

## Perception towards Homosexual Athletes in Malaysia

Azrowani Ulia, M.R.<sup>1</sup>, Azlina, Z.<sup>1</sup>, Omar Fauzee, M.S.<sup>2</sup>, and Rozita, A.L.<sup>1+</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universiti Technology MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia

**Abstract.** This research investigated knowledge and the perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia among sport spectators. There were 43% male and 57% female spectators involved in this study. More than 50% spectators had average knowledge regarding sexuality and 3% had low knowledge about this issue. The perception towards homosexual athlete was recorded based on Attitudes towards Lesbian and Gay Questionnaire (Herek, 1998) and knowledge about homosexual athlete was evaluated by The Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire (Harris, Nightengale and Owen, 1995). The results revealed that most sport spectators perception towards homosexual athlete are rather negative than positive (M=4.73). Male (M=4.74) showed slightly unfavorable perception towards homosexuals rather compared to female (M=4.72). In addition, the results also shown that most respondents know the clear definition of homosexuality (M=2.96). These results were important to guide coaches and others to deal with homosexual athlete. It also helped them to understand how this behavior occurred. It is recommended that to look for the difference in perception based on education level and gender. It also recommends getting evidence from homosexual athlete and investigating how they become homosexual, and other detailed about their life.

**Keywords:** Homosexual, Athletes

### 1. Background of the Study

As an athlete, they have a great influence to the society. People will make an athlete as their idol or people sometimes become huge fans of certain athlete. The spectators always see the athlete via television, internet and others. They also know the information through newspaper and magazine. This information might cover not only the on field story, but also the off field story either it is good or bad. The good story will give the good impression toward the athlete and the bad story will give the negative impression. The issue of athlete behavior and attitudes is happened to be an issue around the world. Few examples are sexual harassment, drugs, corruption, athlete attitude, social lifestyle and many more. This study is more concerned on what will happen if spectators or fans know that their idol is someone who is homosexuals. As a spectators and fans, how do they evaluate this athlete?

Homosexuality is thought to be “against nature” by most of the religion in the world. It has been an issue since the ancient time history (Kligerman, 2007). In the other hand, perceptions toward homosexual people are various according to types of societies, cultural and moral development or political situation. According to Harry (1989), homosexuality is not rare or unusual for people who have that kind of sexual orientation, but they often face the prejudice from multiple sources such as at home, school and work. Weinberg (1972) gives the first definition of homophobia that indicated it as irrational negative attitudes toward people with a homosexual orientation.

Previous study indicates that the perception towards homosexual person is more negative rather than positive. This perception however depends much on few variables such as education level, knowledge about homosexuality, experience with homosexual person, age, gender and many more. The negative perception and attitudes have become more important topic and research area in social science in the last 20 years (Cárdenas & Barrientos, 2008). Besides, in religion perspective, Adorno et. al. (1950) reported that people who are more religious demonstrate greater levels of prejudice towards homosexuality.

Recently, there are many athletes who reported to have homosexual orientation. For example John Paul Calderon an American professional volleyball player reported as gay. He currently involve with the famous

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<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: + (60355437809); fax: +(60355442910).  
E-mail address: (rozita.abdlatif@salam.uitm.edu.my).

modeling agencies in America. During 2004, Calderon began his career on volleyball and become the top ranked volleyball player in America. He also becomes a coach assistant for female team. He revealed his homosexuality in February 2007 and has signed many contracts in modeling agencies and no longer involve in sport. It is a waste for sport arena to lose a highly talented athlete and that had been trained for many years. In his situation, most of his friends and fans has support him and the changes that he made. This situation might be different in our country. As our society stressed us on the religion, culture and our norms, it will be different in the acceptance towards the homosexuality. So that, the perceptions toward homosexual athlete will also varies according to several factor.

In Malaysia, there are few issues of homosexuality discussed in newspaper and magazine, but none of media had ever revealed who is the person and where are they come from. Article titled The Tale of Gay In Malaysia (Utusan Malaysia, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010) had revealed some issue of homosexuals in Malaysia. The article also discussed that youngsters nowadays are very influential towards western culture. They have sharing the information on their own website and their small community. Other than that, the discussion about this issue is rarely discussed because of the people sensitivity. Some sport fan maybe knows about the homosexual athlete, but this had not been proven or published yet. This study was run to investigate perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia. The finding in this study is valuable for people. It is important to understand the perception towards homosexual athlete because by understand what people think about it can help society to find out how society can help the athlete and for the athlete to come to an awareness about the perception and try to improve themselves.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Samples**

There were 43 male respondents (43%) and 57% were female respondents. The age group was divided into five groups between 18 years old until over 54 years old. But only three age groups are found to answer the questionnaire. The most respondents are from 18 years old until 24 years old which represent 75% of the sample. The second highest percent of age group is between 25 to 34 years old which involved 24% of the respondents. The least numbers of respondents is between 35 to 44 years old which only represents 1% of the respondents.

### **2.2. Instrument**

The survey question has been used as the main data gathering instruments in this study. The questionnaire was divided into three section which are the demographic data of respondents, The Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire developed by Harris, Nightengale and Owen (1995), and Perception toward Lesbian and Gay (Herek 1988). This questionnaire has been adapted and adopted to suit the main purpose of the study. All items in 10 statements regarding perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 represents “strongly disagree”, 2 stands for “disagree”, 3 for “neutral”, 4 stands for agree and 5 stands for “strongly agree”. Mean while, 15 Items which evaluate knowledge of sport spectators on homosexuality are measured using a 3-point Likert scale. The scale is starting from 1 that represents “don’t know”, 2 represents “false” and 3 stands for “true”.

### **2.3. Result**

Table 3.1 shows the respondents level of knowledge about homosexuality. The level was divided into five level which are, very high for person who knows many things about homosexuality, high for person who knows well about homosexuality, medium for person who knows the few things about homosexuality, low for person who only knows the basic about homosexuality and very low for person who knows least or nothing at all about homosexuality. The highest percentage shows that 51% of the respondents have medium knowledge about homosexuality which means they know few things about homosexuality. 42% of the respondent has high knowledge about homosexuality. Respondents with very high knowledge represent 4% from whole sample. Only 2% respondents with low level of knowledge and 1% with very low level of knowledge about homosexuality.

Table 3.1: Previous knowledge about homosexuality

<i>Level of knowledge</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Very high</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>High</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Medium</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Low</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Very low</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>

Table 3.2: knowledge about homosexuality

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
A child who engages in homosexual behaviors will become a homosexual adult	2.50	.745
There is a good chance of changing homosexual people into normal people	2.51	.823
Most homosexuals want to be members of the opposite sex	1.99	.969
Sexual orientation is established at an early age	2.24	.955
According to American Psychological Association, homosexuality is an illness	1.92	.939
Homosexuals are more likely to be victims of violent crimes rather than the general public	1.67	.667
A person becomes a homosexual because she/he chooses to do so	2.60	.765
A homosexual person does not agree with his/her own gender	1.96	.875
Every culture has no tolerance towards homosexuality	2.53	.758
Homosexual men are aggressive	1.59	.683
Bisexuality may be characterized by sexual behavior or responses to both sex	2.75	.716
Homosexuality can be treated by therapy	2.15	.968
Homosexuals are persons who are attracted to the same gender	2.96	.281
Many religions prohibit homosexuality	2.84	.507
Homosexual men are more likely to seduce young men than heterosexuals (normal) males are likely to seduce young girls	2.26	.960

Table 3.2 shows the knowledge of respondents about homosexuality. The highest mean was homosexuals are person who are attracted to the same gender (M=2.96, SD=0.28). At the other hand, the lowest mean was regarding homosexual men are aggressive (M=1.59, SD=0.68).

Table 3.3 below shows the level of respondents' perception towards homosexual in Malaysia. Respondents are strongly agreed that homosexual is a sin (M=4.73, SD=0.57), followed by the idea of homosexual marriages seem ridiculous to me (M=4.72, SD=0.06), homosexual athletes behavior is bad influence on children (M=4.41, SD=0.07). Meanwhile, the lowest mean was homosexuality should not be the cause for job discrimination (M=3.28, SD=1.26).

Table 3.3 also shows different perception towards homosexual athlete between male and female respondents. The highest mean to compare perception between male and female respondents are shown on "homosexuality is a sin". Male respondents' highest mean was (M= 4.74, SD=.856), compared to female respondents' highest mean was (M=4.72, SD=.776). This indicates that female respondents' mean was a bit lower than male respondents. But, based on Likert scale, both mean are still considered as strongly agree. This also indicates that there are not many differences between male and female perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia.

The lowest comparison mean between male and female was on the "homosexuality should not be the cause for job discrimination". Male respondents' mean was (M=2.98, SD=.919) compared to female respondents was (M=3.51, SD=.838). The result indicates that female respondents agree with the statement but male respondents have neutral opinion towards the statement. This is maybe due to females are more

concern and care for other peoples' behavior situation rather than men who sometimes do not really take notice about what happen with their surroundings.

Table 3.3: Perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia

Item	Mean	SD	Male		Female	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Homosexuals just can't fit into our society	4.15	.821	4.12	.693	4.18	.453
Homosexuality is a sin	4.73	.566	4.74	.856	4.72	.776
Growing number of homosexuals indicate a decline in society moral	4.26	.824	4.07	.751	4.40	.629
Homosexual athletes are sick	4.36	.689	4.23	.804	4.54	.657
I think homosexual athletes are disgusting	4.35	.730	4.21	.747	4.46	.510
The idea of homosexual marriages seem ridiculous to me	4.72	.621	4.67	.868	4.75	.600
Homosexual athletes behavior is bad influence on children	4.41	.740	4.23	1.186	4.46	.901
If a person has an homosexual behavior, he/she should do everything they can to overcome it	3.99	1.059	3.70	1.456	4.21	1.037
Homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination	3.28	1.256	2.98	.919	3.51	.838
Homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions	3.92	.895	3.67	.618	4.11	.821

## 2.4. Result

After testing all 10 items on the perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia, the result shows that most respondent are strongly agree that homosexuality is a sin ( $M=4.73$ ,  $SD=0.566$ ) although it was among the athlete. That prove the overall respondent cannot accept homosexuals based on their religious understanding regardless what religious they are. Respondent also very understand that from the religious perspective, homosexuality is wrong and against the religion rules. Homosexuality is thought to be “against nature” by most of the religion in the world. It has been an issue since the ancient time history (Kligerman, 2007). Beside, Kligerman also state that according to Shari’a, Islamic laws interpret homosexuality not to be merely a sin but a crime as well. Homosexuality also is seen as a breach of the “religion of nature”. In Christians, some may simply have prejudice when it came to homosexual people (Basset, et. al., 2000). Islam and Christians covered more than half human population in the world. Based on Encyclopedia Britannica and World Christian Encyclopedia (2001), 31% of world populations were Christian and 21% were Islam. This shows that more than half of world populations are under the constitutions of these two major religions that refuse homosexuality. Even though people who never have personal contact with homosexual people, come out with their own perception just based on their religious understanding. This means people can make their own perception without knowing the real value of homosexual people according to their actual behavior and attitudes.

Meanwhile, the lowest mean was ( $M=3.28$ ,  $SD=1.256$ ) homosexuality should not be the cause for job discrimination. This result shows that respondents are more neutral on having homosexuals in working field. They are not too discriminate but not also too open to accept homosexuals in working industry. Based on Lindhorst (1997), homosexuals' are experiencing discrimination and homophobia from society. It includes the discrimination of receiving services, social acceptance and stereotyping (Cao, Wang and Gao, 2010). Besides, mental health professional also discriminate them in giving services and treatment (Lindhorst, 1997). When a gay man is not able to be himself in public situations, they may develop feeling of loneliness, worthlessness, low self-esteem, and increased internalized homophobia (D’Augelli, Grossman & Hershberger, 2001). Based on the results we only can say that some of the respondents might be discriminate and some might not in the working environment or finding a job. This may happen because in the working

environment, people are more concern about working effectively and efficiently rather than personal behavior. They may work together under one roof but not as close during social occasions.

In addition, 15 items in the last section of the questionnaire was answering research second objective that meant to evaluate sport spectators knowledge about homosexuals. This section is trying to seek what people know and what people do not know about homosexuality. Based on research results, the highest mean on this section was ( $M=2.96$ ,  $SD=0.028$ ) homosexuals are person who are attracted to the same gender. According to Cao, Wang and Gao (2010), homosexuality refers to sexual behavior of interest oriented towards the same sex. On 1980, American Psychological Association also redefined homosexuality as a person's sexual, mental, emotional and social interest of another person with the same gender. It support the result and prove that almost all respondent are very sure about the definition of homosexuality and who is the person that engaged in this kind of behavior. It also demonstrate that most respondent at least have few knowledge about homosexuality.

At the other hand, the lowest mean was regarding homosexual men are aggressive ( $M=1.59$ ,  $SD=0.068$ ). This results shows that sport spectators do not see a homosexual men are aggressive. In past research according to American Psychological Association (2000), homosexuals are only assumed as person with mental illness, depression and having psychological problems. Bagley and Tremblay (2000) also confirm that gay students are more depressed, lonely, have fewer reason to live, and are at least four times more likely to attempt suicide but not harm other students. So far, none of the research ever proven that homosexuals are aggressive. Being a homosexual does not mean they are an aggressive person. People can become aggressive although they are not homosexual. So, it is obvious that sport spectators do not think homosexuals are aggressive.

Finally, this research is discussing the difference in perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia between male and female spectators. Based on the results, there was slightly difference in male and female perception. Male respondents perception achieve mean  $M= 4.74$  slightly higher than female respondent that achieve mean  $M=4.72$ . This indicates female respondents mean was a bit lower than male respondents. This result aligns with Heaven and Oxman (1999) that measure the perception by the gender different and make gender as the independent variables. It shows that men endorse more negative stereotypes more than woman. Based on Çirakoğlu (2006), also found that gender has become the component that lead to different perception. Meanwhile, the research of teachers perception conducted by Hoffman (2001) found that the demographic profile of the participants do not give the differences to the upcoming result. Regarding to this research, there were also no differences in the subject responses based on their gender, age and the grade level they have been taught. But, the finding was male reported to have more problems with homosexuals' people rather than female. In this research, men are proven to have slightly higher negative perception rather than women. This result was consistent with Oxman (1999) and Çirakoğlu (2006). This maybe happened because nature of male are easily disgusted with this behavior and female are likely to accept others based on their others quality than behavior. But both mean are still considered as strongly agree. That mean, there are not much differences between male and female perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia and it was consistent with Hoffman (2001).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

As a conclusion, this study indicate that the sport spectators perception towards homosexual athlete in Malaysia is more negative as they are strongly agree that homosexuality is a sin. Meanwhile, there are a bit different between male and female respondent perception towards homosexuality. Male shows more unlike respond towards homosexuality rather that female. In addition, this research proves that most respondent knows at least the clear definition about homosexuality. Most of the respondent knows that homosexuality is a person who attract to the same gender. As a conclusion, all research questions have been answered and it was supported by other literature. The results of this study are very important for athlete, coaches, counselor and sport organization in order to improve athlete behavior and attitudes. These results are also important to guide coaches and others to deal with homosexual athlete. It also helps them to understand how this behavior happened. Besides, sport organization can use this study to monitor athlete lifestyle and identify their unusual activity that might affect their sport performance.

In the other hand, for future research, it is recommended that the research will look into more detail results. For example look for the difference in perception based on education level and gender. It will be better if we can differentiate the perception between people with different education background.

Meanwhile, to make the research become more interesting and valuable, researcher should try to find the evidence of homosexual athlete and investigate how they become homosexual, how do they perform in their sport and other detailed about their life. It will help people understand more about them and get the accurate information directly from homosexuals.

### 3. Acknowledgements

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