

Organizational Support, Disclosure and Job Satisfaction of Lesbian Intercollegiate Coaches

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The purpose of this study was to provide a more complete picture of the perceptions and experiences of lesbian intercollegiate coaches. Previous research on lesbian coaches described a hostile sport climate and the avoidance of complete disclosure of lesbian sexual orientation. This study expanded the literature on lesbian coaches' perceptions and behaviors (Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1996; Krane & Barber, 2005) by investigating the relationships of organizational support and disclosure to job and life satisfaction. Fifty-two self-identified lesbian head and assistant coaches from NCAA Divisions I, II, III, and the NAIA, and representing a multitude of sports, completed online surveys to assess perceptions of organizational support within their intercollegiate athletic departments, degrees of disclosure of sexual orientation, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction. The findings showed lesbian intercollegiate coaches' perceptions of organizational support positively related to their degrees of disclosure of sexual orientation, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction. The results also suggested positive correlations between degree of disclosure and job and life satisfaction. The participants reported fairly high scores on all measures, indicating that the sample worked in supportive environments and also exhibited high levels of job and life satisfaction. On the open-ended section of the survey, coaches described neutral to positive attitudes towards lesbians within their athletic departments, with varying levels of informal support from co-workers, administrators, and athletes. The findings additionally indicated a disclosure continuum for lesbian coaches. The majority of the coaches were not publicly open about their sexual orientations in the workplace, but few coaches reported that they were completely out or completely closeted. Most coaches reported they were implicitly out at work, allowing others to see them as lesbians without explicitly disclosing their sexual orientations. The findings suggested that attitudes towards lesbians within intercollegiate athletics have become more tolerant than was depicted in the previous literature. However, the majority of coaches continue to partially conceal their lesbian sexual orientations in the workplace, indicating that coaches remain aware of homonegativism and the potential for facing discrimination due to sexual orientation. The results suggest the organizational support is related to both disclosure and job satisfaction, and that has implications for coach well-being and effectiveness. This research adds to our understanding of the organizational climate within college athletics, perceptions of coaches, and disclosure of lesbian identity, and how those factors shape the experiences of lesbian intercollegiate coaches.