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# The Impact of Gender Role Conflict on the Quality of Life in Female Athletes

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*Abstract: This study assessed whether female athletes' quality of life varies as a function of their gender role conflict and if one's ability to tolerate distress moderates this function. Also, this study sought to determine why female athletes experience conflict and the psychological processes they use to manage these potentially conflicting roles. A total of 207 female collegiate athletes provided measures of masculinity/femininity, athletic identity, gender role conflict, distress tolerance, quality of athletic life, and responded to open-ended questions assessing their perceptions of stereotypes about female athletes. Results found that several measured variables impact a female athlete's experience of gender role conflict, and found that distress tolerance does not moderate the relationship between one's quality of athletic life and gender role conflict.*

*Keywords: Female Athletes, Gender Role Conflict, Distress Tolerance, Stereotypes*

**T**itle IX legislation signed into law in 1972 states, in brief, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). Title IX not only helped women gain equal rights in education, but it established the expectation of equal rights for female participation in sports as well. While participation rates have increased, women are still not treated equally in sport. Female athletes receive 30% fewer sports participation opportunities, \$1.1 million less at the high school level, and \$133 million less in college athletic scholarships than do male athletes (Dworkin & Messner, 2002).

Also, Title IX has not prevented women from being negatively stereotyped and treated unfairly. Female athletes are often referred to as "unfeminine" or "butch," as a result of participation in active, powerful, assertive, and competitive movements in sport activity (Krane, 2001). These movements are considered masculine and less socially acceptable for females than for males (Krane, 2001). These types of labels can cause discomfort or conflict for the female athlete. Guillet, Sarrazin, Fontayne, and Brustad (2006) found that when sports are gender stereotyped, female athletes experience more conflict between their role as women and as athletes when participating in gender-inappropriate sports such as sports that use heavy objects, bodily contact, face-to-face opposition, and endurance as opposed to female athletes participating in more gender-appropriate sports such as sports that typically place an emphasis on aesthetics or gracefulness. They found that adherence to one's gender role may be so essential to an individual that merely knowing that an activity is contrary to his/her gender role, he/she may discontinue participation in that activity. Experiencing this gender role conflict has caused female athletes to drop out or discontinue their participation in athletics, particularly in adolescence when gender-role stereotypes and expectations become exceptionally influential (Guillet et al.).

Female athletes with a more masculine appearance or demeanor (a muscular build, expressing masculine traits of assertiveness and aggressiveness) are often labeled as lesbian (Krane, 2001). This is particularly problematic when homophobia becomes a deterrent to female athletes and sport leaders (Veri, 1999). A 1989 NCAA Gender Equity Study found that 75% of female sport administrators identified negative stereotypes as a barrier to their athletic careers, with 55% of these administrators specifying homophobic perceptions and accusations of lesbianism as career barriers (Veri). Also, this label, whether accurate or not, can have a negative impact on the female athlete resulting in poor treatment by coaches, verbal harassment by fans, lack of media attention and public endorsements, and even negative bias by officials during

competition. Female athletes who have a more feminine appearance or demeanor, or who are unquestionably heterosexual (having a boyfriend or husband), are treated more positively. More focus is given to the personal lives of more feminine female athletes, with the mention of boyfriends or husbands in media reports, whereas the partners of lesbian athletes are never mentioned. Data indicates that companies grant more endorsement offers to feminine compared to more masculine female athletes (Krane).

## **Studies Assessing Role Conflict**

The female athlete faces certain gender-stereotypical portrayals, ranging from being seen as a sex object to being portrayed as a lesbian. Being too masculine can be equated with being unfeminine, while being too feminine results in trivialization of athletic accomplishments (Krane, 2001). Gender-role conflict is when one perceives contrasting expectations for their gender-role behavior, like being feminine (gender-role) and being masculine (athlete; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Koberg & Chusmir, 1991). For example, research has found that high school female athletes perceive and experience gender-role conflict. Desertrain and Weiss (1988) investigated relationships among role conflict, gender role orientation, and adolescent female sport participation in high school female athletes and found that athletes reported experiencing role conflict more than non-athletes.

In addition, the masculinity and/or femininity of the athlete (Desertrain & Weiss, 1988; Miller & Levy, 1996) also impacts level of gender-role conflict experienced. Female athletes typically rate themselves significantly more masculine than do female non-athletes, while female non-athletes typically rate themselves more feminine than female athletes (Miller & Levy). Athletes who score higher on measures of femininity report higher levels of perceived role conflict than those who score lower on measures of femininity (Desertrain & Weiss). This comes as no surprise since many sports require behaviors traditionally viewed as masculine. Desertrain and Weiss assert that female athletes experience more gender role conflict when there is a large disparity between their perceived femininity and participating in traditional masculine activities. In other words, Royce, Gebelt, and Duff (2003) suggest that a common strategy of female athletes who experience gender-role conflict is to engage in identity management behaviors.

Much of the research (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Cooky & McDonald, 2005; Crawley, 1998; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Halbert, 1997; Krane, 1997; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Russell, 2004; Sisjord, 1997) that has investigated female athletes has used interviewing techniques to understand their experiences. Fallon and Jome found that women rugby players' experienced gender-role conflict related to their appearance (e.g., not looking feminine enough by having short hair, not wearing make up, etc), behaviors (e.g., not behaving feminine enough by not being afraid to get dirty, participating in an aggressive sport, etc), and sexual orientation. These athletes actively employed strategies to resolve or avoid these experiences as will be discussed next.

Cooky and McDonald found that their school-aged subjects described feeling conflict as a result of hearing homophobic taunts, and being faced with daily reminders that they were not expected to be as skilled or athletic as boys. These findings are consistent through much of this research (Fallon & Jome, 2007; Krane, 1997; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004), in which female athletes experience role conflict as a result of their muscular body shape, unfeminine appearance, questions regarding their sexuality including homophobic taunts, and not being "feminine" enough. Fallon and Jome's (2007) research has also found that many of these female athletes, particularly those participating in more masculine sports, attempt to control this conflict by purposely managing their appearance "off the field," like wearing dresses and make up. While this qualitative research has been beneficial in shedding light on this topic and providing valuable information about what female athletes experience and how they manage these experiences, using just interviewing techniques can become problematic. It is difficult to

draw direct correlations, causes and conclusions among variables from qualitative data, in addition to being difficult to control for experiment biases (Kazdin, 2003). For this reason, the current study is important because it is attempting to determine if female athletes experience gender role conflict in a quantitative manner, which will quantify the data and create generalizable results. As a result, this research will expand the current research by drawing more direct conclusions about the experiences of female athletes and the impact these experiences have on how they view themselves.

Krane (2001) feels that the seemingly pervasive stereotypes about femininity drive the need for women to separate their athletic and feminine roles and to take steps to emphasize their femininity “off the field.” Research suggests that a common strategy of female athletes who experience gender-role conflict is to engage in identity management behaviors (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Royce et al., 2003; Russell, 2004). Royce et al. found that female athletes perceive themselves as having both a feminine and an athletic identity, and that each can be salient at different times. For example, an athlete’s athletic identity would be more salient when she is participating in her sport or when she is working out and her feminine identity may be more salient when she is out socially with friends, family, and/or significant other. Her feminine identity may also be more salient when faced with stereotypes about her involvement in sports. Few female athletes report a purposeful adoption of a more feminine profile, but some do relate how they address presentation issues, for example, by wearing make-up and a dress rather than slacks. These female athletes seem to be managing their “off-court” presentation in response to stereotypes and discrimination (Royce et al.). Hence, there seems to be a discrepancy or even a contradiction between how the female athlete actually feels and what she actually reports feeling. Female athletes might not think that there is a conflict between being feminine and being an athlete, but their actual behaviors challenge this belief.

So how exactly does experiencing role conflict impact a person’s life satisfaction? While little research has examined the life satisfaction and distress of female athletes experiencing gender role conflict, there has been research examining this with non-athletes. This research (Chiu, 1998; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Perrone, Webb, & Blalock, 2005) has demonstrated that experiencing role conflict has had a negative impact on one’s well-being and life satisfaction (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson; Perrone et al.). By experiencing an inconsistency between roles, one is more likely to have increased psychological distress, which then impacts one’s well-being and life satisfaction (Perrone et al.). The current study is important because it attempts to measure and determine if gender role conflict in female athletes effect’s their life satisfaction or quality of life.

## **Athletic Identity**

The studies reviewed seem to have a common limitation in basing conclusions on the responses of athletes, and determining people as athletes if they are participating in a sport. This approach would allow classification as an “athlete” when that role may not be the most salient in a participant’s life or the one with which she most readily identifies (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). A more reasonable approach is one in which the *importance* of athletic identity is the basis for inclusion in comparison groups. Such an approach emphasizes the strength and exclusivity of identity with the athletic role as a factor impacting gender-role conflict.

Lantz and Schroeder (1999) employed the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), measuring the strength and exclusivity of athletic identity, to investigate the impact of athletic identity on the endorsement of masculine and feminine gender roles. Male and female athletes and participants with a strong athletic identity maintained greater identification with the masculine gender role than did non-athletes and those with a weak athletic identity (Lantz & Schroeder). Similarly, non-athletes and those with a weak athletic identity reported greater endorsement of the feminine gender role than did athletes or those high in athletic identity.

Respondents both high and low in athletic identification reported greater disparity between their masculine and feminine scores than did athletes and non-athletes. Lantz and Schroeder assert, "... the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role may have differential effects on gender role orientation" (p. 554). An approach to the study of gender-role conflict for female athletes from an athletic identity perspective may help to clarify the relationship among a number of variables that have been shown to impact conflict.

The present study predicted that those females high in athletic identity would experience more gender-role conflict than those low in athletic identity. This relationship was predicted because females high in athletic identity are assumed to struggle more with balancing their opposing roles of being an athlete (i.e., taking part regularly in a masculine domain) versus being a female (i.e., gender appropriate feminine behavior). Similarly, it was expected that those low in masculinity would experience more gender-role conflict than those high in masculinity. Females who perceive themselves as more masculine would not experience a conflict between level of masculinity and participation in sports, which is also perceived as "masculine." Females who perceive themselves as less masculine were expected to experience greater conflict as a result of simultaneous perceptions of being more feminine and yet engaging in the more masculine role of an athlete.

It is also predicted that those females high in gender role conflict would have lower quality of athletic life. This relationship was predicted because experiencing role conflict is assumed to negatively impact one's well-being and life satisfaction. The impact of one's ability to experience and endure negative emotional states (i.e., distress tolerance) on one's quality of life was also explored. The notion is that the higher one's distress tolerance, the less impact one's gender role conflict will have on quality of life. Thus, one's distress tolerance may protect one from being negatively influenced by experiencing gender role conflict.

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Two hundred and seven female athletes from two Northeastern colleges in United States of America participated in this study. Athletes that participated in field hockey ( $n = 46$ ), soccer ( $n = 50$ ), swimming and diving ( $n = 19$ ), softball ( $n = 11$ ), track and cross country ( $n = 25$ ), lacrosse ( $n = 20$ ), rugby ( $n = 23$ ), and volleyball ( $n = 13$ ) were included in this study. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 22 (mean = 19.24). There were seventy freshmen, fifty-five sophomores, forty-six juniors, thirty-five seniors, and one graduate student. The majority of the participants were Caucasian ( $n = 169$ ), with twenty-five African Americans, nine Hispanics, one Asian, and three that indicated a race of "other."

### ***Measures***

Participants completed a packet of questionnaires that assessed: (a) demographic information, (b) athletic identity, (c) gender role conflict, (d) masculinity and femininity, (e) quality of athletic life, and (f) distress tolerance. The participants also completed one additional measure that included open-ended questions addressing stereotypes and coping methods.

### **Demographic Information**

Participants were asked to provide information regarding race or ethnicity, age, year in school, what sport they are playing, and number of years playing sports.

### **Athletic Identity**

The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) was designed to measure the extent to which participants identified with the athletic role (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Participants rated their agreement with ten statements on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items are scored and summed to provide a composite athletic identity index, with high scores indicating stronger athletic identity. The AIMS has demonstrated high internal consistency (alphas = .93, .87, .81) as well as sufficient test-retest reliability ( $r = .89$ ) over a fourteen-day period (Brewer et al.). Significant correlations were found with similar assessments, such as the Perceived Importance Profile ( $r = .83$ ), and nonsignificant correlations were found with dissimilar assessments, such as the global physical self-worth subscale of the Physical Self-Perception Profile ( $r = .11$ ) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ( $r = .01$ ; Brewer et al.).

### **Gender Role Conflict**

The gender role conflict of the participants was measured by the Gender Role Conflict Scale-Female Version (GRCS-F; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986). The GRCS-F is a 37-item self-report measure in which the participant indicates the degree to which they agree (1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*) with various statements concerning their thoughts and feelings about their gender role behaviors. Participants receive a mean gender role conflict score based on the mathematical average of their responses, with the total score ranging from 1 (*low gender role conflict*) to 6 (*high gender role conflict*). Internal consistency reliability estimates have ranged from .78 to .92 for the subscales, and test-retest reliabilities over four weeks have ranged from .72 to .86 (Good et al., 1995). If participants did not complete the questionnaire or missed more than three questions, they were excluded from the analyses conducted in this study.

### **Masculinity and Femininity**

A short form of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Strapp, 1975) was used to measure the participants' perceived masculinity/femininity. The PAQ consists of 24 bipolar masculine (e.g., aggressive, active, independent) and feminine (e.g., gentle, emotional, warm) attributes. Participants rate the self-relevance and typicality of each attribute by assigning it a value between 1 (*less self-relevant*) and 5 (*more self-relevant*). After reverse scoring some items (#3, 5, 7-9, 12-16, 21-23), it will be interpreted that the higher the score, the more masculine the self-perception, and the lower the score, the more feminine the self-perception.

Although internal consistency reliabilities have not been reported regularly for the PAQ, which is a widely used measure of gender role orientation, Richman and Shaffer (2000) reported alphas of .76 and .75 for the masculinity and femininity scales, respectively. Thomson and Zand (2005) also report the internal consistency reliability for the PAQ, but at a slightly higher level, with alpha of .80.

### **Quality of Athletic Life**

Based on the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI; Frisch, Cornell, Villanueva, & Retzlaff, 1992), the Quality of Athletic Life Inventory (QOALI) was developed to measure the athletes' satisfaction with their athletic life. The QOALI consists of 16 domains related to parts of one's athletic life, such as performance, teammates, and nutrition. Each of these domains are rated by the participants in terms of its importance to their overall happiness and satisfaction (0 = *not important*, 1 = *important*, 2 = *extremely important*) and in terms of their satisfaction with that area (-3 = *very dissatisfied* to 3 = *very satisfied*). The score for each domain is obtained by

multiplying the importance rating by the satisfaction rating. A total score is then computed by averaging the domain scores rated either *important* or *extremely important* together. Thus the higher the total score, the higher the athlete's satisfaction with the domains that she considers important in her life. If the participant missed a question or did not fully complete the questionnaire, she was excluded from the analyses in this study.

While the psychometric properties of the QOALI have not been demonstrated, the QOLI has been evaluated and has shown adequate psychometric properties. Petry, Alessi, and Hanson (2007) found that the QOLI has test-retest reliability of .80 to .91 and correlates well with other measures of well-being. They also demonstrated that Cronbach's alpha was .90 (Petry et al.). Frisch et al. (1992) found that the internal consistency coefficients ranged from .77 to .89 across three clinical and three nonclinical samples.

### **Distress Tolerance**

The Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS; O'Leirigh, Ironson, & Smits, 2007; Simons & Gaher, 2005) was used to evaluate the participant's ability to cope with and endure negative emotional states. Participants rated themselves on 15 items based on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items are scored and summed to provide a composite distress tolerance score, with high scores indicating a low ability to experience and endure negative emotional states. Simons and Gaher demonstrated that the DTS has high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and found that the DTS had appropriate convergence with other self-report ratings of affective distress and regulation. The DTS also has adequate 6-month test-retest reliability ( $r = .61$ ; Simons & Gaher).

### **Open-ended Questions**

Based on Oyserman and Sakamoto's (1997) procedure, the participants were asked to describe stereotypes of female athletes that they perceive or experience. After each stereotype, the athletes were asked to indicate whether they experience that stereotype and to describe the strategies, if any, they use to deal with the stereotype. They then were asked to read through their responses and check the one stereotype that they suffer from or experience the most. The open-ended questions were content analyzed by three independent raters who recorded the stereotypes listed by each participant, the coping mechanisms recorded by each participant, and the one stereotype that she suffered from the most.

### **Procedures**

The coaches of all of the female athletic teams at the two Northeastern colleges in the United States of America were contacted to seek permission to use their female athletes for this research study. A time and location was scheduled with the coach to administer the questionnaire packet to the athletes. The following teams from both colleges that either did not respond to the researcher or chose not to participate in this research study were the basketball, tennis, and crew teams. Also, the following teams from one of the colleges chose not to participate or did not respond to the researcher were, cross country and track, softball, and lacrosse. At the meeting with the athletes, informed consent and purpose of the study were explained. The participants were then asked to complete and sign the informed consent form if they wished to participate in the study. The informed consent forms were then collected and the assessment packets then handed out. The participants were told to follow all of the instructions on the assessment packet and to complete all of the questions. The questionnaire packet took about 30 minutes to complete. Once completed, the packets were collected. This process was done with each sport team.

## Results

It was predicted that those females high in athletic identity would experience more gender-role conflict than those low in athletic identity; those low in masculinity would experience more gender-role conflict than those high in masculinity; those who have a low quality of athletic life would experience more gender role conflict; and those with low distress tolerance would experience more gender role conflict. Out of the 207 participants, 191 participants were included in this analysis because of missing data. The missing data was a result of either participants not completing a measure or as a result of the participant skipping a question on the measures. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for Gender Role Conflict scores, Masculinity scores, Athletic Identity scores, Distress Tolerance scores, and Quality of Athletic Life scores in the overall sample, as well as intercorrelations among these variables. As can be seen in this table, there is a significant positive correlation between Gender Role Conflict and Athletic Identity ( $p = .001$ ) and Distress Tolerance ( $p = .000$ ). As participants gender role conflict increased, athletic identity increased (i.e., participants identified more strongly with the athletic role) and distress tolerance increased (i.e., participants had a lower ability to tolerate distress). A significant negative correlation between Gender Role Conflict and Quality of Athletic Life ( $p = .001$ ) was also found, meaning that as participants experienced more gender role conflict, they experienced a lower quality of athletic life. Also, a significant positive correlation between Athletic Identity and Distress Tolerance ( $p = .001$ ) was found. As athletic identity increased, distress tolerance increased. There are also significant negative correlations between Distress Tolerance and Masculinity ( $p = .000$ ) and Quality of Athletic Life ( $p = .010$ ). Thus, as participants distress tolerance decreases (i.e., participants had a better ability to tolerate distress), masculinity increases (i.e., participants identify themselves as more masculine) and quality of athletic life increases. Finally, a significant positive correlation between Masculinity and Quality of Athletic Life ( $p = .015$ ) was found, meaning that as masculinity increases, quality of life increases.

To determine whether one or more of these variables were predictive of gender role conflict, Gender Role Conflict scores were regressed on Masculinity, Athletic Identity, Distress Tolerance, and Quality of Athletic Life. The four factor model resulted in a significant overall test,  $F(4, 186) = 15.51, p = .001$ , accounting for 25% of the variability in Gender Role Conflict scores ( $R^2 = .250$ ). There were three significant predictors of gender role conflict scores in this sample: Athletic Identity, Distress Tolerance, and Quality of Athletic Life (see Table 2). Masculinity did not significantly contribute to the variability in conflict scores in this sample.

A secondary analysis was conducted to examine the effects of selecting those participants ( $N = 182$ ) with a high athletic identity ( $AIMS \leq 34$ ) to determine whether one or more of the variables were predictive of gender role conflict. Like the above analysis, Gender Role Conflict scores were regressed on Masculinity, Athletic Identity, Distress Tolerance, and Quality of Athletic Life. The four factor model resulted in a significant overall test,  $F(4, 177) = 15.13, p = .001$ , accounting for 25.5% of the variability in Gender Role Conflict scores ( $R^2 = .255$ ). There were three significant predictors of gender role conflict scores in this sample: Masculinity, Distress Tolerance, and Quality of Athletic Life (see Table 3). Athletic Identity did not significantly contribute to the variability in conflict scores in this sample.

It is also predicted that those females high in gender role conflict would have a lower quality of athletic life. In addition, it was predicted that distress tolerance is a moderator in this interaction. Thus, one's distress tolerance may protect one from being negatively influenced by the experience of gender role conflict. Out of the 207 participants, 194 participants were included because of missing data. Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for Quality of Athletic Life, Gender Role Conflict, Distress Tolerance, and the interaction term Gender Role Conflict x Distress Tolerance, as well as intercorrelations among these variables. As can be seen in this table, there are significant negative correlations between Quality of Athletic Life and

Gender Role Conflict ( $p = .001$ ) and Distress Tolerance ( $p = .016$ ). As quality of athletic life increases, gender role conflict decreases (i.e., participants experience less gender role conflict) and distress tolerance decreases (i.e., participants are able to tolerate distress better). Also, a significant positive correlation between Gender Role Conflict and Distress Tolerance ( $p = .000$ ) was found, meaning that as one's gender role conflict increases, her ability to tolerate distress decreases. Finally, there is a positive correlation between Distress Tolerance and the interaction term Gender Role Conflict x Distress Tolerance ( $p = .000$ ).

To determine whether one or more of these variables were predictive of one's quality of athletic life and to examine for moderator effects, Quality of Athletic Life scores were regressed on Gender Role Conflict, Distress Tolerance, and the interaction term Gender Role Conflict x Distress Tolerance. The three factor model resulted in a significant overall test,  $F(3, 190) = 3.64$ ,  $p = .014$ , accounting for 5.4% of the variability in Quality of Athletic Life scores ( $R^2 = .054$ ). There is one significant predictor of quality of athletic life in this sample, Gender Role Conflict (see Table 5). Distress Tolerance and the interaction term did not contribute significantly to the variability in quality of athletic life scores in this sample.

## Content of Stereotypes

Out of 207 female athlete participants, 179 chose to describe a variety of stereotypes others have about them (see Table 6). Some of the stereotypes that were described by the female athletes are listed in this table, along with the percentage of female athletes who listed that stereotype and the percentage of female athletes who said they suffered from that stereotype.

Seventy-two percent of the athlete participants that completed this questionnaire indicated that they experienced one or more stereotypes. The stereotypes listed focused primarily on female athletes not fitting into their gender role (i.e., not being feminine enough) or not adhering to traditional social norms (i.e., described as dykes/lesbians). Indeed, the majority of stereotypes reported were those that described athletes as "masculine/butch" or "weak/not real athletes" and/or lesbians. The stereotypes that were not included in the table were cited by only a small percentage (less than 3%) of athlete participants and included beliefs that female athletes are "overly confident," "lazy," and "aggressive."

Table 7 presents the methods the female athletes report using to help cope with stereotypes. It is of note that coping methods were not reported for some of the stereotypes participants reported suffering. These coping methods ranged from "acting more feminine" to simply "ignoring the stereotype." For example, for the stereotypes suggesting female athletes are masculine or lesbian, a coping method reported was to present a more feminine appearance or a more feminine demeanor such as wearing make up, flirting with men, etc.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore what factors influence a female athlete's experience of gender role conflict and quality of athletic life. As predicted, athletic identity, distress tolerance, and quality of life significantly related to one's conflict. Thus female athletes high in athletic identity experienced more gender role conflict than those with lower athletic identity. Those that strongly identify with the athletic role might experience more gender role conflict than other female athletes because of the larger discrepancy between being an athlete (i.e., being masculine) and being female (i.e., being feminine). Their athletic identity is so strong, that the difference in gender roles are too apparent, thus giving them a greater sense of conflict. Also, those female athletes with a low ability to tolerate distress experienced more gender role conflict than those with high distress tolerance. This could be due to the fact that a female athlete's ability to tolerate distress protects her from experiencing a great deal of gender role conflict. If a female athlete is able to experience and endure negative emotional states, she will be better apt to tolerate

discrepant roles of being a female and being an athlete. Finally, female athletes with a low quality of athletic life experienced more gender role conflict than those with a high quality of athletic life. This finding could be due to the fact that experiencing a great deal of gender role conflict as a result of participating in athletics, causes one to be dissatisfied with her athletic life. This dissatisfaction could lead to unhappiness, poor motivation or commitment to the sport, and eventual discontinuation of participation in the sport. This is consistent with research (Chiu, 1998; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Perrone et al., 2005) done with non-athletes that found experiencing role conflict diminished one's well-being and life satisfaction.

The initial analysis did not find that one's level of masculinity significantly related to one's conflict, meaning that a female athlete low in masculinity did not experience more gender role conflict than a female athlete high in masculinity, as it was predicted. However, in the secondary analysis in which athletic identity was controlled for, it was found that female athletes high in masculinity experienced more gender role conflict which is contrary to the initial prediction. By limiting the sample to those participants who highly related to the athletic role, as opposed to just being classified as an athlete because she plays a sport, we are able to get a better sense of what the participants are experiencing. This finding is consistent with Lantz and Schroeder's (1999) research that found that those with strong athletic identity identified greater with the masculine gender role. Thus it could be concluded that having a strong athletic identity and high masculinity increases the disparity between the female athlete's two roles (being an athlete and being female), causing one to experience gender role conflict. In addition, this finding could be explained by the assumption that those female athletes that are more masculine are experiencing more negative stereotypes, like being butch or manly, which is causing them to experience gender role conflict. This is consistent with and extends Cooky and McDonald's (2005) and Fallon and Jome's (2007) research, which discussed the impact of these negative stereotypes and ways that female athletes, try to manage and respond to them.

It was also predicted that those female athletes high in gender role conflict would have a lower quality of athletic life. In addition, it was predicted that distress tolerance would moderate this interaction. Contrary to predicted results, distress tolerance was not found to impact or protect one's experience of gender role conflict from influencing her quality of athletic life. A female athlete's ability to endure and experience negative emotional states, which it is assumed gender role conflict would create, does not protect her from the impact of experiencing gender role conflict on her quality of life.

The content analysis provided some insight into the causes of conflict for the female athletes and what they do to cope with that conflict. The stereotypes that bothered the female athletes most were ones that suggest female athletes are masculine (not feminine), butch, or manly, and that they are lesbians. This is consistent with past research (Krane, 2001) suggesting that being labeled as overly masculine or lesbian has a negative effect on the athlete. Evidence supporting these findings is found in responses of participants to the open-ended questions. One athlete responded by saying that she is "insecure with her athletic appearance to others," and that she "got in a fight at a bar because a girl called her a lesbian." Another female athlete described the pain and adversity that she has endured as a result of being an athlete, stating "being an athlete, it is difficult to relate to others who are unathletic." Other participants explained how they make an effort to appear more feminine off the field by dressing nice, wearing their hair long, wearing make-up, and going on dates with men. Such conscious attempts to demonstrate their femininity emphasize the negative impact of these stereotypes. This is consistent with much of the literature (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Royce et al., 2003; Russell, 2004) that has been conducted in this area with female athletes and how they manage their off the field appearance and identity.

While not all participants expressed such concerns, it is important to note that 72% of female athletes did. Despite the advancements of women's athletics since the inception of Title IX, it is apparent that a lot of work needs to be done. Female athletes are still discriminated against and still potentially face damaging stereotypes. For example, female athletes who have admitted to

being lesbians or who are suspected of being a lesbian have received less media attention and fewer endorsement deals (Krane, 2001). These stereotypes are potentially harmful for athletes who are not comfortable with their athletic role.

Taken together, both the quantitative and qualitative results demonstrate this potential harm and the importance of addressing this discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes female athletes face. The experience of gender role conflict and the effects of detrimental stereotype could be risk factors for depression in female athletes. Also, this experience could be a risk factor for drop-out in both athletics and school. If the athlete becomes dissatisfied or wants to avoid the discomfort of playing, she may stop playing sports since that is causing this difficulty or may drop out of school as a result. Finally, the athletes' performance in both athletics and academically may be impacted and influenced by these negative experiences. This is especially true of high school female athletes, who are in the process of developing a sense of identity. These female athletes subjected to stereotypes could become insecure, develop low self-esteem, or even stop playing sports to avoid this conflict, and could have their performance negatively impacted. Stone and McWhinnie (2008) support this claim, in that they found that stereotypes and the threat of stereotypes have a deleterious effect on athletic performance in female athletes.

Future research needs to continue to examine the negative impacts of stereotypes on female athletes with an eye toward how athletes develop positive coping skills particularly since it has been demonstrated in this study that one's experience is impacting their quality of athletic life. Future research should also examine younger athletes, such as high school student-athletes, experience with gender role conflict. Collegiate athletes, particularly Division I athletes, are assumed to have already made a strong commitment to playing sports, changing their experience and the impact of gender role conflict. High school athletes may be more vulnerable to these effects and may drop out of the sport before reaching college due to these detrimental effects. Guillet et al. supported this assertion that during early adolescence gender-role stereotypes and expectations are especially influential, thus in order to avoid compromising their femininity, some females may drop out of sport participation.

Also, further research should attempt to compare one's answers on the measure of gender role conflict to their answers to the open-ended questions regarding the stereotypes to attempt to capture the participants' actual feelings concerning the conflict they experience. An item analysis on the measure of gender role conflict may give an idea of what factors are particularly bothersome for female athletes, which could then be compared to the answers on the open-ended questions. For example, some female athletes find it necessary to demonstrate their femininity off the playing field to compensate for their more masculine athletic role, but they may not necessarily score high on the conflict scale.

This study's largest limitation is the manner in which athletic participants completed the questionnaires. The female athletes completed the questionnaire with their teammates, which could have had an impact on their responses. The female athletes could have been influenced by their teammates being around them, causing them to answer the questions differently. For example, a participant may be embarrassed by her answers, so she might have answered in a more socially appropriate manner. Future research should control for this, and possibly have the athletes complete the questionnaires individually. Another limitation is the measure for quality of athletic life, the QOALI. This measure is not currently standardized, thus it does not have any psychometric properties. Without having this information, it is unsure that the QOALI is an appropriate and accurate measure of an athlete's quality of athletic life. A third limitation to this study is the lack of control on the impact of the participants' sexuality on the results. A participant's sexuality, whether it is heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, and degree of openness about her sexuality (i.e., open to others, hiding it from others) could be an important factor that may change or influence the results of this study. For example, a female athlete who is a lesbian and is comfortable and open with her sexuality may have a different experience than a female athlete who is a lesbian and has not told others and is uncomfortable with her sexuality. Thus,

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future research should examine the impact of one's sexuality on her experience of gender role conflict and on her quality of athletic life. Future research should either ask the participants directly what their sexuality is or should use a homophobia scale to measure a participant's lesbian/gay/bisexual identity.

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Table 1: Intercorrelations between Gender Role Conflict, Athletic Identity, Masculinity, Distress Tolerance, and Quality of Athletic Life and their Means and Standard Deviations

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	M	SD
Female Athletes ( <i>n</i> = 182)							
1. Conflict	-					3.33	.61
2. Athletic Id.	.231*	-				48.64	8.23
3. Masc/Fem.	-.017	.029	-			69.40	7.63
4. Dist. Tol.	.435*	.223*	-.281*	-		41.23	9.23
5. QOAL	-.226*	.067	.157*	-.168*	-	42.22	19.62

\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2: Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting a Female Athlete's Gender Role Conflict (N = 191)

Measure	B	SE B	$\beta$
Athletic Identity	.011	.005	.150*
Masculinity	.010	.005	.121
Distress Tolerance	.027	.005	.404**
Quality of Athletic Life	-.006	.002	-.187**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3: Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting a Female

Measure	B	SE B	$\beta$
Athletic Identity	.011	.006	.121
Masculinity	.012	.006	.142*
Distress Tolerance	.028	.005	.420**
Quality of Athletic Life	-.006	.002	-.181**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

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Table 4: Intercorrelations between Quality of Athletic Life, Gender Role Conflict, Distress Tolerance, and the Interaction Term Gender Role Conflict x Distress Tolerance and their Means and Standard Deviations

Measure	1	2	3	4	M	SD
Female Athletes (n = 194)						
1. QOAL	-				42.29	19.46
2. Conflict	-.223**	-			3.34	.61
3. Dist. Tol.	-.155*	.424**	-		41.29	9.34
4. GRCxDT	-.012	.066	.260**	-	2.41	6.57

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5: Summary of Simultaneous Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting a Female Athlete's Quality of Athletic Life (N = 194)

Measure	B	SE B	$\beta$
Distress Tolerance	-.166	.168	.080
Gender Role Conflict	-6.058	2.485	-.190*
Distress Tolerance x GRC	.062	.217	.021

\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 6: Perceived Stereotypes of Female Athletes

<b>Stereotypes of Female Athletes</b>	<b>%N</b>	<b>%suffer</b>	<b>Example</b>
Clicky	8%	6%	“Female athletes only hang out with other athletes”
Cocky	7%	4%	“Female athletes think they are better than others”
Competitive	3%	2%	“Athletes are too competitive”
Dyke/Lesbian	65%	25%	“Softball players are dykes”
Inferior/Weak	29%	21%	“Females are not real athletes”
Jock	11%	10%	“Female athletes are jocks”
Masculine/Not Feminine/Butch/Manly	48%	16%	“Female athletes are butchy and manlike”
Muscular/Too Strong	8%	6%	“Female athletes are jacked”
Only Care about Sports	3%	3%	“Female athletes don’t have any other interests”
Smelly/Dirty	3%	2%	“Female athletes smell bad”
Stupid/Dumb	19%	7%	“Female athletes are not good students and are dumb”
Tomboy	3%	2%	“Female athletes are tomboys”
Unfriendly/Scary	5%	3%	“Female athletes are mean”

Table 7: Reported Coping Methods to Deal with Stereotypes

Stereotype	Coping Methods
Dyke/Lesbian	Have a boyfriend Act girly/Talk about men Make out with boys Say not into girls/Not true Ignore/Don't Care Be open/Accept
Inferior Weak	Show toughness/not weak Work hard/Be successful/Prove wrong Ignore Tell them to shut up
Maculine/Not Feminine/Butch/Manly	Wear skirts/dresses Wear make up Look cute Act/dress more feminine Ignore/Don't listen Stay toned, not muscular Show people you can be both girly and athletic

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Rachel Daltry:** Dr. Rachel Daltry studied research and experimental psychology at Saint Joseph's University, where she received her B.S. and M.S. She then continued her education at La Salle University to study clinical psychology, where she received her M.A. and Psy.D. She completed her predoctoral internship and post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Delaware's Center for Counseling and Student Development in Newark, Delaware. From there, Dr. Daltry accepted a Psychologist position at the counseling center at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania. Dr. Daltry's professional interests include working with athletes—particularly student-athletes and athletic departments on a university campus setting. She also has interest in treating anxiety disorders and group psychotherapy. Dr. Daltry has experience using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for both individual and group therapy clients. She enjoys working with college-aged students and working in a university setting—conducting individual and group therapy, along with outreach and consultation with students, faculty, and staff.



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