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**Original article**

## **Communicative approach based on gender towards the sexual orientation in educational sports centers of Santiago de Cuba**

### **Perspectiva comunicacional de género en la orientación sexual de centros educacionales deportivos santiagueros**

### **Perspectiva de comunicação de género na orientação sexual de centros educativos desportivos em Santiago de Cuba**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Human beings have learned to live with, understand and even act upon the diversity that exists in the world. However, it is still a little difficult to reason about those differences that have to do with people. The objective of this study is to design communicational educational actions to provide treatment and pedagogical orientation to individual differences and sexual diversity in women's softball athletes at the "Orestes Acosta" Initiation Sport School (EIDE in Spanish) in Santiago de Cuba. From the diagnosis applied to a sample of 27 athletes from the women's softball team of the mentioned institution and scientific observation, it was possible to learn about difficulties with the acceptance of sexual diversity in training, competitions, and other related sports activities. To carry out this study, methods, techniques, and instruments were applied for the diagnosis of the approach to sexual diversity such as the survey, interview, and group assessment test (desired interrelationships). As a result, a didactic proposal is offered that contemplates some educational aspects to be taken into account in the treatment of athletes with sexual diversity, such as: personality traits of the athletes, levels of sexual information established according to the age of the athlete, respect for their sexual orientation, depth in the analysis of the situation of their sexual diversity, response of the athlete to the treatment offered, linkage of the school, family and community, need for interdisciplinary work of the teaching staff for the adequate sexual orientation of the athletes.

**Keywords:** sexual diversity; female soccer; educational actions.

#### **RESUMEN**

Los seres humanos han aprendido a vivir con la diversidad existente en el mundo, a entenderla y hasta actuar de acuerdo con ella. Sin embargo, todavía cuesta un poco de trabajo razonar sobre aquellas diferencias que tienen que ver con las personas. El objetivo de este estudio consiste en elaborar acciones educativas comunicacionales para brindar tratamiento y orientación pedagógica a las diferencias individuales y la diversidad sexual en atletas del softbol femenino de la EIDE "Orestes Acosta" de



Santiago de Cuba. A partir del diagnóstico aplicado a una muestra de 27 atletas del equipo femenino de softbol de la mencionada institución y la observación científica, se pudo conocer las dificultades con la aceptación de la diversidad sexual en entrenamientos, competencias y otras actividades deportivas afines. Para la realización de este estudio se aplicaron métodos, técnicas e instrumentos para el diagnóstico del abordaje de la diversidad sexual como la encuesta, entrevista, test de valoración de grupo (interrelaciones deseadas). Como resultado se ofrece una propuesta didáctica que contempla algunos aspectos educativos a tener en cuenta en el tratamiento con las atletas que poseen diversidad sexual, como son: rasgos de la personalidad de las atletas, niveles de información sexual que se establezcan según la edad del atleta, respeto a su orientación sexual, profundidad en el análisis de la situación de su diversidad sexual, respuesta de la atleta ante el tratamiento brindado, vínculo de la escuela, la familia y la comunidad, necesidad del trabajo interdisciplinar del claustro docente para la adecuada orientación sexual de las atletas.

**Palabras clave:** diversidad sexual; fútbol femenino; acciones educativas.

## RESUMO

Os seres humanos têm aprendido a viver com, compreender e até mesmo agir com a diversidade que existe no mundo. No entanto, ainda é um pouco difícil raciocinar sobre essas diferenças que têm a ver com as pessoas. O objetivo deste estudo é desenvolver ações de comunicação educativa para dar tratamento e orientação pedagógica às diferenças individuais e à diversidade sexual das atletas de softbol feminino no EIDE "Orestes Acosta", em Santiago de Cuba. A partir do diagnóstico aplicado a uma amostra de 27 atletas da equipe feminina de softball da referida instituição e da observação científica, foi possível conhecer as dificuldades com a aceitação da diversidade sexual em treinamentos, competições e outras atividades esportivas afins. Para a realização deste estudo, foram aplicados métodos, técnicas e instrumentos para o diagnóstico da abordagem da diversidade sexual, tais como a pesquisa, entrevista e teste de avaliação em grupo (inter-relações desejadas). Como resultado, é oferecida uma proposta didática que contempla alguns aspectos educacionais a serem considerados no tratamento de atletas com diversidade sexual, tais como: traços de personalidade dos atletas, níveis de informação sexual estabelecidos de acordo com a idade do atleta, respeito à sua orientação sexual, profundidade na análise da situação de sua diversidade sexual, resposta do atleta ao tratamento oferecido, vinculação da escola, família e comunidade, necessidade de trabalho interdisciplinar do corpo docente para a orientação sexual adequada dos atletas.

**Palavras-chave:** diversidade sexual, futebol feminino, ações educativas.

## INTRODUCTION

Sport is a traditionally male domain in which gender inequalities in other spheres of society are often expressed, and which also reflects the myths, stereotypes and other cultural and educational constraints that mark the attitudes of men and women to sport throughout their lives. Incorporating the gender communication perspective into the sexual orientation of female athletes in Santiago implies taking into account all the conditioning factors that influence the participation of women in sports, identifying the barriers or obstacles that may be limiting such participation, and knowing the needs of the female sex for their practice.



The gender perspective requires a diagnosis of the sexual orientation of female athletes in order to establish measures aimed at correcting the deficiencies that prevent an educational process that is properly oriented towards their needs, and to guarantee adequate sports management that respects the principle of sexual diversity among female students.

The fight against the diversity of sexual orientation requires a structural change that modifies behaviors and favors the emergence of a social and political culture of equality, reciprocity and respect for people with a gender identity or sexual preference different from the majority. Only through respect for human rights and the acceptance that all people, regardless of their sexual preference, have the right to live in peace and be as they are, will it be possible to move to a society that is far from discrimination and stigmatization towards what is different (Gordillo, 2018).

According to (Vassallo, 2017) sexual and gender diversity (SDG) or simply sexual diversity is a term used to refer in an inclusive way to all the diversity of sexes, sexual orientations and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviors and characteristics that make up this plurality. Socially, sexual diversity is claimed as a form of acceptance of any form of being, with equal rights, freedoms and opportunities within the framework of human rights.

For many years sport has been characterized as a space reserved for male heterosexuality and female homosexuality. However, this circulated more than in books or academic papers in the social imaginary. This belief puts the first point of inflection about the theme of sexual diversity in sport, in gender issues that reserve sport as a space for the development and socialization of the heterosexual male, leaving aside all those persons who are alien to this heterosexist masculinity and, as a consequence of this premise, excluding all those persons who deviate from this norm (Piedra, 2015).

Today, the international community recognizes and accepts the benefits of sport among its practitioners, whether on a physiological, psychological, sociological or educational level. However, in certain contexts and situations, sport is a source of discrimination, harassment and aggression for certain people (Iglesias, Lozano and Manchado, 2013; Oswalt, and Vargas, (2013); Cleland, 2014). In this sense, sport has traditionally integrated among its characteristics not only stereotyped views of masculinity and femininity, but also stereotypes linked to sexuality have determined it and continue to do so (Dowling, 2013, Torres, 2017). Regardless of the fact that, in each country, work is being done to eliminate discrimination in society, in relation to sexuality, specifically in the diversity of sexual orientation, the issue continues to be clearly pointed out and repudiated in some sectors or contexts of society, such as sport.

Despite the advances and social changes achieved, the literature review has found a considerable number of authors (almost always foreign) who have confirmed and continue to point out the existence of a hostile climate in their societies related to the diversity of sexual orientation in sport (Caicedo, 2013; O'Brien, Shovelton and Latner, 2013, Davis-Delano, 2014; Krane, 2016; Ensign, Yiamouyiannis, White and Ridpath, (2016); Cohen, 2017). Among the different patterns and actions that generate marginalization in sport are negative stereotypes, verbal harassment, discrimination in team selection, social isolation, loss of support, negative media attention and the persistence of homophobic mentality (Griffin, 2014). All this causes people from this group to be forced to remain invisible, hidden (Devís, Fuentes and Sparkes, 2015), silenced by heteronormativity (Caicedo, 2013, Gordillo, 2018).



In a general sense, there is a lack of studies, research, campaigns and programs focused on understanding and making visible heterosexist discrimination and raising the awareness of both sportsmen and women and society in general, especially in the field of sports performance due to its social influence (Vasallo, 2017, Hernández, 2017, Martínez, J, Galá, R. M. L. and Frómeta, B. M. L. (2017).

Given this situation of scarce research in the sport on sexual minorities, this study focuses specifically on the need to address sexual diversity in the women's softball team of EIDE "Orestes Acosta" from Santiago de Cuba, from a communications perspective. The objective is to develop educational communication actions aimed at improving information on sexual orientation, increasing sports performance, and stimulating interpersonal relations of the aforementioned women's team. From this, according to Bento (2010), it is necessary to consider sport as a kind of anthropological and axiological category, that is, it is a form of philosophy with a clear pedagogical function that helps to give meaning to the athlete's life, to improve the inter-human treatment in the sports team and to assume the function of an instrument to forge the human being.

In the field of Physical Education there are studies such as those by Piedra, Rodríguez-Sánchez, Ries and Ramírez-Macías (2013) which confirm that Physical Education teachers are little aware of homophobia in their classes, taking, in general, few measures to overcome the discrimination that may arise in the classroom.

In Cuba, compared to other countries in the region, there are minimal figures for violence due to discrimination based on sexual orientation; however, various NGOs (non-governmental organizations) point out that ordinary citizens do not accept sexual diversity; the reasons can range from religious to ideological, if religion is not itself an ideology, the violence can be physical, verbal and psychological.

In recent years, the country has been advocating a positive policy towards sexual diversity in all spheres of citizen's life (Jiménez, 2017). Work is still under way in sports facilities to resolve certain traditionalist stereotypes regarding the presence of Cuban women in some sports (Pupo y Sierra, 2017; Barcelán, 2017). Therefore, the objective of this research is to develop educational communication actions to provide treatment and pedagogical orientation to individual differences and sexual diversity in women's softball athletes of the EIDE "Orestes Acosta" from Santiago de Cuba.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This bibliographic background has served as a basis for this research to analyze this phenomenon in the women's softball modality, in athletes of the EIDE of Santiago de Cuba, where difficulties were observed in the acceptance of sexual diversity, in training, competitions and other teaching activities.

The present study is part of the research project *Scientific Culture in the Physical Culture and Sport Professional*, assigned to the National Program "Sport and Human Development" and aims to elaborate educational communication actions to give treatment and pedagogical orientation to individual differences and sexual diversity in female softball athletes of the EIDE "Orestes Acosta" of Santiago de Cuba.

The population and the sample coincide with a total of 27 female athletes from the Santiago de Cuba softball team. The selection of the sample took into account their particularities according to the needs of the research. The following inclusion criteria were established that were the female athletes of the selected team, presenting



and/or sharing diverse criteria on sexual diversity and volunteerism. In addition, the criteria of five female teachers, the team coach and the teaching methodologist were used.

The methodology used has a qualitative approach to characterize the features of sexual diversity in the sample studied. In addition, the following were used:

### **Theoretical methods**

The analysis-synthesis to perform the analysis and assessment of the core aspects referred to the treatment of sexual diversity in the process of teaching and learning sports, with emphasis on the impact on academic and sports performance of athletes.

The structural-functional systemic method was used for the elaboration of the proposed pedagogical actions.

### **Empirical methods**

Observation of classes and sports/recreational activities to check how the indicators that allow the evaluation of the treatment of sexual diversity in the studied sample behave. Together with the triangulation of data with other consulted bibliographic sources, it allowed the description, explanation and evaluation of the results.

The review of documents was used to learn about teaching-methodological aspects related to the teaching-learning process and the training of sports teams in secondary education.

### **Information processing techniques**

The interview with teachers, coaches and the teaching methodologist to find out their criteria for dealing with sexual diversity in female athletes.

The survey applied to students to clarify their criteria about their sexual orientation, how female athletes with a different orientation are treated and how this affects their sports preparation.

By conducting interviews and tabulating surveys with teachers, the coach and female students on the team, it was possible to collect the information needed for this study. Some shortcomings within this female sports group were noted, such as rejection of athletes with diverse sexual orientations, sexual harassment that forces them, at times, to remain silent due to heteronormativity, physical, verbal or psychological violence, aspects that must be addressed as part of the student's training process.

Psychological violence was also observed in the verbal harassment of female athletes through insults, constant criticism, discrediting, humiliation, silence, either by gesture, word or physical act itself. In all these forms, the destructive capacity that these manifestations of violence have in sports classes and training is expressed and they have a negative effect on sports performance as such.

This situation derives, in students, difficulties in solving practical and creative problems in sports training, indifference to the tasks of the collective, insufficient development of individual and collaborative skills that contribute to knowledge of the different positions in the game and communicate their solution, limited communication in the collective of athletes and with the coach and teachers.



In the teachers and coaches, deficient teacher-methodological treatment of the sexual diversity of the team, weak sexual orientation towards female athletes, insufficient work of the teaching staff with families and the community, insufficient use of interdisciplinary relations among the subjects of the faculty for the solution of the problem detected.

The following variables were also considered for the scientific observation of the sample:

Independent variables:

1. Age: 11-17 years old.
2. Sex female (f).
3. Schooling level: primary, high and senior high.

From the characterization made to the team it was possible to know that the team includes the school-youth ages; the social origin is worker-farmer-business owners; that 16 students come from divorced parents, six are from the city of Santiago de Cuba and 11 from the surrounding municipalities; their school performance is satisfactory and the sports performance is regular.

As a dependent variable: sexual diversity in their behaviour.

In the surveys conducted, it was shown that these adolescents and young women have very poor information about sexual education issues, in general. This supports the need for sex education for coaches and players regarding the acceptance of sexual diversity in Cuban women's sports teams. In the analysis of various situations in the field, difficulties emerged such as the presence of verbal discourtesy in its most significant form and verbal violence. In the case of insulting verbal responses, the creation of pairs of analogous members was observed where each speaker, in turn, insults the other and gets another insult in response, or as when a nominal or adjective offense is uttered and the response is "more (noun/adjective) will be you/your (loved one)". It may be that a couple of torts can start a chain of similarly similar replies with added emphasis. In sports training, it is common to see this type of verbal exchange of insults between athletes.

A series of insults related to the athlete's sexual orientation that are harmful to her person and have nothing to do with her sports performance have been collected: ferrule, nut, tomboy, bread with bread, among others.

The negative aspects of the insult as an act of speech and the transitivity of the speech itself are expressed in a special creativity, even overproduction, although the language system only includes a reduced list of these units. In sports training this is contextualised in the sports skills which are demonstrated in the game and which the opponent evaluates as positive or negative. The forms can be pointed out: *guaricandilla, trapo viejo, vieja, jubilada, pureta, pura, nalga e vieja, gorda boterol, ballena, carretilla, mula vieja, pellejú'a, fuetera, cabaretera, puta, puta'ebatallón*. These insults are directed almost all to the age and morality of the sportswoman to devalue her physical-sport-moral condition.

There are many and varied causes that lead to violent demonstrations in sports training, known from the information of the surveys carried out, they can be mentioned:



- Disagreement with the decisions of the referees and the coach and disagreement with the technical-sports performance of the team's athletes.
- Disagreement with the loss of the match by their team.
- Disagreement with the material conditions of the place of sports performance (starting time, late arrival of the athletes, poor hygienic conditions).
- Rivalry with teammates, poor sports preparation of the team.

In summary, the study recorded as most productive the offenses that assign negative qualifiers to the referent by means of nouns, adjectives, or lexies, such as, for example: words related to socially reprobated ethical-moral conduct, that is, diversity in the athlete's sexual orientation, those related to age and sports performance.

These insults provoke perlocutionary acts of various natures, such as rude gestures, reproaches (such as when the victim states that his or her interlocutor is acting unfairly, is committing a daring act, or is offending him or her), threats with subsequent verbal or non-verbal actions, and repayment of the offense, i.e., another insult.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis of the interview with the teachers and coaches of the women's softball team**

Objective: to know the main deficiencies affecting the team's sports performance that are linked to the sexual diversity of its members.

The 100 % of the interviewees agree that the relationships between the athletes are not the best, since sometimes they are mistreated both physically and verbally, some of them lacking the sense of comradeship and solidarity, there is segmentation within the team, lack of group cohesion, difficulties in decision making during matches, negligence in training, little collaboration between athletes, disinformation, indifference to individual needs and verbal discussions, apathy towards teaching activities, among others. It was observed that the most serious difficulties in the group are based on the vocabulary used by the students among themselves and with other people when they communicate. In addition, respect for each other and for other members involved in the teaching and learning process is also affected.

It is concluded that the age diversity of the team, the origin of dysfunctional homes, the time they spend away from the family, the little or no sexual orientation received in their homes and in the institution, the distance from their communities of origin are very important socio-cultural factors in the motivation and sports performance of these athletes. The persistence of traditional educational paradigms in the treatment of students with a different sexual orientation to that of their gender was evidenced in the training, which employed rudeness in treatment, verbal violence, lack of chivalry and respect for their condition as women.

### **Indicators for observing sexual diversity behavior on women's softball sports teams**

1. Working together to contribute to the achievement of the team's educational/sports objectives.
2. Respectful communication, appropriate vocabulary and cooperation, respect for rules.



3. Decisions of the team leader and coach and positions in the teaching/sports activity.
4. Responsabilidad por deficiencias personales, de estudio o de trabajo deportivo.

This proposal is based on the need to design didactic activities within the process of teaching and learning sports that make it possible to develop interpersonal relationships in the personal components of the team and increase their sports and teaching performance. These activities must take into consideration the physical, psychological and pedagogical characteristics of the athletes, which not only consider the difficulties, but also the cognitive and affective potential of the athletes for their assimilation.

### **The educational communication actions must consider the following aspects**

Technical-professional activity: it is a cognitive process through which the essential elements of assimilation of sexual diversity in sport are determined: physical-mental symptoms, presented diseases, interpersonal relationships, sport performance, competitive results, demotivation by the sport group. Its fundamental objective is to lay the foundations for an adequate diagnosis in the process of sports education. For this reason, a total of ten workshops were held on the following subjects: sexuality. Its characteristics, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV. How to avoid them, early pregnancy in adolescence, how to prevent it, femininity and masculinity, their features, sport and sexuality. Its physical risks for women, gender equity, the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba with respect to gender equity and the rights to sexual diversity, the family, the community and the sports collective in the face of the sexual diversity of athletes, adequate sexual orientation in the sports collective: a path to greater sports performance and interpersonal relations in the sports collective.

Social-psychological: its affective-emotional character guarantees that an environment is conditioned to achieve a total understanding of the cognitive information. Its objective is to establish a perfect dialogical communication between the teacher/coach and the athletes in order to achieve a favorable climate in the process of teaching and learning sports and the achievement of a better individual and collective sports performance. We suggest activities that improve the group cohesion of the team such as: excursions where the group integration is manifested in activities of: dramatization, group unity and love of nature, collective birthdays, gift exchanges, educational galas aimed at the development of communication, camping, dance competition, singing competition, bonfires.

Conative: it comes from the two previous ones. Its objective is that the athlete adopts a consistent attitude with the reality of the assimilation of sexual diversity in her sports environment, both in the order of the investigations and the treatment to follow in her subsequent training.

These actions should be systematically evaluated by the coach and team members, especially in terms of their impact on the sporting results of the competitions. The indicators set out above should be observed and the score of each of them should be established according to the behavior of the athletes during the activities.

The result of the scientific observation made to classes and sports/recreational activities and from there, the implementation of the proposal offered allowed to



evaluate the behavior of the indicators established to treat sexual diversity in the sample studied. Subsequently, by triangulating these data with other bibliographic sources consulted, it was possible to describe, explain and assess the results in terms of the socio-cultural context of the sample under study.

It is important in these educational contexts the mutual understanding between teachers and athletes, the inclusion of the whole team in the tasks of the collective. Education in the values of collectivism and responsibility for sports results is a factor to be taken into account by teachers and due to the age diversity of the team, it requires a more precise and personalized pedagogical strategy.

Communication is an effective tool for the understanding of the athlete in the coexistence with others of diverse orientation, which will allow him to raise his sports performance and improve his competitive results.

The didactic proposal showed some educational aspects to be taken into account when dealing with the athletes who have sexual diversity, such as: the personality traits of the athletes, levels of sexual information established according to the age of the athlete, respect for their sexual orientation, depth in the analysis of the situation of their sexual diversity, the response of the athlete to the treatment provided, the link between the school, the family and the community, and the need for interdisciplinary work by the teaching staff for the adequate sexual orientation of the athletes.

By way of conclusion, it is proposed that by covering the problem of sexuality in sport, an attempt is made to open up a space for reflection on this issue not only for those people interested in gender and sexual diversity issues but also, and mainly, for those people linked to sport and physical activity, since certain socially constructed notions must be demystified and at the same time the game must be opened up so that debates, exchanges and changes in exclusion and discrimination behavior in the field of sport can take place.

It is necessary to raise the interdisciplinary theoretical-methodological preparation of sports teachers and coaches at this level of education, of the family and the community in relation to attention to the sexual diversity of athletes in training in order to educate them integrally as required by modern inclusive pedagogy and to include diversity in the process of preventing behavioral difficulties

Although the benefits of sport among its practitioners are recognized and accepted, whether on a physiological, psychological, sociological or educational level, in certain contexts and situations, sport can be a source of discrimination, harassment and aggression for certain individuals. It is therefore necessary to rid sport of stereotyped views of masculinity and femininity and of stereotypes linked to sexuality.

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**Conflict of interests:**

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

**Authors' contribution:**

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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