

Fall 2016

The Spike of Female Soccer Players in the Netherlands since 2010

Morgan Colley
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The Spike of Female Soccer Players in the Netherlands since 2010

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SIT Independent Study Project

Netherlands: International Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender

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December 2016



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Abstract

In the Dutch society, the sport of soccer, also known as football, draws a lot of attention and has millions of followers when it comes to the men's soccer clubs. The most common and widely celebrated soccer teams in the Netherlands are the major teams, such as, AJAX, PSV and Feyenoord, all being male soccer teams. There is a lack of female soccer clubs around the Netherlands when comparing it to the number of male soccer clubs. Women's soccer is underrepresented in the news of Dutch sports media and obviously overpowered by the enthusiasm surrounding men's soccer. Only in the past decade have women's soccer clubs started to become a popular sport by gaining more recognition on a competitive level to the point where it has made public news in the Netherlands (Nixon, 2008). For this research, four current and alumni female soccer players from all across Holland were interviewed about their experiences in playing soccer and how gender differences have played a role throughout their athletic career. These participants were asked questions regarding stereotypes surrounding women in athletics and the taboo ideas about masculinity and if it correlates to being a successful female soccer player. Major themes that were commonly addressed in the interviews were sports media surrounding the accomplishment of the Dutch National Women's Team in 2009, the fading stereotype of "butch" female soccer players and the acceptance of femininity in a male dominated sport. All of these topics pointed to a conclusion that women's soccer in the Netherlands has in many ways broken the old stereotypes about female athletes in soccer and has proven to be of increasing interest to many young Dutch girls and women in the past ten years.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my ISP advisor, Tobias Dörfler, for being available to provide guidance during my research and willingness to review my work when needed. I would also like to thank the academic director of the SIT Netherlands program on International Perspectives of Gender and Sexuality, Garjan Sterk. Throughout the program, she has given me quality guidance on my ISP by providing me with contacts for my interviews as well as emotional support and encouragement. I want to thank the Assistant Academic Director, Natasha Minebo, for her support as well and the resources she provided me to complete my research and Yvette Kopijn, CVE Coordinator, for connecting me with soccer clubs in the Netherlands. I also would like to thank coaches, trainers and parents here in Amsterdam that allowed me to visit women's and girl's soccer clubs and observe matches and practices all across the Netherlands. Finally, I would like to thank my own coaches and mentors back home in America who have always supported me and encouraged me as a student, mentee and female athlete.

Thank you,

Morgan Colley

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Introduction

In the Netherlands the culture's history surrounding Dutch soccer has always been dominated by the macho, or masculine male, stereotype. Male soccer teams in the Netherlands have taken up a majority of the sports entertainment world, like media, sponsors and overall fan base, leaving no room for females to participate at level high enough to be seen as competitive and exciting for the Dutch society. Female soccer teams in the Netherlands have just begun to gain recognition in media, from fans and other countries around the world in the past decade, which is unlike the Women's National Soccer Teams in the U.S. who are recognized highly in their country (Nixon, 2008). There has been a visible transition of more women and young girls participating in soccer in the Netherlands without the fear of discrimination or gender inequality (Krane, 2001). However, women playing soccer is still a fresh idea in the minds of the Dutch, and it is still obvious that men's clubs receive most of attention when it comes to media, training and global recognition. There has been little research surrounding the idea of soccer in the Netherlands being a male dominated sport and what might have sparked the recent increase of female participants, but what is known about the female sport is the lingering stereotypes of women soccer players from past sexuality assumptions, the presence of the LGBT community in women's soccer, and the lack of respect and recognition given to Dutch female soccer players. The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: What has sparked the increase in female soccer players in the Netherlands in the past 10 years? This research will be done by interviewing female soccer players in the Netherlands about their past life experiences regarding sports and athletics and how their society has had any influence. In order to get a accurate representation of the Netherlands, the sample of participants in this research come from all over

Holland and are categorized as middle-aged female soccer players, either currently playing or alumni to the sport of soccer. They were asked a series of questions about their childhood experiences as a female soccer player and what it was like growing up playing a sport that “was not for women” and how that affected their passion for the sport. The questionnaire also touches on stereotypes surrounding sexuality of female soccer players and if the media has had any affect on how their society views athletic women in soccer. A hypothesis gathered from previous research would state that there has been a change in media representation for women in soccer and disappearing stereotypes surrounding women's soccer. In the literature review, there will be an in depth analysis of previous research surrounding the topic of female soccer in the Netherlands, and then the methods section will provide a description of how this study was conducted and what the interview panel consists of. With the information gathered from the life experience interviews of these women, an analysis will be compiled and a conclusion will be drawn using the literature review about what has potentially created the increase of females participating in soccer and where the Dutch society is heading in terms of gender equality in sports.

Literature Review

In the literature review four subjects will be discussed including, reasons how and why females participate in soccer, the stigma behind femininity and masculinity in soccer, female stereotypes in soccer and how the media represents female soccer players in the Netherlands. All of these literature reviews will give background information for answering the research question, what has caused the increase in female soccer players in the Netherlands in the past decade as well as give a good platform to conduct interviews for this investigation.

Reasons how and why females participate in sports

Over the past decade, women have begun to place themselves in the world of soccer for multiple reasons even though it has been viewed as a masculine, male dominated space (Nixon, 2008). The article written by Elling called “Sexuality as a Structural Principle in Sport Participation” focuses on the reasons why women versus men play sports and if this is a conducive environment for athletes to be open about their sexuality, gender and ability to physically perform. The reason why people participate in sports can be different in many ways, especially when it comes to soccer, which was always considered to be a man's sport in the Dutch context (Nixon, 2008). This article was written during the beginning of an increase of women into soccer around 2009 and it walks through explanations of why women, men, homosexuals and heterosexuals chose to play sports and concludes on how little of a difference there is in the reasons why they play when it comes to sexuality or gender.

A huge topic the author, Elling, touches on is the concept of heteronormativity. This is the idea that men are masculine and to be masculine you must have these characteristics: strong, lacking emotion, physical strength over women, and social power. Women are to be weak and passive. According to the author, these “natural” gender classifications have been conditioned into society and in the Netherlands it still lingers around the idea of sports (Elling, 2009). This heteronormative space leaves very little room for women in soccer at all, especially when it comes to starting the sport. In the past, soccer in the Netherlands has been completely represented by men and their successes as Dutch athletes, leaving women soccer players underrepresented. The hegemonic, or ruling, male dominated sport of soccer was not seen as a place for women and

people were not as interested in watching female soccer matches, because it was seen as noncompetitive.

The study performed in this article asks men and women why they participate in sports. For the women, the top reasons were for health and enjoyment. When you look at men, however, the reasons were more spread out and less about the health and enjoyment and more about achievement or physical looks (Elling, 2009). This will later be used in the interviews to compare if this is still an accurate conclusion of females in soccer. This research done by Elling (2009) took place in prior to the increase of female participants in soccer, when sexuality no longer had a stigma behind women's soccer players. Before, the shift, there was many pull factors to the sports of soccer for females and specifically lesbians. The article talks about how many lesbians would concentrate themselves in women's soccer because they knew that this is where homosexual women went to play sports and were commonly perceived as masculine since it was such a male dominated sport. This created an exclusive space for just lesbian identifying women or you could say the mainstream LGBT female sport (Elling, 2009). With this commonality between the soccer players, the stereotypes were correct in some sense regarding a large amount of lesbians playing soccer. When observing women's clubs first hand in the Netherlands and talking to Dutch lesbian players, it seems the stereotypes have faded, which will be discussed in the analysis.

Another reason Elling (2009) concludes about why lesbians found themselves refuging in mainstream sports, like soccer, was because they were perceived as more successful and "more athletic" than heterosexual females in soccer. Before the increase of females playing soccer, there was a stereotype about women soccer players being "too masculine", but good at what they do if they were decent players. However, since the transition there has been different media

representations in the Dutch news about these famous female soccer players, which leads into the question of is it necessary to be masculine to be a successful soccer player?

Elling concludes in the article that lesbians are seen as more masculine and therefore play more masculine sports, like soccer. The author finishes by saying that in Dutch stereotypes from over a decade ago, “more masculine sports” are suited better for lesbians than heterosexual women (Elling, 2009). The survey conducted in Elling's research proves that this is the accurate stereotype for women in sports and that soccer was a man's sport in the eyes of the Dutch. There is also a conclusion drawn for their research, on tennis and gymnastics and how this is seen as a “girl sport”, and even disregarding the sexuality component, most females were found in the less aggressive sports, such as these.

Femininity versus Masculinity in Women's Soccer

When talking about stereotypical gender characteristics and masculinity, one must understand the difference between masculine and feminine. The author, Krane (2001), of the article, “We Can Be Athletic and Feminine, But Do We Want To? Challenging Hegemonic Femininity in Women's Sport” goes into detail about how females in soccer are perceived to be masculine and how this is a common misconception. Krane (2001) talks in-depth about the idea of preserving femininity in such a macho atmosphere of athletics and specifically soccer in the Dutch context. According to the article, women have started to emphasize their femininity in sports in order to overcome the masculine, butch stereotypes. This goes hand in hand with the article discussing women's erotic capital, also known as the social value as a result of ones sexual attractiveness, in sports and how women can use their femininity in order to gain fan support and more coverage in the media (Krane, 2001). There is very little media surrounding

women in sports, but in order to get the audiences attentions, which in most cases are cisgender males, it is necessary to use erotic capital to attract viewers and in turn make money. Erotic capital relates to expressing femininity because the media uses very feminine players to influence the viewers' ideas about soccer. In the article talking about erotic capital, it does research on the correlation between "attractiveness" and the amount of media and attention they received from fans. For instance, the most covered female soccer player in sports media on the Women's Dutch National Team is Anouk Hoogendijk, who is an attractive, blonde woman, but not necessarily the best player on the team. She still receives the most sponsors and airtime regardless of how good she is as an athlete. These female athletes are seen through the male gaze, and in order for these media companies to gain views they focus their coverage on females with the highest erotic capital (Mutz, 2014).

This shows that there is a possible correlation between women soccer in the media and the increase in females playing soccer. Young girls and parents see females playing soccer on TV and in the mainstream media and it is motivation for them to play and be "just like the famous athletes". However, the media manipulates the images these young athletes are seeing because it is through how the "male gaze". The twisted idea that it is more valuable to be attractive and athletic is not a positive reason for women to play sports, but has created a pull for female athletes. The article talks about the acceptance of femininity in soccer due to the media of "attractive" and feminine players on the Dutch team (Mutz, 2014), however, the country is seeing more and more girls and women playing soccer no matter how feminine or masculine they present themselves.

Krane (2001) goes back and forth discussing why being a feminine athlete can be empowering and disempowering. The notion linked with being feminine can also mean you are

weak, but in order to change that idea, female athletes might have to find a blurry line between still being strong and dominate, but also maintaining their feminine attributes. Judith Bulter's idea of gender as a performance in regards to being an athletic female is mentioned as support to the idea that gender does not define how you present yourself (Butler, 1990). Gender as a performance is one way to analyze women in soccer and how it is separate from how they chose their performance off the field. The author draws the conclusion that being feminine in some scenarios does not mean you cannot embrace masculinity in other situations like playing a soccer match. There are many examples of female soccer players that prove that femininity and athletic ability do not necessarily correlate. The idea that in order to be a successful athlete you must be very masculine is a social construct that was created years ago when homosexuality was a taboo idea in women's soccer that people pushed onto these athletes because of their masculinity (Krane, 2001). Homosexual women found this to be a safe space and embraced the stereotype of lesbian women in sports, which is now seen to be fading. The statistics are proving that women's soccer is more based on enjoyment and health rather than sexual orientation and wanting to be around others of "like kind" (Elling, 2009). The author emphasizes that it is important to realize that gender is a performance and how you perceive a female's masculinity does not depend on her athletic ability.

With that said, the article talks about what types of sports are suitable for women due to hegemonic femininity of the sport. For example, in Dutch culture figure skating is more suited for a females than males and soccer is more suited for males. This can be assumed because of many reasons like structural build and aggressive nature of men, however, this article argues that women can also have these characteristics and be feminine. The ideas about which sports are

considered “feminine” were constructed years and years ago by institutionalized clubs that separated men and women (Krane, 2001).

The terms associated with masculinity and males according to Krane (2001) are competitive, assertive, strength, confidence and independent and for females, passive, emotional, dependent, maternal, compassionate and gentle. With the rise in acceptance of nonhegemonic gender roles, like more men playing “female sports” and more women playing “male sports”, society in the Netherlands has shifted from the binary rules of female and male characteristics to allowing roles to interchange. Now women can be assertive, hold executive positions and be competitive especially when it comes to sports. For instance, the coach of the Dutch National Women's Soccer team, Vera Pauw, was ranked as one of the best FIFA coaches in 2016 (Fifa, 2016). As a Dutch female soccer player, that is one of the highest rankings to receive in such a male dominated sport. When publications like that happen, it leads to a change in the stereotypes like it has for females in soccer.

The article also touches on how women might not be able to handle the aggressiveness of soccer and because of the rough connotation associated with sports, women are disregarded when it comes to being competitive enough for the viewers enjoyment (Krane, 2001). This relates to the article on how the media represents women and how there is a significantly less airtime for female soccer compared to the men's teams. Viewers enjoy aggressive competition and our minds have been conditioned to think women are fragile. In the Netherlands, the concept of women in soccer, the most popular Dutch sport, is so new and still hard to grasp as watching for enjoyment.

Krane (2001) continues to address women in media, which has seemed to play a big role on how we view athletic women, and how only the very clearly heterosexual women in sports

are covered on the news and positively talked about and homosexual women were talked negatively about. This is the idea of homonegativity that is conditioned into our minds when it is not the majority, which was assumed decades ago and transferred over to women's soccer. They talk about how lesbian athletes would receive harassment and abuse from classmates and in social situations. This could be a contributing factor in why girls and women were not likely to be apart of athletic clubs because they did not want the stereotype of being lesbian and receiving discrimination. After time and the tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality began to evolve, more girls were open to doing what they wanted and enjoying the game of soccer without the fear of being labeled lesbian. That has been the consensus of why more women are starting to play such a masculine sport like soccer.

With all that being said, it opens up the reasons of why girls and women want to play sports, specifically soccer. When we disregard the social norms and what history has created surrounding gender rules, the reason why women play soccer is almost the same as why men play, however, there is an idea that may be interpreted as gaining back the power that was taken by the hegemonic social concepts of femininity and masculinity.

By being put through this balancing act of "performing gender" for women in soccer, these girls have become mentally strong in order to deal with any discrimination or accusations on their sexuality, but still maintain focus on what they love to do. Breaking out of the social construct takes longer than a lifetime, but with the feminine athletes ignoring what society has told them about women, the Netherlands are taking a step in the right direction when it comes to be inclusive in soccer no matter how you perform your gender.

Mary Jo Festle's (1996) quote about men saying females are not strong enough, but when they win they're too masculine truly puts into words the struggle between reality and the

lingering stereotypes in Dutch culture. It is the social construct that women do not belong in aggressive environments doing strenuous physical acts. The Dutch society is conditioned to think that women and men are not physically capable of exerting the same power and when that stereotype is broken something is unusual (Krane, 2001). The idea of women taking on athletic roles but still remaining feminine debunks the societal norms, which the Dutch culture has started to accept. It is empowering for women and in itself proves that women have the ability and the strength to be mentally and physically capable of playing intense sports, like soccer.

Female sensibility in sports has been created in sports to allow women to celebrate what their bodies are capable of not assume that you have to have a certain sexual identity in order to be good at sports. With this research, the reason why femininity has been accepted in soccer will be uncovered and if there still is discrimination within the world of women's Dutch soccer.

Female athlete stereotypes

Discrimination has been a huge factor in why there are few women participating in soccer. Over the years, women in soccer were considered to be lesbian because this was a counter space where lesbians went to avoid discrimination and be around other people who identify with the same sexuality (Elling, 2003). According to Elling (2003), this may have put a spotlight on the LGBT community in women's soccer and part of the reason why the stereotyping began. The article, "Gay/ Lesbian Sport Clubs and Events" helps support the theory that women in sports are considered to be masculine acting or "butch" and in result are assumed to be part of the LGBT community. This correlates with the lack of women in sports and specifically soccer and supports the hypothesis that women are participating more in soccer because stereotypes are starting to subside or fade over the past decade. Elling (2003) has done

interviews talking about solutions female athletes came up with to break the heteronormative stereotypes and integrate the LGBT community into sports clubs without discrimination.

In the article "Gay /Lesbian Sport Clubs and Events" the author addresses the formation of acceptance in the Netherlands of homosexuality in sports. Different sides to the topic are established, however, emphasizes that there has been a shift in the macho, or manly, culture of sports to being more open and accepting of homosexuality. The macho culture is seen as physically assertive and overly aggressive and is a common assumption about how soccer should be played and also why females who play soccer took on this stereotype. The most important component of this article is this idea of masculinity in female sports and how this stereotype has shaped the way the Dutch society sees women in athletics (Elling, 2003). Women who were athletic were assumed to be lesbian or "butch" according to the author. The term "butch" means a female with a masculine appearance or masculine acting, and in previous decades, to be athletic you were considered a masculine female ("Butch", 2016). The article talks about how both heterosexual and homosexual women in sports have experienced issues with the lesbian stigmatism and homophobia, which comes from the idea that in order to be good at athletics you had to be masculine. Not only to be good at sports, but by playing soccer as a female you understood that the world of soccer in the Netherlands was mainly a male sport (Nixon, 2008). Women rarely ever competed in soccer and if they did they were on mixed teams. If women played soccer it was to be considered a safe place for them to come "out" as lesbian. This stereotype has carried on through many generations and still remains in the back of people's minds in the Netherlands, however, there have been many women that have broken the stereotype, like Anouk Hoogendijk who is a defender on the Women's National Team in the Netherlands and has been the face of the team for a few years ("Anouk", 2016).

The article completes a study to determine the reasons why homosexual individuals are attracted to playing sports. Specifically for women there is a pull factor to meet people of “like-kind” or other homosexuals. However, this has created an exclusive environment because there are clubs now just for lesbian, gay, queer athletes, which are perceived to have the opposite affect by shining more light on the homosexual players in athletics (Elling, 2003). Before the shift of women into soccer it was believed that if you were a woman playing soccer you were considered automatically lesbian. This was one of the biggest reasons why we saw very little female participation in Dutch soccer prior to the shift in 2009.

This research provides a foundation with the idea that women were considered “manly” or masculine if they played soccer due to the dominance of the macho culture (Elling, 2003). This is a huge contributing factor to why female athletes had not participated in soccer. The other research used in this independent study talks about what has initiated the increase in women in soccer and this article explains why women were less likely to be active members of a soccer club. As years go on, the idea of masculinity for females becomes accepted by societies as a whole and other articles go on to talk about how being an athletic female does not necessarily mean you are a masculine or homosexual. There are many other reasons why females have started to play soccer, such as, the positive media representation of the Dutch National Women's Team came in third in the 2009 European Championship. After seeing heterosexual females achieve that high of a ranking in a male dominated sport, it unleashed a surplus of girls and women wanting to participate in soccer.

The article “Gay /Lesbian Sport Clubs and Events” is successful in explaining the stereotypes related to female athletes, but it does not dive deep enough into specific sports. It does not talk much about if there were open lesbians in field hockey, tennis, or even the

hegemonic feminine sport of gymnastics. In the qualitative interviews, we find that women's soccer in the Netherlands has a strong correlation with the "butch" stereotype, which will be discussed in later analysis.

How Sports Media Effects Women Soccer Players

Media plays such a huge role in societies and how it influences the way we live our lives and how we rank our successes and failures. Everywhere you look there is media, all of which has been edited and modified to attract the most people and make the most capital. The article written by Sterkenburg (2004), "Dominant Discourses about Race/Ethnicity and Gender in Sport Practice and Performance" explains how media has given us an idea of what a "perfect" society and life should look like, but in reality there are many underrepresented groups of people in media (Sterkenburg, 2004). The common trend of how media affects society is whenever there is a big success in a country, it gains a lot of media coverage, especially when it is something that counters the societal stereotypes. For example, when the Netherlands Women's Soccer Team came in third in the European Championship in 2009, the Dutch media was covering all of it and airing the shocking success of the Dutch female team. This was the first time in the history of Dutch women's soccer that there was national recognition for female soccer at this high of a level in a male dominated sport.

The first topic this article talks about is how sports media is a male dominated space as of 2004. They say that this is due to the socioeconomic advantage men have over women and the idea that men will always have the upper hand in many categories, such as, intelligence, wealth, and strength (Sterkenburg, 2004). One specific category would be sports. In any sport and any country you always see the dominance of men in sports media, like, men receive the most

airtime, men's matches are always aired over women's matches, men's teams receive the prime air times and athletic commercials highlight the best male athletes (Sterkenburg, 2004). This notion of male athleticism traces all the way back to when the Greek had Olympics and there were naked men represented as powerful and strong competitors in all of the Olympic games ("Ancient", 2007). This has transferred into present day society all around the world and has left women without an appropriate place in sports. In media, social media and any sports news, if there are women's teams competing, the women's sports are deemed less interesting and exciting compared to men's sports. However, this has become less of an issue in soccer after the Dutch Women's National team proved their worthiness for media.

Many sources from this article are from the early 2000s, which helps to put a timeline on when women soccer players began to gain recognition for their accomplishments. In the early 2000s, the media on soccer was dominated by the male teams and females in soccer were not even considered in the Dutch culture. We see the transition happen in 2009 when these female soccer players on the Dutch National team took third place and shocked the country. Not only did the Women's National Team become role models for young girls and women to begin to play soccer, but also the media represented the team with the "most attractive" women on the team, Anouk Hoogendijk, even though she was not the best player. This was a big turn in soccer history because now the media was plastering a very feminine face on what everyone knew as a male dominated sport. These sports media companies were run by cisgender white males looking to make money and knowing their audience, predominately males, they needed to shine light on the attractive members of the team to make the women's team "more exciting" (Sterkenburg, 2004). This concept of using someone's sexuality to gain capital or make money is called "erotic capital" (Mutz, 2014). There are two different situations going on here, attracting the male

audience by using erotic capital and the women's national team completely contradicting the stereotype that had been conditioned in the Dutch culture for all females to see.

All this is the concept that media discourse has influenced institutionalized discourse, like how the Dutch sports system is, very binary with males and females and more male teams than female teams. This translates into individual discourse and how media conditions our mind to individually accept the "normal" discourse of men and women in sports. The success of the Dutch National Women's team being aired on sports media for everyone to watch created a shift in individual discourse and the stereotypes surrounding women in soccer (Sterkenburg, 2004). Successful "attractive" women were seen being athletic which inspired and influenced many females to play soccer in the Netherlands starting in 2009 and got rid of the hegemonic discourse of males in sports.

Another main topic that this article talks about is the big difference between genders in sports and common misconceptions behind why men are "more suited" for soccer than females. This was one of the biggest factors when comparing race/ethnicity/gender, the idea that men were better and "naturally" more fit for athletics than women (Sterkenburg, 2004). This played true in many ways regarding, sports intelligence, athletic ability, strength and endurance and overall competitiveness. In history the cultural tradition was the separation between male and female sports was justified by it was too dangerous for women to play with men or participate in a man's sports because their bodies were not built the same way. Again, this goes back to the ancient Greek times when they had the Olympics with only muscular and macho males as the athletes, which has a huge influence on the lens that which society sees males versus females in sports.

To conclude, it is very important to recognize the amount of influence media has on the world of sports, specifically soccer in the Dutch society. Throughout the research this topic will be highly considered as part of the reason why there was an increase of female participants in soccer. The topic on the stereotypes of females who play soccer could have some relation to the amount of females in this male dominated sport. It is important to keep this in mind when analyzing the interviews conducted from these literatures and draw a conclusion from the links between the life experiences and content of the articles.

Methodology

Interview Guide

The main research question for this research is what caused the increase in female soccer participants in the Netherlands since 2010? This specific year was chosen based on research and trends that were noticed from the participants interviewed and common knowledge in the Dutch context. From there the research was sectioned into four categories or possible factors that could have an affect on the soccer statistics, which are, sports media, female athlete stereotypes, masculinity and how it relates to physical ability and reasons why females participate in sports versus males in the Netherlands. During the interviews the topics were refined and became narrower as conclusions were being drawn from life experience interviews.

When the participants were approached about the interviewing process they were informed the reason behind the study and the qualifications that were necessary in order to proceed with the interview, including being a female soccer player, past or current experience in soccer and having common knowledge about Dutch men and women's soccer. They were informed that the interview would be about an hour long recorded interview, talking about life

experiences as an athlete as well as any influencing factors on their athletic career, including family relations, sexuality, media representation, cultural beliefs, or gender relations in regards to soccer. All questions are listed in the appendix, but some included personal questions about their specific clubs and the Dutch culture surrounding women in soccer. For media, the participants were asked about specific scenarios in media that changed the societal norms about female soccer players and common themes they noticed in the recent years. Questions about gender relations were focused on comparing male versus female soccer clubs and how they are viewed or valued in Dutch society. To unpack that topic more, questions were asked to figure out the root of the stereotypes between men and women in soccer and in regards to more personal questions, some included sexual identity to uncover any stigma around female soccer players and lingering discrimination because of sexual preferences. A list of these questions can be found in the appendices. The answers of the interviews were then compared to the literature previously reviewed to see if there were any common subjects that matched up. Linking each article to a specific theme throughout the research, a general conclusion was drawn from the life experiences of the female soccer players.

Interview Panel

There were four subjects that were interviewed, all female with experience playing soccer in the Netherlands. Young female soccer players were interviewed in order to gain insight about current perspectives on female athletes and middle aged to older soccer players were interviewed to gain knowledge about past experiences in a society where it was uncommon to find females playing soccer. One participant was a mother who played soccer in her 20s and now has a daughter playing soccer with teenagers in Haarlem. This was strategic in a sense to gather her

opinion on how the world of soccer in the Netherlands has evolved, especially now seeing her daughter playing in the past decade. Other interviewees had played previously when they were younger and took time to play other sports and have started playing soccer again in their 30s. There was a trainer also interviewed who had played soccer when she was younger, which gave good insight from a coaching perspective. Also, a majority of the participants identified with the LGBT community in order to gather information on the sexuality lens of the research. The participants reside in many towns throughout Holland, including Haarlem, south of Tilburg, and Utrecht, which provides a quality sample to represent the Dutch society.

Validity

The choice of these participants and this method of research were appropriate because these are all female athletes with experience in Dutch soccer and currently living in the Netherlands. They are well educated people to have discussions about controversial subjects about their culture and draw conclusions from their past experiences. The questions asked were relevant to the main research question and correctly separated factors that were most likely involved in the increase of women soccer participation in the Netherlands. The questions were not biased and provided explanations as to why the question was asked allowing the participant to fully understand the reasoning behind the questionnaire.

The interviews took place in a quiet environment with little distractions, either at their homes, via phone call or Skype. The interviews were recorded in order to go back and partially transcribe to draw out information. Questions were prepared in advance regarding the sub-questions of the main question, but if there were opportunities for other questions to be asked, then more questions were included. This left time for open conversation about their life

experiences as female soccer players. Each interview was conducted in a comparable way by asking the same set questions about the same topics. All constants remained the same throughout the interview process over the course of the research to keep any variables minimal.

Assumptions

Assumptions that may have affected the research are the common knowledge the researcher had from an American background in soccer, influences from the television and media about Dutch soccer when the research started. The assumption of soccer in the Netherlands being a male dominated sport was reached through paying attention to media outlets and initial conversations with Dutch athletes. Stereotypes surrounding the sport of soccer in the Netherlands were apparent, especially in regards to stereotypes of sexuality of female soccer players. The researcher assumed that with the changing worldly views of LGBT equality and the Netherlands to be considered a liberal country that the stigma behind masculine female athletes would be less of an issue and females would have a place in soccer.

Ethics

The ethics of this research were kept in consideration when talking about life experiences. The participants were told the reasoning for the study and that it was to gain better knowledge about the progression of the Dutch culture in hopes that gender equality would spread throughout the world of sports. No unethical questions were asked in regards to sexual identities in soccer or too personal of questions regarding discrimination. The participants had the option to remain anonymous or withdrawal from the interview if they wished. The only concerns regarding the interviews were language barrier issues, because the person conducting the

interviews spoke fluent English and the participants spoke mainly Dutch and not fluent English. This may lead to miscommunication when diving deep into sociological issues.

Analysis

The interviews were completed and themes were pulled from the answers and grouped into four sections: reasons why and how females participate in sports, femininity versus masculinity in women's soccer, female stereotypes in soccer and how sports media affects women's soccer. Information from the literature review will be compared to the life experiences of the participants and a discussion will help draw a conclusion as to what may have caused a spike in women's soccer participation in the Netherlands in the past decade.

Reasons how and why females participate in sports

From interviewing female soccer players in the Netherlands, there has been an obvious transition of acceptance and openness to women in soccer in the past 10 years. Not only has the Dutch society begun to appreciate women in soccer, but for female soccer players the fear of a hegemonic male stereotype has disappeared and acceptance for all types of players are welcome, masculine, feminine, lesbian or heterosexual. Females that are masculine presenting and feminine presenting are welcome to play soccer and have proven themselves as high performance athletes no matter what their appearance is (Elling, 2009). For example, the "star" female soccer player on the Dutch National Soccer Team was seen as a very feminine athlete. She was the face of the team even though she was not the top player, which went against the heteronormative stereotype of having to be masculine to play such a male dominated sport like soccer.

For the women interviewed in the process of the study, they were asked to give life experiences on how they began playing the sport of soccer during a time when soccer was very uncommon for girls. They drew accounts from their parents playing and encouraging them to play soccer, but always knowing that soccer was considered to be a “male sport”. The heteronormative aspect of soccer talked about in “Sexuality as a Structural Principle in Sport Participation” draws a conclusion that soccer was a “boy’s sport” and not necessarily a place for girls, which validates the stories expressed by the participants. Jessica, who played soccer as a young girl in Haarlem, realized this gender dynamic when she wanted to play soccer like her dad. She grew up watching her father play on weekends and he would teach her the basic skills, but when she wanted to join a club she could only play on a mixed team with boys, because there was no girls clubs in Haarlem at the time. Jessica said, “At the time there were only boys teams, so if we wanted to compete we had to play at their level, which was tough as girls.” This was the normal route girls had to take if they wanted to play soccer; being told they could play, but had to compete on the mixed team with boys. Jessica believes this gave her the technique and skill to be a successful player once she started playing on an all girls team, but also made her realize how limited it was for girls playing sports. Now that she is a trainer for a youth club in Haarlem, she has seen the transition of more girls playing soccer and feels the progress is going in the right direction. Jessica has also been a role model to her daughter, who now plays at the club and has been competing on an all girls team for three years. Reflecting back on how joining soccer as a young girl versus now, Jessica believes the acceptance of girls in soccer has changed immensely, but there is obviously room for growth and respect for women playing soccer. For instance, at her club in Haarlem, Onze Gazellen, there is about a fourth of the amount of girl’s teams, than boy’s teams, proving the lack of equality between the gender groups.

Elling (2009) also talks about how stereotypes around women in soccer over 10 years ago tended to be “lesbian” and “butch” females, which in some ways proved to be true according to the participants. The article was written with only the knowledge before the increase of women in soccer, and from investigating the topic more through interviews, it seems this was an accurate representation of the type of women who participated in soccer. Eva, an individual who identifies as a lesbian in soccer, stated, “Back then there were mainly lesbians and masculine girls playing soccer and that was a safe place for women who wanted to play sports to do so if they were lesbian”. Elling (2009) calls this a homonormative space, where individuals go to meet and interact with people of “like-kind”. For these women, this was somewhere they felt comfortable, because in that time period there was still a negative connotation about the LGBT community, but those individuals knew they would find people in soccer with the same sexual orientation. The participants were very clear to point out that sexuality does not matter anymore in soccer, saying, “Being lesbian does not determine how good of a soccer player you are”. In recent years, the female soccer players have not experienced discrimination or homophobia, but were aware that it was a stereotype in the past. Eva, one of the interviewees, mentioned that two of her other teammates came out as well after her being open on the team about being gay, showing that being lesbian on the soccer team was not necessarily the common discourse, but it was openly accepted to be lesbian. When asked why there is not much of a stereotype in soccer anymore the participant responded with comments on how in general society in the Netherlands has begun to be more open to LGBT and how in sports being feminine versus masculine did not justify how “athletically talented” you were.

Elling (2009) conducted a survey on why individuals play soccer giving them options of health, enjoyment, compensation for sexual orientation, social life and physical looks. When

interviewing the participants for this research, the female soccer players all came to the same conclusion that they were playing for enjoyment or the social aspect of it, and that sexual orientation had very little to do with why they participate in soccer now. Evelien from South Holland said, "My parents were very open to me playing soccer as long I was happy. I joined my team now for the social aspect to meet people and have fun." The conclusion gathered from this was that the Dutch culture puts a lot more value on enjoying what you are doing rather than what you look like or your sexual preferences. It also comes across that the pressure of being a very good, high achieving soccer player is mainly put on the male athletes, which brings up the point that there is more structure and quality coaching being given to boys and men's soccer teams. Jessica, in her interview, brought up a past experience about how her coaches were very relaxed and not enthusiastic about her girl's team when she was younger. Even observing her daughter's coaches now, she noticed a lack of enthusiasm when coaching the girls and even recounted a time when she confronted a coach for being easier on the girls than the boys. Her exact words were, "You can't treat the girls like dolls, you must treat them the same as the boys and that is how you will gain their respect as a coach." After speaking up about the issue she said the girls have had a positive reaction to being put under the same amount of pressure as the boys and have achieved a new level of skills. Jessica concluded that the training has been the biggest difference in how females are treated in soccer. This was a surprise to hear because it was not found in previous research, but clearly a very valid point. The way the coaches approach the girls team has a lot to do with how well they perform and in turn determines if girls will want to play soccer or not. Decades ago when she played soccer, the training was not as intense and the coaches did not seem to pay as much attention to the girls' technique as they do now in her daughters club. The coaches now record practice, discuss matches after and give tips to the girls to improve.

There has been a visible change in how many girls are actively playing soccer, but still a lack of enthusiasm in some circumstances. Jessica brings up a very reasonable conclusion that we must start at the root of the issue, and in this case it is how the girls are treated and the respect they receive from their coaches.

Femininity versus Masculinity in Women's Soccer

As stated before, when talking about masculinity of females in soccer and some stereotypes surrounding what types of females play soccer there is not much of a difference than why men play. Clearly men have a different physical physique than women, which is stated in the literature (Krane, 2001), but this has nothing to do with how feminine or masculine presenting you are in day-to-day life. The quote that validated this conclusion was from Jessica, "It does not matter what you do outside of the club, the only thing that makes you a good soccer player in how you play on the field." She said she has seen many women that are feminine and not lesbian, her being one of them, play soccer. She even points out that her and her daughter, who she thinks is a tomboy, both played with boys at one point and became a better player because of it. Her final statements were that it does not correlate to how well you play on the field, as long as you have fair training.

More girls are beginning to participate in soccer and break down the social construct of having to be masculine to play soccer. After completing observations for a soccer club in Haarlem, it is apparent that it is not uncommon to see what would be considered a "feminine girl" in mainstream culture playing soccer with make up on, pink cleats and earrings in her ears and bows in her hair. As Jessica stated and also what Butler (1990) believes, is that gender is just a performance and does not determine how well you do in sports. Evelien clearly made the point

hat masculinity does not correlate with looks and femininity when she point out the star player on the Dutch National Women's team to be Anouk Hoogendijk, who is a blonde petite player. This player has a muscular build, but is still considered to be "girly" to all the participants interviewed. Even though this is the case, she is used as the face of the team, as well as for sportswear companies and sports commercials in the Netherlands.

Marjolein is also a female soccer player from the South of Holland in Gilze and she offers a different viewpoint on physical strength and comparing females and males. She believes that it is not accurate to compare women and men in athletic ability because she says, "Men are built differently than women. They are stronger and tougher. That is why Usain Bolt is the fastest on earth and not a female". This could be seen as a contradiction to the research due to the fact that physically women are not the same as men, but this research focuses more on how females use their physical strength to reach the competitive level of men's soccer to be seen as "interesting" to viewers.

Female athlete stereotypes

As performance of gender has affected the uprising of stereotypes in soccer a few decades ago, it has also been a reason why girls did or did not become involved. Some of the participants brought up the point that 10 years ago, some lesbians would play soccer without discrimination of being "masculine", or as stated before macho, because their teammates were of similar orientation. Eva recalled that 10 years ago, "My girlfriend was gay and did not experience any discrimination probably because girls on her team were also gay and that was the normal idea about girls playing soccer". Now she says that this is not the case, that you will find a mix of tomboys, feminine, homosexual and heterosexual females in soccer. On her team specifically she

says, "There are actually more heterosexual women than homosexual women, and a lot of them being mothers". This proves that the stereotype of female soccer players mentioned in "Gay/Lesbian Sport Clubs and Events" by Elling (2003) is something that has faded over time with the general acceptance of the LGBT community in Dutch society.

Evelien, who also identifies as a lesbian soccer player, believes that this is stereotype has started to disappear because of the overall acceptance on lesbians around the world due to the amount of open famous actors, athletes and celebrities. As the media continues to show females who are feminine and masculine coming out as lesbian it will get rid of the stigma behind masculine females correlating to being lesbians, as well as how the national teams are presented in media. Evelien said, "Look at the girl that is used the most to represent the Dutch National Women's Team, Anouk Hoogendijk, she's not the best player but because she's pretty and attractive they use her for sponsors and as the main face of the team". Using this as an example for how women are represented in Dutch soccer now, is a perfect way to show how the image of female athletes is slowly changing from the masculine, "butch" female to females of all physique.

Jessica is a heterosexual female who played soccer and now is a trainer, and she recalled a time about 20 years ago when the boys teams would see the girls teams playing soccer. "The boys would stare at the girls and say 'look they are so tough playing soccer they must all be lesbian' and this was a normal idea they had about athletic girls". For her she has seen the stereotype disappear now with very feminine girls being some of the best players, but she knows there is still a lack of respect due to the idea that women are supposed to be doing other things, like at home cooking and cleaning and not playing sports. However, when she was younger her father was determined to make his first born a soccer player no matter if it was a girl or boy. She

said her father trained her and would take her to his matches on the weekends, giving her skills prior to her joining a mixed gendered soccer team in Haarlem. She was one of only a few girls on the team and she believes it is because it was much harder for girls to keep up with the fast boys. Before the boys joined soccer clubs, most of their fathers were already teaching them how to play, giving them the upper hand on girls and leaving little room for girls to be competitive enough. Jessica just so happened to be the exception. She said that the coaches knew the boys tended to be quicker and already skilled and would put more time into the boy's teams and not pay as much attention to the girls.

Jessica also tied this into how coaches can be softer on girl's teams than the boy's teams. This was not mentioned in previous research about Dutch soccer, but brings up a point that females were seen to be fragile or weak, as mentioned in "We Can Be Athletic and Feminine, But Do We Want To? Challenging Hegemonic Femininity in Women's Sport". Krane (2001) addresses the issue that women are seen to not be as physically fit or have the right body shape to keep up with the boys so coaches are easier on them. This is the same conclusion drawn by Marjolein with the comparison of the fastest runner in the world being male and also brought up by Jessica who explained a story specifically on this subject, which was talked about in the first section of the analysis, *Reasons how and why females participate in sports*. Coaches were not giving the equal amount of time to the girls as they did with the boys because in their head, there is still a stigma behind how athletic girls can be in such a fast sport, according to Jessica. This can contradict the lesbian stereotypes that once were very apparent in women's soccer, because if you are lesbian you were seen as masculine. Jessica concluded that this stereotype has disappeared, but even after the fading stereotype there is still a lack of respect for women and a stigma surrounding women being weak or not tough enough to play soccer. Along with the other

participants, she believes this is a hard stigma to erase in a society where soccer is such a male dominated sport.

For many years, the idea of women playing soccer was going against heteronormative ideas and women who played sports had more of a space in the world of field hockey according to female soccer players. To society, field hockey was seen as a heteronormative space where most women went to play sports rather than on a soccer team. When girls and women began to play soccer in the Netherlands it became a topic of conversation on the news and in communities all over the country and there was a push for social integration into the Dutch mainstream sport of soccer.

How Sports Media Effects Women Soccer Players

All of these subjects discussed in earlier sections are ideas that are conditioned into a society through multiple outlets, with media being the main source. The way the media presents women and females in sport has a lot to do with how views these individuals and leaves an impression in peoples minds that this is the “normal” image of what a girl in soccer look like or act like. To begin, women's soccer was not aired on television and sports media covered no aspects of women playing soccer until 2009. Evelien recalls the most evident time when the Dutch Women's Soccer Team came in third in the European Championship and the half final was aired on television for the whole country and world to see. She said, “I remember calling my mom asking if she had watched the match and telling her how amazing it was that women were playing soccer on TV”. To her she believes this was the biggest moment in women's soccer history in the Netherlands because after that women soccer matches started to be played live on the television and Dutch sports media started to pay attention to the females in soccer. After this

Evelien said that you could visibly see the increase of interest in women's soccer and the amount of girls and women joining teams around the Netherlands. This conclusion helps put a date on the study, saying that there was a spike in female participants in soccer around 2010.

However, when looking at how the Dutch Women's National Team was represented in the media, there could be bias involved from the people working for these media companies. Evelien also point out about the face they used the most to represent the team was Anouk Hoogendijk, as mentioned before, she was a pretty blonde, very feminine soccer player. The article, "Dominant Discourses about Race/Ethnicity and Gender in Sport Practice and Performance" by Sterkenburg (2004), talks about how sports media is controlled by cisgender white males who know their audience is males as well. There are very little women that are watching sports, and in order to gain the attention of males they use the more "attractive" athletes as the face of the team. Evelien believes this could send the wrong message to girls who are looking to play, but on the other hand has helped the transition out of the "butch" stereotype that once existed in women's soccer.

Also, the media has put a large focus on the men's soccer teams in the Netherlands and according to Eva, this is because people are more likely to watch men play rather than women. Eva said, "people still think men are more capable to play soccer than women in sports". This goes back to the idea that physique has a lot to do with why more attention is put on male soccer (Sterkenburg, 2004). Media plays a role in putting male soccer players on a platform for Dutch society to engage in. AJAX, Feyenoord and PSV are the three biggest teams in the Dutch soccer world and have captured many people as fans. The acceptance for female soccer in a culture of high performing teams is hard for people in the Dutch society to catch on to.

Overall, this topic of women soccer players in media is new to the Dutch society and still has room for improvement in the gender equality aspect. The underrepresentation for female soccer players is still very obvious when talking with the participants and making observations on the Dutch sports culture. However, even though there is still a huge gap in the amount of female representation in the male dominated sport, media has had such an influence in the right direction with the first the start of airing women's football on television. The participants all came to a common consensus that women will gain more and more attention in Dutch soccer over time, but it will not be an overnight transition.

Discussion

When conducting this study, many decisions were made in regards to how the interviews were given. To start off, the sample size was small with the given amount of time for the research, four weeks, which only allows for general conclusion. In order to make a concrete conclusion on why there has been an increase in female soccer players in the Netherlands, the research would need to include more participants for a bigger sample. With that being said, when interviews first started, there were a set group of questions derived from the literature analysis, but were modified throughout the study to focus more on key themes brought up along the way. For instance, media was not one of the initial articles reviewed for the study, but it became a reoccurring topic brought up, so it was added as a subsection to the research and more questions regarding media representation of female soccer players were added to the questionnaire. On the other hand, the topic about masculine versus femininity in female soccer players was not mentioned as much as expected. It was still incorporated into the research as a subsection, because it is crucial to the study to understand where female stereotypes stemmed from.

The study was conducted as planned and new topics were brought up along the way to assist the research, but the hypothesis remained accurate through a majority of the study. When selecting the types of participants, it was understood that there was a limited amount of time, but a wide range of knowledge was needed surrounding history of women's soccer in the Dutch context. For this reason, older female players were chosen who played when they were younger, as well as currently. This was done so they could include their experiences from 10 to 20 years ago as well as currently in women's soccer. Also, one participant was a mother and trainer of her daughter who plays soccer now, which gave insight into the culture behind the young girls soccer clubs. By having this data, it widened the range of knowledge for the conclusion to be drawn.

For future studies on the topic of the participation of female soccer players, if more time is allocated for the research, it would be helpful to include perspectives from male soccer players as well to cover all aspects of how Dutch society views female soccer and get rid of any bias that might be present when just including female soccer players.

Also, if future research were to be done, it would be beneficial to focus on how clubs and teams are marketing themselves in order to attract females to their club. From a business standpoint it is important to understand what female soccer players are looking for when they want to join a soccer club, and since this has been a male dominated sport in the Netherlands, the clubs marketing might have an effect on how many women or girls are requesting to join.

Another topic that came up regarding the fair treatment of female soccer players was the respect they receive from their coaches. It would be interesting to interview coaches and see how they view women soccer players compared to male soccer players and see if they think there is fair treatment in how they coach their athletes. It would also be beneficial to understanding how

the shift of women into soccer is happening and if the coaches are preventing this by not providing fair coaching or helping by pushing the girls teams harder to compete at higher levels.

To conclude, this analysis was done as thoroughly as possible with observations from soccer clubs around Holland as well as a sample from different areas. Adjustments were made when needed and conclusions were drawn from life experiences provided by Dutch female soccer players.

Conclusion

This study comparing the gender differences of soccer in the Netherlands has come to answer the specific research question, what has sparked the increase of female soccer in the Netherlands in the past decade? This research began because of media surrounding new girl's soccer clubs popping up around the Netherlands and the excitement of young girls and women that there was now a welcoming space for them in a highly competitive sport. When first preparing for the research, there was initial background information found on the topic from the "International Review for Sociology of Sport" from universities all over the Netherlands, regarding the stereotypes surrounding females in sports and the understanding that soccer was a male dominated sport in the Dutch society. Coming from an American lens, this was controversial to see the distinct separation between genders in soccer and the lack of females participating in the sport. As hypothesized earlier in the introduction, the possible reason for the recent increase in the amount of women soccer players could be due to fading lesbian stigma behind female soccer players, specifically the masculine "butch" stereotype, and the increase in the amount of media representation seen across the country. To conclude, female soccer participation has shown a drastic increase of acceptance over the past 10 years due to the

realization of high-level performance from female players, as well as the overall acceptance of the LGBT community in society, allowing the understanding that not all masculine presenting women are lesbian and does accurately correlate anymore with the stereotype of "butch".

These conclusions can be drawn from real life experiences of current female soccer players in the Netherlands who have witnessed or been associated with the fading stereotypes over the past couple decades. Many stories include the Dutch National Women's Soccer team and their public platform they have created on media all over the country after making it to the half finals of the European Championship in 2009. This marked the significant transition of public interest for women's soccer and the first spike of female participation at soccer clubs around the Netherlands. In addition to the increase in media representation for females in soccer, there was also a better understanding of sexuality stereotypes and how body physicality did not necessarily correlate to someone's sexual identity. A majority of the female soccer players included in the study identified as lesbian and recognized that there has been very little to no discrimination among their team or seen in other female soccer clubs now. This study has brought a conclusion that acceptance of females in soccer has still room to improve in the Dutch society, but since 2010 there has been a visible rise in the amount of active female clubs due to positive media representation and will continue to grow as time goes on allowing more open and progressive mindsets in the world of women's soccer.

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Interviews:

1. Evelien Muijs- Gilze-Rijen (South Holland)- November 15, 2016
2. Jessica Schaap- Haarlem- November 28, 2016
3. Eva Roos- Utrecht- November 30, 2016
4. Marjolein Kusters- Amsterdam- December 1, 2016

Appendices

Questionnaire:

Reasons how and why females participate in sports

1. Why did you begin to play sports?
2. What was the timeline of your history in soccer and any other sports before that?
3. Rank from most important to least important, why you play soccer: achievement, health, appearance, compensation for sexuality, social life, enjoyment
4. Have you experienced any discrimination as an individual of the LGBT community from your teammates, coaches or clubs?
5. Are your coaches harder on you as a female team than the male teams at your club? Explain.
6. What is the main reason you participate in soccer, a male dominated sports in the Netherlands?
7. Were coaches treating female soccer players the same as the boys? Now versus 10+ years ago?
8. Has the respect for women in athletics gotten better over the past decade? Or is there still men that treat women inferior in sports?

Femininity versus Masculinity in Women's Soccer

1. What does masculine mean to you?
2. Did being masculinity or femininity make you a better soccer player? Why?
3. What transitioned the shift of feminine soccer players in women's soccer? How?
4. Is there still a stigma behind female athletes?
5. Do you believe that it is accurate to compare male and female sports when talking about level of performance? Why?
6. What are the over hegemonic characteristics associate with females versus males in the Netherlands today versus prior to 2009, when the Dutch Women's National Team came in third at the European Championships?

Female athlete stereotypes

1. When you were younger (17 and under) did you have any lesbians on your team that you knew of? Did the talk surround sexuality come up?
2. After high school (17 and up) were you aware of any stereotypes surround female soccer players?
3. What were the assumptions about females playing soccer?
4. In your opinion what was considered a "girls sport"? Why?
5. Do you believe that sexuality has any correlation with your athletic ability? Why?

How Sports Media Effects Women Soccer Players

1. How has media affected the way you see female athletes in the Netherlands now versus 10+ years ago?
2. Has there been a shift in sports media after the Dutch Women's National Soccer Team achieved third place in the European Championship?
3. What types of players do you believe the media highlights when talking about female athletes?
4. Erotic capital is the idea that "attractiveness" sells and can make more money. In your opinion have you seen this play a role in sports media regarding the women's soccer team? Explain.
5. Do you think the more "attractive" you are the more media coverage and sponsors you receive as a female athlete?
6. Does media present the female soccer players as masculine?
7. Do you believe social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) has had an affect of how female athletes see themselves physically and competitively?