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# Homophonbia : a socio-cultural barrier to U.S female athletes in Olympic tryouts

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HOMOPHOBIA: A SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIER TO U.S. FEMALE ATHLETES IN  
OLYMPIC TRYOUTS.

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Natalie L. Wells

May, 2001

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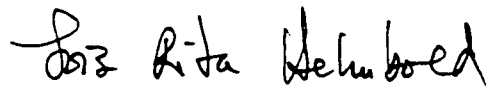
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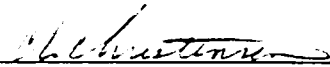
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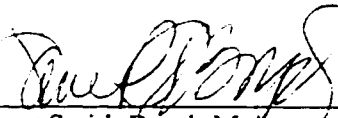
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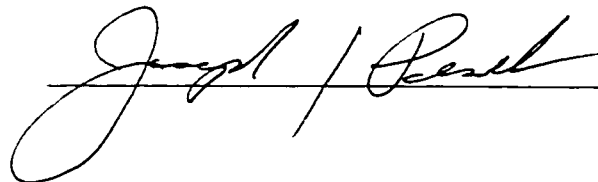
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## **Abstract**

There is little research on homophobia and female Olympic class athletes, yet socialization into gender roles and homophobia has a profound impact on women's participation in sport.

I surveyed female participants in the 1992 or 1996 Olympic trials. Working with the National Governing Boards of the summer Olympic sports, I received 53 usable responses from athletes. Athletes completed the Hudson & Ricketts (1980) Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals and an open-ended questionnaire.

There was a direct correlation between a heterosexual's level of homophobia and the likelihood that her athletic participation would be limited to sports deemed feminine. There was a direct correlation between an athlete's choice of sport and both her level of homophobia and the likelihood that she would either know, or be, an out lesbian athlete in her sport. Homophobia enforced by community socialization also appears to discourage some women of color from participating at the Olympic level.



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Dedicated to

Cathy Calvert-Hjelt

and

Tekla Balukas

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## **Homophobia: A socio-cultural barrier to U.S. female athletes in Olympic tryouts.**

### **Introduction**

In the United States, societal attitudes toward women and sport have a long and negative history. Only in the past two decades have researchers engaged in significant exploration of social-cultural perspectives on women's participation in sports. Until recently, women's role in sport has not been recorded with much accuracy, sometimes merely because female athletes were not taken seriously, and sometimes with what appears to be actively malicious intent. For example, the press reports of the Women's 800-meter race in the 1928 Olympics, which painted it as a debacle, the track strewn afterward with collapsed female bodies, were used to justify the event's abolition, in spite of the fact that credible eyewitnesses completely contradicted the claims (Wilson, 1996). The feminist movement has influenced and updated the history of women in sport (Cahn, 1994; Duquin, 1982; Howell, 1982).

Athleticism, competition, and the display of physical competence have been considered the exclusive domain of males in our culture, as in most cultures (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). Society has imprinted upon our collective psyche the notion that sport is for boys and men. Under this ideology, men are strong, powerful and competitive. Women, in turn, are defined partially by the absence of these qualities. Sport is a model of how our society perceives itself, especially concerning the acquisition and exercise of power and the resultant male (dominant) and female (subordinate) roles. Sport helps to

control women. The dominant culture relies on the axiom that women are biologically inferior to men, as measured by arbitrary and misleading “biological” standards. Sport as an institution both proves and perpetuates this dichotomy (Crawford & Unger, 2000; Griffin, 1998). Men fear women’s participation in sport and the power and freedom that this participation creates for women (Bryson, 1987). The patriarchal system fears losing its control and power over women (Cahn, 1994; Duquin, 1982; Nelson, 1994).

Researchers have shown that exercise helps develop self-image, self-esteem, confidence, and creativity, all of which are considered indicators of self-awareness and self-determination. Exercise also brings a number of physical health benefits. People who exercise regularly exhibit less depression, anxiety, tension, fatigue, and have greater clarity and vigor than those who do not get regular exercise (Balaza, 1975). Being physically active releases natural endorphins, which are good for both body and mind. Exercise reduces stress levels, which helps to clear thinking, and tones the body, which helps to lower fatigue. With all this in its favor, athletics presumably should be seen as an unmitigated good for all people.

Sport is legitimized and deemed socially beneficial by many social institutions, including family, school, and government (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). Sport produces perseverance, competitiveness, drive, a sense of fair play, the ability to work with people and the ability to win or lose graciously (Gondola, 1988). Balaza (1975) found that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem, achievement, and participating in sports. For which athletes, however, is sport socially beneficial?

In North America, the male-dominated world of sport is one of the last sanctuaries of masculine superiority still remaining (Cahn, 1994; Cobhan, 1982; Duquin, 1982; Griffin, 1984, 1987; Gondola, 1988). According to Tokarz (1986), society relegates sports to the domain of men and considers women who participate to be social anomalies. Ludwig (1996) found that elite female athletes experienced conflict between their roles as athletes and as women. Indeed, she lists this conflict as one of the primary issues that female athletes discuss with sports psychologists provided by the U.S. Olympic Team.

When women demonstrate excellence in any particular sport, they increase the spotlight on women's sports overall. Women have progressed from participating solely in the lady-like and graceful sports such as the early 1900s' diving, golf, gymnastics, and figure skating, to power sports, such as swimming, downhill skiing, track and basketball (Ryan, 1975). Women have changed perceptions about the types of sports in which they can participate and excel (Cahn, 1994). The inclusion in the 2000 Summer Games of women's pole vault, water polo, and, as an exhibition sport, freestyle wrestling, are heartening evidence of this ongoing change. Women like Mildred (Babe) Didrikson Zaharias, Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, Peggy Fleming, Billie Jean King, and Robin Smith were pioneers who expanded the limits for women's sports and for the participation of women in sports (Jacobs, 1964; Ryan, 1975). More recent heroes have broken different barriers within women's sports. Joan Benoit successfully challenged both the biological and the social restrictions of long distance running on the female body. Jenny Thompson has won the greatest number of Olympic medals of any athlete, female or male. Martina Navratilova is considered one of history's greatest female athletes and openly

identifies as a lesbian. All of these women have had to overcome obstacles resulting from social-cultural myths and restrictions.

In the late 1800s, public opinion restricted women to leisurely and genteel sports such as archery, golf, and croquet. Scientific wisdom of the era claimed that intense athletic endeavors were beyond women's abilities and would cause permanent physical damage to the more delicate female body. Society labeled women as muscle molls and mannish when they expanded into team sports like basketball and softball in the 1920s. Today, female athletes may be expected to provide confirmation of their femininity and their heterosexuality. In an egregious example of the discrediting of women's athletic abilities at the highest levels in sport, elite female athletes can even be required to submit to laboratory verification of their genetic sex (Cahn, 1993).

Athletic opportunities for girls and women have increased dramatically within the past three decades. But it has taken laws to enable this to happen. One of the most notable laws is Title IX, passed in 1972, which gives legal recourse for women to full and equal right to the participation, the facilities, and the resources that the men have in education. The law states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (NOW L.D.E.F, 1993). The law requires equalization of sports opportunity, including facilities, equipment, supplies, game and practice schedules, travel and per diem allowances, coaching, academic tutoring, housing, dining facilities and publicity in institutions receiving federal funds. Title IX gives women legal access to full and equal rights to the

participation, the facilities, and the resources that the men have at federally funded institutions (Cahn, 1994; Griffin, 1998). Title IX forced all public organizations, specifically colleges and universities that receive federal funding, to supply women with similar opportunities to the ones that the men receive. Change has been hard won for women in sport.

Even with new laws, many Americans still cannot separate the idea of athletic superiority from its cultural affiliation with masculinity, masculine sports, and the male body (Cahn, 1994). Strong and sometimes subtle social and institutional influences on the control of women's participation in sport are exerted through peer pressure, family restrictions, and lack of opportunities and facilities. Homophobia is another profoundly effective way that women's participation is controlled (Bennett, Duffy, Kalliam, Martin, Woolley, & Whitaker, 1989; Bennett, Whitaker, Woolley Smith, & Sablove, 1987). Homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality in sport have greatly influenced the way women see themselves and each other, and have had an effect on the participation of all girls and women in sport (Griffin, 1984, 1987, 1992, 1998; Lenskyj, 1987, 1997).

"Homophobia is the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and desire those of the same sex" (Pharr, 1988, p. 1). It includes fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, and aversion that individuals feel for gay people. Herek (1988) defines homophobia as prejudice, both personal and institutional, against lesbians and gay men. Hudson and Ricketts (1980) define a broad multidimensional category for anti-gay responses called homonegativity. Hate and dislike of any group of people are learned phenomena. A person just does not hate without learning that hate, either from experiences or from



others. Homonegativity takes into account all aspects of the socialization of homophobia. Krane defines homonegativism as incorporating “the social context in which negative attitudes toward non-heterosexuals develop and are maintained, and ties discrimination based on sexual orientation with discrimination based on race, sex, and other individual characteristics” (1996, p. 238). Homonegativism can be both internal and external, and is socially constructed and maintained.

I chose to use the term homophobia because it is more familiar to the general population, and thus, to the athletes of my survey population. Homonegativism, although perhaps more precisely accurate, is, unfortunately, a term familiar primarily to academics, and therefore in using it I would have introduced a source of confusion into my research. I used a definition for homophobia combined from those of Pharr (1988) and Herek (1988). For the purposes of this research, homophobia is the fear of lesbians and gay men that is reflected both personally and institutionally.

Pharr (1988) argues that homophobia keeps ten to twenty percent of the U.S. population living in fear for their lives. That fear makes people consider carefully whether or not they can afford not to hide their sexuality, because of the repercussions that they can incur. This fear, then, is both literally and figuratively a fear of losing their lives, either through literal death or more figuratively through the destruction of livelihood, family or career. Institutionalized homophobia appears in the military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, in the government’s refusal to codify protection for the legal rights of homosexuals, and in dominant organized religion’s condemnation of homosexuality.

The fear is so great that the Women's Sports Foundation is concerned that homophobia may keep girls and women away from sports. Lopiano (1996), director of the Women's Sport Foundation, believes that "sport is one of the most important socio-cultural learning environments in which our children participate. We cannot tolerate individuals or the media instilling unwarranted fears in parents and their daughters that result in women choosing not to play sports" (p. 3). Homophobia, then, is intolerable precisely because of the effect that it has on women who want to and do participate in sport.

Both lesbians and straight women suffer the effects of homophobia. Blinde and Taub (1992) found that lesbian athletes disempower themselves internally in response to received external negative stereotyping of lesbians in sport. This process is "counterproductive to the self-actualizing capability of sport participation" (p. 154). Homophobia discredits an athlete's womanhood, because by participating in sport, she is violating gender norms (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Griffin, 1987).

Western society adheres to strong traditional gender roles, and this affects people's attitudes toward homosexuals. Newman (1989) concluded that male and female attitudes toward gender roles correlate strongly with their attitudes toward homosexuals in general and toward lesbians in particular. The more liberal attitudes the respondents had about gender roles, the more liberal attitudes they expressed toward lesbians.

Sport perpetuates gender roles. Harry (1995) found that the effects of sport ideology generate and support sexist ideology, which also perpetuates anti-homosexual attitudes. "Sport ideology and imagery serve to define heterosexual manliness" (Harry,

1995, p.110). The converse is also true, as heterosexual femaleness is delineated through the very limiting socially approved ideology of feminine sport.

By their participation in sport, lesbians affect it in many ways. By their existence and visibility, they are seen as a threat to patriarchy, to male heterosexual hegemony, and to the nuclear family (Lenskyj, 1989). Lenskyj's (1986, 1989) research points out that freedom of sexual expression is one of the real issues behind the hatred of lesbians in sport. The silence and invisibility of closeted lesbians serve homophobic interests by dividing all women in situations where solidarity is essential. The bonding of women is essential in making the participation of women in sport possible and safe. Sport, sexuality, and power are interconnected and those interconnections affect all women (Cahn 1994; Griffin 1984, 1987; Lenskyj, 1989). The old feminist rallying cry, "The personal is political." applies here. Sport is power, and therefore political. It is important that public discussion be open to demystify, to educate, and to understand the issues relating to women in sport. Sport symbolizes and embodies important cultural values: teamwork, cooperation, dedication, competitiveness and perseverance. Some of these values are gender neutral in this culture and some are considered more appropriate for men than for women.

### **The Olympics**

The first record of the ancient Olympic games dates back to 776 BCE. Some scholars suggest that the idea for the Olympics was borrowed from the women's Herean Games, a foot race for young girls and single women in celebration of the Goddess Hera.

Both the Herean Games and the Olympics were held for religious purposes (Blue, 1987). In the ancient Olympic Games, no women were allowed to participate. Though virgins could observe, married women were forbidden to do so, and if caught, were put to death. (Leder, 1996). When Baron Pierre de Coubertin instituted the modern Olympics in 1896, participation was once again a male prerogative. He believed that the only appropriate role for women was that of spectator and cheering section, providing female applause for male athletic prowess. Only in 1900 were female athletes first allowed to compete, and then only in golf and tennis, sports deemed appropriate to their feminine limitations (Wilson, 1996).

Today there are women participating in a much wider variety of Olympic events than the originators of the modern games envisioned. Even with the advances, however, research shows that little progress has been made toward closing the numbers gap between female and male participants. The ratios did not change much through the Summer 1992, Winter 1994, and Summer 1996 Games. The athletes, on average, are 35 % women and 65 % men (Eastman & Billings, 1999). The Summer Games in Atlanta, 1996, were touted as the Year of Women in Sport by the media. However, whether the number of events open to men and to women, or the number of competitors of each gender are compared, women have not even achieved parity, let alone the numerical superiority that the slogan implies (Eastman & Billings, 1999).

The U.S. Olympic qualifying events are a time when the nation's best athletes come together to compete for spots on the U.S. Team and for a chance to be recognized as the best in the world. However, female and male athletes do not meet for tryouts on a level

playing field. To begin with, there are only one third as many events offered to females as offered to males (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Williams, Lawrence, & Rowe, 1985). Even in the events offered to both males and females, the males still outnumber the female participants. Overall, female athletes preparing for the Olympic Trials process are fighting to divide up a skinnier piece of the pie than that allocated to male athletes. They are attempting to qualify for a smaller total number of potential team places than are men. For example, in the 1996 Summer Games, there were 3,800 women and 7,200 men competing, or approximately twice as many male athletes as female athletes (Eastman & Billings, 1999).

The process for an elite athlete to compete at the Olympics starts with the athlete joining a local or state team, club, or organization that is affiliated with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), which represents the United States in the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Through the USOC, the National Governing Boards (NGBs) of each IOC-recognized Olympic sport learn what the rules and requirements will be for their sport in the upcoming summer or winter games. Each NGB is responsible for organizing an Olympic Trials, or try-outs, the process to select the athletes who will represent the United States as members of the U.S. Olympic Team.

The National Archery Association's (NAA) Olympic Trials is an example of this process. This is one of the Olympic Trials processes that is the least unfair to female athletes. It results in two U.S. Olympic Archery Teams, three men and three women, each with an alternate. Since there are over a hundred women qualified to compete at or near this level, and well over two hundred men, a great deal of winnowing must occur to

narrow the field down to four. The NAA invites archers to compete in the Olympic Trials process only after they meet certain objective qualification criteria. The regional Olympic Trials, the Semi-Finals, and the Finals progressively reduce the size of the field by eliminating the athletes with the lowest scores. In the last phase of competition, there are only eight finalists of each sex. Then, the two sets of finalists shoot a prescribed number of rounds. The cumulative scores for these rounds for each archer are ranked. First through third place finishers win the spots on the team, and the fourth place finisher is the alternate.

### **Homophobia at the Olympic class level**

In this research, I investigate homophobia and how U.S. female athletes perceive and overcome it in order to participate in an U.S. Olympic Trials. This study examines how homophobia influences the internal and external prejudices of female athletes and their participation in sport. It will increase the understanding of the social-cultural barrier of homophobia for U.S. Olympic class female athletes.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

There is recent research concerning sex-role development and sport, homophobia, and women in sport, but none specifically addressing my research topic, homophobia and women at the Olympic class level. The socialization of gender roles and homophobia in society has a profound impact on women's participation in sport. Out lesbians participating in sport challenge the homophobic status quo.

Nelson's (1994) research on sexism and the American culture of sports shows how the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity has affected sports in American society. Nelson asserts that as more women participate in sport, that, "All of us collectively, are a threat--not to men exactly, but to male privilege and to masculinity as defined through manly sports" (1994, p. 30).

According to Nelson, sport, as an institution, is used to train boys to become traditionally masculine men. Because the role of athlete epitomizes masculinity, women in sport are perceived as trespassers and are attacked, verbally and physically. Nelson gives example after example of how women participating in sports have been stigmatized, their achievements minimized, and their continued existence challenged. She also cites the transformative experience that playing sports, especially team sports, can be for female athletes, citing the bonding experience and the importance for women of living in their own bodies and becoming physically powerful. This is a sufficiently transgressive act that, in societal eyes, it justifies the use of any artillery that can be brought to bear against it. Nelson marshals anecdotal evidence from mass media, including newspaper and magazine

articles and television interviews, as well as from personal interviews with college athletes and coaches of her own to demonstrate the magnitude and pervasiveness of sexism in sport. Her work implies, though quite never bluntly states, that men encourage homophobia in women and about women out of their own homophobia around male homosexuality.

Cahn (1994), on the other hand, analyzes both homophobia and lesbianism more directly. Cahn asserts that though women throughout the twentieth-century made inroads, sport remains a “key cultural location for male dominance, a site where traditional values are upheld and transformed” (p. 278). She argues that although the public disdained the “contemptible stereotype of the ‘mannish lesbian athlete’” (p. 185), lesbian athletes managed to bond through sports, and lesbian spectators sought them out, creating a lesbian sports subculture of “pride, pleasure, companionship and dignity” (p. 206). Cahn cites the All-American Girls Baseball League of the 1940’s and early 1950’s as well as the Ladies Professional Golf Association as examples of organizations within which lesbian athletes were offered a chance to play, as long as they were willing to conform to policies that denied their existence and presented them as normal, i.e., heterosexual, feminine, and appealing. Cahn’s work demonstrates the history of homophobia in American women’s sport. Her work on homophobia is historical in nature, which means that her work is an effective springboard for this research.

Griffin has been researching homophobia in women’s sports for more than two decades. She has functioned as a participant-observer in the world of women’s sports, as a college educator, as a coach of sports teams at the high school and college level, and as



an athlete in a variety of disciplines at levels up to and including a place on a national field hockey team and a medal in the triathlon at a Gay Games. This has provided her with an ideal vantage point for observing, conducting interviews, and analyzing homophobia in women's sports. Griffin explores the discrimination against and stigmatization of lesbians in sport and the interconnected nature of homophobia and sexism in women's sport (1992). She asserts that homophobia in sport has prevented girls and women from partaking fully of the benefits which sport participation offers (1998). Griffin claims that socialization of homophobia and the stigmatization of lesbianism strongly shape women's sports participation, impelling women to avoid athletics altogether or to self-select sports in which participation does not conflict with self-image. Griffin argues for reevaluating our cultural prejudices and beliefs about lesbianism, which would result in a better sporting experience for all, one "free of intimidation, fear, shame, and betrayal" (1992, p. 263). Griffin's body of work brings homophobia clearly into the light of analysis, validating it as a serious subject for study.

Blinde and Taub's (1992) research identifies homophobia in women's sports as a source of disempowerment for female athletes, both through silence surrounding lesbianism and the athlete's own internalization of societal stereotypes of lesbians and of women in sport. Their analysis was based upon a series of extensive tape-recorded interviews that they conducted with a selection of female athletes attending three colleges on the East Coast.

Krane (1996) consolidates the existing empirical literature about lesbians and applies it to sport to formulate a "conceptual framework for understanding and studying

the experiences of lesbians in sport” (p. 238). She uses homonegativism, a term which implies the inclusion of “the social context in which negative attitudes toward non-heterosexuals develop and are maintained, and ties discrimination based on sexual orientation with discrimination based on race, sex, and other individual characteristics” (p. 238), to help analyze the creation and perpetuation of homophobia in sport. The central premise of her model is that lesbian athletes face a “double dose of homophobia” (1997, p. 144): “While all female athletes are stigmatized by stereotypes, athletes who, in fact, are lesbians also must contend with societal perceptions about lesbians” (p. 143). She interviewed a purposive sample of self-identified lesbians who had completed a competitive career in collegiate athletics no more than five years prior to the date of the study. She conducted semi-structured interviews and found that given the opportunity to express their views and experiences in a safe environment, the athletes were extremely forthcoming, and their responses overwhelmingly validated her hypothesized framework.

Vealey (1997) examines the tacit conspiracy engaged in by sport psychologists to avoid mentioning or dealing with homophobia. She identifies the harmful intellectual and social consequences of this silence, including the negative impact it has on the psychological development and behavior of girls and women in sport. Vealey does this by using examples of social editorializing and commentary presented in mass media reporting on women’s sports. Her work is in the realm of theory, creating an epistemological model for studying sexual orientation in sport psychology, thus laying groundwork for future methodological studies. She argues for a social constructionist analysis to replace the traditional functionalist understanding, that is, that rather than attempting to downplay the

differences and convince the world that lesbianism in sport and elsewhere is a non-issue, we should instead be recognizing the power inherent in claiming our own truths and validating the identities of all athletes.

As an athlete competing at the Olympic trials level, I had certain perceptions based on my direct observations and experiences. I had come to assume that many or most athletes acquiesce to the silence that homophobia requires of them so that they can participate in sport, even if it means that they must remain within the narrow confines of poorly fitting stereotyped gender roles. The existing research validated those perceptions on a theoretical level, giving me a framework for conceptualization. I was curious if my perceptions and experiences as an athlete in elite competition were anomalous or if they would be confirmed by my peers. Scholarly literature has legitimized the study of lesbians in sport as an appropriate field of inquiry, and it has helped me to clarify the parameters of my study and focus my explorations.

Most of the research on women in sport, lesbians in sport, and homophobia in women's sport has been done at the high school and college level, with the occasional Olympic or professional athlete or coach interviewed. There is no existing research on perceptions of homophobia and lesbians at the Olympic class level. My research is an attempt to analyze how elite female athletes at the Olympic class level deal with and are affected by homophobia.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methods and Sample**

How to track down the elusive elite Olympic class athlete,  
and then how to get her to talk.

#### **Subjects**

I located the female athletes for this study with assistance from the National Governing Boards (NGBs) of the sports that are qualified to participate in the Summer Olympics. I sought female athletes between the ages of 18 and 60 who had participated in U.S. Olympic Trials for the 1992 or 1996 summer games. I contacted all twenty-three National Governing Boards of the sports in which women participated in those summer games in order to secure their help in contacting their athletes who participated in the tryouts for the Olympic Team. I requested the assistance of the NGBs in distributing a survey to athletes who would meet my criteria. My goal for a sample was a minimum of fifty athletes.

My initial goal was to compare four sports from the Summer Olympic Games--two team sports and two individual sports--to see if there were any differences in the perception of homophobia between the participants in an individual sport versus those in a team sport. Since sizable numbers of only one team, swimming, responded to the inquiry, I was unable to accomplish this comparative research, but it shows promise for future study.

On the first inquiry, eight NGBs responded positively: USA Basketball, USA Table Tennis, US Equestrian Team, US Team Handball Federation, United States Diving, Inc., US Synchronized Swimming, Inc., US Swimming, Inc., and the National Archery Association.<sup>1</sup> After a second letter to those NGBs which did not respond, two more NGBs (US Fencing Association and US Field Hockey Association), and one individual (from USA Volleyball) responded. Later, the US Canoe and Kayak Team and the US Badminton Association also responded.

Of the twenty-three NGBs contacted, only thirteen responded. I can only speculate about why the other ten did not. Furthermore, the cause of the seemingly low rate of return on the three hundred twenty-seven surveys sent out is also a matter for speculation. The obvious possibility is the highly charged subject matter, homophobia.

In 1997 and 1998, while I was a resident athlete-in-training at the ARCO U.S. Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California, I surveyed the U.S. female rowers and race-walkers who were in residence, as their respective NGBs had not responded. I distributed the survey packets via an intermediary, thereby avoiding any direct contact with the surveyed athletes. Thus, if the athletes chose to participate, they were still anonymous. I thereby avoided any possibility of contaminating the data or prejudicing the participants' responses.

The packets contained a letter of introduction, a psychological index, and a questionnaire. I sought general demographic information, qualitative information and quantitative information about the subjects' attitudes and perceptions. The survey packet dealt with the athletes' experience with and perceptions of social and cultural barriers to

women's participation at the Olympic Trials level. Specifically, participants were queried on how they felt about being athletes, how they saw themselves, how they felt that they were perceived by society, how they felt about lesbians in sport, and on their experiences with homophobia (See Appendix for example of the packet).

A total of three hundred and twenty-seven survey packets were distributed to fourteen NGBs, their representatives, or individuals.<sup>2</sup> Fifty-three usable packets, an 18% return rate, were completed and returned, meeting my minimum requirement.

In order to insure the athletes' anonymity and to keep athletes' names and addresses private and confidential, the NGBs agreed to forward to the athletes sealed survey packets that I sent to them. All data collected was confidential (with the exception of a signature on the consent form), to protect the identities of the subject-participants. I immediately separated all data received from the return envelopes. I awarded no compensation to subjects, and anticipated no risks in participating in this research.

I am very pleased that I received fifty-three usable packets. The largest numbers of respondents were from swimming (23) and field hockey (12). In comparison with the number of packets sent out, field hockey had the greater percentage of returned surveys, 38%. Swimming had an 18% return rate. (For a breakdown of the returns by sport, see Table I.) I found the lack of response from sports like women's basketball, soccer, track and field, and volleyball disappointing. I am not sure whether this lack of response is due to the NGBs or the athletes. Four NGBs of team sports (basketball, table tennis, team handball, and badminton) agreed to participate, but no one returned packets. The NGBs could be acting overprotectively *in loco parentis* in sheltering their female athletes. I

wonder if some NGBs which had been comfortable disseminating a theoretical questionnaire about unspecified social and cultural barriers were less comfortable when they saw the actual text and realized exactly which social and cultural barriers I was asking about. An NGB could want to protect the image of its sport by silencing athletes who might talk about homophobia, lesbian baiting, or attacks, or, alternately, it could be trying to protect the image of its sport by denying the existence of lesbian athletes within its ranks. It is unclear to me whether the lack of willingness to respond was on the part of the NGB or of the athletes.

I posit a number of reasons for the relatively low return rate, including undeliverable mail, fear, and apathy. Survey packets were sent to the NGBs during 1997 and 1998, and since some of the athletes in question were competitors from the 1992 Olympic Trials, the NGBs may not have had up-to-date addresses. While only 19 packets were returned to me as undeliverable by the US Postal Service, others may have been improperly delivered and not been returned. Apathy is an ongoing variable and one that all researchers face. Homophobia could easily have made potential subjects unwilling to respond. Since the consequences of being labeled a lesbian can be so terribly high, some athletes might not have been willing to respond at all, perhaps out of a fear that their responses might somehow not be as confidential and anonymous as promised (Krane, 1997).

## Surveys

My goal in this research was to get not only quantitative but qualitative responses from the athletes. I used a previously published psychological index, the Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals-IAH (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), and I also created an open-ended questionnaire in a women's studies methodology class to elicit qualitative responses. The demographic information enabled me to compare how lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual athletes differ in their perceptions of and attitudes toward homosexuals. The qualitative data reveal subject-participants' perceptions of how homophobia has helped or hindered their ascent to the Olympic level in sport.

### **The IAH**

The Hudson, Ricketts' Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals-IAH (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), was used, with the permission of the authors, to find the athletes' levels of homophobia. This index is a twenty-five question Lickert-type scale with five degrees (1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-neither agree nor disagree, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree).<sup>3</sup> The closer a subject's mean score is to one, the less homophobic attitudes the person has toward lesbians/gay; the closer to one hundred, the more homophobic attitudes. The athletes can fall into one of four subgroups created by Hudson and Ricketts: 1-24, least homophobic; 25-49, shows some homophobic attitudes; 50-74, has more homophobic attitudes; and 75-100, most homophobic.

The purpose of using the IAH was to compare athletes at this level of competition with the societal average. Most research focusing on feelings about homosexuals in general and lesbians specifically has been on college students. This means that I did not



have access to a control group that was actually representative of society as a whole. However, since the majority of my respondents were college students or at least college age, the comparison is valid. The results also enabled me to compare and contrast the sports with the largest number of participants in this study, specifically field hockey (12 respondents) and swimming (23 respondents). The IAH further allowed me to separate and contrast attitudes and biases that different athletic groups exhibit.

### **The Questionnaire**

The purpose of the questionnaire<sup>4</sup> was to survey feelings and perceptions about participating in sport, barriers to being in sport, attitudes on homophobia and lesbians in sport, and to survey how those athletes who identified as lesbian felt about homophobia in sport (See Appendix). Each section was designed to get the subject to think about her experiences in sport and how each of the areas has or has not affected her participation in sport. I wanted to know if these female athletes perceived homophobia as a threat or not. I wanted to see how many respondents identified as lesbians. I hoped that the lesbians in sport would be willing to share their experiences specifically including those experiences with any type of homophobia that they might have encountered. I was interested in discovering how lesbian athletes at this level of competition have dealt with homophobia as a barrier to their success.

### **Demographics of Sample**

The largest number of the fifty-three respondents are young (18-24 year old, 47.2%), educated (BA/BS, 50.9%), white (83.0%), single (62.3%) and self-identified heterosexual (77.4%). For most women, college, which offers the greatest number of

opportunities for sports participation and athletic competition, falls during the years of eighteen to twenty-four.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, in most sports, peak physical performance can be expected during these years. Finally, during this time period, most athletes have fewer outside responsibilities, such as families and careers, demanding attention and time away from practice and performance.

Lesbians made up 15.1% of my respondents, 7.5% identified as bisexuals, and the majority of the respondents, 77.4%, identified themselves as heterosexual. The ethnic background of the athletes who responded varied somewhat. The one respondent identifying as Native American and the one respondent identifying as African-American each made up 1.9% of the survey population. Three Mexican-Americans responded, for a total of 5.7%, and four Asian-Americans responded, for 7.5% of my sample. The vast majority of the athletes responding, 83%, identified as Euro-American, or white.

Almost two-thirds (60.4%) of the women who responded described themselves as single. Of those who are partnered, 17% are married and 18.9% are cohabiting, including those describing themselves as being in lesbian relationships. Another 3.7%, two lesbians, identified themselves as "other". The single status of the majority of the respondents is unsurprising. To begin with, the time and energy required to achieve and maintain performance at the Olympic trials level leaves little left over for other pursuits. Furthermore, the largest number of respondents fell in the 18-24 year old group, many of whom would not yet be married, coupled, or building a family.

By sport, 43% were swimmers; 23%, field hockey players; 9%, fencers; 7%, canoe-kayakers; 6%, divers; 6%, synchronized swimmers; and 2% each were in volleyball, rowing and race-walking.

A 15.1% response rate from lesbian athletes could be considered good seeing that the percentage of gay/lesbians in the general population is estimated at about 10% (Rathus, Nevid & Fichner-Rathus, 2000). Considering fear of lesbians in sport and the taboo about homosexuality and sport, I believe that many lesbians in sport remain silent due to the possible repercussions of coming out.

Since homosexuality has traditionally been a taboo subject in our society, many lesbians are reluctant to divulge their orientation. Biemesderfer (1998) describes how many lesbian collegiate basketball players learn to avoid talking about their sexuality and even to publicly uphold the unwritten compulsory heterosexuality clause that their schools have adopted. Players' and coaches' complicity is sealed because the image of heterosexuality is one that sells to the media, to the public, and to the sources of sponsorships for both schools and players. Presumably, this avoidance of even the taint of lesbianism is powerful enough, and rewarded well enough, to pervade the attitudes in other sports as well.

Eighty-three percent of the athletes surveyed self-identified as Europe-American (white). Since the largest percentage of athletic opportunities for women are available to college students, this means that white women, who make up the majority of female college students, have more options and more chances to compete. Interestingly, those sports that have a higher percentage of women of color participating, such as basketball

and the track and field sports, were not represented among the respondents. The athletes who responded are in sports that are expensive, at least in their history, and strongly associated with affluent white society. Consequently it is not surprising that there are so few women of color in this sample. Furthermore, cultural taboos against homosexuality may have made athletes of color less likely to respond to this particular survey, as I will explore in Chapter Seven.

In this society fear of rocking the boat prevails, especially in sport. Those athletes who did participate felt that they needed to respond so that they could give voice to their experiences. In reporting the findings in this research, I have intentionally quoted the same athletes in a number of chapters because socio-cultural barriers intersect one another. The quotes from these athletes reflect this intersection.

Because a majority of the athletes who answered were white, the implication is that white athletes feel less anxiety over the subject and fear the repercussions of talking about it less. I believe that the more we research, gain the trust of athletes, and let their voices be heard, the diversity in the samples will increase.

### **Role as Researcher**

Since beginning my study of homophobia I have become more aware of the fear surrounding this socio-cultural barrier. I became aware of not only my own fear surrounding this research, but also the fear of others. While doing this research, I had to deal with my own internalized homophobia. I was especially affected by it while living at the U.S Olympic Training Center as an athlete.

I was afraid that I might lose my position at the Center as an athlete because I was researching this subject. One of the conditions of being a resident athlete at the Training Center is that you must sign a contract which incorporates a code of conduct. In it, an athlete promises to refrain from any inappropriate behavior which could reflect poorly upon, or be damaging to, the NGB or the USOC. Although I certainly considered my research to be perfectly appropriate for an athlete, I was not certain that everyone who might be in a position to interpret and enforce the code of conduct would agree. So, most of my tenure at the Center, I kept my silence.

I know that not disclosing my research topic, saying that I was studying socio-cultural barriers in the broad sense, distanced me from some of the athletes on site, especially athletes who were gay and lesbian. I had to deal with the fact that I was doing research on a taboo subject matter in an environment that enforces silence. Sports and homophobia have always had a negative and unspoken relationship. I learned this firsthand as an Olympic class athlete and as a researcher studying the effects of homophobia at the Olympic trials level.

### Chapter 3

I am a big strong powerful female, and yet I am still a woman.

Many Americans cannot separate the idea of athletic superiority from its cultural affiliation with masculinity (Cahn, 1994). Myths and stereotypes have limited female participation in athletics, leading many women to avoid playing sports altogether or to abandon sport when they were faced with criticism. Athletic women commonly risk being labeled lesbians. This is especially true for those who participate in sports not considered appropriate for women. Whether or not they are actually homosexuals has little bearing on the application of the label. So, when heterosexual women internalize homophobia, they are more likely to limit their athletic participation to sports perceived as socially acceptable for women.

Women are supposed to be genteel and delicate, so playing contact sports goes against societal norms. This view is beginning to change. High school girls are being allowed to play baseball, play water polo, and to wrestle, but they usually stop competing when they get to college. Most colleges do not have programs in which these young athletes can participate. Even when colleges do provide opportunities, many women are leery to take advantage of them for fear of acquiring reputations as homosexual or butch. This is true even for established sports such as basketball, field hockey, and soccer. In these sports, women are pressured to present themselves as feminine off the court or field (Griffin, 1987). Many teams require players to dress in a feminine manner after games. Even the Women's Sports Foundation had a make-up class for female athletes before their

October 16, 2000 awards dinner in New York so that the athletes would look more presentable to corporate sponsors like NuSkin. It is as if they must prove they are heterosexuals, regardless of their sexual orientation. Although all women are exposed to societal propaganda that encourages them to remain within norms for ladylike heterosexual behavior, some women internalize this propaganda more than others. Women with higher levels of internalized homophobia (that is, those upon whom the propaganda was more successful) are more likely to limit themselves to more feminine and acceptable sports (Margolies, Becker & Jackson-Brewer, 1987).

Homophobia is an effective enough control that many lesbians are afraid to speak up. Fear is learned and women see it reflected from the men's teams. Why would the women want to add one more barrier to their participation? The fear of not conforming can have significant consequences for the female athlete. Within socialization into homophobia, four issues arise. Those issues include the social perception of appropriate sports for women, the stereotypes of the individuals and of their sport, the treatment of homosexuals versus heterosexuals in sports, and personal attributes and strengths. Whether we are aware of it or not, socialization into fear as a control factor, like homophobia, biases our perceptions of not only others but of ourselves as well.

The process of socialization into homophobia in sports starts with the development of gender identification and social control of gender. Through the control of masculine and feminine identities of sport and laws governing sport participation, women have had to overcome many obstacles to participate. Athletics is a model of our society, especially the acquisition and exercise of power and the resultant male (dominant) and female

(subordinate) roles (Coakley, 1998; Duquin, 1982; Griffin, 1998; Sage & Loudermilk, 1979). Socialization is the process of embedding the norms and values of a society into the next generation. Sports can be seen as a microcosm of our society, through which clear lines of demarcation for men and women have been drawn and must be adhered to.

The dominant sports are organized, played and taught to the advantage of most men and to the disadvantage of women (Messner, 1989). Many women's sports, like rhythmic gymnastics and synchronized swimming, are not supported because of society's preordained notion of what sport is. These are often misunderstood and thus athletes involved in them are mistakenly criticized for their perceived lack of athleticism (Coakley, 1998). Many athletes reported feeling socially hindered in many ways, which included feeling a lack of social, financial, and emotional support from society. A synchronized swimmer reported being told that "it was a waste of time to train for something that wasn't even a sport".

Many respondents reported that the lack of support for them as female athletes was pervasive and came even from those who should have been their staunchest supporters. "During the height of the season, my non-athlete friends would constantly harass me for not spending enough time with them. It hurt my feelings terribly" (a swimmer). Even coaches can have negative attitudes. "I had an Olympic coach tell me that I would never make the Olympics because I reminded him of himself AND [sic] he never made it" (a diver). These criticisms can have dramatic effects on athletes. Such comments may deter young women from following their dreams. If the sport that they want to pursue is considered highly masculine, they will be even more vulnerable to the



cumulative effect of such negativity. Thus, it is the identification with and acceptance of gender roles that socialization ingrains within our psyche.

If socialization is the tool, then gender logic is the practice. Gender logic is the term for the common sense societal beliefs about men and women that are founded on faulty logic. This logic includes the premise that since men are physically superior and more powerful, women are the inferior half of the species (Coakley, 1998). The belief in a woman's lack of abilities is used to belittle men into performing better. Comments like "you throw like a girl," derogatory terms like "sissy" and references to male players as "girls" display the gender logic of our society. They are used to insult both men and women, and perpetuate the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The belief and subsequent teachings of gender logic result in boys and girls who are socialized to believe and act in certain ways, including the type of sports which men and women should and should not play according to social norms.

When a female bisexual field hockey player and her female friend wanted to play ice hockey in high school with the guys, the guys did not want them playing and gave them some looks. It was only after they played a couple of times before they were asked back. A swimmer believed that "women tend to include people (regardless of sexual orientation, gender, color, etc.), and I felt that the boys (in high school) were not inclusive no matter how hard I tried to impress them with my athletic ability." Because gender logic has become so ingrained in our society, the definition of what is masculine and what is feminine carries over to everything, including sport.

This fact and the perceptions against them may hold back many newer sports women have started to participate in, sports like women's boxing, and women's wrestling, which are not yet at the Olympic level. Kinnick (1998) found that media coverage over-represents women in feminine sports and under-represents women in sports not seen as consistent with cultural images of femininity. In order to counter women's under representation, laws, such as Title IX, have been enacted to help the equity in the participation of sport. Though Title IX has been in effect for over 30 years, there are still universities fighting the law and in non-compliance.<sup>6</sup> Even laws are ineffectual in the face of social and political powers. Socialization and attitudes developed through time are hard pressed to change. Because socialization is deeply ingrained, labeling and stereotypes develop as a form of social control.

Ludwig (1996) found that women who participate in programs originally tailored for men are held to higher expectations. They feel they have to adapt to male-oriented coaching philosophies and tolerate the invalidation of their feelings. The role of athlete continues to counter their female role. They are pushed toward male role expectations and find it difficult to balance their feminine side with male expectations. The general public also has confusion with this distinction. Labeling and social stereotyping are ways of coping with and controlling the confusion. Labeling and strict gender role adherence produce strong social controls, such as homophobia, to enforce those roles.

All but one athlete reported having observed homophobic attitudes, comments, or situations in her sport. Clearly, homophobia as a social control is virtually ubiquitous. Many reported having heard homophobic comments within or about their sport, directed

at them, at other athletes perceived to be homosexuals, or at homosexuals in general. These homophobic comments covered the entire spectrum from the intentionally, maliciously anti-gay to those that simply illustrate the far reaching effectiveness of homonegative brainwashing. Many cited cases of other athletes who had been affected by homophobia, and many also pointed to the way that homophobia interferes with sponsorship, both for individual athletes and for entire sports.

Female athletes are often covertly or even overtly required to demonstrate their femininity, their heterosexuality, and in some cases, even submit to DNA testing to provide evidence of their genetic sex (Cahn, 1993; Clarke, 1998; Lorber, 1993). Understanding socialization of gender labels, gender identity, and stereotyping of sport will help in understanding why women chose the sport that they participate in.

One of the main effects of being a woman in sport was on the athletes' personal relationships. A number of athletes said their sexuality was called into question. Comments like "fucking dykes," "rug-munchers" and "all females in your sport must be gay" are just a few. Some of the women lost friendships as their athletic abilities grew because of assumptions about their sexuality. They had the conflict and social pressure to fit into the gender role of femininity, and being athletic is not fitting in. A lesbian field hockey player said, "My sexuality seems to be a topic of conversation in my little home town eight hours away from me." Another athlete, a heterosexual canoe/ kayaker, had heard comment such as, "Every female in your sport is gay, and you must be gay to be in this sport." A volleyball player even stopped playing basketball in high school because of the belief that all female athletes are lesbians.

Many responses related to the fear of being labeled a lesbian, including two from self-identified lesbians. One athlete observed young straight women having a problem with homosexuality when they first joined the team (a bisexual field hockey player). Five athletes said they were afraid of being called a lesbian. One said that if she were not a lesbian, she would be afraid of being labeled. Three athletes worried because they fit the negative stereotypes that society has about being “a broad-shoulder, tall female who is highly competitive” (a heterosexual swimmer), “over 30 and never married” (a heterosexual volleyball player), and looking “strong w/ short hair” (a heterosexual canoe/kayaker). Two self-identified lesbians believed that the label encouraged people to judge unfairly. A lesbian field hockey player worried about being labeled “because I feel that I would be solely judged on my sexuality rather than on the many facets that also make me who I am.”

Notably, many who claimed to be unafraid of the label found it necessary to emphasize their heterosexuality in answering this question. Some directly addressed the label and how it affected them. All of the responses indicated that they were confident in their sexual orientation and they really did not care about what others thought of them. They also indicated that having close family and friends helps. A heterosexual race walker said, “If someone wants to label me because I am an athlete, let them, it still does not affect who I am or where I want to go.”

Three athletes did not see homophobia. Comments like “swimming isn't like that” and “have not ever seen or heard anyone be called a lesbian just because they participate in sports” are indicators that the athletes have had different experiences. The response from

a heterosexual swimmer who states, "No, because swimming isn't considered to be a "lesbian" sport really, but if I were in another sport I would be afraid," indicates that the labeling of sports associated with lesbians does influence homophobic attitudes of athletes and their choice of sport.

Another and more common label was that of being called a "tomboy." The main reasons for this label of tomboy were playing with boys or male toys, and doing things conceived as masculine such as climbing trees. Their appearance also had a big effect, especially when they did not wear dresses, make-up, or they displayed muscle. When girls are taught that being a tomboy is bad, many girls give up sport because they do not want to be bad. Of the fifty-three athletes, thirty-four have been called tomboy by relatives, friends, teachers, coach-more in elementary school, and friends of the family. Thirteen of the nineteen who had not been labeled tomboys were swimmers, which indicates that those athletes who participated in sports considered sex appropriate were not ridiculed by being called "tomboy".

Along the same line as the question of one's sexuality, is the question of one's gender identity. Several athletes commented about the criticism by others about their own or their teammate's gender. The statements were not just about their physical appearance, but also about the way they acted, such as playing and winning against boys. A heterosexual field hockey player stated that others "made fun of my teammates because they looked like men." Another athlete, heterosexual, had her boyfriend's mother warn "that I wasn't 'feminine' enough." A heterosexual swimmer received comments such as, "Man, we could use you on our football team. You're bigger than any of our players."

Other comments were directed toward body image. If women did not fit society's definition of what is feminine, they were condemned. Those insults included: their arms muscles are too large, their hips are too big for their bathing suit, they smell like chlorine, and their legs are hairy. Women can not even get away from the stereotype of the dumb jock, which men have endured for some time. Several of the athletes commented that they had been criticized for being a dumb jock regardless of their performance in school, which is where most of the comments originated.

Some saw the term jock as negative because of the social condemnation to which they were subjected. "I think my childhood friends may have called me that because they may have been jealous of my success or may be fearful to be called that themselves" (a lesbian field hockey player). An Asian-American heterosexual fencer brought up the idea that some cultures are less accepting of females participating in sport. "In Asian cultures, females do not do "serious" sports." A heterosexual swimmer stated that she was often called a tomboy because guys see competitiveness as an unfeminine quality. One heterosexual swimmer turned the insult around, pointing out that the labeler needs better education, "I would just think that the person (labeler) was the most closed-minded bumpkin. I think and hope we're past this era of females in sport being labeled lesbians. I go to a very liberal school so the 'labeler' would look like the outcast."

A number of athletes found themselves not liking the labels that were associated with their sports, but learned to ignore them. Nine athletes talked about this type of situation. A heterosexual field hockey player stated, "Well, at one point I hated the

association people made of field hockey players, but now I am over it and if they are that ignorant and think that about me, then, oh well. I am over it!”

The comments that these athletes reported ranged from bad jokes, teasing, mimicking of stereotypes and the attitude of, “It’s not cool to say racial remarks, but somehow OK to ‘dis’ gays” (a heterosexual canoe/kayaker). Some athletes also heard comments like, “let’s beat the fag” (a heterosexual diver). This last comment could be interpreted in a variety of way, from the mean spirited insult to the extreme of literally doing someone physical harm. Either form still indicates a strong form of hatred. Significantly, the majority of the examples given concerned male athletes. This could be due to the fact that society frowns so intensely upon homosexuality and a way of denigrating men is by challenging their masculinity. Jokes and teasing are ways to keep males and females in line with social-cultural norms. Women observing this behavior think twice about stepping outside of social norms, especially in sport, which is considered to be a male domain. Coming out as gay in sport for women is seen as just one more strike against them. Such commentary begins to have effects on the athletes. One heterosexual diver commented about how angry it made her to see the “horrible treatment and blasting” of an openly gay top male diver.

Three athletes mentioned that younger players would make fun and joke about the lesbians on the team, but after the younger women got to know the lesbian players, their attitudes changed and they were then “cool about it.” This supports the theory that once you get to know someone or have a positive experience with a group, the stereotypical attitude can decrease. But even knowing someone who is gay or lesbian will not

guarantee attitudes will change. In fact, one athlete was very adamant about not wanting to play or associate with lesbians. This athlete had an IAH score of 54 (100 being the most homophobic). Even knowing someone who is homosexual (exceptions to the rule) cannot always overcome cultural training and sanctions.

Do these comments represent a denial of the subjection of homosexuals or are these women trying to dissociate themselves from the reality of homophobia? Some of these comments also condone the mocking of an athlete's sexuality, dismissing it as just part and parcel of the sports experience. Do they realize that by not condemning such action and commentary they are helping perpetuate the problem of social stigma not only on others but also on themselves? Many of the social trends of discrimination lead not only to strengthening the social biases but also divide individuals, especially women, who have had to overcome many social barriers.

I asked the athletes if, in their sport, they had noticed homophobic attitudes, comments, or situation (i.e., bad jokes and slurs). The comments that were directed at the athletes themselves were all making presumptions about their sexuality. Comments like, "Oh, no wonder you are good. You're a dyke," and "Are you gay? Gee, you are not a typical looking butchy athlete I pictured!" This reinforces the idea that female athletes go against society's perception of what a woman should be. It also expands the generalization that society has of women in sports, regardless of the truth. The stereotype permeates just about all the sports in this survey.

The strongest comment came from an athlete in a sport considered appropriate for women to participate in. A heterosexual volleyball player stated:



If someone in our sport was gay, they were ostracized. In fact, I stopped playing HS [sic-high school] basketball because all my club volleyball teammates said that all basketball players were gay. So I played HS soccer. Now there are a lot of lesbians on the women's beach double tour, and even as an adult, I wouldn't want to be associated with that.

This type of social stigma affects not only what sports women will want to participate in, but also how they perceive other athletes and sports.

Because the fear of homosexuals and homosexuality is so great in our society, athletes are affected in many different ways.

A top diver who won almost every time he competed was really blasted and treated horribly by other male divers who were heterosexual. But they never distracted the diver enough to ever have him compete poorly. He was so tough. It of course never worked but it sure made me mad [sic] what those men did to him. (a heterosexual diver).

Two other athletes gave more specific points of view on homophobia. A heterosexual swimmer said, "lesbians in swimming are not out because they are not accepted and swimming generally isn't seen that way." According to a heterosexual volleyball player, "Indoor volleyball is not considered a lesbian sport".

Some of the athletes gave examples of the ideology of homophobia. One athlete even quoted the female University of Connecticut women's basketball coach's policy of "no lesbians allowed," while another athlete relayed that "people don't really like to room with them, because we don't want to change in front of them." Responses like these show significant homophobia.

In response to the question, "Do you feel that lesbians who are "out" to everyone are treated differently," thirty-five (68.6%) answered yes, ten (19.6%) answered no, and

six athletes (11.8%) were unclear. Responses ranged from the unobserved, "I can't say as I've seen anything to indicate that" (a bisexual swimmer), to the affirmative, "In general yes, but I have known a few lesbians to be very open about their sexuality and after the initial shock everything went back to normal" (a heterosexual swimmer). One felt "it depends upon how they are 'responsible' for coming out about their sexuality. It all depends on how much they pressure others into reacting one way or the other. If they can be OK themselves about it, then that's all that matters in the end anyway. Ex. The actress Ellen" (a heterosexual diver).

According to more than two-thirds (68.6%) of the respondents, out lesbians are treated differently. Three athletes said it was not unusual for lesbians to be the subject of comments and jokes: "They're not discriminated against--only made fun of--slightly." Others believed that "out" lesbians merely confirmed the common supposition about female athletes; "I think it's assumed that women in sport tend to be lesbian." "I think women who are competitive, strong, or larger are just assumed to be gay. But I don't see their sexual preferences hindering them." Some athletes commented on the respect that "out" athletes earn. "They may be made fun of for being 'butches' but are respected for their athletic powers." "They usually are strong people (mentally) and because of their hurdles in life can apply that to competing (i.e., Billie Jean King)." While some athletes cited the effect that being out can have on receiving sponsorship and on the fears that are created by this, others believed that "In most women's sports I don't think it is much of an issue."

Fear was another big issue brought up by the athletes. Six talked about fear in the locker room, fear of being hit on, and fear of butch women, because they are not feminine. Those who felt uncomfortable around lesbians described it several ways. One felt it was a defining aspect of that person and for some people it was awkward to be around homosexuals. Others thought people, particularly men, feel awkward; they see them separated from the group and are uncomfortable with lesbians and therefore avoid them (a heterosexual synchronized swimmer, a heterosexual synchronized swimmer, and a heterosexual diver). A heterosexual volleyball player stated that people “feel differently because a lot of straight people don't feel comfortable around them, and/or don't want to be seen with them because of the guilt by association clause.”

Others felt respect for the lesbians who were out because of their honesty. “There are no assumptions, no ‘talking behind their backs’, no hiding, and this helps people feel more at ease about it.” “They are honest and therefore they are not covering anything up. It’s an honest relationship when they’re (out)” (a heterosexual field hockey player). A heterosexual swimmer agreed that when “they are honest enough with themselves and strong enough to be who they are, I'd say more respect.” Another athlete, a heterosexual swimmer, stated the atmosphere of peers/society best in her response, “Yes, with disrespect early on, then probably with respect as time goes on if they don't push themselves or their beliefs on anyone else.”

Of those athletes (19.6%) saying that lesbians are not treated differently if they are out, six said nothing, one said “not in my sport” (a heterosexual field hockey player), and another said that they were treated as manly and not as women (a heterosexual swimmer).

A heterosexual swimmer talked about when a “girl” on her team, ten years older, came out, everyone was so cool with it. The “girl” had helped out as a volunteer assistant and no one had any qualms, and it did not matter.

Two-thirds (68.6%) of the total respondents felt that “out” lesbians were treated differently in sport. It is possible then to compare how female athletes in general perceived lesbians to be treated with the way in which lesbian athletes perceived themselves to be treated. To examine this, one question was directed specifically to athletes who were lesbian, asking them about their own experiences with differential treatment and discrimination. Surprisingly, four self-identified heterosexual athletes considered themselves competent to answer this question. Two simply answered “No”, while one of the others went on to describe a teammate’s struggle with her sexuality and the lack of acceptance that the teammate had faced. While the heterosexuals who responded to it might have misunderstood or ignored the intent of the question, at least one of them was aware of her lesbian teammate’s situation.

I'm married and am heterosexual. Yet, as early as 1980-81 I had teammates that struggled with their sexuality because it wasn't accepted to be gay. I saw the pain and agony they went through and really tried to be supportive. Acceptance is a very tough human condition. And my friends wanted to be authentic and had fear of the outcome if they "came out" (a heterosexual diver).

Eleven athletes (21%) discussed the experience of being out and why they came out. Six were out completely, three selectively, and two not. For those who are out, their reasons varied from the need to be honest with their teammates due to all the time spent traveling, to knowing who they are and standing up for themselves. One athlete gave real

life concerns in relation to keeping and attaining employment outside of her sport. A lesbian field hockey player stated, "I worry less as I grow older, but I do fear that if my sexuality were completely public, I would not be able to attain a job when I retire from my sport." A lesbian field hockey player worries that the "wrong" person would find out and then there would be negative consequences.

Even the athlete who identified as bisexual was worried about her coaches finding out and those in power in the hierarchy of her sport, but not the other athletes. Comments ranged from, "My teammates are my best friends. I matured and had a great family and enough friends to come out, so it's easy when you know you have support" (a lesbian field hockey player) to, "Because I am confident in who I am, I know I am a good person...I don't care what people think. I only want to surround myself with good open-minded loving people-straight and gay"(a lesbian field hockey player). A lesbian swimmer stated "I am who I am" and that "I am very proud of myself." The three athletes who answered that they were out selectively all agreed that being out to their teammates was important because of the travel and the honesty within a group.

One factor that contributed to the motivation of some lesbians not to come out is the treatment of those who are out. A number of athletes knew of gay male teammates who were ridiculed or hindered in some way due to their homosexuality. One athlete knew of a gay male teammate having the "U.S. Swimming Governing Body telling them to 'tone it down' or else." A lesbian field hockey player stated that "it's a known fact that some universities will not recruit you if you are suspected to be gay/bisexual." Other athletes discussed a male teammate quitting the team due either to fear of coming out or

conflicts with coming to terms with their sexuality. Two athletes talked about a male swim teammate who quit swimming because of his homosexuality, specifically because of how he was going to be perceived by the rest of the team.

With the examples of social stigma and of the treatment of out homosexuals that these athletes have observed, we have a better understanding of the treatment of homosexuals versus heterosexuals in sport, and the effectiveness of homophobia as a social control. Seeing that homophobia is such a strong control, what helps an athlete overcome it so that they can participate in sport?

Obviously athletes who do overcome the social controls to excel, possess certain internal strengths and attributes. One of the questions asked athletes to list the attributes that allowed them to reach this level of competition. As would be expected, many of the athletes cited athletic skill and talent, passion and love for the sport, and luck, qualities that it would be hard to imagine anyone reaching the Olympic Trials level without. However, many of the other attributes cited are central to success in the world of business, a very masculine domain: mental toughness, confidence, discipline, competitiveness, and leadership. Some of the other qualities that athletes listed sound like the buzzwords of a management training seminar: organization, getting along with others, time management, being a team player, attention to detail, dedication, and commitment. Understanding that these traits are considered masculine, it is easy to see the conflict that female athletes experience. These attributes are socialized and then internalized by athletes.

The expression of these attributes is encouraged and rewarded by our society, but up until recently, by and for males only. These attributes are the building blocks of what

businesses look for when hiring new employees. “Attitude, dedication, and determination, those are what helped me” (a heterosexual swimmer). If our young girls are not taught the building block of business, how are they to compete?

Even with all the internal attributes, support from an outside influence still carried a great deal of weight. Nearly all of the athletes reported that their support system, from friends, family, teammates and coaches, was important for their success. “I feel that my hard working attitude and having a positive atmosphere (friend and family) have helped me the most” (a heterosexual fencer).

Taking back negative terms like “tomboy” shows internal strengths. Some athletes saw being called a tomboy as positive, “I called myself a ‘tomboy’ because I felt it was a positive attribute to have. If I were worried about how I looked, then that fear alone would have stopped me. Tomboy means a good thing to me. Yet, I like to be very graceful and pretty as well. I think you can have an ability and still be a woman” (a heterosexual diver).

### **Levels of homophobia among the responding athletes**

Eighty-one percent of the athletes had IAH scores of 50 or less, indicating low homophobic attitudes. The scores range from a low of 4 to a high of 71. I anticipated that among female, Olympic-caliber athletes the more masculine the participant’s sport is, as perceived by western society, the lower the athlete’s level of homophobic attitudes would be.<sup>7</sup> The specific sport was found to be a significant indicator on IAH scores<sup>8</sup> (see Table 2).

Field hockey and swimming are the best groups available to analyze the effect of sport type on homophobia because they were best represented among the respondents. Field hockey had a mean IAH score of 23.6 and swimming had a score of 35.1 (see Table 2). Coakley (1998) points out that the women's sports that have been given priority in the media emphasize grace and femininity rather than endurance and skill. Field hockey is considered a masculine sport because of the level of contact and physical interaction. Field hockey neither receives media attention nor much corporate sponsorship. It received no prime time TV coverage during the 1996 Summer Olympics, whereas swimming, which is considered a feminine sport, received nearly an hour of coverage (Tuggle & Owen, 1999).

Among the athletes responding, those participating in field hockey, a team sport, scored consistently lower for homophobia than participants in swimming, an individual sport. However, several studies on women's basketball have indicated that within this team sport, homophobic attitudes are prevalent (Biemesdorfer, 1998; Blum, 1994). Thus, being on a team could either expose heterosexuals positively to homosexuality, therefore lowering their level of homophobia or raise the possible negative consequences of exposure, encouraging lesbian players to stay cloaked. This silence may add to maintaining negative stereotypes, which in turn maintain high IAH scores. Future studies with participation from more team and individual sports may allow us to generalize further.

Age and the IAH scores correlated significantly. The largest age group in this study was 18-24 and this group corresponded in their scores (50.9) to the average college



student (58.2) in other studies (Roderick, McCammon, Long, & Allred, 1998; Wells, 1989). This group had the highest average for the IAH, meaning that they had greater tendencies for homophobic attitudes. With the development of personal attributes as an ongoing process through life, especially self-confidence, athletes learn early to adapt and survive if they are to get to this level of competition. The process of socialization also happens at a younger age, so older athletes are less likely to be affected by factors outside of sport like homophobia.

I found that the level of education had a significant effect on the level of homophobia, which therefore affects sport participation. Educational levels were the best predictor of IAH scores.<sup>9</sup> As an athlete's level of education increases, her IAH score decreases. The majority of the athletes surveyed have at least a bachelor's degree, which correlates with low IAH scores. Of the 84.3% that have a Bachelor's degree or above, 42.3% scored in the lowest IAH category or 1-25. The 26-50 category accounted for an additional 32.5% of the women with a BA or above (see Tables 3 and 4). The number of athletes who only reported completing high school or AA (15.7%) had a greater percentage overall of high IAH scores than did those with a bachelor's degree or advanced education.

This is consistent with the findings of several other studies, including Newman (1989) and Wells (1989). Wells' study focused on the effects of direct education about homosexuality on homophobia levels, whereas Newman showed that years of education in general had an effect. Both of these studies used undergraduate college students at universities in the United States and did not examine the effects of age. During college,

women are free to pursue competitive athletics without the competing demands of other social obligations. Athletes also repeatedly made reference to the dearth of competitive or professional athletic opportunities available after high school or college.

When women participate in sports, they are influenced by all these factors. The more they are perceived to fall outside the acceptable social norms, the more pressure is put on them to conform, leading some women to change their choices in sport or to drop out altogether. With homophobia being a very strict form of social control, women in sport are even harder pressed to conform. And when heterosexual women internalize homophobia, they are more likely to limit their athletic participation to sports perceived as socially acceptable for women.

## Chapter 4

How often have I heard, 'I can tell who's gay and who's not by which sports she plays.'

When an individual meets and has positive experiences with homosexuals, the gay man or lesbian becomes a person, rather than just a stereotype. The experiences can be through direct interaction, educational experiences, or other exposure to gays and lesbians (Newman, 1989; Wells, 1989). During college, many people get their first exposure to out lesbians and gay men, so it is not surprising that the athletes with more education had lower levels of homophobia than athletes with less education. There is a direct correlation between the sport an athlete competes in and both her level of homophobia and the likelihood that she will either know an out lesbian athlete in the sport or be one. The relationship appears to be causal, as getting to know comfortable, secure, out lesbians as fellow athletes reduces the homophobia of the other members of the team in a positive feedback loop. Training for and competing in sports at the elite level is intense and bonding, the sort of experience that can be transformative.

I will show that there is a correlation between an athlete's level of homophobia and the sports in which she chooses to participate. The LAH scores from respondents in field hockey (a lesbian identified sport) were lower than those of respondents in swimming (a non-lesbian identified sport), when correlated with both age and education levels. There were lesbian respondents from both teams, but several heterosexual swimmers blithely stated that there were no lesbians in swimming. Lesbians who are open about their sexuality promote honesty and acceptance from teammates.

The IAH results from the sample correlated with other research indicating that an individual's experiences with homosexuals have a direct effect on their perceptions of homosexuals. Eighty-one percent of the subjects had an IAH score of 50 or lower indicating low homophobic attitudes. The scores range from a low of 4 to high of 71.

Field hockey is considered a masculine sport by societal standards because of the high level of contact and physical interaction between players. Swimming is considered a feminine sport, and thus appropriate for women, because of the lack of physical contact between athletes during competition and because it appears graceful and ladylike.

The IAH scores for the type of sport were found to be a significant indicator for an athlete's level of homophobia (see Table 3).<sup>10</sup> Participants from field hockey (means IAH of 23.6) scored consistently lower for homophobia than participants from swimming (means IAH of 35.1). This is likely due to the fact that field hockey is considered to be a less-acceptable sport for women to participate in. Field hockey players have had to overcome more societal pressure to play than swimmers, therefore they have a greater understanding of themselves and attitudes about their sport. Basically field hockey players have had to take a "I'm-playing-and-I-really-don't-care-what-you-think" attitude.

However, several studies of women's basketball, also considered a masculine sport, have indicated that within this team sport, homophobic attitudes are prevalent (Biemesdorfer, 1998; Blum, 1994). Debra Blum (1994) stated that "in sport, the L-word is lesbian and everyone--homosexuals and heterosexuals--lives in fear of being called a lesbian because it's used to discredit and disqualify people." This disqualification comes in the form of losing jobs, the opportunity to play, scholarships, corporate sponsorships, and

media coverage. In 1991, Penn State's women's basketball coach Rene Portland stated that she had a policy of forbidding lesbians from playing on her team. In fact, there were lesbians playing for her (Griffin, 1998; Phillips, 1996). A lesbian field hockey player in the sample noted that the female basketball coach at the University of Connecticut was quoted as saying, "no lesbians allowed". Thus, being on a team could either expose heterosexuals positively to homosexuality and lower their level of homophobia, or raise the possible negative consequences of exposure, encouraging lesbian players to stay cloaked, thus helping to maintain high IAH scores.

Another factor that affects levels of homophobia is an individual's level of education. As stated in the previous chapter, education is the best predictor of IAH scores.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the athletes surveyed have at least a bachelor's degree, which correlates with low IAH scores. Of the 84.3% that have a bachelor's degree or above, 42.3% scored in the lowest IAH category, the 1-25 score range. The 26-50 category accounted for an additional 32.5% of the total (see Table 4). The number of women who only reported completing high school had the highest IAH scores.<sup>12</sup>

The college experience is significant because most of the athletes who responded were college age. During college, women are free to pursue competitive athletics without the competing demands of other social obligations. Respondents repeatedly made reference to the dearth of competitive or professional athletic opportunities available after high school or college. Twelve athletes specifically brought up this point when asked if they felt that being a woman has hindered their progress in sport. A heterosexual fencer stated, "There were several occasions in college where I wasn't able to practice with the

top men because practice was at the NY Athletic Club (only men at that time) and in my sport, women and men practice together.” And another lesbian field hockey player felt that “The time period in which I grew up allowed me the opportunity to be successful via sport. I am aware, however, of the ceiling that exists that does not allow participation post-college (exception: WNBA).” These experiences during their education help the athlete to mature not only in their athletic endeavors, but also socially.

IAH and the level and amount of exposure to homosexuals that a person gets, affect an individual’s level of homophobia.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that slightly less than half of the respondents (47.2%) in this study were in the 18-24 age category. The life experiences that occur during this time period, both personal experiences of sexuality and exposure to homosexuals, may have a dramatic effect on how these individuals respond later in life (see Tables 4 and 5).

Exposure to homosexuality decreases the level of stereotypical attitudes, especially when a person has close personal experiences. This was the case with the respondents from field hockey. The field hockey team members commented about the newer members getting over their biases through exposure and time. Three athletes specifically brought this up when asked if they had ever noticed homophobic attitudes, comments, or situations (i.e., bad jokes and slurs) in the sport. A heterosexual athlete in her late twenties from field hockey said, “The younger players make fun of the lesbians, but once they get to know them, they’re cool about it.” Another heterosexual field hockey player in her late twenties expanded on this by explaining, “Young players who have not been exposed to homosexuality tend to be homophobic till they get to know bisexual or homosexual

teammates. Then they are OK. If they are secure with their own sexuality, it is no big deal.” Another lesbian field hockey player in her late twenties further stated “as time goes by and by including them in things, we learn to accept each other and end up a closer team.” The members of the field hockey team, by including everyone, heterosexual and lesbians, have created a more cohesive team. Dr. Sue Rankin, softball coach of Penn State, helped explain this point by stating that we must address this silence (homophobia) “in order to begin to build the confidence in ourselves, and in breaking the silence, we can educate and empower not only ourselves, but those we come into contact with” (Townsend, 1997, p. 20).

These examples of socialization contribute to the idea that homophobia is a learned response, stemming from fear or misunderstanding of homosexuals. With understanding then acceptance, like those younger field hockey players, homophobia is decreased. Lesbians who are out and open about themselves promote honesty and acceptance from teammates. Dispelling the fear of homophobia leads to understanding.

Being out helps to demystify homosexuality. When the athletes were asked if they felt that the lesbians who were “out” were treated differently, one athlete responded, “In general, yes, but I have known a few lesbians to be very open about their sexuality and after the initial shock everything went back to normal” (a heterosexual swimmer). A heterosexual diver responded, “It depends upon how they are ‘responsible’ for coming out about their sexuality. It all depends on how much they pressure others into reacting one way or the other. If they can be OK themselves about it, then that’s all that matters in the end anyway. Ex. The actress Ellen.”

The large majority of the respondents (68.6%) answered that lesbians are treated differently if they are out, but indirectly it is their being out that is helping to change and empower women in sport. A majority felt more respect for the lesbians who were out because of their honesty. There are no assumptions, no talking behind their backs, no hiding, and this helps people feel more at ease about it. “They are honest and therefore they are not covering anything up. It’s an honest relationship when they’re (out)”(a heterosexual field hockey player). A heterosexual swimmer agreed that when “they are honest enough with themselves and strong enough to be who they are, I’d say more respect.” These subjects find that knowing an out lesbian has made it a norm on their team and therefore non-threatening in sport for them.

The LAH scores from field hockey compared to swimming correlated with both age and education levels, and showed lower levels of homophobia in field hockey. That is, in a sport less socially acceptable, and which has open lesbians participating, homophobia is less pervasive. The idea is that once a person gets to know someone and have positive experiences, stereotypical attitudes decrease. Additionally, lesbians who are out and open about themselves promote honesty and acceptance from teammates.



## Chapter 5

Language, media, and how athletes have to look. Really, image is everything.

At the national and international levels, an athlete's participation is very dependent on access to sponsorships (Coakley, 1998). The media and sponsorship are mutually dependent. The media affects sponsorship by how it portrays female athletes, creating a socially acceptable image for the athletes. This can include language, image, coverage and legitimization of a sport through the amount of coverage it receives from the media. Sponsors, both corporate and private, want to fund athletes in sports who fit a specific image, thus increasing the amount of coverage and social legitimization of the sports and athletes who fit this image. The more acceptable the sport or athlete is to the public, the more sponsorship and media attention they will receive. Public recognition, in the form of sponsorships and media attention, is much less likely to be given to athletes and sports that are associated with lesbianism.

Sponsorship is critical to Olympic qualified athletes because of the expense of training, travel, and cost of equipment. Most of the Olympic sports have corporate sponsors, mainly those who produce sports equipment, athletic wear, or food products. Corporations are the number one sponsors of sports and individual athletes in the United States. Through their endorsements, certain athletes and teams have been able to achieve their goals and dreams.

The private sponsors, including individuals and foundations, are other sources from which athletes can gain financial assistance, but like corporations, they pick and

chose whom they will sponsor. One advantage to private sponsors is that most come from families and hometowns of the athlete or team. The athlete then becomes the town's local figure, hero, or role model. The private sector also includes the governing bodies that run and organize sports at the local, state and national levels. They organize and support athletes and teams with places to train and compete as well as supply certified coaches for the sports that they control through their organizations.

Educational institutions are another source of financial support for female athletes. Title IX has helped women receive greater opportunities, but there are still institutions not in compliance. A race walker gave an example of inequity within sport at the collegiate level. "My college once paid for the men to attend an athletic competition while the women had to fund their own trip. I filed a complaint, but nothing was ever done--the university sided with the coaches and athletic director." A fencer discussed how she was not allowed to practice with the top men several times because they were practicing at the NY Athletic Club (men only at the time) and in her sport men and women practice together.

The issues of sponsorship and image are interrelated. The athletes talked about how image and sponsorship tend to go hand in hand depending on what an athlete looks like. They had a greater chance of getting sponsorship if they presented themselves as very feminine. The athletes commented how friends, coaches, and some media interviewers did not address them as women but as girls. This may be a social indication of the hopes that they will mature out of this childish phase and into a proper womanhood. This image is sometimes called "the All-American Girl" look or the "girl next door" look.

A white lesbian field hockey player suggested that lesbian athletes did not present a sufficiently “feminine/acceptable image”, or that “companies did not want to promote something many deem as ‘wrong’”. One other athlete, a slightly older white lesbian field hockey player, pointed to the connection between sponsorship and the function of athletes as role models, suggesting that lesbianism gives an athlete (and thus the sponsor) a “bad public image” because “no kid wants to be like you when they grow up”. And yet, another field hockey player makes a distinction between sexual orientation and surface presentation of femininity, saying that she thinks athletes are denied sponsorship “not so much because they were thought to be a lesbian“ but because “they were too ‘butch’ looking--sex sells--they want appealing women, ex: Gabrielle Reese.” A rather analytical swimmer theorized that these limitations on sponsorship are temporary:

Yes, lesbianism isn't "All-American", it isn't thought of as something to look up to or admired so it won't "sell" and the company or sponsor wouldn't want to have a stigma attached to them. Once the world is ready, they will WANT that to show their acceptance, etc.

A field hockey player, a white lesbian, argued that actual or perceived lesbianism hurts an athlete’s chances at sponsorship “because companies don’t want anyone other than the ‘all American girl’ to represent their product. Anyone who does not fit that mold won't do.” Two swimmers also made reference to the idealized “All American Girl” in that if a woman did not have that look, they did not have a chance to get sponsorship.

When athletes were asked if they “believe that some women in their sport would not (have not) been sponsored because they were thought to be (are) lesbian,” 64.7% (33) responded no, 7.8% (4) indicated neither yes or no, and 27.5% (14) said yes. Of the

fourteen affirmative responses, two pointed to the lack of sponsorship within their sport (field hockey) and two to fear on the part of the sponsors. Eight more responses pointed specifically to image. One related to the dearth of lesbians in the sport and the fact that it “wouldn’t help sell swimming gear in my opinion” (a white heterosexual swimmer).

One of the two who responded about the lack of sponsorship stated, “We are not a high sponsorship sport, but I feel if we were, that it would affect sponsorship” (a white bisexual field hockey player). One of the two athletes who indicated that she believed that fear was a reason for the lack of sponsorship also stated that it could be due to ignorance (a white lesbian field hockey player). A common theme through many of the affirmative answers is the “right image” for sponsorship.

When the athletes were specifically asked about sponsorships and homosexuality, they observed that lesbians were less likely to be given jobs, given negative recruiting precautions. If known to be lesbian, they were not recruited or hired, and were paid less (both coaches and athletes) than their heterosexual peers. Society’s attitudes against homosexuals were shown with comments like “the more ‘butch’ girls are more aggressive”. “Yes, Yes, Yes. The media at the Olympics was only interested in the one woman on our team who was married and had a child--they were not interested in the commitment or sacrifices by others” (a lesbian field hockey player). Another athlete, a bisexual swimmer, continued with, “You know, there aren’t any “out” women at the elite national level that I know of.” This is an invisibility issue; not only do people not want to believe in homophobia, but also the athletes are afraid to come out because of homophobia. If we don’t see it or believe it, then it really does not exist.

Two swimmers reported that a homosexual male swimmer who was a good friend was asked to “tone down” his flamboyance if he wanted to join the US Swimming and US Olympic Committee funded program. He refused and was denied access to the program. This example of homophobia gives athletes an example of social control. If one does not conform to the standards of what is appropriate in regards to sexuality, one will be denied access. The female athletes already felt this type of control because they are women fighting for the right to participate in a male dominated arena. Even greater barriers are in place if they do not conform to gender-appropriate behavior and heterosexuality.

Fifteen athletes elaborated on the correlation between actual or perceived sexual orientation and sponsorship. Six stated that their sports were not sponsored very well, therefore, neither heterosexual nor lesbian athletes got endorsements. Three said that they know a lesbian or gay athlete in their sport who is sponsored, but indicated that the athlete demonstrated exceptional performance and marketability. “I personally know one woman who did very well for herself with sponsors. Everyone loved her sense of humor as well as personality” (a heterosexual diver). While a heterosexual swimmer observed, “If they are good-represent the sport well and the nation, I believe they would still get the sponsor they deserve. (i.e. diving, Mary Ellen Clark (Speedo) & Greg Louganis (he's a man and gay, but still is very well endorsed).”

Two swimmers believed that sponsorship was not affected, because swimming was not normally stereotypically linked with lesbians and that the swim team is “notoriously hetero. Our team has a reputation for hooking up between the men's & women's teams” (a heterosexual swimmer). Another swimmer stated “If you are fast and somewhat

attractive you will be sponsored.” One synchronized swimmer asserted that sponsorship in her sport “is based on rank not social life”. Two other swimmers’ answers seem to indicate they believed the reason sponsorship is not affected is because lesbians are either not present or not visible. One athlete who answered in the negative said, “I would hope not. I would hope it depends on their talent and skills” (a heterosexual swimmer). We all hope that sponsors will chose athletes based on their talent and skill, but that is rarely the case.

Newspapers and television coverage of women’s sport is dismal. When the media does cover women’s sports, it focuses only on certain individual women’s sports. Tuggle and Owen (1999) found that 61% of NBC’s coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympics dealt with only three individual women’s sports, swimming, diving and gymnastics, and gymnastics alone received 34% of the coverage. Kinnick’s (1998) analysis of newspapers showed that the most represented women’s sports were swimming (15.6% of all profiles), track and field (14.3%), gymnastics (10.4%), and basketball (10.4%). Swimming and gymnastics, 26% of the newspaper profiles, have been consistently “identified as ‘sex appropriate’ sports for women in public” (Kinnick, 1998). This shows that the media influences and limits the public’s perception of women’s sports, women’s identity in sport and their interest in women’s sports.

During the 1996 Summer Olympics, women’s field hockey received no prime time TV coverage whatsoever. In contrast, women’s swimming, a much more feminine sport, received nearly an hour of prime time coverage (Tuggle & Owen, 1999). This is not unusual. Coakley (1998) points out that the women’s sports that have been given priority

in the media emphasize grace and femininity rather than endurance and skill. The media upholds and reinforces social standards.

These researchers conclude that female athletes get better media coverage now than in the past, but only in sports deemed sex appropriate and characterized by low levels of physical contact between athletes. “These areas of difference in reporting practices suggest that women, even the greatest athletes in the world, still cannot escape gender stereotyping” (Kinnick, 1998). The likelihood of getting media coverage is slim for athletes that do not fit the image of femininity or participate in a sport deemed inappropriate.

Through language, coverage of sports and athletes, and legitimizing a sport, media influences our experience of sport. Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) found that the “pretty versus powerful” statement is an important distinction used by sports writers when “confronted with female athletes in stereotypic male and stereotypic female sports (p. 189).” Messner (1993) found that linguistic differences both reflect and (re)construct inequality. Sports writers call males, men, and females, girls or ladies. This linguistic difference affects how we perceive athletes as either being strong, powerful and exciting or weak, little and boring. When athletes were asked if they participated in a sport that others in society would associate with lesbians, a bisexual field hockey player stated that “most women in sports are, but TV shows like *Mad About You* do not help when they make comments like, ‘I knew I shouldn't have let her play field hockey’ (mother after she found out her daughter was gay).” Movies also contribute to the negative stereotyping of female athletes. Movies like Disney’s “Matilda” show a female athlete, one who

participated in field events of track, as a non-nurturing, man hating (killing) ugly, non-sexually appealing woman. Media has the power to bias images of women.

There is not very much coverage of women's sports unless the local, state, or national team is winning and is sponsored. According to Susan Tyler Eastman and Andrew Billings (1999, p.142), the "media adopts promotional themes to capture audience attention without having much correspondence to reality. This could be said with the 1996 Olympics touted as the 'Year of the Woman' by the media. But it goes even further by what is represented in the media, especially around female athletes."

A number of athletes remarked that, in sport, lesbians who look too "mannish" or "dykey" would not get either the attention or the money. Martina Navratilova and Greg Louganis were given as examples of losing some sponsors because of their coming out. A heterosexual swimmer sums it up when she stated, "Sponsors look for "manly" men & "glamorous" women (Summer Sanders and Mia Hamm) to endorse their products. If you don't fall into those categories, you might not be considered." It is only the extremely outstanding athlete who is a proven winner again and again who might receive sponsorship simply because she is a winner, and image is played down, most likely overlooked.

Since media makes the images that we see and hear and sponsors pay for those images, athletes must produce those images if they are to be awarded financial sponsorship, media coverage and sport legitimization. Because these images must represent certain socially acceptable norms ( i.e., femininity for females) athletes are



forced to conform. When a sport or athlete becomes associated with lesbianism, they are less likely to be given public recognition due to not living up to social norms and the fear of homophobia.

## Chapter 6

### How Girl Power got its Start.

The research by child psychologists and children's sport psychologists have indicated that support is important for participation in sport. I asked athletes about their families' level of support, in order to examine whether or not these athletes experienced the level of support that boys, in general, experience when they become involved in sports. The stronger the social support that women have, the more likely they are to participate in socially stigmatized sports (Krane, 1996).

All of the athletes had someone emotionally supporting them during their participation in sport. Eighty-seven percent said that their families were supportive. "My father pushed me a lot and treated me like the son he never had!" (a heterosexual swimmer). Another heterosexual swimmer said about her parents, "They just wanted me to give 100%--to try my hardest. They never pushed too hard. I have great supportive parents."

Some athletes had family members who expressed ambivalence or even outright rejection of their participation. An Asian-American fencer said that her family did not support her at all, in the beginning. Seven of the athletes had ambiguous support systems within their families, from being detached and indifferent to unconditionally supportive. A white fencer has a mother who is not very supportive, but her father and brother are both extremely supportive--especially when it comes to competition--and a very supportive sister, especially in helping her plan her training and travel. The athletes made it very clear

that having supportive people in their lives helped them participate in sport. The support, acceptance of who they were and their choice to participate in sport, all reinforced the athletes' decision to participate in sport.

Because of our society's infatuation with sport, especially male sports, female athletes have had to deal with negative influences, attitudes and experience in order to participate. Athletes gave a wide variety of examples of negative experiences. When a bisexual field hockey player and a friend wanted to play ice hockey with the guys, the guys did not want them playing and gave them some looks. It was not until they played a couple of times before the guys were asking the women back. "You're a woman so you will never be as good as a man in sport or otherwise," is what a swimmer heard. Another swimmer believed that, "women tend to include people (regardless of sexual orientation, gender, color, etc.) and I felt that the boys (in high school) were not inclusive no matter how hard I tried to impress them with my athletic ability."

When asked if they had ever felt hindered in sport due to being female, many of the athletes' responses were "put last in the line up" syndrome, no respect, "are there a lot of homos on your team?" or "do a lot of lesbians play hockey?" One lesbian field hockey player commented that she felt "different in high school from my female peers who would rather not sweat, wear makeup and party every weekend, etc."

Twenty-eight athletes, slightly more than half of those surveyed, responded that they had never had a negative experience participating in sport simply because they are female. However, many of the illustrations and explanations given partially or completely contradict this assertion. "No, but some women in my sport have had to deal with male

coaches who will come on to them or make comments (body, looks, weight)” (a swimmer). When an athlete said that she had never had a negative experience in her sport, the lack of discrimination she is claiming is undermined by her further admission that she actually has been discriminated against. But she considers that it does not count, because it was “just outside the sport because they don't know or care” (a heterosexual swimmer). One athlete neatly demonstrated the effectiveness and the invisibility of the societal controls, noting that she had not experienced discrimination as a female athlete because “the sports I have participated in have always been considered graceful or even a ‘women's’ sport.” The consequences of transgressing norms can be safely ignored and minimized by those who stay well within those norms.

All of the criticisms have dramatic effects on athletes, especially if they come from their primary emotional support system. These comments have effects on younger, less experienced women, which may deter them from following their dreams. They manipulate them to fit into the constricting roles of society, particularly if the sport is considered highly masculine. The athletes relayed that even with a strong personal support system, the lack of support from society still took a toll.

Lack of support came from various sources. Several athletes found a lack of support at school. “A teacher told me that I shouldn't be playing soccer with the boys during recess” (a canoe/kayaker). Others received unappreciated, unwelcome, and offensive, sexually explicit comments from other athletes and coaches. “Some women in my sport have had to deal with male coaches who will come on to them or make comments (body, looks, weight)” (a swimmer). They dealt with the lack of respect from

male college coaches. "My college once paid for the men to attend an athletic competition while the women had to fund their own trip. I filed a complaint, but nothing was ever done--the university sided with the coaches & athletic director" (a race walker).

Another question, "what is the meanest, nastiest thing anyone has said to you about your playing/participating in sport," examined the stereotypes and criticism directed at the athletes. The responses called into question the athletes' sexuality, intelligence, the legitimacy of their sports, and their private life. Comments about sexuality included "fucking dykes," "rug-munchers" and "all females in your sport must be gay." Some of the women lost friendships as their abilities grew because of the assumptions about their sexuality. A lesbian field hockey player said, "My sexuality seems to be a topic of conversation in my little home town eight hours away from me." A canoe/kayaker had to hear comments like, "Every female in your sport is gay, and you must be gay to be in this sport."

Other comments were directed toward their body image. Did they look like a female according to our society's definition of what is feminine? If they did not fit this ideal, they were condemned for it. Those insults included your, "arm muscles are too large," "your hips are too big for you bathing suit," "you smell (like chlorine)", "and your legs are hairy."

A number of sports, especially for women, are either not considered athletic enough, or are misunderstood and thus athletes that are involved in them were criticized for their lack of athleticism (Coakley, 1998). A number of athletes reported that people thought "it was a waste of time to train for something that wasn't even a sport" (a

heterosexual synchronized swimmer). This lack of understanding even filtered to friends and family who did not understand the commitments that athletes gave to their sport. “During the height of the season, my non-athlete friends would constantly harass me for not spending enough time with them. It hurt my feelings terribly” (a heterosexual swimmer). Another comment “Don't you wish you had a life?” was reflected in responses by two heterosexual swimmers, and a bisexual canoe/kayaker. Even coaches can have negative emotional effects on the athletes. “I had an Olympic coach tell me that I would never make the Olympics because I reminded him of himself. AND he never made it. Well, he was wrong. I competed in the 1988 Olympics for myself and in spite of what he thought” (a heterosexual diver). But even with all these pressures, the athletes still persisted in their participation in sport, especially when they had support from friends and family.

With the support and encouragement from a family member, the athletes believed that their participation in sport increased. Due to the pressures and prejudices that our society directs to female athletes, these athletes achieved their status not only due to their persistence, but also due to the support from family and friends. For those athletes in sports considered socially stigmatized, it was important to have some form of positive support available from at least one family member. So, the stronger the social support that a woman has, the more likely she is to participate in socially stigmatized sports.

## Chapter 7

### Homophobia, Ethnic Diversity, and Sport

Homophobia must be looked at in regards to the ethnic make up of the sample. It is important to analyze why 83% of the female athletes self-identified as white. More white women attend higher educational institutions than any other ethnic group. Could it be that sport is more accessible to white women here than for other ethnic women? The sports that responded are expensive and at one time were considered sports of the affluent white western society. This is compounded with the fact that working class women do not have the opportunity to participate at this level due to economics. Secondly, cultural socialization of what is feminine is used to keep women in a certain place in society. With the understanding that homophobia is used as a social control for gender role conformity, I believe that since lower socio-economic class women of U.S. minority groups are not seen as real women in the eyes of the dominant culture, they must not only defend their right to be viewed as a woman, they also need to defend their right to participate in sport. Some women of color are discouraged from participating at the Olympic class level due to social controls like homophobia that are enforced through community socialization.

The fact there was only one African-American athlete responding to this survey could stem from the socialization from within the black culture within the United States. There have been numerous studies indicating homophobia attitudes within the black community at large (Cohen & Jones, 1999; Joseph, 1986; Herek & Capitanio, 1995).

With such a lack in diversity of ethnicity in this study, I do believe that this type of research should be studied further. There was no statistical significance in comparing minority women's LAH score (29.1) and majority women's LAH score (31.07) because of the small numbers to compare. Only nine athletes represented minority groups out of fifty-three total responses (see Table 6). The qualitative portion of this research and the continued work of other authors in the area of gender in the non-white communities help to shed some light on the reasons for this lack of response.

I wanted to investigate if the athletes of different ethnic groups felt difficulties beyond being just a female athlete. I asked if they had ever felt hindered because of their race, class/economic status, sexual identity, etc. in their participation in their sport. If they answered, I wanted to see if they knew someone who had been hindered in some way. The athletes discussed gender, sexuality, age, respect, ethnic background, and economics when asked if they ever felt hindered in their participation because of social-cultural barriers.

Economics is a major issue for athletes, and class, race and gender are all major influences on their financial support systems. The athletes are dealing with these issues of image combined with the taint of homophobia. "Class/economic status has been a factor for some friends. Being able to afford things in our sport (i.e., travel, entries, suits, etc.)" is what a heterosexual swimmer, tells us, while a heterosexual diver informs us that "horseback riding is very dependent on economic status." A swimmer responded, "People in my sport, have 'normally' come from certain backgrounds. It's beginning to change, but in order to succeed, a person usually needs strong financial backing for traveling and



meet expenses.” Another swimmer stated that, “Some of the swimmers in the PDR (Philadelphia Department of Recreation.) had a hard time because most are minorities, lower class inner city kids. Swimming is not a way out as far as most can see, so they are encouraged to play basketball.” Athletes without the finances for training felt the disappointment of not being able to compete, “having to miss competitions in the past that I was qualified for because I did not have sufficient money to fund the trips on their own” (a race walker).

Some athletes have to deal with race issues on top of finding the financial support. “Volleyball is an elitist sport. It is very expensive to play club ball, and you have to play club to be recognized for a scholarship, because few college coaches attend high school matches. Also, being black, either you are a superstar, or colleges don't recruit you. The mediocre scholarships are saved for white girls” (an African-American volleyball player). Another athlete talked about how being a Mexican-American hindered her dreams of participation.

Yes. I wanted to be an ice skater. I lived in Colorado where top ice skating teams were. But, my parents were trying to help me afford the sport but with two other children besides me -- we couldn't do it. My dad was also raised understanding he was a Chicano. So that was tough, because of getting top jobs for his family became difficult. There was a class distinction for him (a diver).

Ethnic backgrounds and economics showed some overlap in the athlete's responses. One athlete felt her Asian background and her height reduced her chance to succeed in fencing. Another responded that athletes from different countries stereotyped American athletes as not very good, no matter how they finished. Four other responses

dealt with economics. Besides athletes not having the finances for training, two athletes talked about economics, race, and class and how they influenced their participation in sport.

These athletes were the minority of those who answered. Forty athletes answered that they have never felt hindered because of their race, class/economic status, sexual identity, etc. in their progress of participating in their sport, and twenty-two of the forty were swimmers. Of those forty, only nine athletes told why they feel that social-cultural barriers have not hindered their participation. "Not in my sport" was the reason given by four respondents. One swimmer believed that if she ever did have any cultural barriers she would "use them to my advantage, and would fight to overcome them. If you want something bad enough, stop at nothing, and go straight for it. Make it happen" (a white heterosexual swimmer).

The minority athletes felt that American society hinders them and that their own ethnic groups do as well. An Asian American heterosexual fencer discussed that some cultures are less accepting of females' participation in sport. "In Asian cultures, females do not do 'serious' sports. Societal roles and cultural bias are the major forms in which our children are socialized into believing what is good and bad." These feeling are confirmed in Horhri's (1986) research, "Are you a liberated Woman? Feminism, Revolution and Asian American Women." She explains that Asian American women are "not only oppressed by this American government and society which is based only on what is profitable, Asian women are also oppressed inside our communities by the force of Asian feudal tradition" (p. 422).

Fifteen athletes said that they personally did not feel hindered but knew someone who had been. Eight athletes gave explanations, grouped into three social-cultural barriers: economics, ethnic population in sport linked to class, and sexuality.

Twenty-four respondents raised issues about economics. The major issue is that people cannot travel to meets due to lack of funds. One swimmer points out that “Class/economic status has been a factor for some friends. Being able to afford things in our sport (i.e. travel, entries, suits, etc.)”. Another swimmer thought that comparing the number of participants and the limited diversity in swimming, many people must have been discriminated against in her sport.

Status and economics are social control elements, helping to keep many sports elitist. A heterosexual swimmer responded, “People in my sport have ‘normally’ come from certain backgrounds. It’s beginning to change, but in order to succeed, a person usually needs strong financial backing for traveling and meet expenses.” “Most people who swim are in a higher economic class--it is an expensive sport” responded another swimmer. “Some of the swimmers in the PDR (Philadelphia Department of Recreation) had a hard time because most are minorities, lower class inner city kids. Swimming is not a way out as far as most can see, so they are encouraged to play basketball.” Even though many athletes may not have known any athletes directly hindered by social-cultural barriers, it appears as though they do know some indirectly. This could be because the majority of these athletes are themselves white from upper and upper-middle class and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Three swimmers stated that even though swimming is expensive, “economic status doesn't show very much because water is water and a suit is a suit.” One of the three believed that only her gender has hindered her, since she is a “white, upper middle class, heterosexual female.” Another believed that since “swimming isn't really “professional’ and there are actually more collegiate women's programs than men's programs (at least in Division I),” that there are no barriers. A white lesbian field hockey player stated, “I do believe my race, class, economic status helps me to progress in my sport.”

Athletes of color already feel the strains of economic and class prejudices. Homophobia adds one more. Women of ethnic minority groups not only have to manage and deal with the socialization from within their own community, but also have to deal with the dominant cultural socialization (Espin, 1986 and 1987; Horhri, 1986; Joseph, 1986).

There are many other examples of athletes’ experience with homophobia in sport. All the controversy of being or not being homosexual or knowing and/or not liking homosexuals contributes to the social perceptions of ethnic cultures. The strong religious and cultural precepts carry over into the world of sport.

If someone in our sport was gay, they were ostracized. In fact, I stopped playing HS basketball because all my club volleyball teammates said that all basketball players were gay. So I played HS soccer. Now there are a lot of lesbians on the women's beach double tour, and even as an adult, I wouldn't want to be associated with that (a African American heterosexual volleyball player).

When we look at the whole picture and see how not only sexuality, but ethnicity, class and economics interplay with one another, we get a better understanding of the

barriers and fear that female athletes have when attempting to participate in sport. Their determination to participate in any sport is hampered from so many different areas of life. A woman of any ethnic group besides white will have a harder time participating in sports, due to race, class (especially lower ones), gender, and sexuality (especially if she does not fit or perceived to not fit the norm, heterosexual). The cycle of social control is so pervasive it is sometimes invisible.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Within our society, homophobia, especially in sport, is such a taboo subject that few feel comfortable talking openly about it. In an article in *The Advocate*, Biemesderfer (1998) describes the way that many lesbian collegiate basketball players learn to avoid talking about their sexuality and even to publicly uphold the unwritten compulsory heterosexuality clause that their schools have adopted. Players' and coaches' complicity is sealed because the image of the heterosexual, feminine, All-American girl, is one that sells, to the media, to the public, and to the bestowers of sponsorships for both schools and players. Presumably, this avoidance of even the taint of lesbianism is powerful enough, and rewarded well enough, to pervade the attitudes of athletes in other sports as well. Both society as a whole, and the athletes themselves, cling to the illusion that elite athletics is somehow a pure and objective arena where performance alone is at issue, like the swimmer who claimed that her sport was free from homophobia, because "it is just you vs. the clock." However, the participants in swimming had the one of the highest average IAH scores of any sport I examined. My research shows that whether or not they directly acknowledge it, female athletes at the Olympic trials level have to deal with homophobia.

Homophobia has an effect on the social perceptions of what sports are appropriate for girls and women to participate in, the stereotyping of those individuals and sports, and

the treatment of lesbians in sport. Heterosexual athletes who internalized homophobia (higher IAH scores) were likely to participate in sports deemed appropriate for women.

In contrast, those athletes with higher education levels, who had experiences with or knew lesbians and gays, and who participated in sports that are stigmatized as being less appropriate for women, tend to have the lowest IAH scores and to demonstrate less homophobia in their written answers and comments. Athletes presumably both self-select and self-censor: I found there were fewer self-defined lesbian athletes in sports with high average IAH scores, and that an athlete who had never known a lesbian athlete in her sport was likely to have a higher IAH score. This correlates with other research indicating that an individual's experience with homosexuals has a direct effect on her perceptions of lesbians. The lower a heterosexual athlete's IAH score, the less she can be controlled. The lower her levels of homophobia, the less she lives in fear, be that fear of other athletes or fear of being branded with the label, lesbian. Athletes with less fear have more freedom and therefore can devote more energy, focus, and power to their athletic success.

The athletes I interviewed believe that public recognition, sponsorship and media coverage is limited to those sports and individuals that have the "all-American girl" look. If the sport or individual has associations with lesbianism, participants are less likely to be recognized. Even if they become winners at the international level, sponsorship is still tenuous.

All the athletes stated that they had someone in their family or immediate family that supported them in their pursuit and participation in sport, especially to get to this elite level. Those athletes that participate in sports that are seen as more masculine or are less

popular have a strong support system to help them emotionally. In the context of societal pressures to conform to appropriate sex-role definitions, which for women usually does not include sports competition, these female athletes had supportive families to help overcome the narrow confines of the gendered dichotomy of sex-role conformity.

A very limited number of minority female athletes responded. Research targeting women of color and homophobia in sport is extremely limited. Minority athletes receive a similar “double dose” of homophobia to that which lesbian athletes get, but in this case, it is as female athletes and then, as women of color, from within their ethnic group. Women of color are not represented at the Olympic trials in anything approaching their proportions in the general population. Further research is needed before a causal relationship between these two issues can be considered more than a hypothesis.

In the 2000 Summer Olympics there were a number of new Olympic sports for women and an increased acceptance of women as elite athletes. However, the idea that women must meet the social definition of femininity is clearly still with us. Incontrovertible evidence of this paradox was a television ad which juxtaposed spectacular athletic footage of the United States’ gold medalist in the first-ever women’s pole vault competition with background music with an ultra-traditional message that reassured viewers that she was still very feminine: “I enjoy being a girl,” from the Broadway musical *Flower Drum Song*. Sport, whether one views it as a metaphor for society or as a powerful tool of socialization, is wrought with patriarchal biases and perpetuates stereotypes and discrimination.



Sport is a significant and meaningful part of our culture. I hope my research will further an understanding of women's participation in sport and how homophobia limits that participation. Whether we are aware of it or not, homophobia biases our perceptions, not only of others, but of ourselves. I argue, as Vealey does, for a transformative social constructionist interpretation of women in sport and of lesbian in sport. Whether one is looking at competition at the Olympic trials level as an athlete, lesbian or heterosexual, or simply as a spectator who feels invested in the success of America's Team, we all lose when homophobia controls and limits female participation in athletics.

## End Notes

### Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> I chose not to use those female athletes in the National Archery Association due to my affiliation with the NGB. I was a member of the 1996 US Olympic Archery Training Team and a National Team member. My familiarity with the female athletes within this organization led me to exclude them to avoid possible conflict of interest or the skewing of these findings in any way.

<sup>2</sup> Of that number, nineteen could not be forwarded and were returned to me, and seven were unusable. Two were unusable because they were incomplete and five were disqualified as not meeting the selection criteria because they came from athletes who were at the Olympic Training Center but have yet to participate in their first Olympic tryout (they are currently training for the 2000 tryouts).

<sup>3</sup> The index has an Alpha coefficient of .90 or larger for reliability and a validity coefficient of .60 or greater. The LAH is a straight means score ranging from 1 (least homophobic) to 100 (most homophobic), 50 being the mean.

<sup>4</sup> As the data was being analyzed, one drawback to the questionnaire was found. In the demographics section the division of age was put into age groupings. The athletes were asked to place themselves into an age range instead of specifying their actual age. I considered this a drawback because when explaining the data in regard to theory and the athletes input, I cannot give exact voice to the athlete that is giving insight to the questions proposed.

<sup>5</sup> The 25-29 group followed with 26.4%, then the 30-34 age group with 24.5%, and only one athlete was in the 35-39 age groups, 1.9%.

### Chapter 3

<sup>6</sup> In 1995, San Jose State was not in compliance with Title IX. According to a Compliance Review from the Office of Civil Rights, as late as October 1995, San Jose State University was found to be in violation in 6 of 13 area covered by Title IX. San Jose State agreed to "add four women's teams in the next four academic years and will survey student athletics interest every two years." (O.C.R., 1995)

<sup>7</sup> The IAH scores did not show that the type of sport had a significant chi-square value at 0.184 at the .05 significance level.

<sup>8</sup> In the linear regression, with a significant F of 0.003 and accounted for 0.154 of the B score.

<sup>9</sup> Pearson R score of .004.

#### **Chapter 4**

<sup>10</sup> The IAH was also found to be a significant factor in the linear regression. It accounted for 15% of the total variance of an individual's IAH score

<sup>11</sup> A Pearson-R score of .004. This shows that statistically there is a correlation between an athlete's level of education and a decrease in her IAH score.

<sup>12</sup> Education was a significant in the linear regressions at the .05 level with a score of 0.024. It accounted for -0.331 of the total model, showing that it had a significantly negative effect on the increase of an individual's level of homophobia.

<sup>13</sup> The results for age in the cross-tab were not shown to be significant. The linear regression, however, showed that age has a relationship to IAH scores, with a significant F of 0.066. This shows that how old you are accounts for 6.6% of the total variance of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The lack of data for other age groups definitely had an effect on the statistical findings.

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Table 1

### Respondents by Sport

Sport	Surveys		
	<u># Sent</u>	<u># Returned</u>	<u>% Returned</u>
<b>• NGBs<sup>1</sup></b>			
Basketball	24	0	0%
Table Tennis	5	0	0%
Equestrian	12	2	17%
Team Handball	10	0	0%
Diving	31	3	10%
Synchronized Swimming	31	3	9%
Fencing	11	5	45%
Field Hockey	32	12	38%
Volleyball	1	1	100%
Canoe-Kayak	9	4	44%
Badminton	3	0	0%
Swimming	126	23	18%
<b>• ARCO<sup>2</sup></b>			
Rowing	26	6	23%
Racewalking	2	1	50%
<u>Totals</u>	327	60	18%
# Unforwardable		19	
# Unusable <sup>3</sup>	7	-7	
Revised Totals	301	53	18%

Note:

- 1) Contacted through National Governing Boards.
- 2) Contacted at ARCO Olympic Training Center.
- 3) Unusable surveys due to incomplete packets.

**Table 2**

**IAH scores spread across the sports**

Sport	IAH Score Category			Total	
	1-24	25-49	50-74		
Canoe-Kayak	N <sup>1</sup>	2	1	1	4
	N <sup>2</sup>	3.8%	1.9%	1.9%	7.5%
Diving		3			3
		5.7%			5.7%
Field Hockey		8	4		12
		15.1%	7.5%		22.6%
Fencing		2	3		5
		3.8%	5.7%		9.4%
Race-Walking		1			1
		1.9%			1.9%
Rowing			1		1
			1.9%		1.9%
Swimming		9	7	7	23
		17%	13.2%	13.2%	43.4%
Sync Swimming			2	1	3
			3.8%	1.9%	5.7%
Volleyball				1	1
				1.9%	1.9%
Total		25	18	10	53
		47.2%	34%	18.9%	100%

	Value	df	Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	20.857	16	0.184
Likelihood Ratio	25.462	16	0.062
N of Valid Case	53		

24 cells (88.9%) have expected count less than 5.

The minimum expected count is 1.9

Notes:

N<sup>1</sup> is the number of athletes with IAH in that category

N<sup>2</sup> is the total % of the sample that falling into each category. So there were 9 swimmers who have a low IAH score, which is 17% of the sample population.

We know that because there is such a low spread of subjects in each category, this is not a significant model; but it is good for displaying purposes to show how IAH scores are spread across the sports

**Table 3**

**Education, Age, Sport and the IAH**

Model	Std. Error	beta	Sig.
Constant	0.511		0.015
Educational Level	0.1	-0.331	0.024
Age	0.133	0.293	0.066
Sport	0.049	0.465	0.003

Sig. .004a

Model Summary			
r squares	0.274		

The r squares indicates that this model (all the IV's used here) accounts for 27.4% of the total variance of the dependant variables. The significance level indicates that this model is statistically significant at the 0.05 level: this means there is a 95% confidence in this model.

Beta is the standardized form of all the variables (basically they are all using the same numerical scale so we can compare them to one another). We see that education has a negative effect on the levels of homophobia, whereas sports has a positive effect. We also know that age does not have a significant effect on levels of homophobia at the .05 level. Both education and what sport the athletes are in, does.

Table 4

**Educational Levels and IAH Score**

Educational	IAH Score Category			Total
	1-24	25-49	50-74	
High School	2 3.8%	1 1.9%	5 9.6%	8 15.4%
BA/BS	15 28.8%	8 15.4%	5 9.6%	28 53.5%
Grad Work	7 13.5%	9 17.3%		16 30.8%
Total	24 46.2%	18 34.6%	10 19.2%	52 100.0%

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.612 a	4	.004
Likelihood Ratio	15.947	4	.003
N of Valid Cases	52		

a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .154.

Comparing education level to IAH scores, we know it is highly significant at the .05 level because it has a significant level of .004.

Example: This table tells us that two people with HS education have a low IAH score, which accounts for 3.8% of the total sample.

**Table 5**

**Age and IAH Scores**

Age	IAH Score Category			Total
	1-24	25-49	50-74	
18-24	11 20.8	8 15.1	8 15.1	27 50.9
25-29	9 17	3 5.7		12 22.5
30+	5 9.4	7 13.2	2 3.8	14 26.4
Total	25 47.2	18 34	10 18.9	53 100

	Value	df	sig
Pearson Chi-Square	8.167	4	0.086
N of Valid Case	53		

4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.26.

This is the same as above only using age instead of education.

This is not a significant table (.086 > than .05).



Table 6

**Average IAH by Ethnicity**

IAH/Ethnic Group	Ave.	Totals
African-American	54.00	1
Asian American	35.97	4
White	31.07	44
Native Indian	18.00	1
Mexican American	15.33	3

Individual Women of Color IAH Scores

Ethnic Background	IAH Score
African-American	54
Asian American	21.88
Asian American	16
Asian American	67
Asian American	39
Mexican American	21
Mexican American	9
Mexican American	16
Native Indian	18

## Appendix



**San José State**  
UNIVERSITY

College of Social Sciences

Social Science Department

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Asian American Studies  
Program

Culture Program

Social Science Program

Women's Studies Program

April 10, 1998

Dear US Female Olympic Class Athlete,

As a member of the 1996 US Olympic Archery Training Team and National Archery Team I became interested in social barriers encountered by top level female athletes. I have an opportunity to study in this area as part of my Master's Degree work at San Jose State University (SJSU). My work is in collaboration with two faculty members at SJSU: Dr. Lois Helmbold, Women's Studies Program, and Dr. Carol L. Christensen, Department of Human Performance.

I need your help in my study of the social-cultural barriers that US Olympic Class female athletes perceive and overcome in order to effectively participate in an Olympic Tryout, for a summer sport. Attached is a questionnaire and index asking for your feelings and opinions about your participation in sport in regards to one particular barrier, homophobia. Will you please spend some time on the questions (approximately 15 minutes) and return the questionnaire, index and the top white sheet of the signed consent form within two weeks of receipt of this letter in the prestamped addressed envelope.

You should understand that your participation is voluntary, totally confidential, and that choosing not to participate in this study, or in any part of this study, will not affect your relations with San Jose State University or your NGB.

There are no risks or benefits to you for your participation in this study.

The results of this study may be published, but any information that could result in your identification will remain confidential.

If you have questions about this study, I will be happy to talk with you. I can be reached at ~~(619) 482-6260 ext. 6449~~. If you have questions or complaints about research subject's rights, or in the event of a research related injury, please contact Serena Stanford, Ph.D., Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2480.

Sincerely,

Natalie L. Wells  
Researcher  
408 295 7619



San José State  
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Asian American Studies  
Program  
Cultural Pluralism Program  
Social Science Program  
Women's Studies Program

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator: Natalie L. Wells

Title of Protocol: Homophobia: A Social-Cultural Barrier to US Women Athletes' Participation in Olympic Tryouts.

1. I have been asked to participate in a research study investigating the social-cultural barriers that US female athletes at the Olympic CLevel Level must face and overcome in order to participate in an Olympic Tryout.
2. I will be asked to answer a questionnaire on my perceptions of my participation in sport and return my questionnaire within one two weeks of its receipt to the investigator.
3. There are no anticipated risks to my participation in this research.
4. There are no benefits, but the knowledge that will be gained from participating in this study.
5. The result of this study may be published, but all information that could identify my identity will be strictly confidential.
6. No compensation for participation in this study will be given.
7. Any questions generated from this questionnaire/study maybe addressed to Natalie L. Wells at 619-482-6260 ext. 6449. Complaints about this research maybe addressed to Lois Helmbold, Women's Studies' Chair 408-924-5590. Questions or complaints about research, subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Serena Stanford, Ph.D., Associate Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at 408-924-2480.
8. I understand that if I choose to not participate in this study, no services will be lost or jeopardized.
9. I understand and voluntarily give my consent to participate in this study. I also understand that I may refuse to participate in the study or in any part. I further understand that I may withdraw at anytime without prejudice to my relations with San Jose State University.
10. I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.

The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of her rights.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Subject's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date 4/10/97 97 Investigator's Signature Natalie L. Wells

The signature of a parent or guardian on this document indicates approval for the child or ward to participate in the study and a statement that the child or ward is freely willing to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child or Ward                      Parent or Guardian's Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Relation to Child or Ward                      Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Full Mailing Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature                      Date

**Questionnaire for Female Olympic Class Athletes**

Please answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can.

**Demographics:**

Age:     18 - 24             30 - 34             40 - 44             50 - 54             60 - Over  
           25 - 29             35 - 39             45 - 49             55 - 59

**Sexuality:**

Heterosexual             Lesbian/Homosexual             Bisexual             Uncertain

**Marital Status:**

Single                     Married  
 Co-Habiting             Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Parental Status:**

W/ Child(ren) at Home  
 No Child(ren) at Home  
 No Child(ren)

**Educational Background:**

High School  
 College: (circle one) AA/AS--BA/BS--MA/MS--Ph.D.  
 Technical/ Certificate

**Ethnic Background:**

African American     Europe-American     Pacific Island American  
 Asian American       Mexican American     Other not listed \_\_\_\_\_

Sport \_\_\_\_\_                    Number of Years Participated \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions honestly and the best you can.

- How many Olympic tryouts have you participated in?
- How did you feel the first time you participated in the Olympic trials?
- What personal attributes do you feel have helped you in your participation in sports?
- Were your parents very supportive of your athletic participation?
  - Mother?
  - Father,?
  - Brother(s)?
  - Sister(s)?
  - Grandparents?
  - Other Family Members?
- Have you ever been called a tomboy because you participate in sports? Y/N If yes, by whom? And why?
- Do you feel that being a woman has hindered your progress in sport? Y/N If so, how:
- What is the meanest, nastiest thing anyone has said to you about your playing / participating in sport?
- Have you ever had a negative experience participating in sport because you are a woman? Y/N If so, example

-Have you ever felt hindered (because of your race, class/ economic status, sexual identity, etc.) in your progress of participating in your sport? Y/N How?

-If you answered No to the above question, do you know someone who has been ?

-In the sport you participate in, have you ever noticed homophobic attitudes, comments, or situation (i.e., bad jokes, slurs)? Y/N If yes, example

-Do you feel that lesbians in sports are discriminated against? If YES, How? If NO, why?

-Do you feel that lesbians who are "out" to everyone are treated differently? Y/N, How ?

-Do you participate in a sport that others in society would consider to be associated with lesbian participants? Y/N

-Do you believe that some women in your sport would not (have not) be sponsored because they were thought to be (are) lesbian? Y/N Why?

-If you are not a lesbian, are you afraid of being called--labeled--a lesbian because you participate in sports? Y/N, Why?

-If you are a lesbian and still in the closet, do you worry that someone will find out?

-If you are a lesbian, are you "out" in your sport? Y/N Why? What helped you to make this decision?

-Is there information about your participation in sport, you would like to share?



San José State  
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Academic  
Vice President  
Associate Vice President  
Graduate Studies and Research

TO: Natalie L. Wells  
2800 Olympic Parkway  
Chula Vista, CA 91915

FROM: Serena W. Stanford *Serena W. Stanford*  
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: March 30, 1998

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"Homophobia: A Social Cultural Barrier to U.S.  
Women Athletes Participating in Olympic Tryouts"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Serena Stanford, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at  
(408) 924-2480.