, the stories from participants provide the data. The researcher uses these stories to shape the interpretation of the experiences, and to let the voices of the participants be heard (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, case study provides an in-depth understanding of a single, group, or bounded systems being researched (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2011). In other words, "case study research assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case(s) being studied are integral to understanding the case(s)" (Yin, 2011, p. 4). Case study addresses a descriptive or explanatory research question (Yin, 2011).

Participant Selection

The selection of athletes will be chosen through purposeful, or network sampling. Network sampling will be used to invite participants. This is a strategy where participants are asked to refer others that they know who share similar experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). While numbers are crucial for quantitative research, sample sizes for qualitative research need to reach levels of saturation in order to reach understanding of the case. Additionally, before conducting the interviews, Creswell (2007) notes that written permission should be obtained from the participants

before beginning the research. Prior to the initial meeting, each participant will be given an informed consent form.

Data Collection

The primary source of data collection will be through in-depth semi-structured interviews. While collecting information, I will use ten interview protocol for participants to answer.

Significance of the Study

This research is important because participants, faculty, coaches, administrators, and other students might understand the meaning of the events, incidents, and occurrences LG student athletes endure during their college years. Furthermore, this research extends the body of knowledge relating to LG students' experiences on college campuses and hopefully will inform institutional policy, especially how it relates to persistence and graduation. As enrollments of LG student populations continue to increase across college campuses, authors agree that student affairs practitioners need to give more attention to LG issues and create a more LG friendly environment (Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Sandeen, 2003; Sanlo & Schoenberg, 2002; Yoakam, 2006). Although Sandeen (2003) does not specifically discuss working with LG populations, he eludes to the significant influence that student affair administrators have over students. In his research, Sandeen examines the critical impact relationship building has with students. In order for students to persist in their studies, have good experiences and persist towards graduation, students need to make connections with other students, as well as faculty, or individuals that they can relate to on campuses (Roper & Halloran, 2007). Sandeen (2003) explains how student affairs administrators need to be careful when labeling students and the impact labels can have on students. This lesson can be shared across all populations to include how labels impact LG students when in an unwelcoming environment.

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