

Relationship of Heterosexism and Team Cohesion in Women's Collegiate Athletics

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Introduction

- Cohesion has been defined as the extent to which groups stick together or remain united with task objectives or social goals in mind (Carron et al., 1985)
- Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal form a sexual expression or orientation and all other forms are considered deviant (Griffin, 1998)
- Qualitative sport psychology researchers have suggested that homophobia and heterosexism likely hinder team cohesion (Krane, 1996; Vealey, 1997)
- Using general psychological instruments, researchers have been unable to quantitatively measure a relationship (Forbes et al., 2001; Mullin, 2009).



Hypotheses

- In the current study, the researcher hypothesized that higher levels of heterosexist attitudes, as measured by the Heterosexist Attitudes in Sport – Lesbian scale (HAS-L; Mullin, 2013) would correlate with lower levels of team cohesion, as measured by the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985)



Participants

- A national sample of female collegiate athletes ($N = 595$) participated in the study
 - Age: 19.46 ± 1.21
 - Number of seasons with team: 2.95 ± 2.31
- Participants represented 33 colleges and university
 - Division I : $n = 47$
 - Division II: $n = 259$
 - Division III: $n = 292$
- Participants were members of 16 different NCAA sports
 - Basketball, Crew, Cross Country, Equestrian, Field Hockey, Golf, Gymnastics, Lacrosse, Rugby, Soccer, Softball, Swimming, Tennis Track and Field, Volleyball



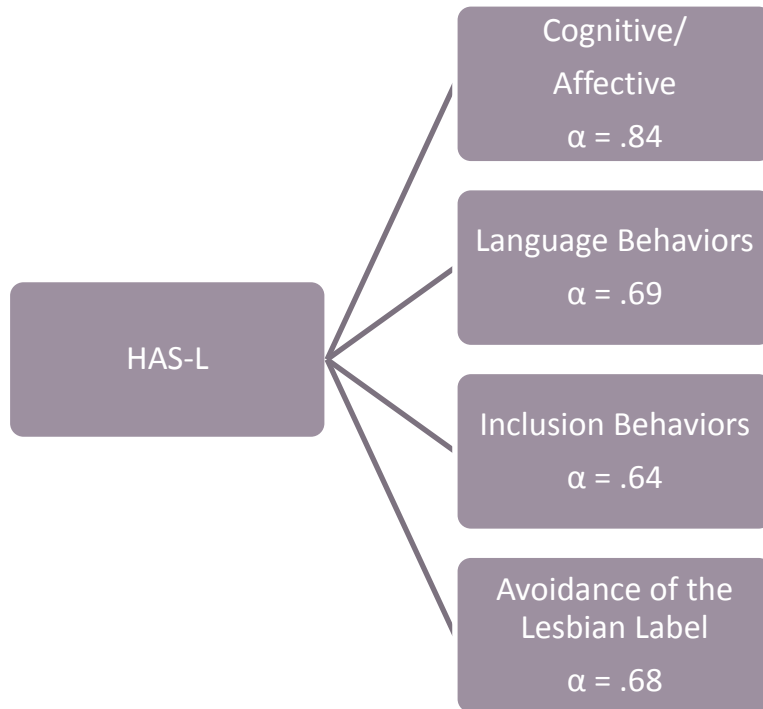
Results

- A majority of participants ($n = 573$) reported knowing at least one Lesbian, Gay male, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) individual
 - Average number of LGBT people known: 11.50 ± 16.23
- A majority of participants identified as exclusively heterosexual ($n = 439$)
 - 140 fell between 1 and 5 on the Kinsey Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948)
 - 20 identified as exclusively homosexual

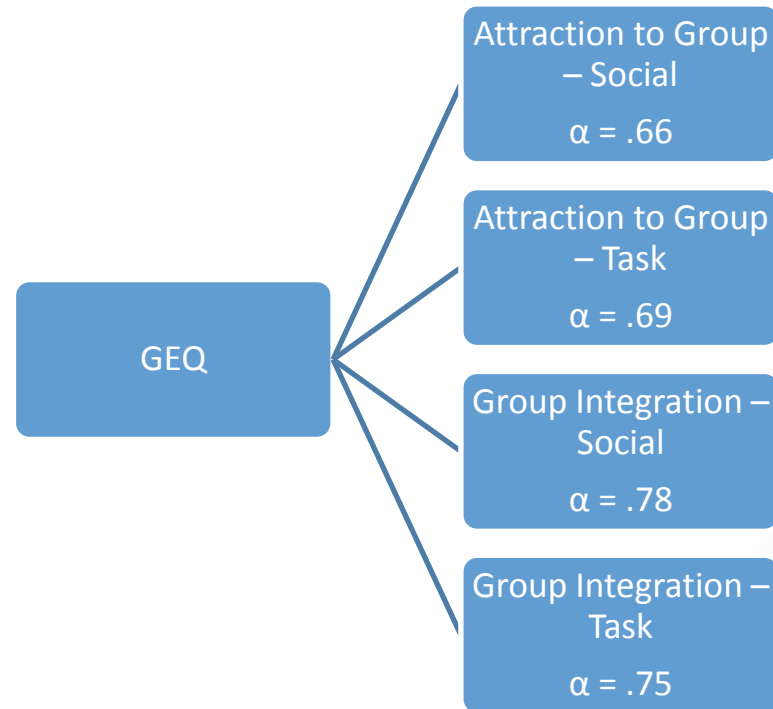


Instrumentation

HAS-L (Mullin, 2013)



GEQ (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1985)



Validity Check Question: “On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not comfortable at all with Lesbian teammates and 10 being extremely comfortable with lesbian teammates, how comfortable is your team?”



Procedures

- Female collegiate athletes ($N = 595$) were recruited from NCAA Division I, II, and III universities
 - Permission to recruit was received from ADs and head coaches of the teams
- Participants were emailed a description of the study from their coach with a link to the questionnaire
- Participants completed the questionnaires online on a server hosted by SPSS Data Collection Server Administration
- Surveys were retrieved from the server and analyzed



Results

	Attraction to Group - Social	Attraction to Group - Task	Group Integration - Social	Group Integration - Task
Cognitive/Affective	-.10*	-.16*	-.10**	-.16**
Language Behaviors	-.03	-.20 **	-.03	-.18**
Inclusion Behaviors	-.14**	-.17**	-.11**	-.17**
Avoidance of the Lesbian Label	-.06	-.11**	-.09*	-.15**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



R² of significant correlations range from 1% - 4%

Results

- Linear Regression: Attraction to Group - Social

Predictors	β	t	F	R^2	p
Cognitive/ Affective	-.01	0.22	4.26	.04	.01
Language Behaviors	.05	1.09			
Inclusion Behaviors	-.12	-2.72**			
Avoidance of the Lesbian Label	-.01	-0.16			
Comfort w/ lesbians	.11	2.18**			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Results

- Linear Regression: Attraction to Group - Task

Predictors	β	t	F	R^2	p
Cognitive/ Affective	-.02	-0.49	9.11	.07	.00
Language Behaviors	-.13	-2.75**			
Inclusion Behaviors	-.09	-2.09*			
Avoidance of the Lesbian Label	-.02	0.50			
Comfort w/ lesbians	.14	2.87**			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Results

- Linear Regression: Group Integration - Social

Predictors	β	t	F	R ²	p
Cognitive/ Affective	.03	0.55	3.82	.02	.00
Language Behaviors	.03	0.71			
Inclusion Behaviors	-.08	-1.65			
Avoidance of the Lesbian Label	-.05	-1.08			
Comfort w/ lesbians	.14	2.78**			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Results

- Linear Regression: Group Integration - Task

Predictors	β	t	F	R ²	p
Cognitive/ Affective	-.01	-0.13	9.44	.07	.00
Language Behaviors	-.10	-2.08*			
Inclusion Behaviors	-.07	-1.60			
Avoidance of the Lesbian Label	-.03	-0.57			
Comfort w/ lesbians	.17	3.50**			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Discussion

- The current study is the first to detect a quantitative relationship between heterosexism and cohesion in sport, albeit a weak relationship.
 - As opposed to previous conjecture (Forbes et al., 2001; Mullin, 2009), heterosexism was a stronger predictor of task components of cohesion rather than social components of cohesion.
- Behaviors (language and inclusion) were stronger predictors of team cohesion than the Affective/Cognitive subscale.
 - However, the Validity Check Question, a self-report perception of comfort with lesbians, was consistently a predictor of high levels of cohesion
- While 7% explained variance is small, in the scheme of factors that contributes to team cohesion, it is relevant.
- Coaches and Sport Psychology Consultants should be cognizant of role heterosexual behaviors could have task objectives.



Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

- No attempt was made to control for time of the season or proximity to a competition date, as suggested by Carron et al. (1985).
- Selection bias at the AD, Coach, and student-athlete level may have skewed findings.
- Future researchers should examine whether programs which affirm tolerance have further implications on team cohesion and collective efficacy.



Thank you for your time and
attention!

