Examining homophobia in female elite team sports
Disclaimer

• Half way through data collection period
• Four initial interviews
• Initial findings
• Elite but not full internationals
Homohysteria

Homoerasure  Homohysteria  Inclusivity

100%  0%

Awareness of homosexuality

Antipathy toward homosexuality

One-time rule of homosexuality
One-time rule of homosexuality
Demise of the one-time rule


(Anderson et al. 2016)
Culture change
Lionesses • @Lionesses • Jul 1

@ellsbells89's and @JoPotter8's tribute to the anti-homophobia campaign celebrated at today's game 😊
Participants

- Four participants
- Age range: 24-34
- Football and rugby
- Elite level
- Two retired
- Average 45 minutes
- Semi-structured interviews
Declining homohysteria

- P2: “Back in the day it was the worse thing that you could say to a female footballer”
- P2: “Society has come a long way”
- P3: “Overall perception of LGBT is changing”
Team climates

- P1: “Being in that environment almost made me feel reassured that it was ok”
- P1: ”Coming out would not have been a problem…in any of my teams”
- P2: “Club level is an easy environment to be a lesbian”
- P3: “You feel safe…you feel comfortable”
- P4: “A comfortable environment to be who I knew I was and who I wanted to be”
Climates – Griffin, 1998

- Hostile
  - “Lesbian participation prohibited” (p. 93)
  - “Identity must be concealed” (p. 93)

- Conditional tolerant
  - Don’t ask, don’t tell
  - Glass closet

- Open and inclusive
  - “Can be more open” (p. 104)
  - “Without as much concern about the kinds of discrimination or harassment experienced” (p. 104)
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<td>• Supported by team mates</td>
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Coming out – team confidence

• P1: “Gaining confidence speaking to my teams and friends, I then spoke to my parents”
• P3: “You can walk into a team like that [with open players] and just be like, ok I am safe, this is fine”
• P4: “I definitely remember feeling a lot more, at that time, more comfortable in football and around my football friends, just to be gay and to be who is was”
Coming out quietly

- P1: “There is not that moment when you sit people down”
- P2: “There was no real coming out”
- P3: “You don’t physically stand there and say ‘Hi I am [name] and I am gay’”
- P3: “There’s no actual having to come out”
- P4: “It wasn’t an announcement…It definitely wasn’t a coming out like I did to my family”
Homophobia

• No homophobia from team mates or managers

• P2: “My manager is really supportive”

• P4: “I can’t remember any incident when anyone has said anything nasty to me or made me feel like they aren’t accepting of me”

Exception

• P1: “A familiarity with the manager that I didn’t appreciate”
Homophobia - fans

- P1: “I have heard it in the stands, a lot…I went to watch a match last season and there was a guy behind me saying it and I had to say ‘are you actually joking?!’”

- P2: “Fans were really supportive of me”

- Not many spectators at games
Media and sponsors

• Not asked by the media or sponsors
• P1: “No there was never an incident when I had to come out to sponsors”

• Evidence of some activism
• P3: “I wouldn’t want to be sponsored by someone who didn’t accept that of me”
Travelling

• P2: “I would find it difficult going to play sport in a country now with having to be somebody else…I probably wouldn’t go”

• P3: “I probably wouldn’t go”

• P4: “I have played in Russia, twice maybe three times…I can’t remember any incidents or feelings of being uncomfortable or anything like that…[when asked if things had changed] I think for me I wouldn’t be happy at all about it but its never down to the players in this situation is it…I just don’t like tolerating that sort of stuff”
Room for improvement - international

• P1: (at junior international level) “It’s an environment where you can’t always be yourself”
• P2: (at junior international level) “I found it really, really difficult in the England set up at club level it was really easy”
• P2: “I hated my England experience”
Room for improvement - coaching

- P1: “He brought me off the pitch...he tried to shake my hand, I refused. He approached me aggressively, grabbed my jacket and started screaming in my face...I told him to ‘fuck off’ because I was scared...my confidence was sort of shot to pieces. You are trapped because you can’t leave unless the manager says to can. It took me about a year to get over that...I don’t know if it had something to do with sexuality...he couldn’t turn the charm on with me”
Summary

- P1: “Being gay within my sport gave me the confidence to be gay…I was accepted”
- P3: I am part of an open inclusive welcoming team so my sexuality has never been an issue…I think that makes me a better rugby player I don’t have to hide anything”
- P4: “Football has always made it really easy for me”
Limitations

- Two sports
- Not full internationals
- Some areas are limited on data due to lack of international experience
- Wider range of experiences needed
Participants wanted!

Participant requirements:

- Female — identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Played a team sport at a national league level/international level for at least one season in the last 10 years.
- To take part in a 1-to-1 interview for around 90 minutes.

Aims of the project:
1. Examine the environment of elite team sport in the UK.
2. Investigate if the environments differ across sports.
3. Analyse any cohort differences between athletes.

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The experiences of openly gay and lesbian athletes in competitive sport

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References
