

Perceptions of Sexual Identity Stereotyping among Physical Education Undergraduate Students

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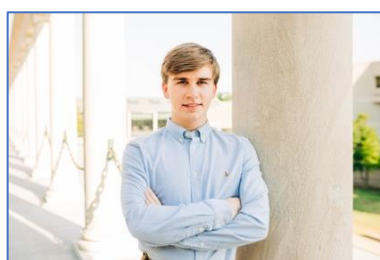
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Abstract: This study examined the perspectives of six college students enrolled in a physical education teacher education program on sexual identity stereotyping (SIS), the stereotyping of individuals as a certain sexual identity (e.g., homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual) based on external factors. The purpose was to construct a general landscape of physical education (PE) majors' views on SIS and gender roles, athletic and PE expectations in regards to gender and sexuality, and these ideas' impact on the efficacy of PE, both for students and educators. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the standard interpretive methods of analytic induction and constant comparison. These findings revealed that in general, those interviewed were aware of SIS and could identify its potential impact. Still, the participants felt that SIS was not enough of an issue to prevent them from pursuing a career in PE. Multiple participants reported experiences with being stereotyped as a result of their athletic activities of choice. Through the thoughts of the interviewees, the authors of this study hope to enrich the field of PE and provide awareness towards biases that can cloud the quality of education.

Keywords: Gender role, Gender identity, Masculinity, Femininity, Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, PE teachers



Mr. Brody Johnson is an undergraduate researcher enrolled in high school at the Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science, located on the campus of

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1. Introduction

According to Jackson [1], the concept of identity hinges on a combination of sameness and difference. Originated from the Latin *idem*, the word "identity" carries the quality of being identical with ourselves and with others [2]. That is, we as humans share common characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and nationality. Some characteristics that belong to an individual or are shared by a group of people can, at the same time, be different from others [1]. This unique characteristic is what Lawler defines identity as an ongoing process of finding self and how it plays a role in day-to-day life [3]. Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of being a male, female, or outside the gender binary, and it is developed over time by the influences of home, school, workplace, and society [4-7]. It is through the observation and interactions with parents and other family members,

teachers and peers, superiors and colleagues, and surrounding people (physically and virtually) that children and adults explore gender-specific behavior, make sense of their inner self, and express the gender identity that they feel comfortable with, which may or may not be congruent with the gender assigned at birth. Gender-conforming individuals behave in a way that is expected in a given culture, which often dictates which personality traits, outward appearances, and sexual relationships are appropriate based on their birth-assigned gender [8-9]. Although these expectations vary from culture to culture, many are adopted by a large number of cultures and are deemed to be acceptable in most societies (called the "norms"). More often than not, traditional gender roles (i.e., the "norms") associate men with masculinity and women with femininity. This association is a major attribute of gender stereotyping – an idea or image of behaviors, attitudes, or roles ascribed by reasons only of one's gender [10].

Common gender stereotypes are centered around the concepts of masculinity and femininity, including but not limited to, colors (e.g., blue for boys, pink for girls), clothing (e.g., men in suits, women in dresses), toys (e.g., boys play with cars, girls play with Barbies), emotion (e.g., men don't cry, women get their feelings hurt easily), and professions (e.g., male construction workers, female nurses). Further, "men play football" and "women do gymnastics" are examples of gender stereotyping in sports. Contact sports and physical activities that illustrate power, speed and aggressiveness are associated with masculine traits; hence, it is "normal" for boys and men to participate in football, boxing and auto racing. Non-contact sports and rhythmic activities, on the other hand, exhibit flexibility, coordination and elegance, which leads to a "natural" connection between feminine traits and female participation in gymnastics, dance and cheerleading. According to previous research, the idea of masculine and feminine sports exists regardless of age [11-17].

Through the lens of gender equity, sports offer a platform for male and female athletes to find their talents and showcase their abilities despite their perceived limitations based on gender. However, as male/female athletes display their physical skills in cross-gender sports and obtain the physiques required for them to perform at the highest level, a threat of opposing traditional masculine/feminine traits surfaces; consequently, they run the risk of being labelled as gay or lesbian regardless of their actual sexual identity.

This sexual identity stereotyping (SIS) is quite prevalent in sports and well documented in the literature [18-24]. This stereotypical assumption is unnecessary and has misrepresented many men's and women's athletic performance and achievement in cross-gender sports. Although genetic professionals as well as behavioral and social scientists have claimed that homosexuality is a normal variant of sexual identity [25-29], many people and social, political and religious groups still consider it a sexual aberration, a mental disorder, or a sinful disposition [30-32]. These individuals may uphold or practice "prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence that are based on fear, distrust, dislike, or hatred of sexual minorities" (p. 398) [33]. The impact of homophobia can be quite damaging to homosexual athletes and people around them such as teammates and other athletes who are in the same sport because of guilt by association [33-38]. In reacting to homophobia, athletes have attempted to conceal their homosexuality, publicize their heterosexuality, deflect the discussion of their sexual identity, or normalize the concept of homosexuality and advocate its importance to the general public [18, 35, 39-45].

Gay and lesbian educators whose subject areas are inconsistent with traditional gender roles (e.g., a male preschool teacher, a female shop teacher) are likely to encounter similar SIS and homophobia [46-48]. Physical education (PE) teachers are the most fragile target of all because of the discipline's close link to sports, their job responsibilities, and other attributes that come with the profession. Although it has not been as thoroughly documented, biographical information of gay PE teachers can be found in Landi's personal narratives and Sparkes' fictional autoethnography [49-50]. For fear of losing their personal reputation, institutional power, professional credibility, and possibly employment, many lesbian PE teachers choose to avoid settings or social events where discussions of personal life are likely to occur, and when asked, they steer the conversations away, change gendered pronouns, or make up a mythical boyfriend to cover their tracks [48, 51-56]. The institutional, interpersonal, and internalized homophobia [57] also makes it difficult for them to perform tasks associated with their job adequately, such as physically correcting/spotting students in class, supervising a shower/changing room, or developing an honest rapport with colleagues and students [52-53, 56]. When facing homophobic harassment, the closeted teachers often silence the incidents because they do not think school administrators will support

them or that reporting the incidents will draw too much attention to themselves and risk further conjecture about their sexuality [52-53, 56, 58]. While some PE teachers continue to battle living in the dissonant "double life" [48, 52-53, 55-56], others choose to resign [34] or, conversely, to "come out" completely and be openly homosexual [51]. Those who are "out" are committed to challenging the status quo and helping sexual minorities find a place where they can feel a real sense of belonging and acceptance.

Homosexual PE teachers are not the only victims to SIS and homophobia. In fact, "any woman in physical education may be suspected of being lesbian if her performance of heterosexuality is not convincing" (p. 169) [59]. The stereotypes of female PE teachers: short hair and muscular physique, wearing athletic clothes most of the time, and playing sports as a hobby create the guilt-by-association suspicion [56, 59-60]. This "paranoid closet" termed by Sykes becomes more horrified when suspicions are confirmed, that is, when a female PE teacher explicitly comes out [59]. In response to this SIS, some heterosexual PE teachers feel the need to maintain a feminine appearance and practice straight behavior in front of colleagues and students to reaffirm their heterosexuality. In this way, it is not only lesbian PE teachers, but straight ones as well, that must police the way they behave and how it could be stereotyped. By contrast, there are also those heterosexual PE teachers who do not feel the need to display heterosexually stereotyped behaviors unlike themselves simply to reaffirm their heterosexuality, despite the stereotypes and suspicion they may face [59].

To date, the majority of previous research conducted on SIS and homophobia in PE focuses on in-service and retired teachers. Although there is a growing body of studies exploring a variety of sexual identity and homophobic issues on pre-service teachers [61-64], research conducted on PE undergraduate students remains scarce [65]. In this study, Chen and Curtner-Smith reported that four of the five heterosexual female PE majors they interviewed held the same stereotype on female athletes participating in masculine sports and had a natural connection with female PE teachers because of their physical appearance and heavy involvement in sports and physical activities [65]. All but one of the participants had no personal encounter regarding SIS before or during the physical education teacher education (PETE) program because they were dancers or gymnasts. Lastly, this SIS did not seem to have a significant

impact on their career choice in PE; rather, they would use SIS and homophobic incidents as teachable moments to educate their students about issues of sexuality. Due to the lack of previous research conducted on this specific population, the purpose of the present study was to examine (a) the perceptions of undergraduate students on the concept of SIS, (b) their experiences with SIS, and (c) how SIS would impact their career in PE.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

After the institutional review board approval was granted, all undergraduate students enrolled in a PETE program at a public university in the mid-south region of the United States were invited to participate in the study. A brief description of the study was given by one of the authors at the beginning of all PETE courses to recruit potential participants in the fall of 2021. The first author sent an email containing the same study description to all PE majors every other week through the end of April 2022. Unlike Chen and Curtner-Smith [65] who specified "only female PTs [pre-service teachers] who identified themselves as heterosexual individuals were eligible" in their recruiting email (p. 4), the authors removed this criterion for one main reason. Sexuality was no longer a dichotomous term ("straight" and "gay") and could be fluid for some. Verification of one's sexual identity became difficult and added little value to the present study because any teacher could experience SIS regardless of their sexuality. The participants consisted of three male and three female undergraduate PE majors. Three of them were freshmen, one was a junior, and two were seniors. Five of them were Caucasian with one being African American. All participants received a \$25 gift card as compensation for their time.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The first author formally interviewed each participant face-to-face in a private room at the university library or virtually via video conferencing technology. Additional questions suitable to the male perspective (e.g., "What do you understand by the term 'sexual identity stereotyping' in relation to male participation in sport?", "During your time in the PETE program, have you encountered any general stereotyping of male physical education teachers as gay? If yes, please describe.") were added to the

interview script recommended by Chen and Curtner-Smith [65]. Using the semi-structured interview protocol [66], the predetermined questions were asked in the same order to all participants, during which follow-up questions were used to pursue elaboration of their initial responses. Interview duration ranged from 30 to 50 minutes, depending on the thoughts and experiences each participant had to offer. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author.

The standard interpretive methods of analytic induction and constant comparison were used to analyze the data in three phases [67]. During the first phase, both authors read the interview transcripts individually and highlighted keywords and statements that were related to SIS in sports and PE. Phase two involved each author comparing his/her own highlighted keywords and statements in relation to the three themes described in the purpose statement. In the last phase, the authors came together and compared their analyses, ensuring that both agreed on the selection of keywords and statements, the alignments of keywords/statements and themes, and the consistency in the interpretations. Credibility and trustworthiness were secured by a thorough search for negative and discrepant cases [67] and member checking [68]. None of the participants wished to make changes on the interview transcripts or the final manuscript, which indicated that the authors' interpretations were grounded in the participants' experiences.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Concept of SIS

3.1.1 SIS of athletes

Five of the six participants were aware of the concept of SIS and its prevalence amongst female athletes participating in masculine sports such as basketball, softball and soccer. Lisa¹ said, "if you look at the WNBA, it's a proven fact that a pretty good percent of them are lesbian, so whenever you look at females in sports, that's what people stereotype them as", which was a perfect example of "guilt by association" [33-38]. The "contact" nature of the masculine sports was another reason that made participants suspicious about female athletes' sexuality. Lisa and Sara believed that female athletes

participating in sports like volleyball and tennis "would be classified as not [lesbian] because there's not much physical contact" and these were not typical "male-dominated sports." Compared to the SIS of female athletes, Kylie believed that "they [i.e., male athletes] don't have a problem" and Lisa claimed the prevalence of SIS among male athletes was "not even close" to what females had to endure. Even with the non-comparison, Adam, Jeremy, Kylie, Lisa, and Sara were still able to identify what they believed as feminine sports that put male athletes at risk of being stereotyped as gay: dance, cheerleading and figure skating. As expected, the representations of masculine and feminine sports identified by the five participants in this study were congruent to the ones listed by children, adolescents and young adults in previous research [11-17, 65].

3.1.2 SIS of female PE teachers

Adam, Jeremy, Kylie and Sara acknowledged the SIS of female PE teachers and attributed the stereotyping to the "guy clothes" they wore all the time and the "short haircut" or "always had their hair up [in a ponytail]". The four participants also indicated that female PE teachers who appeared to be muscular and fit were more likely to be sexually stereotyped. The physical appearance and lack of feminine traits identified by Adam, Jeremy, Kylie and Sara were in line with what was found in the literature [51-52, 56, 65]. The following interview extracts are examples of their thinking and beliefs about the connection:

I know personally a couple of them [i.e., female PE teachers] have been called gay because of the ways they dress, which is not right, because all of them dress the same, males or females, usually it's an athletic wear . . . I guess [when] people view females dress, they picture them all dressed up to go to teach or go to work, and when you dress in shorts, sweatpants, and a sweatshirt, you just get labelled [as a lesbian] . . . some males would make fun of that, like "Oh, you're not trying, you obviously are lesbian. (Adam)

As a PE teacher, we don't dress up that much. You know, wear sweatpants, and that could lead people to think [of them as female athletes in sports], and most of the time, you know, PE teachers tend to be more fit, so they're obviously going to be more muscular than an average female. (Kylie).

¹ The names of the participants in this paper are fictitious.

By teaching in this subject matter, female PE teachers were not conforming to the cultural norms that portrayed women being in the nurturing, less physically active role [8-9], and further suggested them subverting the traditional gender expectations and deviating from the culturally accepted sexuality (i.e., heterosexuality). According to Kylie, female PE teachers suffered the same guilt-by-association stereotype that existed amongst female athletes participating in sports: "when girls play sports, basketball for example, people are always like 'Oh, they're mostly gay' and PE deals with [physical] activities and athletics so I feel like that all goes into the same [stereotype]." Sara had a very similar thought process:

I think it [i.e., female participation in masculine sports] actually plays a big role because if you look at the numbers in professional sports, famous athletes like Sue Bird, a lot of them are lesbians. I don't want to say this in the wrong way, but it sort of bleeds over into physical education because it deals with sports.

Sykes [59] called it "closets of association", where the participants in her study, both heterosexual and homosexual, implied the notion that if you are a PE teacher, you must be gay, especially when a female PE teacher silenced about her sexuality. No matter what her actual sexuality was, she would always be suspicious about her sexuality and stereotyped as "one of *them*" (p. 169).

3.2 Experience with SIS

3.2.1 SIS of others

Five participants reported memories of SIS on their teachers, school counselor and classmate. Adam shared how one of his middle school PE teacher's sexuality was misconstrued simply because of her physical appearance and how this false accusation affected his emotion and his friendship with others:

I had [experienced SIS of PE teachers] in middle school . . . I felt distraught. I didn't like those people that were calling my teacher names. They were considered my friends at the time, not anymore . . . I felt bad that they labelled her like that, and she obviously wasn't, but the way that she dressed, it made her appear that way. (Adam)

Peter who was not aware of the concept of SIS and its relation to athletes participating in sport or to women taking on the role of PE teacher had actually stereotyped a school counselor's sexuality when he was a teenager:

She's the kind of person that doesn't care what people think about her, she never does her makeup, her hair is really short. She would come into PE and we'd be playing football or something and she'd just get rough with us, and really play . . . I never said anything, but I always thought, maybe [she is a lesbian], even though she's married.

Kylie was the only participant who had a SIS experience on a male individual. She recalled, "there's somebody in my PE class who I could see as gay . . . The clothing he wears, the depth of his voice, and he acts very feminine, even though he's a guy." These three stereotypical incidents occurred because the individuals in question did not behave in the gender-conforming way described by Egan and Perry and Wong according to the Western culture [8-9]. The testimonies of Adam and Peter reflected the lives of many heterosexual female athletes and PE teachers who had been suspected of being lesbian because their involvement and performance in the chosen fields did not highlight feminine traits [18, 21-22, 59].

Jeremy had a similar experience in middle school, however, he did not have much to share in terms of this experience; he recalled, "we had one of our PE teachers, she was a female, and people thought she might have been gay." Born and raised in a politically conservative state, Jeremy believed that "it's part of the culture. No one would really talk about it." The environment described by Jeremy was a heteronormative and often homophobic one in which homosexual teachers had to use various strategies to construct and manage their sexual identities [48, 52-56]. The impact of heterosexism and homophobia in schools could have negative consequences on how homosexual teachers performed their job [52-53, 56]. Sara's memory of an "out" PE teacher illustrated how her homosexuality had affected her professional life:

One of the PE teachers back at the elementary school is a lesbian and a lot of the older kids talk about it . . . Me, personally, feel like people have a different view on her, with her being lesbian, and how she approaches things,

how she accommodates different things, talks and acts around the students while at school.

3.2.2 Personal experience

Half of the participants had personally encountered SIS themselves. Adam and Kylie's accounts of being stereotyped were a result of their past athletic pursuits. They both experienced surface-level harassment for daring to deviate from the norm (i.e., participating in the sports associated with peak masculinity/femininity). Due to the anecdotal fact that one member of a group deviated from societal expectations, the rest of the group were also perceived as deviant. In both cases, the SIS came from outside the group, which suggested that the targets of this stereotyping were often in groups as it was easier to generalize the actions of a group of multiple people who shared a common characteristic [33-38]. Examples of the guilt-by-association mentality experienced by Adam and Kylie are illustrated in the following data passages:

I had been called gay for playing a certain sport [i.e., badminton]. Some people are going to say really harsh things and I don't get why they would do that, because everybody has a right to play every sport they want without judgement, and I don't think it's fair that just because a woman would play football, or a man would play, say, volleyball, they would be identified as gay or lesbian because of the sport they play. (Adam)

I played girls' basketball, or at least I did in high school, and people would just be like "Oh, you play basketball. You definitely like girls." Especially because there were a couple of gay girls on our basketball team, they just automatically assumed that we all were. (Kylie)

Compared to Adam and Kylie's encounters, Peter's experience was somewhat unique because he received two opposite treatments for the different extracurricular activities he participated in:

I chose marching band, and I played drums. I got called gay for doing that. I did track so I could stay fit when I wasn't doing band. I got made fun of for doing both of those. Then I quit track. I think it was my sophomore year [in high school], and I did baseball in the spring . . . they stopped [calling me gay] once I quit track and joined baseball. (Peter)

It was evident that, according to Peter's testimony, the idea of masculine and feminine activities existed amongst high school students [11-12] and the same person could be treated much differently based on the involvement in the gender-specific activity or sport.

3.3 Impact of SIS on Career Choice in PE

3.3.1 Interpersonal and internalized homophobia

When asked how SIS could have an impact on women who were considering a career in PE, Kylie said, "there could be other reasons why most women aren't in the PE field, but that [i.e., SIS] could definitely be a possibility." The reason given by the participants in Chen and Curtner-Smith's study [65] was specifically on "the stereotypical physical appearance of female PE teachers" (p. 8), which was only implied in the present study. Sara presented a possible threat particularly to heterosexual women who might not want to be in Sykes' closets of association [59]; Sara said, "[the thought of] not wanting the students to view them as 'Oh, you're going into physical education, you must be lesbian' might conflict with certain people, especially if they are not." As undergraduate students pursuing a degree in PE, Adam, Jeremy and Kylie understood the passion they all shared in sports and physical activities, but "the emotional side is so fragile" (Adam) that some women, both heterosexual and homosexual, might not be able to handle the suspicion or harassment reported in previous research [52-53, 56, 58-59]. The following data extracts suggested that the stress caused by interpersonal and internalized homophobia [57] might be the deal-breaker for some:

I think it could alter your path. If you don't feel like you're comfortable doing what you're doing because people are making fun of you or calling you names, it could have a drastic career change . . . You may feel so strong about doing this [i.e., teaching in PE], but you don't think you can handle what people are saying. I mean, it [i.e., what people say] could change your life. (Adam)

They probably are skeptical to go into the field of PE. They might really want to but feel scared of being stereotyped by students, faculty, parents, things like that and might go a different route, being a math teacher, a social studies teacher, something else to not have those stereotypes labelled upon them. (Jeremy)

I think it can have an impact on you to a certain point. If you really want to do that job and you love it with your all, it's not gonna matter what other people say, but if you care about other people's opinions, and you don't want to have that possibility or reputation of being called gay or something like that, I believe it could take somebody into a different career if it matters to them that much. (Kylie)

According to Adam, Kylie and Sara, interpersonal and internalized homophobia [57] could also have an impact on female in-service PE teachers regardless of their actual sexuality. Kylie claimed, "they [could be] more cautious with how they teach the kids or act [in front of them] because they don't want to be stereotyped, like they don't want to say or do the wrong thing." The "wrong thing" that Kylie referred to could be an ordinary event that every PE teacher performed on a daily basis, but with the possibility of being labelled as lesbian, physically correcting or spotting a student could get them in trouble, let alone the other interactions with the students that have been documented in the literature [52-53, 56]. Similarly to what Chen and Curtner-Smith found [65], Adam and Sara believed that female in-service PE teachers who were threatened by the SIS would adopt the "deflection" coping strategy to avoid being stereotyped by children and adolescents in schools:

It could affect how their teaching is . . . She could feel more hostile towards that group of gender or group of students that is harassing her . . . If it was coming from the male side, she could be more hostile or unfair towards male students. It could go both ways; if females were saying the same thing, I think it could keep her closed up, not wanting to do certain activities or sports that would make her look like that [i.e., a lesbian]. (Adam)

Some students might not take them [i.e., female PE teachers] as seriously as they would [to] a male physical education teacher . . . It could hurt them from not being able to get the respect from the students or not being able to teach them and do the activities that they need to do. (Sara)

3.3.2 Make a difference

In congruence with the five pre-service PE teachers in Chen and Curtner-Smith research [65], all six participants in the present study expressed no

threat to the issues of SIS. In fact, Lisa and Peter had not given much thought about the topic before the interview, and neither of them appeared to be bothered by it during the interview or let it alter their career path or teaching style. Adam, Jeremy, Kylie and Sara, on the other hand, took the topic seriously and were committed to making a difference upon entering a career in PE. For Jeremy and Adam, the issue between traditional gender roles and SIS in sports and PE gave them the opportunity to provide a diverse learning environment to their current and future students:

In the back of my mind I'm constantly thinking that people might think I'm gay because I teach Zumba and I'm really good at it . . . One thing I tell my students in my Zumba class is that anyone is welcome in my class. I don't discriminate, whether it's racial, sexual, or any type, because I want everyone to have a good time when they come to my class. I think that, to get rid of these stereotypes, more needs to be done with inclusion in the classroom. Something that I will definitely do in my class as a teacher is [to] make sure no matter what, everyone in my class feels welcome and no one feels left out. (Jeremy)

If it happened to a colleague of mine while I was in the workplace, I think it would change my workstyle. I would try to gear it away from that [i.e., SIS] and have more variety of options for students, like different sports to play. By doing that, students wouldn't be identified as a certain way, so I think it would change the way I teach, but for the better. (Adam)

Viewing the topic from the female perspective, Kylie and Sara believed that there needed to be more female teachers in the field of PE. By saying "females make the setting more comfortable than a man would", Kylie suggested that students may feel more receptive and be willing to discuss further when a female teacher initiated a conversation about this sensitive topic. Besides, serving as a role model, female PE teachers could also help normalize female participation in (masculine) sports and PE, and consequently put the issues of SIS at ease. Sara's response below indicated that when an "out" teacher simply focused on teaching to her best ability, the teacher's homosexuality and other sexuality-related attributes would become normal and ultimately send a

positive message to the students who might be struggling with their own sexuality. Kylie, on the other hand, used herself as an example to combat the stereotypical physical appearance of PE teachers, suggesting that her agenda of being the best teacher possible trumped other people's opinions about her sexuality.

They [i.e., female PE teachers] shouldn't be judged [by their sexuality] because they're just trying to teach the kids . . . if students realize it's okay to come out, they're not gonna be harmed or judged, then they can come out and be comfortable doing what they enjoy doing. (Sara)

I do see myself being a little muscular, just because I work out a lot and I feel pretty strong and I'm starting to look more muscly like a man would, but honestly I really don't care what people say or think about me. If they want to stereotype me, they can go right ahead. It's not gonna change the way I teach. I'll teach in the best way possible for the people I'm teaching for, so if they think I'm gay because I do that, then that's just their personal opinion. (Kylie)

4. Conclusion

The careers and lives of female PE teachers are often fraught with SIS. Female PE teachers can be made to live a double life, forced to ignore homophobic harassments, and discouraged from performing their job adequately. In a sense, their heterosexual colleagues are also in a sort of "closet," as they can feel compelled to exaggerate their femininity and heterosexuality or remain in ignorance due to the lack of threat. This study was conducted to examine the perceptions of undergraduate PE majors on the concept of SIS, their experience with SIS, and the impact of SIS on the PE career path. Semi-structured formal interviews were conducted with three male and three female PE majors. The audio-taped interviews were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the standard interpretive methods of analytic induction and constant comparison. Findings indicated that SIS of female athletes participating in masculine sports and male athletes participating in feminine sports existed, although the prevalence in the former population was far greater than the latter, indicated by five of the six participants. Four of these five felt these stereotypes additionally applied to female PE teachers, citing their mannish physical appearance, PE being a male-

dominated field, and the guilt-by-association mentality. Three participants had been sexually stereotyped because their athletic pursuits did not conform to societal expectations. Although acknowledging interpersonal and internalized homophobia might turn away women contemplating a career in PE, none of the participants appeared to be threatened by the issue. In fact, ideas and strategies were presented with the intention to make a difference upon entering a career in PE.

4.1 Practical Implications

The important issue then becomes how to mitigate the issues underlying SIS. Traditional gender roles should not be used to dictate one's future. One's career qualifications are the first and foremost factor that should be considered when making hiring choices. Youth should feel empowered to challenge status quos and break gendered expectations. PE teachers, rather than enforcing harmful stereotypes regarding "male" and "female" sports, should facilitate the enjoyment of sport by all students, regardless of gender. The third proactive strategy is for PE teachers to help students understand and appreciate athletes' performance and achievement, rather than criticize their physical appearances, behaviors or attitudes that differ from traditional gender expectations. Lastly, there is a desperate need for comprehensive gender and sexual identity education. A well-developed curriculum has the potential to help all parties in schools have a better understanding of the complex nature of gender and sexual identity, learn the skills necessary to respond to stereotyping and homophobic situations, and ultimately create a positive learning environment for students and a safe workplace for teachers.

4.2 Limitation and Future Research

This research is limited to the opinions of six undergraduate students in one PETE program at a public university in the United States. Their life experiences and perceptions of SIS may resemble those of the participants in previous research, but precaution needs to be taken before a generalization to all PE majors is drawn. Besides, the data source for the study is limited to one formal interview with each participant over a study span of six months. Other data collection techniques such as non-participant observation or journal entry in a sport/activity class are recommended to gather richer contexts for future research. Another direction for a future study is to follow the participants into their first year of employment as full-time PE teachers and examine their

interactions with colleagues and students regarding issues surrounding SIS.

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