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| Comments  | Section  |                               |  |
|   | <b>Title and Abstract</b><br>Title to include: A concise indication of the research question/problem.<br>Abstract to include: A concise summary of the empirical study undertaken.   |                               |  |
|   | <b>Introduction and literature review</b><br>To include: outline of context (theoretical/conceptual/applied) for the question; analysis of findings of previous related research including gaps in the literature and relevant contributions; logical flow to, and clear presentation of the research problem/ question; an indication of any research expectations, (i.e., hypotheses if applicable).   |                               |  |
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**CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**  
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**CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT**

**DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE**  
**(HONOURS)**

**SPORT & PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

**TITLE: BEING ON CAMPUS, BEING “OUT”: THE**  
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**UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

**(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of**  
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**BEING ON CAMPUS, BEING “OUT”:**  
**THE HOMOSOCIAL SPACES FOUND ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

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**ABSTRACT**

There are a growing number of scholars who have contributed to the literature surrounding discourses of homosexuality, homophobia and heteronormativity in sport and educational settings, namely Butler (1990), Caudwell (2006), Foucault (1984; 1990) and Griffin (1992; 1998). The burgeoning research on sexuality in sports studies provides insights into the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) women and men in sport, as well as physical education teachers, and how they construct and manage their conflicting identities. These papers depict stories of marginalization, discrimination and victimization (Lock, 2003; Messner, 1999; Sparkes, 2002, 1994; Sykes, 1998; Veri, 1999). However, more recently evidence suggests (Anderson, 2011; Broad, 2001; Iannota and Kane, 2002; McCormack, 2011) there are groups of individuals who have had positive experiences related to their LGB identity. It is hoped this paper will contribute to the lack of research relating to students experiences of sexuality. Using semi-structured interviews with five participants, this paper aims to highlight the experiences of female LGB students within a university sports campus. This research ultimately shows that further education settings and the sports environment *can* provide positive experiences and a ‘safe space’ for young LGB females

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## **Introduction**

A growing amount of research in sports studies explores gender and sexuality, nonetheless Messner exclaims, “when it comes to understanding the social and inter-personal dynamics of sexual orientation in sport we have barely begun to scratch the surface.” (Messner, 1999, p.227). Despite a large body of research that exists on the experiences of LGB physical education teachers (Griffin, 1992,1998; Sparkes, 2002, 1994; Sykes, 1998), little work explains the experiences of LGB students in higher education. Research that has been carried out suggests that LGB students are still victims of homophobia and heterosexism (Caudwell; 2006, Griffin; 1992, 1998 Veri; 1999). This research project aims to highlight the experiences of female LGB students within the university sport environment and explore whether, contra to previous research, these experiences are positive with reference to their sexuality.

This research is concerned with the arguably ‘homosocial’ space of a university sports campus, located in Wales, UK. To provide some background knowledge on this subject, in the first chapter, a literature review has been conducted and categorized; (1) A social constructionist account of sexuality, (2) Butler’s account of un-intelligibility, and (3), the history of homophobia in sport and educational institutions. In the second chapter the appropriateness and effectiveness of using qualitative methods for research that aims to reveal useful sociological insights, is discussed. Semi-structured interviews with participants will provide a platform for LGB female students to tell of their experiences in this environment, this is further explained in chapter two. Following data collection the findings will be analyzed and discussed in-depth in terms of what has been gained from the research.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Review**

Sport is said to be a discipline that typically encourages hegemonic masculinity and, according to research, is an environment that often requires participants to perform ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Anderson, 2011; Messner, 2002). Sport, however, can also be a space for exploring alternative sexuality given the sexualized nature and homosocial spaces within sport. As Nash and Bain (2007) explain, the queering of spaces occurs “through the establishment of locations that provide the opportunity to experience alternative sexual practices and behaviors” (p.49). Research into the interaction between sport and educational environments, and individuals identifying as LGB, has shown how people negotiate their identity. In the 1990’s there was a great deal of research published concerning the topic of sexuality in sport. The main themes that will be explored in order to inform this research project are; a social constructionist account of sexuality, Butler’s account of un-intelligibility and a history of homophobia in sport and educational institutions.

### **A Social Constructionist Account of Sexuality**

Historically, sexuality has been seen as a fixed entity largely to do with biology and reproduction, "heterosexuality...has been naturalized, viewed as unproblematic and seems to require no explanation or justification for its existence" (Johnson and Kivel, 2007 p. 98). Furthermore, as Howson (2004) states, "there is an assumed equivalence between the sex that is attributed to people (male or female) and their sexuality...attraction to the opposite sex is the default sexuality attributed to people, although there is no necessary empirical equivalence between sex and sexuality" (p.41). Despite a move away from the belief that the primary purpose of sexuality is reproduction, as Seidman (2009) puts it, "they [sexologists] continue to think that heterosexuality is the natural and normal form of sexuality." (p.3). Sexologists developed classification of sexuality detailing the normal and abnormal forms that exist. As cited in Sykes (2006), Foucault famously stated: "the homosexual was now a species" (p.18). Since the category of 'homosexuality' was created, it was inferior to the category of heterosexuality and thus seen as the 'other' sexuality.

Psychology and sexuality studies have combined, to look into how sexual desires are managed in relation to the individual's psychology. Overt sexual expression could cause instability both psychologically and socially, whilst heavy social constraints could lead to personal unhappiness as a result of psychosexual frustration (Seidman, 2009). Developing from Freud's psychoanalysis of sexuality and sexual desire, sociologists (Kinsey, 1948; Messner, 1999) have acknowledged the fluidity and changeability of sexuality within ones life-time to be common place. As Seidman explains, for both men and women sexuality "is not fixed by nature but shaped by social forces and circumstances such as economic independence, social values, peers, or family culture" (Seidman et al, 2006, p. 12). The view of sexuality as constructed by the wider society and the environment stems from the work of Foucault (1980). Foucault contended that systems of power and knowledge created the sexual categories, homosexual, heterosexual, that still exists today (Epstein, 1996). That is to say that one is neither 'naturally' heterosexual nor homosexual, identity is produced and given meaning through the systems of power that are in place in society more

generally. Butler (1990) concludes, “he [Foucault] proposes ‘sexuality’ as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power that produces the misnomer of ‘sex’ as part of a strategy to conceal and hence, to perpetuate power-relations” (p.129). This constructionalist approach to sexuality whereby sexuality is the product of social forces was also introduced to sociology by Jeffery Weeks. Similarly to Foucault, Weeks proposed that, “we can no longer set ‘sex’ against ‘society’ as if they were separate domains...there is a widespread recognition of the social variability of sexual forms, beliefs, ideologies, and behavior... we must learn to see that sexuality is something which society produces in complex ways.” (Seidman, 2009, p.9)

Given that many sociologists believe sexuality to be constructed by discourses of society, it is not possible to talk about conceptions of sexuality without reference to discourses of gender. The view that gender is a social identity that contains within it a set of norms that guide behavior is common to most feminists. Giving an overview of the feminist position, Seidman explains, “ we are not born men or women but acquire these gender identities through a social process of learning and sometimes coercion...our sexual desires, feelings, and preferences are imprinted by gender” (2009, p.7). The gender order frames behaviors and attitudes towards men and women in all aspects of society; workplace, education, home and the sports arena. According to Messner and Sabo (1990), gender order is a dynamic process that is always changing, concerned with a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity. The media plays a major role in the promotion of ideologies of femininity and masculinity, particularly in sport. Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal form of being a man, according to Connell (1987) that is, “configuration of courage, physical strength and toughness” and is “endlessly paraded in the mass media” (Longhurst et al, 2008). Accordingly, the sports media are said to shape public consciousness about gender (Hargreaves, 1994). In the media and in many western world social-cultural environments, “an acceptable female is not simply accepted for being a female. An acceptable female is one who appears or behaves in certain ways...being a woman is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being considered acceptably feminine” (Lock, 2001, p.403). Other conditions for being feminine might include

characteristics related to appearance such as being slight/small framed, having long hair and groomed body hair. The set of ideologies that exist surrounding what it means to be an acceptable female i.e. femininity and heterosexuality, are generated from what Butler (1990) terms the 'heterosexual matrix', a framework of meaning through which we can supposedly understand sex, gender and desire. The impact this 'heterosexual matrix' has on females in sport will be discussed in the following section.

### **Butler’s Account of Un-intelligibility**

Judith Butler’s work has been very influential in feminist theory and gender studies in sport, with her approach to thinking of sex, gender and sexuality in her book, “Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity”. For Butler, the conceptions of sex that exist, without evaluation or questioning, are problematic. The problem is that, for her, sex is “inevitably regulative” and therefore any uncritical assumption of the category of sex “extends and further legitimates that regulative strategy as a power/knowledge regime” (1990, p.130). Butler (1990) argues that societies that believe in a natural gender order are also organized around the norm of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is the basis of a culture of romance, marriage, and the family, and is enforced by our laws, government, churches, schools and the military. A major function of being masculine for men is to be attracted to and have sexual desires towards women whilst a major aspect of being feminine (for women) is to be attracted to and have sexual desires for men. Therefore, the gender order must be considered in conjunction with ideologies of sexuality, as the two are inherently linked. Women’s sexuality, like men’s, is not fixed by nature but shaped by social forces and circumstances, by factors such as economic independence, social values, peers or family cultures (Seidman et al, 2006). In sport, these ideologies lead to conflicts that female athletes have to face, between their muscular sporting ‘bodies’ and their ‘femininity’. Some previous research (Cockburn and Clarke’s, 2002; Clark, 2012; Adams et al., 2005) has revealed the difficulty girls experience in embodying a sense of self as sport participants, attempting to balance overt performances of ‘girliness’ and ‘skilful bodily performances’.

This ideology of what constitutes a suitably ‘feminine’ sport or ‘masculine’ sport stems from the belief in a ‘heterosexual matrix’, a framework of meaning through which we can supposedly understand sex, gender and desire. Butler contends that gender is, “rendered culturally intelligible at present through what she terms the ‘heterosexual matrix’” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 34.). The “heterosexual matrix” that exists in society, Butler argues, is first based on the conception that gender is a direct result of sex. However, “the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is

culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Butler, 1990, p.8). Ultimately, the matrix generates a series of ideal relationships between them; gender follows naturally from sex and sexuality follows naturally from gender. In other words, the ‘heterosexual matrix’, according to Butler (1990), is the hegemonic belief in the relationship connecting sex, gender, sexual practice and desire (Lock, 2003, p.399). Lock (2003) claims that the gender social order is specifically heterosexual and sexuality is implicated in the construction of sex and gender. Hence, when women in sports disturb the historical gender order by partaking in the traditionally masculine sports, the sexuality that is said to naturally follow on from gender becomes questionable, as their gender is no longer “intelligible”. Butler’s explanation of (un)- intelligibility is summed up in the following paragraph:

‘Intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.” As a result, a person’s gender or sexuality becomes ‘unintelligible’ when it disrupts the, “causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the ‘expression’ or ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (Butler, 1990, p.23)

As a result of this ‘intelligibility’, and therefore what constitutes an acceptable or acknowledged way of living, a symbolic violence becomes apparent. Butler calls this ‘violence of derealization’. According to Lloyd (2007), “this is a form of normative violence wherein certain groups fail to count as human according to the dominant regime of intelligibility.” (p.144). In this instance the groups that ‘fail’ to be human would include women with ‘masculine’ tendencies or whose sexual desires are not of the desired heterosexual ‘norm’. Drawing from Butlers account of intelligibility the result is that, “to be human is to be heterosexual... consequently anyone who is not heterosexual (gay, lesbian or bisexual) is not (fully) human.” (Lloyd, 2007,p.35). The ‘derealization’ Butler describes is produced both through discourse and simultaneously through erasure. A ‘failure’ to be ‘human’ has stark consequences, including a lack of recognition by institutions, such as the government, of your rights to live the same way as those who are considered to live an ‘intelligible’ life. Explicitly put, “various cultures and

various mainstream human rights groups do not view gays and lesbians as part of the 'human' to whom human rights belong" (Lloyd, 2007, p.152). For example, in South Africa there are a small group of women who openly promote their involvement in a lesbian football team, chosen few. To be openly lesbian in a community that is so deeply entrenched in homophobia is to risk their lives. In South Africa lesbians risk being the victims of 'corrective rapes', beatings and murders. By this action, lesbian's relationships and their lives are rendered "un-intelligible", they are deemed to be exempt from the basic human rights straight women have access to, and hence to some degree lesbian relationships do not 'exist'.

There are a growing number of women resisting these "intelligible" genders that consist of ideals of femininity. In sport, one of the ways women resist the heterosexual matrix is by participating in traditionally masculine sports such as football and rugby. Female dopers are another group of women that explicitly disrupt the heterosexual matrix due to the aesthetics produced as a result of doping being characteristics normally attributed to masculinity e.g. big, muscular, strong etc. Their attempts at resistance do come at a price, since the ideal of femininity is conceptually connected to the ideals of heterosexuality and desirability. This is a result of the myth that women who engage with non-conventionally feminine sports i.e. rugby or football, are lesbian (Lock, 2003). The 'intelligibility' Butler describes, leads to the 'masculine' yet female sports persons being depicted as the sexualized 'other' particularly in the case of women, as female athletes who transgress 'intelligible' genders. As Lock points out, "women who do not stick to traditionally feminine sports are accused or presumed to be lesbian" (Lock, 2003, p.406). Furthermore, "insulting women who are not feminine and stereotyping non-feminine female athletes as lesbian illustrates how sex is situated with gender and gender is situated with sexuality" (Lock, 2003, p.399). Stereotyping, when it occurs in relation to women in sport, is often a result of homophobia. A clear example of this homophobia in sport is the tennis player Amelie Mauresmo in her younger days as a player. After coming out in the sport and leaping into the arms of her then girlfriend after winning the Australian open in 1999, Mauresmo was the target of homophobic remarks from the media and opponents. Martina Hingis called her "half a man" and Lindsay

Davenport claimed Mauresmo played like a man. Whether the stereotypes based around the assumption of traditionally non-feminine women being lesbian are true or not, homophobia is a threat to women in sport as spectators, participants and teachers. Explained by Hargreaves (1994), “The implications that athletes may be ‘pseudo-men’, ‘unfeminine’, ‘gay’, ‘masculine’, ‘mannish’, ‘butch’, ‘dykes’, or ‘lesbians’ put pressure on heterosexual sportswomen to play the ‘femininity game’ and stigmatize homosexuality” (p.171). The next section of this literature review will cover the history of homophobia in sport and education institutions.

### **History of Homophobia in Sport and Educational Institutions**

Most research, to-date, surrounding homosexuality in sport has centered on the experiences of PE teachers. Sparkes (1994) used findings from life history interviews with a young lesbian PE teacher to explore the self, silence and invisibility of lesbians in educational institutions. The findings of his research, focusing on the identity and management strategies of one particular individual as a method of coping with different situations in her life, provides in Sparkes own words, "important insights into a reality that is oppositional to the taken-for-granted reality of the dominant and privileged sexual class in schools, that is, heterosexuals" (p.93). Other sociologists including Sykes (1998) and Nixon (2009) have also focused their research on the experiences of homosexual PE teachers, both drawing on Butlers (1990) theories of heterosexuality to write poststructuralist critiques. One key theme that emerged from Sykes critique on the subject of the 'closet' is the concept of silence. Silence according to Sykes (1998, p.164), "has been the most obvious and enduring feature of the closet, often a permanent feature in a discursive world where there simply were no words to name the closet and its secrets". She argues that silences *can* have meaning, as does speech, the meanings only become apparent when given context, for example what *has* been said.

Discourses of athletic masculinity have been etched into the female body, disrupting the normal links between female/femininity and male/masculinity...the heterosexuality of women who participate in sport and physical education has long been recognized as fragile due to the masculinizing effects of sport (Sykes, 1998, p.161).

For this reason, women in sport often find themselves closeted, that is to say not open about their sexuality. Specifically in the case of lesbian sports women or female educators but equally heterosexual female educators could experience the 'pull' of the closet. Sykes (1998) article "turning the closets inside/out: towards a queer-feminist theory in women's physical education" contains a poststructural analysis of how the closet was constructed in the life histories of 6 lesbian/heterosexual physical educators. Sykes uses deconstruction to suggest how heterosexuality can sometimes find itself inside the closet, thereby

undermining the boundaries between inside/outside, silence/ speech, and lesbian/ heterosexual. The closet is a space created through heterocentrism. Heterocentrism refers to "the privileged position of heterosexuality, our ways of speaking, seeing, experiencing sexuality presumes that heterosexuality is the most normal, natural form of sexuality" (Sykes, 1998, p.156). In contrast, homosexuality is often only implicitly implied or silenced either by avoidance of the subject altogether e.g. "I don't think she's the type to get married" or by the use of gender neutral terminology e.g. "my partner and I". Veri (1999) states, "silences are significant elements of discourse, conveying meaning and power as effectively as more obvious spoken and written statements" (p359).

In sport, women who participate in traditionally masculine sports are 'touchstones of masculinity' in terms of appearance e.g. athletic, muscular and strong. Yet, often initiate conversations about their boyfriends/ husbands in an attempt to claim back their femininity, making explicit their heterosexuality and dispelling accusations of lesbianism. However, this is not always the case. There are groups of women who are 'unapologetic' of their participation in traditionally masculine sports. Broad (2001) suggests that women's participation in sports represents a type of resistance that can be understood as "queer" resistance, a gendered one. Broad recognizes the assumption has been sports are masculine; therefore, women in sports are masculine; therefore, women in sports are lesbians. "The concern is not that women athletes are too plain, out of style, or don't have good grooming habits. The real fear is that women athletes will look like dykes, or even worse are dykes" (Broad, 2001, p.184).

This fear is characteristic of homophobia. Homophobic discourse in women's sports, according to Butler (1991), serves two functions. The first accuses straight women of "deviant" behavior in hopes of deterring them from sport participation. The second accuses and threatens women who are correctly labeled as lesbians with the "violence or erasure". Additionally, "homosexuality is often exaggerated and ridiculed by others and is 'extra visible' in contrast to heterosexuality because heterosexual is recognized as normality whilst homosexuality is characterized by rumors, myths and taboos" (Caudwell, 2006, p.58). The women in Broad's paper who played rugby faced comments regarding their participation relating to issues

of sexuality as apposed to issues relating to their ability or athletic performances. One participant's grandmother commented she would never get a boyfriend whilst playing rugby. This is not an isolated case, this attitude is echoed across many traditionally masculine sports throughout the western world. The significant point of Broads paper is to illustrate how the women playing rugby that were resisting the gender 'norms', were also resisting the heterosexual matrix. As opposed to being 'apologetic' they displayed 'in your face' attitudes towards the gender order and sexuality. They were proud of their participation in rugby and mocked the heterosexual and homophobic discourses of society for example many of the players had bumper stickers depicting slogans such as "ruck me". Ravel and Rail (2008) also found that, "sexuality often was constructed as fluid, changing and resisting the heterosexual/homosexual binary" (p. 21). In their article the narratives of 14 young Francophone sportswomen who identified as "gaie," "lesbian," "bisexual," or refused these labels, were explored. The findings of the research, according to Ravel and Rail (2008) challenge the heterosexual/homosexual binary, the idea of a fixed sexuality, and the linearity of the coming out process. "The participants' discursive constructions of sexuality destabilized the idea of a fixed identity and, as a result, downplayed the idea of coming out as a "once-and-for-all" process" (p.21).

Research that gives a more positive outlook of the experiences of LGB persons in education is not as readily available. In particular, there is little work being done in relation to the experiences of LGB students. However, McCormack (2011) published an article online illustrating that, "it is possible for LGBT youth to have positive experiences of secondary education free from harassment and fear." (pp.7). In his research, McCormack interviewed four students at a sixth form college in England. The students spoke largely positively about how they were accepted as part of an inclusive school system and, despite some challenges to their sexual identities, they mostly enjoyed their school life. Having said this, McCormack also maintains the, "implicit ways in which these students can feel marginalized in school." (pp.7). To conclude, McCormack (2011) contends that although it is important challenge homophobia when it occurs, heteronormativity is an equally if not more damaging discourse that should be challenged and disrupted to ensure positive school experiences for all sexual minority youth.

The gap in literature relating to the experiences of female LGB students, in relation to their sexual identity, provides an opportunity for this current study. The reason for pursuing the female LGB student population, as opposed to the male LGB student population is mostly due to the strong sense of identity attached to the female LGB students on this campus. The female LGB students are generally more ‘visible’ than the male LGB students and it is anticipated that the experiences of Male LGB students would be very different from anticipated findings of this study. The current study is framed by an interest in addressing the following questions; Are the experiences of female LGB students similar or different to those of LGB teachers, often found to be negative? Is the university campus unique in its influence over the experiences of the female LGB students, because it is a predominantly sports orientated campus? Finally, what factors influence the female LGB students ‘openness’ regarding their sexual identity in the different sociological spaces found on campus? By addressing these research questions it is hoped that an insight into the experiences of LGB students will be a welcome addition to the existing research within sexuality studies and sociology. Furthermore, by identifying the different environments within the campus in which the students may find themselves either ‘out’ or ‘closeted’, e.g. the classroom, library, corridors, students union, sports teams etc., the findings may increase our understanding of the complexity of the students ‘coming out’ stories. The following section will outline the methodological approaches that will be used to answer these research questions.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

# **METHODOLOGY**

## Methodology

This research project aims to shed light on the experiences of female LGB students within the university and sport environment. The methodological approach adopted is solely one of a qualitative nature. According to Gratton and Jones (2010) qualitative research, “aims to capture meanings or qualities that are not quantifiable, such as feelings, thoughts, experiences and so on...” (p.30). Qualitative approaches to research are most appropriated for social studies because most social studies are not concerned with quantifiable measurements and statistics. Instead, they tend to be concerned with issues that are contextual, changeable and relative. This research project aims to capture the *experiences* of individuals from a particular social group, therefore, a qualitative approach is necessary to achieve these aims. Qualitative research commonly takes the form of interviews, participant observation and/or focus groups. Each of these methods has its advantages and disadvantages. Focus groups for example, may create a more relaxed atmosphere for the participants, enabling participants to be more open and comfortable in talking to the researcher (Gratton and Jones, 2010). It also provides opportunity for debate amongst the focus group, bringing to light interesting issues for the researcher to consider in itself. However, focus groups are not suitable to all participants, especially when dealing with potentially sensitive data. The sensitive and personal topic of discussion for this research reduces the possibility of a focus group as a method for data collection. Instead, the data collection has taken the form of interviews. Interviews are valuable in providing opportunities for cultural knowledge to be uncovered by the subjects themselves, as explained in the following passage;

In a way, subjects are like onions. Layers are peeled away, and the informant reveals not only more of his or her personality but also layers of cultural knowledge...in these opportunities of lengthy, almost free-flowing discussions...the layers will be exposed and knowledge will fortuitously come to light.

Sands, 2002, p.69.

By interviewing the participants the aim is that interesting stories and narratives will be revealed from which conclusions or suggestions can be made in relation to

the original research questions. Conducting interviews is my preferred method to participant observation, because although a wide angle view of cultural behavior is produced by participating and observing in that culture, Sands (2002) argues that the researcher must eventually focus their attention on individuals lives in order to clarify concepts, get explanations of particular behaviors or gain an understanding of the effects of behavior on individuals. This qualitative methodology is appropriate for a study of this nature as Iannotta and Kane (2002) argue, “sexual stories are far more than individual human- interest stories; they are cultural narratives with social and political implications (p.348).

### Data Collection Methods

The research method will take the form of semi-structured, thematic interviews conducted face to face within each participant's chosen environment. The participants will be given the choice of location of the interview because participants need to feel comfortable, and must trust the fact that they can say whatever they want without being overheard (McNamee, Olivier et al, 2007). Open questions will be used for the interviews, as these kinds of questions "invite the participant to tell a story", and can "generate detailed descriptions" about the topics of interest (Roulston, 2010, p.12). Although semi-structured, it is important to recognize that, as with most qualitative research projects, the questions themselves or the direction of the questioning can change depending on the preliminary responses of the participant (McNamee et al, 2007).

Data will be collected from the interviews in the form of tape recordings, and closely edited quotations transcribed straight from the mouths of the participants. It is hoped this data will provide the information needed to report on the sexualized identity construction practices of female university students. As the researcher I will adopt the use of reflexivity in the processing of the data analysis, and the final text. Through my own experience as the researcher the aim is to shed light on behavior of cultural members and my own behavior, in turn helping to trace, to some degree, a sense of cultural reality. In other words, in this type of sociological study "researchers engage in a self-reflexive analysis of the social categories to which they belong, since these enter into and shape what constitutes knowledge in any project" (Sparkes, 2002, p.17).

This research aims to produce a piece of literature of a positivistic type of qualitative research, being one which; "minimizes the amount of material that directly relates to the researchers role in the text" (Sands, 2002, p.88). However, the narrative of self can be an evocative form of writing, often resulting in personalized and revealing texts in which authors (the researcher) tell stories about their own lived experiences (Sparkes, 2002). Gratton and Jones (2010) suggest researchers in social science need to acknowledge the personal on a much deeper level than at present. This is achieved by combining thoughts and

quotations about the participants in studies with that of our own experiences, as the reality is that the two are not separate entities. Therefore at moments throughout the research process it may be appropriate to reflect on my own experiences. As Sparkes (2002, p.79) claims, this type of data analysis is “used by a growing number of scholars in sport and physical activity, drawing on their personal experiences to explore issues relating to body-self relationships over time, identity construction, gender and sexuality”.

## Participants

The research for this project took place within a sports university within the UK. The participants at the centre of the research were a combination of five undergraduates or postgraduates. Participants were selected by both opportunity and criterion based sampling. Opportunity based sampling involves selecting subjects due to convenience and accessibility, for example students within one's own college (Burns, 2000). This is relevant to the research carried out for this project since all the subjects are current or past students on the sports campus, Furthermore, the subjects were chosen based on the criteria I set in order to achieve the research aims, namely being female, identifying as LGB and being a member of a university sports team past or present. As explained by Thomas and Nelson (2001), 'Criterion based sampling is sampling in which the participants are selected because they possess certain characteristics set forth by the researcher' (p.334). All of the participants engaged in team sport during their time at this university. These participants are ideally positioned to give an insight into how they manage their behavior depending on the situations they find themselves in, with particular attention paid to how they construct and experience their sexual identities. More specifically, in the context of the different social spaces offered within the universities diverse campus, such as the library, corridors, student union and the classroom, in contrast with the wider social space that they find themselves in when outside of the campus grounds. The identification of participants is an important aspect of the method as Roulston exclaims, "to use phenomenological interviews effectively, it is essential that the interviewer has identified participants who have both experienced, and are able to talk about the particular lived experience under examination" (2010, p.17). As such, the participants were approached personally, given an explanation of the research aims and given the opportunity to express their interest or disinterest in the project before being directly asked to participate.

### Data Analysis

On completion of all interviews the data was analyzed closely and as accurately as possible. Each interview transcription was read and reread on numerous occasions to ensure thorough understanding, and to familiarize myself with that specific interview. The data was then reviewed and analyzed together, as a whole, implementing a comparison method which successfully compared different quotes with each other to allow the identification of both differences and similarities (Patton, 1990). Thematically, all of the data was searched through until the meaningful and most effective data was identified and then labeled allowing for an easier process of categorization. As Patton (2002) describes, “The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data” (p.432). The categorization of the data involved grouping the ideas and themes into categories based on the similarities and differences identified, in order for them to be theoretically analyzed and to ensure fluidity in the write up of the analysis and conclusion.

### Judgment Criteria

According to Denzin, “there are several styles of qualitative writing, several different ways of describing, inscribing and interpreting reality” (1994, p.506). Given this large scope for write up, qualitative research will always carry with it some risk relating to issues of accuracy and misrepresentation of both individuals, social groups and specific cultures within wider society. As sociological research methods have moved from those based on the same scientific model as most quantitative methods, there has been a call for re-conceptualization of how such research should be judged (Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). Validity and reliability, the markers used in more traditional research methods, cannot be successfully applied to poststructuralist, qualitative research papers that take a more subjective, multi-dimensional stance. A ‘newer’ set of judgment criteria for qualitative study have now emerged including; contribution, trustworthiness, impact, reflexivity and authenticity (Richardson, 2000; Sparkes, 2002).

Sparkes (2002) argues that authenticity is an important factor in engaging the reader. Writing a paper that is engaging helps in the process of making the findings and representations in the text both believable and possible. The quotations, chosen to illustrate themes in relation to the research aims and questions, have been carefully chosen and weaved into the data analysis. In this way it is hoped the reader will be able to empathize, be enlightened and be interested in the findings of the research. As Sparkes (2002, p.214) claims,

Evoking a response from the reader requires that they experience vicariously the life of another, even if only momentarily. To assist this process, it helps if the tale is deemed to be authentic.

The reader is more likely to read the whole paper, and feel they have gained something from its reading, if they believe what has been written. The sense of authenticity in a research article is termed as Verisimilitude by Schwandt (1997) this is the, “criterion for judging the evocative power or sense of authenticity of a textual portrayal” (p.170). Verisimilitude is one of the judgment criteria that can be used to tell whether the research I have conducted does well to contribute to sociological research that already exists. Hence, at best, in the writing up of this research project, if the reader feels connected in some way to the text and to the

participants in the study, if the reader is empowered to engage in further reading or to increase their understanding of the issues in the text when the final page is turned, then I have done my job as the researcher, as the author and as a sociologist.

## Ethics

Considering that “sociological research in sport, in particular, focuses on disenfranchised and vulnerable groups” (McNamee, Olivier and Wainwright, 2007, p.140), ethical considerations and protective measures must be taken to ensure the vulnerability of the participants is minimized. From the outset, I ensured that the level of professionalism and sensitivity I would hold over any disclosed information was made clear to the participants, reassuring them and reiterating this at every stage of the data collection process. Additionally, the participants were required to complete informed consent forms in order to ensure that the study is conducted in line with the ethical requirements of the university’s ethics committee. Furthermore, the participants were asked to self-select pseudonyms for this study to ensure anonymity, the pseudonyms have been used throughout the project. To ensure the identity of the participants is kept anonymous any revealing information they may have given during the interview has not be included in the data analysis or conclusion of this project, instead only the most valuable quotations, those which can be justified as necessary to answer the research questions and that do not give away their identity were focused on (McNamee and Olivier et al, 2007). Finally, the participants were given the opportunity to read through their respective interview transcriptions as well as the data analysis and conclusion sections of this project, before finalization of the research project for internal validity purposes. During this member checking process, participants were able to select pieces of information they did not want to be disclosed, ensuring they have not been misrepresented in the text.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

A number of key themes relating to the research aims were identified following the data collection process. The themes identified were; gender, lesbian 'labels', socialization on sports teams, 'safe' spaces and identity management. The findings of the study have been carefully organized and presented in this write up, to be followed by an in-depth discussion of their analysis and meaning, in relation to the research questions, in the penultimate section of this dissertation.

### Gender

While the focus of the interviews was to explore sexuality and sexual identity, there is a clear conceptual link between sexuality and gender (Butler, 1990). This was evident in the data collected. All of the participants discussed sexuality with reference to gender. With at least three of the participants, conversations about homophobia turned to issues relating to 'looking like a boy' or lack of 'femininity', as the following conversation with Ellie demonstrates;

RH: in college then you said that nobody knew you were gay, so how did you find that experience?

Ellie: awkward...because I knew I was like, I looked different to my friends, and I acted different...like they were quite girly and I was like not, I was always in tracksuit bottoms and a hoody..."

Similarly, Alicia puts the homophobia she experienced down to her 'boyish' looks;

Alicia: I look quite like a boy so I've always been bullied for that... I think people are scared to talk to me or be friends with me because of how I look... you know like a boy.

Stacey also talked about how she gets mistaken for looking like a boy when asked about her experiences of homophobia;

Stacey: I mean there's been like the standard odd comment and like stares off people like "oh is that a girl or a boy?" kind of thing.

Furthermore, Stacey reinforced the gender issue when talking about common stereotypes surrounding female sexuality. In these discussions, female sexuality was always linked with or compared to male/masculine characteristics;

RH: okay, um if I was to say the term butch lesbian, what would that mean to you?

Stacey: umm the boy lesbian...taking on the male persona, stereotypically short hair, boys clothes..."

A large proportion of the interviews were spent talking about the visibility of lesbians on campus. The participants talked about sexual identity as a gendered performance. Interestingly the participants in this study, although voicing their distaste in using stereotypes and labeling people, reproduced the stereotypes themselves either consciously or subconsciously. Stacey recalled a time she was accused of being lesbian, because of the fact that she played football. Describing the relationship that others presume exists between her sexual identity and her decision to play football;

Stacey: like when I joined the football team everyone was kind of like "oh, she's gay because she play's football, that's what made her gay" it was like that.

As well as the link between sport participation and the assumption of lesbianism, appearance also came up as a give away of a woman's sexuality when talking about the visibility of LGB females on campus. Clothing is seemingly a factor in being able to identify a female as LGB according to the participants. They talked about style of clothes, particular clothing brands and hairstyles.

Ellie: like there are certain jeans that they wear. Like the boyfriend fit or like the slim, but not so slim at the top, like baggier. Also you can tell from their hair, like they have it tied back with pre-wrap or a band.

Stacey agrees that clothing is a giveaway to a lesbian's sexuality, even suggesting that there is some underlying code of dress that lesbians in general adhere to;

Stacey: there is sort of a dress code for lesbians; check shirts, polo shirts, baggy jeans...

In keeping with the apparent need for participants to be able to describe lesbians by referring to either masculine or feminine qualities, participants actively

engaged in the labeling of lesbians depending on their degree of femininity or masculinity. These lesbian ‘labels’ namely; “butch” and “femme” or “lipstick lesbians”, will be highlighted more clearly in the next section.

### Lesbian 'Labels'

The phenomenon of being able to identify a person as gay or lesbian, often referred to as 'gaydar', was also briefly discussed during the interviews. In these conversations stereotyping emerged as something that lesbians themselves engage in, making differentiations between 'Dykes' and so-called 'lipstick lesbians'. These stereotypes were primarily based on appearances being either in conflict with or conforming to ideological norms and characteristics of femininity and masculinity. 'Dykes' were described by Ellie as;

Ellie: Rugby girls, because they have got big bones they're very broad, very big, short hair, um they walk like a man [pause] they like, slouch around like a boy and I dunno like when I've seen rugby girls they've just been quite manly and they drink like men.

Robyn and Stacey similarly described 'dykes' in relation to gender transgressions;

Robyn: short shaved hair and like wearing guy's clothes, really baggy or, I spikey hair.

Stacey: if in a straight couple you've got the boy and the girl, in a lesbian couple you've got the butch and the femme like so that's [butch] kind of taking on the male persona.

The reference Ellie makes to 'Dykes' as rugby girls is representative of how physicality is used as an indicator and labeling mechanism of lesbians in sport. For Ellie, stereotyping and homophobia her mother engaged in prevented her from playing for a football team;

Ellie: um well back when I played for particular team, my mum didn't want me to go on the ladies team, because she knew they were lesbians, she said if I turned gay when I was on the team then she would be pulling me out.

'Lipstick' lesbians are referred to more by characteristics associated with feminine or 'girly' behavior. Descriptions by the participants of what a 'lipstick' lesbian looks like included, "long hair", the wearing of make-up, "girly behavior", tighter clothing and generally replicated the dominant and traditional images of what a woman should look like. On the question of whether the female LGB students on the campus could be categorized as 'butch' or 'lipstick lesbians', the participants

identified that, given the sporting environment of the campus and the type of clothing and sporting bodies that this requires most females to conform to, lesbians on campus could not easily be categorized as 'butch' or 'femme'. Holly explained this adeptly;

Holly: I think, being on a campus that is dominated by sport, it's hard to say if people are butch or femme as there is a general mix. Most of the time people are in sports kit, which makes it harder to say yeah they're femme or not. Someone can look butch because they are muscular but actually it's just because of their sport, like their sport requires them to have muscle.

Concerning the treatment of these two groups of lesbians there is seemingly a denial or inability for others to take the 'lipstick lesbians' seriously. When Lesbians fit in with the 'lipstick lesbian' identity their sexuality is questioned by others. As opposed to the experiences of the stereotypical 'butch dykes' that are assumed to be lesbian. As articulated by Ellie in the following passage;

Ellie: outsiders ...they would straight away tell who are like the butch lesbians, whereas with lipstick lesbians people take the piss, like boys say "oh I can turn you".

Stacey echoes this perception of people's general reactions to 'lipstick lesbians':

Stacey: like "oh its such a waste they're such a pretty girl" umm, I think they are kind of viewed like it's more of a curiosity thing than a defining thing... So yeah they're not taken as seriously.

This differentiation in treatment of the 'butch dykes' and 'lipstick lesbians' in some cases is not only upheld by heterosexuals but also other lesbians. During the interview, Alicia described a rivalry that existed between the 'butch dykes' of the rugby team and the 'lipstick lesbians' of the football team. The association of the football girls with the 'lipstick lesbian' stereotype as Alicia explains, led to her quitting the team altogether;

Alicia: there's a kind of a rivalry between the rugby and football girls ... like almost the butch dykes versus the femme lipstick lesbians, its stupid really and like I'm a footballer but I only played for the campus team for a couple of months because I didn't really fit in because of that... we didn't look the same, so they would make fun of me like my short hair and the fact I wouldn't wear make up... they try and put make up on me when I go out or veet me you know to get rid of the fluff off my face but that's not what I want, it doesn't bother me I'd rather just be left alone.

Socialization on sports teams, in itself, came up as an interesting topic in the interviews, as will be discussed in the following section.

### Socialization on Sports Teams

All of the participants had at least spent a few months participating in team sport. The sports they engaged with were football (2), rugby and hockey (2). An interesting theme that emerged was that sexuality proved to be a significant part of the socialization amongst the women's football and rugby teams. This theme is relevant not only for the lesbians on the teams but also the straight players, as Ellie and Robyn describe;

Ellie: there's straight girls in the football team now and like the older girls are like "oh by the end of the year you'll be gay". Because people have come into the team straight and now they're gay... they do try to like push it on you in the team.

Robyn: a lot of the straight people felt like how gay people would in the, general society, they felt very, as if it wasn't [sic: relevant] to them at the time, and like whenever we went out it was a big group of gay people, and like we would meet other gay people out or we go to gay venues.

Contrastingly, for Holly, as a hockey team member, there is an indication that being gay is only acceptable to the other team members, once you have established yourself on the team in terms of athletic ability.

Holly: until I told people on the team I felt a bit awkward but when everyone knew, this was after I had established myself on the team as a top player, and so it didn't bother people at all I think the fact I was a key player who became captain shows that they were more bothered about my hockey performance than my sexuality.

For Alicia, on the football team athletic ability wasn't an influential factor in her experience, instead appearance was deemed important to the other girls on the team. This emphasis on appearance made Alicia's experiences on the team negative;

Alicia: they would make fun of me like my short hair and the fact I wouldn't wear make up, I remember one time they chased me around campus at a social, they pinned me down and put a whole bottle of tanning stuff on me, urgh It was horrible and my skin just looked dirty for like a week and I had an allergic reaction to it.

Bullying amongst team players, much like the situations described by Alicia, is a troubling issue that has come to light during the interviews. The ‘banter’, as most participants termed the bullying, amongst the players themselves often caused unsociable behavior that was frowned upon by the participants in this study. Amongst the sports teams this so called banter was often aimed towards issues of sexuality. Stacey and Alicia highlight these issues below;

Stacey: in [pause] fresher’s everyone’s kind of like you need to define something about them, and pick out parts of peoples personalities that make them stand out, and for me being gay was that thing.

Alicia: I used to sit with the football girls or rugby girls in the library a lot, and that made me feel uncomfortable ... you know like they talk about women kind of the way that men do, and they’ll rate girls that walk into the library, stuff like that.

Whilst for Alicia the library was an uncomfortable experience, most of the participants felt, in general, that the campus in itself was a ‘safe space’. This will be discussed more deeply under the following sub-heading.

### 'Safe' Spaces

For most of the participants in this study, the university campus itself was considered a 'safe' space, a place where they did not have to 'manage' their identity on a conscious level. Ellie puts this down to the maturity of the student cohort as well as the university's 'reputation';

RH: why do you think that people in uni are more accepting of it [lesbians] then?

Ellie: because it's a more mature bunch of people that go to uni... and like the campus is known for lesbians.

RH: known for lesbians? What do you mean by that?

Ellie: because like its sporting and from just like previous experiences like from people I knew before I went to uni, when I told them I was going to UWIC they were like "oh city of dykes!" and all that.

Holly, similarly felt that the campus is a 'safe' space for LGB females;

Holly: I think on campus, LGBT students can be loud and proud because it's quite a safe space for people to come out, particularly girls... I would say university has been my safe space.

Other participants felt experiences they had on their sports teams made the campus a 'safe' space for them. A key factor often referred to by the participants in relation to their comfortableness with a situation was other people 'already knowing' that they were gay.

Robyn: With rugby everyone knew already, so I was just myself and then sexuality didn't really become part of my socializing, it was just people went out and had fun.

However, for Ellie 'people already knowing' she was gay proved to be a conflict, specifically around the other football team members. I asked if there were any particular 'safe' spaces for her on campus;

Ellie: The back of the library because that's where all the football girls hang out, so generally when I'm with the football girls anywhere that's a safe space for me. But then, when I'm with my girlfriend it probably wouldn't be a safe space because they would like make

you feel uncomfortable by shouting things at you like crude things and single out the fact that I’m a lesbian quite loudly in a crowded library.

Contrastingly for Stacey, the library was always considered her ‘safe’ space, as long as she was in a group situation;

Stacey: in the library, if you’re with a group of people then yeah it’s a safe space, like you’ve got people who are on your side.

Unlike the experiences of the other participants, on campus, Alicia faced experiences of explicit homophobia during her first year at the university;

Alicia: me and my twin sister were in the same halls, we are both gay and during fresher year we were the subject of some nasty homophobia, mostly from boys who I think were quite immature really...they weren’t physically violent but it was more mental, like they would slip notes under our doors saying DYKE on them or say stuff to us or you could even hear them talking about us in their rooms like quite loudly even, like they wanted me to hear them, it was horrible. It went on for a good few months and got gradually worse...like I couldn’t use the kitchen or anything, I was scared.

As a result Alicia did not feel that campus was her ‘safe’ space in any way. She referred, only briefly, to “being at home or in gay nightclubs” as her safe spaces.

### Identity Management

The final theme that came to light having conducted all of the participant interviews was identity management. In some way or another all of the participants either consciously or subconsciously engaged in identity management strategies in relation to their sexuality. For some of the participants, 'coming out' is never a situation they want to put themselves in, it either gets forced upon them or their sexuality is assumed. Robyn sums up how she found herself being 'outed' at university;

Robyn: when I first came to uni I wasn't out at all and [pause] it kind of got dragged out of me, it wasn't on my own terms. Like, because my body looks quite stereotypical, like they just assumed I was, rightly so, but they were kinda just like "oh your gay aren't you?"

Other participants have actively engaged in avoiding situations where they might find themselves being forced to 'come out'. For Ellie this means avoiding new situations or meeting new people;

Ellie: I just like to keep the same friends that I feel comfortable around, I don't really care about meeting new people because its less hassle like I think "ohhh its another person I have to tell" sort of thing.

Stacey and Robyn refer to situations when they have suspected people know about their sexuality, yet they still choose to not explicitly come out to these people;

Stacey: I'm not out rightly saying I'm gay, like even if they know it, they don't ask me about it.

Robyn: I'm pretty sure he [my best friend] knows, but I just haven't been able to tell him...like he sends me articles about gay rights (both laugh), so I'm like ohh why have you sent me that.

For Stacey this need to 'hide' her sexuality from others has decreased over time;

Stacey: people in my halls knew, because I had a girlfriend at the time, so I couldn't really hide it from them...in the majority of

situations now I try and make people aware of my sexuality as quickly as possible.

However, for the other participants, 'hiding' their sexuality is something that they continue to do. Despite Robyn living in shared accommodation with other LGB female students and being in a yearlong relationship, Robyn has never discussed the sexuality of herself or her housemates with her parents;

Robyn: I never talk about anything to do with my parents nothing like, all my housemates are gay but I haven't said that, I'm like no yeah we all like sport, we got short hair its fine! Whenever I say to my parents that I'm going somewhere with my partner I usually add a few peoples names who aren't actually going [laughs].

Robyn was not the only participant in this study who felt their sexuality would not be accepted by her parents, Ellie, even after coming out to her mum, still feels that this is not something her mum has come to terms with;

Ellie: it's horrible because I'm scared to talk to them [my parents] about anything because of the way they will act. Because they wont want to really talk about it, they will just be like shrugging it off which is quite hard.

In other situations, Robyn has chosen to physically hide from others or has changed her behavior so that others wouldn't find out about her sexuality;

Robyn: like around Cardiff I'm a bit reluctant to hold my partners hand or to be kind of coupley with her in case certain people see me.

The public gaze also has an influence on Alicia, oppressing her own behavior, affection and emotions to 'protect' heterosexuals from having homosexuality 'put in their faces' as summed up in the following conversation;

Alicia: I don't think you should exactly shout about it [being gay] from the rooftops because that's when people get offended, like when you're in peoples face about it, that's not necessary and scares people away probably.

RH: what do you mean? What kind of things might be putting your sexuality in people's faces?

Alicia: like talking loudly about your girlfriend maybe, or a night you spent with a girl or being lovey dovey in public. Like kissing and stuff like that, I think it shocks people more.

Holly, who considered herself to be very open and forthcoming about her sexuality having grown up in a comfortable home environment, still engages in identity management to some extent. After coming out to her Hockey team she described how her behavior in the changing rooms evolved;

Holly: I got changed in double quick time! [Laughs] I think that was partly my fault though, because I didn't want them to think I was looking at them, or fancied them, or anything because that wasn't the case.

This behavior is representative of all of the participant's identity management strategies. These findings show the participants changed their behavior on some level, most of the time consciously, because of what they perceived others to be thinking about them and their sexuality.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

# **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

"Mum, is that a boy or a girl?"

The first key finding of this study is that the suppositions of homophobia and stereotyping that were presented in the findings are strong indicators that conflicts of gender in sport are yet to be resolved. Gender emerged from the findings as a concept implicitly linked with sexuality. The conceptual link between sexuality and gender as theorized by Butler (1990) was clearly articulated throughout the data collection process. Whilst the focus of the questions asked in the interviews was to explore sexuality and sexual identity, participants often made reference to gender and gender identity. When participants were asked to describe their experiences of being gay in different situations, responses generally referred to certain gendered 'performances' such as; looking like a boy, wearing boy's clothes, not being 'girly' enough etc. This 'masculine' persona is representative of a culture that Griffin describes as, "butch-femme role playing in which women in relationships adopt variations on traditional masculine and feminine roles" (1998, p.41). According to Griffin (1998) women engaging in this culture, "had a more difficult time hiding" (p. 41). Indeed, most of the participants in this study described their experiences of being 'outed' because of their stereotypical 'masculine' appearance.

The participants seemed to have a narrow conception of what it means to be feminine. Femininity was constantly referred to by the participants with regards to appearance. Key characteristics of femininity, according to the participants, materialized as; short hair, wearing make-up, wearing tight or 'girly' clothing and so on. The prominent factors the participants attributed to femininity were appearance, body size, height/ weight, bodily gestures and language. This echoes the findings of similar research conducted in the sporting context, as well as widely accepted views portrayed in the media and in many western world social-cultural environments, that "an acceptable female is not simply accepted for being a female. An acceptable female is one who appears or behaves in certain ways...being a woman is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being considered acceptably feminine" (Lock, 2001, p.403). Historically, for women, femininity is also used as an indicator of heterosexuality, whilst masculinity is considered an indicator of homosexuality. A major function of being feminine (for

women) is to be desirable to the opposite sex. According to Caudwell (2006), when this 'heterosexual matrix' is challenged, people react with assumptions and accusations of homosexuality, myths and taboos. The participants in the study were found to engage in stereotyping processes, predominantly based upon historically accepted conceptions of femininity and masculinity. This kind of stereotyping and labeling is a powerful tool used to control women in sport, "when a woman is called 'masculine', 'unfeminine', or 'dyke', she knows she has crossed a gender boundary or challenged male privilege" (Peper, 1994, cited in Griffin, 1998, p.18). Football is a traditionally masculine sport and therefore females who play football are described as masculine and accused of or presumed to be a lesbian (Caudwell, 2003; Hargreaves, 1994; Lenskyj, 1986; Theberge, 2000). The participants on the football team talked about the assumption that because they played football, they were lesbians. Even though the participants identified as gay or lesbian, they were uncomfortable with the tacit link between football and lesbianism. Robyn, as a rugby player, shared the same experience. This advocates that rugby and football are both viewed as highly physical sports, normally a test of masculinity for male players and a tell tale 'symbol' of lesbianism for female players. As Russell (2007) clarifies, "For rugby players, the most striking aspect of the labeling process begins and ends in the physicality of the sport and the assumption that muscles equates to lesbianism" (p.107). In describing 'dykes' Ellie referred instantly to "rugby girls", due to their stereotypical masculine characteristics. Labeling lesbians as 'butch', 'dykes' or 'lipstick lesbians' was something that all participants tended to do, whilst simultaneously distancing themselves from the butch and dyke labels through the use of language such as "them" or "they". This is a clear example of the homophobic discourse of 'silencing' or distancing themselves from the "lesbian bogey woman" (Griffin, 1998, p.66). These findings denote that possessing a muscular physique is still unacceptable for women and further still, something to be ashamed of.

The 'Heterosexual Matrix': Which Girl Are You?

The data collated in this study reveals how the participants struggled with their identity in terms of what lesbian 'category' they fit into. The participants neither wanted to conform to the overt displays of 'hyper-femininity' associated with "lipstick lesbians" nor the negative connotations of being a "dyke". Previous research (Cockburn and Clarke's, 2002; Clark, 2012; Adams et al., 2005) has revealed the difficulty women experience in embodying a sense of self as sport participants, attempting to balance overt performances of 'girliness' and 'skilful bodily performances'. The historically dominant conception that femininity is passive has rendered sport (active) an un-feminine pursuit. As such, sport participation undermines girls' construction and performance of their feminine identities (McRobbie, 1978; Hargreaves, 1994). In this study, the 'lipstick lesbian' was constructed much the same as the figure of the 'hot lesbian' in a study by Gill (2009) in which she explains how this 'type' of lesbian is, "notable for her extraordinarily attractive, conventionally feminine appearance. Women depicted in this way are almost always slim, yet curvaceous, flawlessly made up and beautiful" (p.151). Similarly Greiger, Harwood and Hummert (2006) portray the 'lipstick lesbian' as the, "stereotype associated with very feminine qualities such as beauty, sensitivity, and maternal instincts" (p.171). The participants in this study echoed these previous constructions and discourses surrounding the stereotypical 'lipstick lesbian', claiming that they are more 'girly', 'wear dresses' and 'do their hair nice like straight girls do'. Whilst this move situates lesbians away from previous images of 'manly' or 'ugly', the danger is that lesbianism is now being portrayed within heterosexual norms of female attractiveness (Ciasullo, 2001). In doing so, the problematic or 'dangerous' effect is that the 'butch' is silenced, annihilated or diminished (Gill, 2009, p.152). 'Butch' lesbians being those "characterized as angry, dominating, defensive, and humorless person, who was also seen as being masculine and unattractive in appearance (i.e. stocky, muscular, and/or overweight)" (Greiger et al, 2006, p.171). The participants in this study distanced themselves from this image, depicting "them" (butch lesbians or dykes) negatively as, "loud", "boyish" and sometimes "cruel". This is similar to the findings of previous research (Cox and Thompson, 2000; Ravel and Rail, 2006) in which participants were found to engage in 'distancing

strategies’ and provided evidence for the existence of somewhat butch-phobic behavior and attitudes within women’s sports teams.

Despite the attempt at distancing themselves from the ‘butch’ image, the participants in this paper demonstrated to some extent a lack of identity or sense of belonging to any particular lesbian ‘group’. Instead, for the most part, the participants steered clear of giving themselves any labels or categorization of identity. At times it is clear that although these participants are unable to situate themselves on any kind of identity continuum, others are able to do so for them, making their coming out process much easier. As Greiger et al. (2006) claim, “lesbians who ‘fit’ into a certain of the categories described in this paper may find ‘coming out’ to be a relatively unproblematic event- their friends and colleagues may have already categorized them” (p.180). As such, at least three of the participants found themselves being ‘outed’ by others and thus have avoided any situation in which they might have to ‘tell’ about their sexual identity. However, given the strong associations with the football team and the ‘lipstick lesbian’ identity, Alicia in particular, struggled to gain any sense of self in the sporting environment, nor did she want to associate herself with the ‘butch’ rugby players of the campus. For Alicia, there is a strong sense that she has struggled with ‘coming out’ in the campus environment and as a result does not tend to socialize with peers or members of the sports teams, in line with the theory that, “ for individuals who present a less good fit, ‘coming out’ may be considerably more thorny” (Greiger et al, 2006, p.180). These findings show that in the narratives of lesbians themselves, even in a seemingly ‘inclusive’ sporting environment, they can be subject to stigmatization and exclusion.

### Sexual Diversity: Normalized or Ghettoized? The Unmarked Territory of The Campus...

The final key finding in this project is that the campus is a ‘safe’ space for being ‘out’ for almost all of the participants, with the exception of Alicia. Not one of the participants reported situations on campus, or in their sports teams at university, in which they found themselves closeted<sup>1</sup>. In a similar study, Ravel and Rail (2006) found that, “the closet seems strikingly absent from the participants sporting experiences”. Furthermore, for the participants in Ravel and Rail’s study the sports arena was a site in which lesbianism or ‘gaie’<sup>2</sup> sexuality, was embraced and even celebrated. Although the participants in this study did not talk explicitly about lesbianism being celebrated on the campus, there was a distinct impression that those on campus embrace lesbianism. Ellie talked about how conversations with students, before she enrolled on to a course at the campus, included open descriptions of the campus as “the city of dykes”. This ‘visibility’ of lesbians on the campus was revealed to be a key factor in feeling ‘safe’ on campus. All of the participants had been able to explicitly or implicitly ‘come out’ to their fellow teammates or others attending the university even if they found themselves in the closet in other aspects of their individual lives.

Whilst the visibility of lesbians on campus is unproblematic and a positive step towards challenging heterocentrism, a key question that arises from the findings of this research is related to whether lesbianism is normalized or ghettoized on the campus. The football and rugby teams, specifically, may harbor an inclusive environment for lesbian players, seeing as though they are the majority, but for heterosexual players or even lesbians who don’t fit in with the ‘image’ that the team wants to portray i.e. the lipstick lesbian, there is a distinct difference in the narratives available to them. Those being narratives of homophobia and sexual bullying, as apposed to resistance type narratives. The very fact that almost all of the participants in this study, primarily those with experience on the football or

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘closet’ refers to a social phenomenon that LGB persons may find themselves ‘in’. The key purpose of the closet is to uphold the boundary between homo/hetero, and self/other. Lesbian sexuality is often hidden inside the closet to maintain the natural status of heterosexuality. See Sparkes (1998).

<sup>2</sup> ‘gaie’ is the term the participants in Ravel and Rail’s (2006) study used to identify themselves as lesbian. Ravel and Rail used the term ‘gaie’ throughout their study accordingly.

rugby teams, seem to want to distance themselves from the prevailing behavioral norms of their lesbian team mates, shows that there is something about that behavior which is problematic. The women on these sports teams, at the same time as engaging in constructing a conformist ‘feminine’ appearance, act in such a way that is similar to displays of ‘hyper masculinity’ of male jock culture. As Sparkes, Partington and Brown (2007) claim, jock culture can be seen as a practical and symbolic manifestation of a dominant, heterosexual, masculine orientation to the world. This ‘jock’ behavior is mirrored by the women in the university football and rugby teams, particularly through the ‘sexualization’ of women, in which the participants explained how other team members would “rate” women as they walked by, in terms of attractiveness, and engage in the telling of explicit sexual stories in public places. This was problematized by some of the participants themselves who admitted that they avoid socializing with their teammates in areas such as the library, where most of this behavior occurs, and describe much of the behavior with distaste, as “mannish” and “boisterous”. The very manner in which the participants in this study talked about these incidences highlights that this behavior is not indicative of a ‘normalization’ of homosexuality amongst the females on campus in any way, but indeed rather a ‘ghettoized’ environment in which this problematic behavior can be cultivated, unquestioned and unchallenged.

## **Conclusion**

Past research papers concerning the experiences of LGB athletes and educators have often depicted stories of marginalization, discrimination and victim type narratives (Lock, 2003; Messner, 1999; Sparkes, 2002, 1994; Sykes, 1998; Veri, 1999). However, this research along with Broad (2001), Iannotta and Kane (2002) and McCormack (2011), suggests that, more recently, there are groups of individuals who have had more positive experiences related to their LGB identity. This paper has highlighted the experiences of female LGB students within a university campus predominantly consisting of sport students. This research ultimately shows that further education settings and the sports environment *can* provide positive experiences and a ‘safe space’ for young LGB females. Furthermore, in line with the initial aim of this research to explore the identity management strategies of the individuals involved in the study, this paper shows that LGB females are still engaging in identity management strategies in order to ‘cover’ their lesbian identities in some aspects of their lives e.g. family, religious groups. However, importantly, it is perceived by the very same individuals that there is little need for this ‘covering’ of their lesbian identities in the sport and university setting. In fact, in the university sports campus this study was focused on, there was perhaps a need to ‘perform’ their lesbian identities outwardly, explicitly showing off their sexuality to teammates and fellow students. This ‘performance’ seemingly results in the re-creation of typically male ‘jock’ behaviors, including objectifying women, and problematic rituals celebrated by the student body such as exceeding ridiculous amounts of alcohol, fooling around, displaying toughness, respecting hierarchy and ridiculing weakness (Skelton, 1993). Future research should consider this ‘jock’ behavior, in relation to lesbian identities, in greater depth to gauge a better understanding of why this behavior is ‘valued’ by the student body and lesbian community and also, what problems this behavior presents for members of the student body and lesbian community that do not wish to engage in such behavior.

# **CHAPTER SIX**

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