

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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TITLE: THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENT MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETES AND NON-ATHLETES TOWARD GAY MALES AND LESBIANS AT A MIDWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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This study examines the attitudes that men and women aged 18 years or older have toward gay males and lesbians. This included discovering whether attitudes toward gay males and lesbians varied if an individual was a male or female non-athlete, or a female or male athlete.

A survey of 443 undergraduates consisting of 232 athletes and 211 non-athletes, at a Midwestern university was conducted. There were 240 male students and 203 female students in the sample. Of the athletes, 149 were male and 83 were female. Ninety-seven percent of the participants were traditional college age (18-24 years). Of the students who reported their ethnicity, 77% were White, 18% were Black, 1.1% were Hispanic. Importantly, 55 of the Black respondents were athletes.

Students' attitudes toward lesbians and gay males were found to be moderately negative. Gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuality were observed. Males consistently expressed more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than did females. Within the vein of gender differences, female athletes expressed more positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay males than male athletes. Male athletes not only appear to keep more staunch negative attitudes in general toward gay men and lesbians, but are less tolerant of gay males than lesbians.

Particular attention was focused upon gender and athlete/non-athlete status. However, other factors were found to be important correlates of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, such as, how religious are you, frequency of attendance at religious services,

relationships with homosexuals, and size of hometown. An empirical comparison between White and Black ethnic groups were analyzed. No significant race differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay males were found.

The levels of condemnation have fallen slightly for men but much more so for women. Tersely, male athletes are more prejudicial toward lesbians and gay men than non-athlete males and females and female athletes, suggesting that homophobia has its roots deeply embedded in the aura of masculinity and power in sports.