

NCAA STUDENT-ATHLETE PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT
CLIMATE CONCERNING LGBT+ ISSUES

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Leisure and Sport Management

Middle Tennessee State University
December 2017

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ABSTRACT

Past research has indicated a movement towards the acceptance of diverse sexual-orientation within society and the workplace (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff, and Crosby, 2004); Unfortunately discrimination is still very prevalent today, especially within athletic departments on a university campus (Jacobson, 2002).

Despite this fact, very little research has explored student-athletes attitudes and perceptions of LGBT+ climate. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study will be to investigate athlete's ($N= 287$) perceptions of their institutions (Southeastern Division I University) athletic department LGBT+ climate and determine possible relationships between independent variables such as sexuality, gender and citizenship.

Results of this study support previous research, while further expanding the field through exploration of new independent variables and shifting the focus to athletic department climate. However, the main objective of this research is to serve as a basis for institutional change. Administrators must take a proactive approach to ensure student-athletes feel safe and respected.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States 2016 election has undoubtedly brought about a grocery list of concerns for Americans across the nation. More specifically, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community have been anxiously awaiting to see what President Trump's campaign slogan, "Making American Great Again" could precisely mean for them. While past research has indicated a movement towards the acceptance of diverse sexual-orientation within society and the workplace (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff, and Crosby, 2004); the unfortunate truth is that discrimination is still very prevalent today. This may be why so many Americans seem to be concerned that the new shift in power will only amplify these prejudices. While, only time can tell what the future holds in regards to this great Nation and its laws; what is evident now, is that within the past couple of years, perceptions of the LGBT community has become a "hot topic" of discussion within our society, especially within athletics.

Despite several professional athletes have "stepped out of the closet" and into the spotlight in recent years; Michele Van Gorp and Sheryl Swoops both came out as lesbians in back-to-back years (2004-2005) while playing in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) (Jet, 2005), Abby Wambach of the USA Women's National Soccer Team and former National Basketball Association (NBA) player John Amaechi (Greene, 2010) have also both self-identified as gay athletes; research still describes sport culture as "one of the last homophobic environments" (Greene, 2010). In fact, Boykin (2005) went as far as stating, "I can think of no place in America that is as homophobic and as homoerotic as the sports team locker room" (p. 219). These negative and discriminatory behaviors and attitudes continue to happen throughout sport; even

within the walls of university college campuses, where there has been a recent shift in focus on the importance of acceptance of diversity in all facets of campus life (Greene, 2010; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite & Southall, 2011).

Universities and colleges have embraced the benefits of diversity and begun incorporating it within their own core values (Southall et. al., 2011). Interestingly, many predominantly white U.S. institutions pride themselves on being at the forefront of the push for acceptance and multiculturalism. However, despite the new policies and procedures put into place by universities across the nation and the ongoing efforts put forth by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), research continues to show that U.S. college campuses are still affected by homophobia (Rivers, 2016). This is perhaps because policies are not a direct reflection of an individual's attitude and therefore discrimination continues to take place, as noted by Nelson and Krieger (1997). The authors also maintained that "as a microcosm of a larger social environment, college and university campuses, reflect the pervasive prejudices of society" (Nelson & Krieger, 1997). Therefore, despite what policies may have been put into place in effort to shield campuses; universities are still vulnerable and susceptible to the same prejudices as society at large.

This includes the way in which sport continues to play a major role in homophobia both in society and on campuses. More precisely, research has also found that when it comes to homophobia on a university campus, the biggest culprit continuously seems to be the athletic department (Jacobson, 2002). Yet very little research has explored heterosexual student-athletes attitudes along with Gay student-

athletes attitudes towards lesbians and gay men and their perceptions of athletic department climate on a university campus. Obtaining such information would be extremely beneficial for institutions across the nation. As the Student-Athlete Climate Study (SACS) 2011 final report stated, athletic departments in conjunction with other faculty members of the university have the ability to improve collegiate experiences of student-athletes, which would directly affect their levels of both academic and on field success.

Furthermore, it is necessary to separately assess student-athletes perceptions of climate as they can easily be distinguished as a separate social group on campus and will therefore have different experiences than non-athletic students (Chang, 2002). Many student-athletes will face a variety of obstacles and distractions such as public scrutiny and serious time constraints that the majority of their non-athlete peers will never have to undergo (Carodine, Almond, and Gratto, 2001). Furthermore, research has shown that that campus climates and educational attainment for students of all sub-groups are directly correlated (Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005).

Purpose Statement

Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to investigate current attitudes and perceptions of student-athletes at a Southeastern NCAA Division I University to accurately assess their current athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues. While the chosen institution's campus life is currently under examination, there have been no studies to date that have provided insight from a student-athlete perspective, specifically regarding the athletic department; a group that is at the heart of a subculture

of campus life that has been generally known for its homophobic attitudes. As such, this study will focus on the perceptions and attitudes of current student athletes within the university in order to gage the current athletic department climate for student-athletes in regards to LGBT+ issues. This information will help in the deliberation and the possible necessity for future interventions and improvements that can be made on campus, or more specifically within the athletic department.

Research Question

1. What are student-athletes current attitudes and perceptions of their athletic department's current climate concerning LGBT+ Issues?

Although at first glance this question may appear to be too broad of topic, being that departmental climate encompasses a wide array of features; through the use of descriptive and inferential analysis, this study will be able to address the many different components of an athletic department's climate. Simply put, this process will happen very similarly to the way in which you could make assumptions about a student's overall academic achievement.

For instance, a student's GPA is actually a compilation of quantitative data taken from various components of a student's academic career (attendance grades, exams, different classes, spanning over several semesters, etc.). These different components of a GPA provide a data set much in the same way that the various features involved in determining the climate of an athletic department would. Then through descriptive analysis, all of the information gathered about the various components of a student's GPA, or in this case about the athletic department climate, would be analyzed in order to

provide mean scores. These scores will reflect student-athletes perceptions of their athletic department's climate, just as a GPA provides valuable insight to a student's academic performance. Further analysis of these findings as well as other statistical tests will be used in this study and further explained in Chapter III.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes sexual-orientation and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues
2. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes gender and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues
3. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes Nationality and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues

Limitations

Several limitations arose due to the controversial nature of the subject matter investigated during this study. One such limitation, may have been that the study was conducted at a university in the "bible belt" of the USA. This could have effected certain coach's inclination to respond to the solicitation email or even influenced player's decisions on participating within the study. Another limitations for this study, despite being assured complete confidentiality, is it possible that participants were reluctant to participate and/or answer questions honestly due to the sensitive topics/issues explored. Participants may have been afraid to participate or disclose personal information. Furthermore, athletes may have provide bias responses in order to adhere to political correctness, especially those who knew the sexual-orientation of the primary investigator.

Finally, because the study only surveyed the student-athletes at a single institution, results cannot be generalized.

Definition of Terms

1. Asexual: without sexual feelings or associations
2. Bisexual: A person who is attracted emotionally, physically and/or sexually, to members of both sexes.
3. Campus Climate: current attitudes, behaviors, and standards held by female student athletes concerning the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential.
4. Discrimination: Prejudicial actions directed toward someone based on their sexual identity, gender identity, or gender expression.
5. Gay male : a male who is attracted, emotionally, physically and/or sexually, to another male
6. Gender Expression: The manner in which a person outwardly represents their gender, regardless of physical characteristics that might typically define them as male or female.
7. Gender identity: A person's inner sense of being male, female, both, or neither. The internal identity may or may not be expressed outwardly, and may or may not correspond to one's physical characteristics.
8. Harassment: Exclusionary (e.g., shunned, ignored), intimidating, offensive and/or hostile conduct that has interfered with one's ability to work or learn.

9. Heteronormative: the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality.
10. Homoeroticism: marked by, revealing, or portraying homosexual desire
11. Homophobia: is the fear of being thought homosexual because of behavior that is typically considered gender atypical
12. Homophobia: An irrational fear, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexuality, or individuals perceived to be homosexual
13. Homonegativism: negative attitude towards homosexuality.
14. Hyperheterosexuality: Behaviors which involve exaggeration of heterosexual behavior.
15. Hyperfemininity: an exaggerated adherence to a feminine gender role as it relates to heterosexual relationships (Murnen & Byrne, 1991)
16. Hypermasculinity: A psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behavior, such as an emphasis on strength, aggression, body hair, etc.
17. Lesbian: A female who is attracted emotionally, physically and/or sexually, to another female.
18. Sexual Harassment: A repeated course of conduct whereby one person engages in verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature, that is unwelcome, serves no legitimate purpose, intimidates another person and has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.
19. Sexual identity (orientation): Term that refers to the sex of the people one tends to be emotionally, physically and sexually attracted to; this is inclusive but not

limited to lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, heterosexual people and those who identify as queer.

20. Transgender: of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity is opposite the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth

Significance of the Study

In 2011, following the tragic death of one of institutions female Basketball players, a grief stricken University had created a brand new pledge along with a set of four core values which were to serve as a new foundation for the school. Every member of the university, be it student, faculty, employee or other is expected to uphold each of these values. Of the four principles, “Respect for Diversity” demands respect for all members of the community, including those of a different sexual-orientation. While the university has created and implemented the steps they believed to be necessary in order to uphold these standards across campus (Ruble, 2011), little is known about what has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions. Currently, the campus climate is being assessed for the university in general, however, previous research (Cunningham, 2010) has made it evident that further attention should specifically be paid to the university’s Athletic Department.

Literature has previously estimated that college athletics is one of the most diverse sub-cultural groups within a university setting and yet it is also one of the most homophobic places on campus (Cunningham, 2010). This study is pertinent to extending current university LGBT+ climate literature and is exceptionally relevant given sport culture within today’s society. Overall, the purpose of this study will be to measure

student-athletes attitudes and perceptions of LGBT+ climate of their athletic department.

Furthermore, this study aims to help the chosen universities athletic administrators and coaches determine if further plans should be developed to specifically improve the athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

As with current trends, the Southeastern Division 1 University has recently made a change to their core values and have begun the push for a multicultural campus environment. Specifically stated within their revised ideals, every member of their community shall be respected regardless of sexual-orientation, among other diversity characteristics. The president of the university has gone as far as electing a committee that has been placed in charge of developing an action plan to better campus climate and help regulate conflict resolutions. Unfortunately, this is something far easier said than done. As Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1998) have explained, campus environments are an extremely complex intertwining of systems made up of countless moving parts all relating back to one and other. Furthermore, different social groups will experience the exact same environment in different ways, only adding to the complexity of the situation. Therefore, in order to better assess the climate of the chosen institutions athletic department, it will be important to first identify a specific social group, such as student-athletes, in order to minimize outlying variables. More specifically, the present investigation will explore student-athletes' perceptions of the Southeastern NCAA Division I athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues.

Student athletes are not only considered a special population on college campuses with unique challenges and needs different from their non-athlete peers (Gayles, 2009); but climate literature on the experiences and attitudes of intercollegiate athletes has been noticeably absent in regards to this specific subgroup (Rankin, Merson, Sorgen, McHale, Loya & Oseguera, 2011). This seems to be especially true in regards to studies that focus

on sexual orientation topics (Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite & Southall, 2011). In fact, previous studies suggested that research pertaining to college athletes' attitudes and behaviors in regards to sexual orientation topics is scarce within the literature (Roper & Halloran, 2007; Southall, Nagel, Anderson, Polite & Southall, 2009). Furthermore, the 2012 Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer National College Athlete Report noted that the majority of previous research that has focused on the experiences of LGBTQ students has regularly excluded student-athletes from their studies. This limited research on sexual identity differences in intercollegiate athletics suggest that the athletic environment does little to encourage and support non-heterosexual identities (Rankin et al., 2011). This may be due to the fact that administrators are purposely negligent out of fear of negative results, a sort of "ignorance is bliss" ideology. Or perhaps this lack of research is due to administrators not realizing the importance of such studies. Either way, the lack of literature surrounding these topics are evidence of present and future demands.

While previous literature has indicated a shift in attitude toward sexual minorities within society and the work place; literature still indicates that negative attitudes and discrimination exists on US College campuses to date (Greene, 2010; Roper & Halloran, 2007). More specifically, the athletic department continues to be identified within the literature as the most homophobic area on a university campus (Cunningham, 2010; Southall et al., 2009). There is considerable research that documents the homonegative and homophobic climate of many sport settings (Anderson 2002; Roper & Halloran, 2007; Southall, 2011) and yet very little research has been attributed to further investigating homophobia within a college sport setting (Southall, et. al., 2009). This is an alarming fact considering that a positive campus climate is an essential component for athletic

success as well as athlete retention. Not to mention its overall impact on educational success and personal development as well (Rankin et al., 2011).

Therefore, in order to better understand the institutions athletic department current climate regarding LGBT+ issues, it is vital to first establish an understanding of not only societal attitudes towards LGBT+ issues but also examine how sport has continued to perpetuate and foster a homonegative climate throughout the literature. In doing so, we can gauge a better understanding of the sub-group most directly affected by all aspects of campus (both athletic and none athletic) the student-athlete. Because student-athletes, experience not only campus life and culture but also their athletic department's culture; they may have a greater opportunity to witness or experience LGBT+ issues within their university, and therefore may be able to more accurately depict what the athletic department climate is truly like.

While large scale data is best to provide generalizations across various populations such as student-athletes; a single-institutional study such as this will be able to more accurately provide valuable information that is specific to a institutions own needs (Gayles, 2009). Therefore, this study will focus solely on athletic teams at the chosen Southeastern NCAA Division I University. Furthermore, literature has also identified a possible relationship between attitudes of athletes towards sexuality issues and their participation on either a team sport or individual sport (Rankin et al., 2011), thus both "team sports" and "individual sports" will be asked to participate in the present investigation. . Finally, by using a modified version of the survey established by Rankin (2003), it will be possible to more accurately assess the current climate of the institutions athletic department in regards to LGBT+ issues.

Climate

According to Hart and Fellabaum (2008), campus climate has become a popular term amongst higher education entities despite the overwhelming lack of unanimity surrounding its definition and best practices to measure it. Regardless of these shortcomings, for the past couple of decades, both colleges and universities have continued to invest their efforts into campus climate research in efforts to gain a better understanding of their own environments in relation to diversity as well as multiculturalism (Southall et al., 2011). Major characteristics such as race, ethnicity and gender have been the primary focus for the majority of these studies, while very little attention has been placed on other topics such as sexual-orientation, religion and other (Greene, 2010).

Furthermore, “campus climate” and “campus culture” have been used interchangeably throughout higher education literature despite the two being distinguishably different (Cress, 2002). Simply put, campus culture is the “personality” and general understanding that helps shape climate (Gruenert, 2008). That being said, Hart and Fallabaum (2008) after careful review of previous climate literature, have found that Peterson and Spencer have provided the best definition of “campus climate” and have listed the three main characteristics that differentiate “campus climate” from “culture climate”. The following definition is what they have recommended to be used as standard practice. “Climate is defined as: the current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members’ perceptions of and attitudes towards those dimensions” (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; p.7). Furthermore, “the major features of climate are (1) its primary emphasis on common participant views of a wide array of

organizational phenomena that allows for comparison among groups or over time, (2) its focus on current patterns of beliefs and behaviors, and (3) its often ephemeral or malleable character” (as cited by Sandone, 2015). Perhaps the most important thing to note in regards to campus climate research is that its primary objective should be to serve as a basis for institutional change and progress (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). As such, this research aims to provide a baseline understanding of the university’s athletic department’s current climate. By evaluating current perceptions and attitudes of the athletic department’s climate regarding LGBT+ issues, administrators will have a better basis to evaluate their current efforts and implement any necessary adjustments. Furthermore, as specified by the University of California Regents study group, in order to fully address any diversity and inclusion issues, as the chosen institution has aimed to do, it is essential to fully incorporate campus climate efforts as well.

Campus climate evaluation is extremely crucial for any institution because as aforementioned, there is a direct correlation between positive campus climates and student success (Rankin et al, 2011). In fact, the Student Athlete Climate Study (2011) listed several areas in which campus climate may impact a student’s life. These areas include but are not limited to: “a student’s ‘successful academic performance, educational outcomes, social adjustment and interpersonal skill development” (p. 28). In fact, it was the American Council on Education that went as far as to say that in order to foster an efficient learning environment universities must be able to offer a campus climate where intellect be the primary focus but where are all individuals are equality supported and protected (Boyer, 1990). Shortly after, the Association of American Colleges and Universities presented a challenge to these institutions, charging them with the task of

creating a learning environment of complete inclusiveness with a climate that both “cultivates diversity and celebrates difference” (Rankin & Reason, 2008; p. 263). In doing so, institutions would not only be benefiting themselves, but their students, faculty and society as a whole. In fact, universities, more specifically their athletic departments, play a major role in developing well rounded individuals who will positively impact today’s society (Vermillion, M 2014). This means that while universities campuses are exposed to some of the negative qualities of today’s culture, it is also a great place to begin to promote change.

According to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002), students feel better prepared to engage in an increasingly multicultural society when they are a part of a campus that promotes inclusiveness. This is because positive campus climates not only affects student success but also student development and personal growth (this holds true for faculty members and staff as well). However, it is important to remember that what may seem positive for some does not necessarily mean that the climate is perceived as positive for all. In fact, research has shown that not only do men and women navigate their college experiences very differently but men also are more likely to have a negative outlook on subculture and diversity groups. This is true of female and male athletes as well. Female athletes experience intercollegiate athletics and college differently than male athletes (Howell & Giuliano 2011; Rubin & Moses, 2017). SACS 2011 found that because female athletes tend to associate less with their “athletic” identities they tend to have a more positive outlook on campus climate and share greater success. Furthermore, women also tend to identify as LGBT+ at a much higher percentage than male athletes. However, this study will include both male and female participants.

Brief History & Types of Homophobia

Over the past several decades, within the United States alone, there have been countless strides and setbacks for gay men and lesbians across the nation (Loftus, 2001; Momentum report, 2014). George Weinberg back in 1972, for the first time in history coined the term homophobia. In doing so, Weinberg had completely reversed the issues of homosexuality; the blame had gone from being solely placed upon homosexual people to instead being placed upon those who were intolerant of them (Herek, 2004). That being said, literature continues to support the fact that the LGBT community continues to be a persecuted minority group in this nation (momentum report, 2014). Since its debut in the 1970's, homophobia has evolved immensely. While most simply put, homophobia can be defined as a hostility toward gay men and lesbians; over time society has continued create a need for a much more developed understanding of this term. Today, homophobia can be experienced and expressed in a multitude of ways.

First, there is what is known as institutionalized homophobia. This type of homophobia refers to homophobia in relation to the discrimination against sexual orientation brought forth by religious, government, business and other organizations (ALGBTical). This type of homophobia is often times encompassed within the scope of heterosexism. Heterosexism, which is often times misused as a synonym for homophobia, is actually more accurately defined as cultural ideology established within society's institutions (Herek, 2004). Examples of heterosexism within society are still abundant today. From lack of legal protection within the workplace for LGBT members to various

state laws surrounding same-sex marriages, heterosexism continues to perpetuate sexual stigmas within society.

The Second type of homophobia was actually specified by George Weinberg himself within the scope of homophobia's original definition and is known as "internalized homophobia" (Herek, 2004). It is understood that internalized homophobia refers to the negative feelings and prejudices against one's own homosexuality (Herek, Cogan, Gillis & Glunt, 1998). Unlike heterosexism, examples of internalized homophobia are not as common due to the fact that it can only be self-experienced and therefore can only be identified on a personal level. This type of homophobia is often times experienced due to an implication of an internal battle between how an individual experiences their own sexuality and how they think they should experience it (Herek, 2004). This belief of "how things should be" is often times referred to as heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, essentially is the belief that heterosexuality is and should be a societal standard. It is in large part, this promoting of heterosexuality as a societal preference that has created one of the most commonly seen homophobias within sport: social homophobia.

Social homophobia, also known as homophobia, can be summarized as a fear of being labeled as either a gay man or lesbian. Sports very roots lay within the notion of "making a man out of a boy" and preparing men for war. In fact, in the past sport has been widely referred to as the "embodiment and celebration" of masculine heterosexuality (Clarke, 1998). Messener further explains that from an early age boys are taught that being gay is synonymous with weakness and femininity, and that the inability to

prove one's heterosexuality is simply unacceptable. This belief continues to be upheld by college age men today who believe that homosexuality is equivalent to the rejection of masculinity. This is perhaps why the majority of studies have consistently shown that in general, men tend to hold more negative attitudes and be more hostile towards gay men and lesbians than women (Green, 2010; Rankin et al, 2011; Oswalt & Vargas, 2013). This type of social scripting has been perpetuated throughout sport history. That being said, women have experienced and continue to experience discrimination in sport as well.

Gay Men & Lesbians

While much of the focus has been placed upon the homophobia that exists within male sport culture, it is important to remember there are actually two very distinctive stereotypes that are prominent within sport. These stereotypes encompass both gay men and lesbians within sport culture. "They [gay men and lesbians] are thought to introduce an unwanted eroticism, and gay men are regarded as effeminate while lesbians are seen as masculine" (Hekma, 1998). While past research has focused on investigating the former, the accessibility to investigating women's experiences is quickly becoming far easier. A recent study done by Campus Pride (2010), found that a "higher proportion of women student-athletes identified as LGBTQ (8%) as opposed to men (3%)" (p.5). This seems to be the trend across the board. This trend may be due to the fact that the lesbian stigma not only causes issues for those that identify as lesbian but it also holds negative implications for heterosexual women as well. This divide between straight women and lesbians created by homophobia is a major factor inhibiting all women to work together towards the elimination or discrimination within sport (Clarke, 1998).

Krane and Barber (2005) note that “women of every sexual orientation may feel stigmatized because of their involvement in athletics, while lesbians may feel an added rejection because they are perceived as deviant from the heterosexual norm”. Females who participate in sport, especially those sports that require “strength, power, and muscularity”, are left susceptible to questioning about their sexuality (Clarke, 1998). This is in large part due to the fact that femininity is not only negatively correlated with athletic identity but it also completely opposes athleticism (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). Essentially, female participation in sport contradicts sports historical definition as a manly domain and thus female athletes, especially those who excel in sport are labeled as masculine.

Historically, for most women, the fear of being labeled as a lesbian or even as a “tomboy” has been enough to discourage their participation in sport (Roper & Halloran 2007; Clarke 1998). Additionally, this fear of being labeled has fostered the practice of women going to extreme lengths to prove their heterosexuality often times resulting in hyperfemininity. For some, this means distancing themselves from sport all together, for others it comes down to a choice to participate in only “feminine” or traditional female sports in order to portray a more heterosexual image, and then again for some it means going to greater lengths when participating in a sport such as the use of make up or jewelry within their sporting arena, despite its possible negative impact on performance.

These extreme stereotypes have continued to perpetuate discrimination not only in sport but also in society. Hyperfemininity though may seem most obvious on the playing field can be seen in the work place, at home and especially within the media. While sport

has continues to foster a homonegative atmosphere it is critical to understand that it is not the only place people exhibit discrimination. In fact, research has shown that university campuses in general show pervasive amounts of homophobia and heterosexism (Bowen and Bourgeois, 2001). Rankin (2003) even described college climates as “unwelcoming and unsupportive” environments for gay men and lesbians. Because of this, it will be crucial to gain the perspective of student-athletes on LGBT+ issues within universities and colleges. They are the only ones who experience both campus life and athletic culture. Therefore, they will be the ones who have the best overall understanding of total campus climate for LGBT+ issues.

Student-Athletes

The majority of the research that has focused on student-athletes has generally fixated on how a student-athletes participation within athletics has affected different educational outcomes for them (Rankin et al., 2011). To date, there has been very little attention attributed to the actual experiences of intercollegiate athletes within climate literature and even less addressing student-athlete perceptions of athletic department climate towards LGBT+ issues (Greene, 2010). Furthermore, literature continues downplay the complexity of student-athletes identities; usually suggesting that student-athletes must merely learn to cope with both on field and classroom success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). However, the role of playing an intercollegiate sport is much more complex than what it may seem at first glance.

Student-athletes not only learn to navigate through the same experiences that their nonathletic counterparts will face in University (attending class, social life and career

development among others), but they also must learn to juggle the added pressures and demands that come with being an intercollegiate athlete (daily practices, training room and even media pressure) (Watt & Moore III, 2001). Wolverton, (2007), revealed student athletes confess to spending more time within their chosen sport than on their own academic work; usually dedicating 40-45 hours per week to their game. However, unlike nonathletic students, student-athletes have more than just the fear of disappointing their parents to look forward to if they fail to succeed academically. They are obligated by the NCAA, their coaches and even their teammates to maintain an acceptable grade point average. Because of these high demands placed on them by both their sport and academics, athletes often have little time to participate in non-athletic events and create bonds with non-athletic peers (Rankin et al, 2011). In fact, student athletes are commonly isolated from non-athletic students. They generally attend the same classes (due to scheduling conflicts) where they often times segregate themselves, live together and obviously train together as well (Rubin & Moses, 2017). Thus, further illustrating the fact that student-athletes will define and experience their campus climates much differently than none athletes.

Furthermore, college athlete's experiences are additionally affected by their own individual unique factors and characteristics as well. Athletes will commonly experience college differently based on factors such as their institutions division classification, their gender, race, sport type and even athletic ability (Rankin et al., 2011). Each of these characteristics may have an impact on how student-athletes perceive their campus climate. For instance, according to the findings of the SACS 2011, Division I athletes are more accepting of teammate diversity than Division II and III Schools. Female athletes

tend to have more positive experiences with campus climate than their male counterparts do and LGBT+ student-athletes tend to have one of the most negative outlooks on campus climate.

While it would be nearly impossible to control for all of the possible contributing factors, this study aims to eliminate as many variables as possible in order to obtain the most accurate feedback possible. Literature suggests that sub-groups within the same environment will most likely perceive its climate differently. As previously established, student-athletes are a very significant sub-group on all university campuses. While student-athletes can be further subdivided into various sub-groups based on race, gender, nationality, etc. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge there are still outlying factors that could affect participant's responses, however, we must also acknowledge that despite minor differences there is enough commonality to provide accurate feedback.

All of the participants will be students at chosen university, which is a member of the NCAA Division I. It is a predominantly white university (student and faculty) located within the "bible belt" of the Southeastern United States. The Student body is composed of students of all ages and the gender ratio is split nearly 50/50 between male and females. Specifically within the athletic department, the university supports eight different male sports and nine female sports. These athletes are also supported by two different scholarship types (percentage or full) and have different fields of study. However, expectations both academically and athletically will be similar for each athlete, as the university's athletic department expects their athletes to be held to the highest standards.

Gay and Lesbian Student-Athletes

It is no secret that student-athletes bodies undergo major stresses day in and day out. That being said, it is important to note that throughout their career as student-athletes they are also tasked with enduring a great deal of mental strain as well (James, 2017). While the majority of these stressors can be experienced by all student-athletes, there are additional tensions that must be considered when taking into account the diversity of such a large sub-group on campus. In particular, student-athletes who are LGBT+ may experience these stressors at a greater level than their heterosexual student-athlete peers (Breene & Karpinsky, 2013). This is because gay or lesbian student athletes are faced with not only the same challenges of overcoming the strains faced by their heterosexual peers but with the added pressure of also either remaining “closeted” or being open about their sexuality in a highly competitive environment (Breen & Kaprinski, 2013). In fact, Iwasaki & Ristock (2007) have even stated that in regards to the overall population of the U.S., gay men and lesbians are found to be the most stressed. If you consider Iwasaki and Ristock’s findings alone and then take into account the additional stresses caused by the demand to succeed both in a classroom and on a field that every student-athlete must face; it is easy to make the assumption that gay or lesbian student-athletes face greater amounts of stress than both their athletic and non-athletic heterosexual peers. A great deal of this can be accredited to the fact that there is still discrimination against this minority group today.

As previously stated, athletics is one of the worst environments for homophobia today. Previous research has stated that LGBT+ student-athletes in the past have faced

greater levels of harassment and discrimination compared to their heterosexual peers (Bieschke, Eberz & Wilson, 2000). These past findings seem to be congruent throughout the literature. A 2012 LGBTQ National College Report found that LGBTQ student-athletes would experience a more negative climate within their respective campuses compared to their heterosexual peers and face greater discrimination. They also reported that LGBQ Student-athletes tend to achieve lower academic scores and are skeptical about their own athletic departments addressing LGBT+ issues. Both these areas of course have been shown to be directly correlated with campus climate perceptions. In fact, Rankin and Weber (2014) found that campus climates have a huge impact on academic success for LGBT+ student-athletes, as well as their athletic outcomes. These findings further stress the importance of climate research surrounding LGBT+ issues.

Instrument & Validity

As specified by (Brown & Gortmaker 2009) “the validity of conclusions drawn from any study is limited by the quality of the measurements used to collect the data. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, a previously published scale has been chosen as the instrument, as it already has a well-established history of validity. Rankin (2003) “Assessment of Campus Climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons instrument” and slight variations of it, have been used in several other campus climate surveys to date. For instance, the University of California Berkley used a modified version of Rankin’s survey in order to complete a campus wide climate assessment. Their survey contained 115 questions and was used to assess participant’s personal experiences, perceptions of campus climate and attitudes toward their institutions efforts and policies

concerning diversity topics (Rankin & Associates, 2014). Furthermore, this studies chosen university has also decided to use a modified version of this instrument in a campus wide project for none-athletes. Because of these factors, the findings from this study will possibly be able to be used comparatively to other published studies or at the very least in addition to the chosen university's current research project. However, it is important to note that the instrument will be slightly modified and refined in order to more accurately answer the given research questions of this specific research.

The Rankin (2003) adapted survey for this study will still consists of a mix of categorical, Likert-type, and semantic differential matter (Rankin and associates, 2014). The instrument will collect respondent's demographic information, personal experiences, perceptions and suggestions towards LGBT+ issues within the institutions athletic department. The quantitative survey will then be analyzed accordingly to provide further information to the university's administrators on the current athletic department climate and possible needs for future interventions.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In effort to gain insight regarding the current perceptions of student athletes at a Southeastern Division 1 institution surrounding LGBT+ issues, research will be conducted utilizing an adapted version the “assessment of campus climate for lesbian, gay and bisexual, and transgender persons” survey used by Rankin (2003). The primary purpose of this study will be to investigate athlete’s perceptions of their institutions athletic department climate and determine possible relationships between independent variables such as sexuality, gender and nationality.

Participants

Participants for this study will be selected based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria. All participants for this study will be required to (1) be a current member of one of the 17 athletic teams at the Southeastern University during the 2016-2017 season and (2) they must be 18 years of age or older. Within the given criteria, there are a total of 287 possible participants, this will be the population size. Each of those athletes will be given the opportunity to participate, contingent on their coach’s prior approval. This is to ensure that the research will in no way affect team training and will allow investigators to gain email rosters directly from coaches.

In order to maintain the highest possible response rate, it will be essential to ensure confidentiality to all participants. Therefore, those who chose to participate in this research project will remain anonymous. Because of the inherent sensitivity of some of the subject matter involved in this research project, it will be extremely important to stress this point to all possible participants. Furthermore, a mix of convenience sampling

and snowball sampling will be used in effort to maximize response rates. All coaches will be sent an email outlining the procedures and importance of this study. If the coaches show interest and support in the project they may pass on the information to their athletes themselves or, if they prefer, have the primary investigator (PI) contact their athletes with a similar email to the one that they initially received. However, due to the fact that athletes from different sports naturally interact on college campuses, it is possible that athletes may be informed about the study without having received an email from either their coach or the PI. These athletes may opt to partake in the research project as well and will be given the same guidelines and information as the participants who were initially contacted by their coaches or PI's.

Instrumentation

The survey questions that will be administered for this research project will be specifically based on the work of Rankin (2003). After careful review of the survey, questions were modified in order to more appropriately assess the climate of the Southeastern University's athletic department, as well as be more contextually suitable for the population (student-athletes) in question. The final draft of the survey will be further vetted and approved by both the thesis committee and IRB to ensure validity has not been lost. Upon approval, the final copy that will be administered will consist of 15 total questions. These questions will further be divided into two separate sections.

The first section, Demographics, consist of five questions in order to obtain information regarding participants birth ex, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, citizenship and religious associations. These questions serve both a general purpose, such as obtaining

basic information on the participant's background, as well as establishing specific variables that will be used to analyze the data (sexuality, gender and nationality). All questions will be multiple choice type questions and some will also include an option to specify a variable that may not have been presented (the "other" option). In doing so, this section will help align the survey with the latter part of the first of the three main features of climate research recommend by Peterson and Spencer which states common participants views must allow for comparison across groups. These five specific questions will allow us to establish the groups in order to complete the necessary comparisons.

Section 2 of the survey will be used to obtain information regarding participant's personal perceptions and will be called "Perception of Athletic Department Climate Regarding LGBT+ issues". This section will be helpful to establish player's current attitudes and beliefs regarding their athletic department. This section is composed of 10 total questions, ranging from multiple choice, liker-type scales and open ended questions. Because of this, the information obtained through this sections will completely be in line with the 3 recommended features of climate study, previously established. For instance, question 14 (as shown in Table 4) will use a 5 point scale to determine participants' current beliefs about their athletic department climate across several variables (friendly vs hostile; improving vs regressing; etc.). The results of this question easily represent Peterson and Spencer's first feature as "participant's views of a wide array of organizational phenomena" will be obtained and will later be analyzed and compared across groups. All questions most closely related to Peterson and Spencer's first climate feature will be considered a part of subcategory 1 and can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1.
Demographic questions

Question	Response options
1. What is your birth sex?	Male Female
2. What is your race/ Ethnicity?	White Black or African American American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Other (please specify): _____
3. Which term best describes your sexual identity?	Asexual Bisexual Gay/ Lesbian Questioning Other (please specify) _____
4. What is your citizenship Status?	U.S citizen Dual citizenship Permanent resident (immigrant) Permanent resident (refugee) International (F-1, J-1, H, A, or G visas) Other (please Specify) _____
5. Are you religious?	No Yes (please specify) _____

The remaining two features “Focus on current patterns of belief and behaviors” and “it often has ephemeral or malleable character”. Both of these feature will also be addressed by several questions. In fact, question 8 (as shown in Table 5) asks participants to indicate their personal level of agreement with a multitude of scenarios depicted across various levels of the athletic department, from players all the way to administrative staff. Whereas, question 9 (as shown in Table 5) specifically asks participants if they have

witnessed different harassment scenarios within the past year. Both of these help form subcategory 2 of the survey, which is associated with questions most directly tied to Peterson & Spencer's second climate feature.

Table 2.

Subcategory 1 Questions

Ranked Items	Responses
6. Overall, how comfortable are you with the climate in your athletic department?	
	Very comfortable
	Comfortable
	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
	Uncomfortable
	Very uncomfortable
11. Related to real or perceived sexual identity, use the following scale to rank how safe the following locations are for LGBT+ members:	
Student-athlete enhancement center	1- These spaces do not feel safe because I, or someone I know experienced harassment or maltreatment there
Locker room	
Hall of Fame	
Athletic department offices	
Ticket sales offices	2- These spaces do not feel safe, but nothing has happened to me or anyone I know there
Faith-based organizations (FCA)	
Playing Field/ court	
Athletic Training Room	3- These spaces feel safe, but a negative incident did occur
Weight room	
Coaches office	4- Very Safe
Team bus/ Plane	5- Not applicable as I do not spend much time at this location
Team hotel	
14. Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions:	
Hostile - Friendly	1= very (negative dimension)
Indifferent - concerned	2= somewhat (negative dimension)
uncooperative - Cooperative	3= neither (negative dimension) nor (positive dimension)
Regressing - Improving	4= somewhat (positive dimension)
Not welcoming - Welcoming	5= very (positive dimension)
Disrespectful - Respectful	
Negative for people who do not identify as heterosexual - positive for people who do not identify as heterosexual	

Table 3
Subcategory 2 Questions

Ranked items	Responses
8. Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements:	
I feel valued by my coaches on the field/ court	Strongly Agree
I feel valued by my teammates on the field/ court	Agree
I think faculty are genuinely concerned with my welfare	Neither Agree nor Disagree
I think my teammates are genuinely concerned with my welfare	Disagree
I think my team staff is genuinely concerned with my welfare	Strongly Disagree
I think athletic administrators are genuinely concerned with my welfare	Don't know
I think my coaches pre-judge my abilities based on my identity/ background	
I perceive tensions in the locker room discussions regarding LGBT+ issues	
I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ issues and topics	
9. Within the past year how often have you observed the following within your athletic department?	
Men who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality	Never
	1-2 times
women who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality	3-5 times
	6-9 times
	More than 10 times
12. Has the athletic staff used derogatory words such as "fag", "pussy", "homo", or "dyke" when referring to a lesbian, gay man or bisexual woman or man?	
	Yes
	No
13. Select the option that best applies:	
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination	Strongly Agree
	Agree
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Harassment	Disagree
	Strongly Disagree
	Don't know

Finally, the last question of the survey will serve as an important component of the third feature identified by Peterson and Spencer. As they stated climate is short-lived and flexible, or better put, climate is continuously changing. Therefore question 15

provides participants an opportunity to evaluate the way in which the athletic department currently handles LGBT+ issues as well as allow them the opportunity to include their own suggestions to improve the climate. By using a short answer question stating: “Provide one suggestion that you would recommend to your athletic department do in order to improve its climate concerning LGBT+ issues” participants have the opportunity to possibly help the athletic department climate change for the better. It is also important to note that questions 7 and 10 both are short answer questions which simply allow participants the opportunity to elaborate on the previous question they answered. These questions and responses will be further discussed in Chapter V.

In doing so, this survey will allow respondents the opportunity to provide valuable information about their personal perceptions of the athletic departments climate for LGBT+ issues within their university, as well as offer insight to their own personal experiences and opinions/concerns of their institutions current actions regarding LGBT+ issues. Furthermore, by focusing the instrument questions to adhere to the three main features of climate research, it is evident that the survey aligns with our previously established definition of climate. While some questions will provide more specific feedback than others, all of the questions will still help to establish a basis for the current perceptions of the athletic department’s climate. The full survey will be made available on-line and responses will be collected anonymously before being further organized and analyzed using Chi-Square tests.

Procedures

Upon IRB approval, the Head coaches of each athletic sporting team of the Southeastern University will be contacted in order to assess their team's availability for participation within this research. These coaches will be administered letters (see Appendix B) in order to obtain permission to distribute the sport adapted version (Appendix A) of the instrument and demographic questionnaire to their teams. If granted permission (both from IRB and coaches) the PI will be granted access to team's current roster and email list.

Student athletes will then receive an email (Appendix C) to notify them about their requested participation within the research project. This email will include a brief description of the research topic and purpose, a description of the survey (number of questions and question type), a statement ensuring their confidentiality and the measures being used to maintain their privacy, additional information on the intended use of the researches results and finally a link in order to access the online survey. If the athlete choses to use the link provided, consent will then be attained as a precursor to the survey (Appendix D), however no identifying information (name, student ID number, etc.) will be collected. Following the consent page, is further detailed information regarding the specific directions for the survey.

Athletes will also be given a second option to take the survey in person by contacting the Primary Investigator (PI) by email. Based on availability, athletes will be able to take a paper version of the exact same survey that was made available to them online. Their consent (Appendix E) will be given prior to taking the survey and both the

consent form and survey will be placed in an envelope by the athlete themselves before directly submitting it the envelope to the PI. This precaution is to further ensure the athletes anonymity.

All paper survey data will then be collected, organized and entered into SPSS and password protected. Data will then further be organized in order to facilitate the Analysis process. All data and forms will be stored in the Faculty Advisor's (Dr. Joey Gray) office (room 203 AMG) where it will remained locked and safely stored. Finally, all data will be input into Qualtrics and Chi Square statistical tests will be performed to test null hypotheses.

Data Analysis

In order to properly answer the research question: "What are student-athletes perceptions regarding the current athletic department climate concerning LGBT+ issues?" all of the data will be collected and analyzed from the anonymous surveys. Specifically, the data collected for this research will be used to test the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes sexual-orientation and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues
2. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes gender and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues
3. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes Nationality and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues

As aforementioned, descriptive statistics will be calculated based on the information collected during the demographic portion of the survey. A Chi-square analysis (with a level of significance of less than .05) will then be used to investigate possible relationships between the three independent variables identified by the null hypotheses and the student-athletes' self-expressed attitudes related to the athletic department climate surrounding LGBT+ issues. As this study aims to test the relationship between categorical variables the Chi Square analysis will be the most appropriate method of analyzing the data. Moreover, this study's the null hypotheses state that the categorical variables of the given population will be independent; this type of question is precisely what a Chi square test is used to investigate (Statistic Solutions, 2017).

Projected Timeline

Table 4
Projected Timeline

Task to be Completed	Time Frame
Write Draft Proposal	Feb 2017- April 17 th
Complete Presentation	April 19 th 2017
Propose Thesis	April 26 th , 2017
Submit IRB	By May 1 st
Set up online survey	May 2017
Solicit subjects	May 2017
Second solicitation of subjects	End of May 2017
Complete Data collection	June 2017
Data Analysis	July 2017
Final write up	August 2017
Defend Thesis	August 2017

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study focused on uncovering the attitudes and perceptions of student-athletes from a Southeastern Division I University regarding LGBT+ climate within their athletic department. Specifically, this study aims to determine if there is a significant relationship that exists among independent variables (sexual-orientation, gender and nationality) and student-athletes self-expressed attitudes and perceptions of their athletic department LGBT+ climate. The following data has been collected through anonymous surveys, and can assist researchers in future investigations of the relationship between LGBT+ issues and athletic department climates on a university campus. The results can also serve as a useful tool for prospective universities to gain insight on possible adjustments or improvements that could be implemented within their athletic department or on campus.

Description of Sample

From the selected Southeastern University, 99 of the 287 male and female student-athletes of varying sports, from the 2016-2017 season participated in this study; giving this research a response rate of 34.49%. Due to several outlying factors, (i.e. coaches unwillingness to allow athletes to participate, time conflicts/ or constraints) not every student-athlete participated. The 99 participants were all members of varying athletic teams; however, the degree to which each specific sport is represented is unknown. Female student-athletes had a much higher response rate than their male student-athletes counterparts. Of the 99 participants, only 38 were male student-athletes (38.38%) while a total of 61 participants were female student athletes (61.62%). Because of this, gender groups were reversely represented in the sample. The affects that this may

have had on the final results will be further elaborated on and explored in the following chapter.

As this study aims to specifically explore and compare contrasting perceptions among specific sub-group populations within the student-athlete body; other noteworthy demographics are as follows. Sexual orientation with participants self-identified as being “heterosexual” at a rate of approximately 76% (74 total student-athletes), participants identified as a member of the LGBT+ community just over 23% (23 student-athletes) and 2 student-athletes chose not to answer this question at all. Furthermore, a large portion of student-athlete participants were identified as being citizens of the United States of America (80%), while a much smaller number of respondents revealed that they were attending the University on an international student visa (F-1, J-1, H, A or G) (20%). Additionally, the survey revealed that 71.43% of all 99 student-athlete respondents considered themselves as being religious and 75% of total participants identified themselves as White.

When further analyzing the breakdown of all the demographics gathered, it is fair to conclude that the participant pool was slightly homogenous. Large majorities of participants were primarily student-athletes that identify as heterosexual (+75%), born and raised in the USA (+75%), White (75%) and self-identified as religious (+71%). These results, including all demographic information, are provided in Table 5.

Table 5.
Description of Sample

Characteristic	subgroup	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Sex	Male	38	38.38%
	Female	61	61.62%
Sexual identity	Heterosexual	74	76.29%
	LGBT+	23	23.71%
Citizenship	U.S citizen	79	79.80%
	International (F-1, J-1, H, A or G visas)	20	20.20%
Religious	Yes	70	71.43%
	No	28	28.57%
Ethnicity	White	75	75%
	African American	14	14%
	Other	10	10%

Note: The total *n* for each selected demographic characteristic may differ due to missing data.

Additional Descriptive Statistics

After further examining the demographic breakdown of the participants, the data collected during the second section of the survey “Perceptions of Athletic Department Climate Regarding LGBT+ issues” (an adapted version of the “Assessment of Campus Climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and transgender persons” created by Rankin, 2003) can now be analyzed. Qualtrics “Free Account” Reports, and Data & Analysis programs was used to analyze the data. This section of the survey consisted of 10 questions which were administered with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of student-athletes personal attitudes and perceptions of the LGBT+ climate in their athletic department. These specific questions were chosen in order to properly align the surveys purpose with Hart Fallabaum (2008) previously identified three essential characteristics of campus climate, originally established by Peterson and Spencer (1990). Using Likert-type scales, multiple choice questions and a few open ended questions, this section of the survey

explored student-athletes “views of a wide array of organizational phenomena”, their “current patterns of beliefs and behaviors” as well as provided them with an opportunity to generate valuable “feedback”, comments and concerns specifically with their athletic department’s climate concerning LGBT+ issues (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). The following section will discuss survey questions, scores and analysis of the data.

As previously mentioned, section 2 of the survey is comprised of 10 total questions. Within these questions, a total of six questions (questions 6, 8, 11, 12, 13 & 14) as seen in Chapter 3, prompts student-athletes with varying Likert-type scales. These questions are primarily composed of positive statements such as “I feel valued by my teammates on the field/ court” and are scored so that positive responses such “very comfortable” or “strongly agree” would be valued as lower score than a negative response such as “very uncomfortable” or “strongly disagree”, which would therefore be attributed to higher scoring. However, this is not the case for two statements within question 8, which are considered negative statements (“I think my coaches prejudice my abilities based on my identity/ background”; “I perceive tensions in the locker room discussions regarding LGBT+ issues”).

Reverse scoring was used to score these statements so the data could be analyzed and represented on the same scale. Furthermore, question 12, although not a Likert-type scale, was still scored following the same regulations as the previously explained questions. Therefore, all six questions can be analyzed together. A higher mean indicates more negative attitudes, perceptions and experiences with the athletic department climate and LGBT+ issues; whereas a lower mean score indicates a more positive attitude,

experiences and perception of the athletics department climate and LGBT+ issues.

Midrange scores ($M= 2.5 - 3.5$) indicate athletes are perceive the climate as neither positive nor negative. Specific results for all the student-athletes combined scores regardless of sexuality, nationality and gender can be seen in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6.
Subcategory One *M* Scores

Questions/ Ranked items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall, how comfortable are you with the climate in your athletic department?	1.95	0.96
How safe is the student-athlete enhancement center for LGBT+ members	1.84	0.88
How safe is the Locker room for LGBT+ members	2.08	0.98
How safe is the Hall of Fame for LGBT+ members	1.22	1.11
How safe are the Athletic Department offices for LGBT+ members	1.51	1.08
How safe are the Ticket Sale offices for LGBT+ members	0.99	1.14
How safe are the Faith-based organizations (FCA) for LGBT+ members	1.39	1.38
How safe is the playing field/court for LGBT+ members	2.01	0.86
How safe is the Athletic Training Room for LGBT+ members	2.05	0.83
How safe is the Weight Room for LGBT+ members	2.14	0.93
How safe are the Coaches offices for LGBT+ members	2.01	0.93
How safe is the Team bus/ plane for LGBT+ members	2.05	0.92
How safe is the team Hotel for LGBT+ members	2.06	0.92
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Hostile - Friendly	2.04	0.92
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Indifferent - Concerned	2.44	0.88
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Uncooperative - Cooperative	2.36	0.85
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Regressing - Improving	2.47	0.87
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Not welcoming - Welcoming	2.09	0.91
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: disrespectful - Respectful	2.24	0.98
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Negative for people who do not identify as heterosexual - positive for people who do not identify as heterosexual	2.5	0.87

Table 7.
Subcategory Two *M* Scores

Questions/ Ranked items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I feel valued by my coaches on the field/court	2.39	1.34
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I feel valued by my teammates on the field/court	1.75	0.78
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I think faculty are genuinely concerned with my welfare	2.39	1.02
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I think my teammates are genuinely concerned with my welfare	1.90	0.75
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I think my team staff is genuinely concerned with my welfare	2.10	0.87
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I think athletic administrators are genuinely concerned with my welfare	2.72	1.07
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I think my coaches pre-judge my abilities based on my identity/ background	2.61	*1.26
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I perceive tensions in the locker room discussions regarding LGBT+ issues	2.32	*1.09
Please indicate your level of agreement to the following: I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ issues and Topics	3.00	0.79
Within the past year how often have you observed Men who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality within your athletic department	1.13	0.54
Within the past year how often have you observed Woman who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality within your athletic department	1.38	0.86
Has the athletic staff used derogatory words such as “fag”, “pussy”, or “homo”, or “dyke” when referring to a lesbian, gay man or bisexual man or woman?	1.12	0.33
Select the option that best applies: The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination	0.81	1.10
Select the option that best applies: The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Harassment	0.86	1.12

Overall, the data showed athletes reporting a positive perception of their athletic department both in general and concerning LGBT+ issues throughout the questionnaire. Nearly 85% of male student-athletes indicated they were comfortable or very comfortable with the climate of their athletic department and over 70% of female athletes indicated

they felt the same. However, none of the questions or items presented had a high mean score; three of the items within question 8 fell within the medium mean range (2.5 - 3.5). The most noteworthy and highest mean score of these statements directly attests to the athletic department climate and LGBT+ issues, stating “I believe the athletic department climate encourages free & open discussion of LGBT+ issues/ topics” ($M= 3.00$). The other two medium range means “I think administrators are genuinely concerned with my welfare” ($M= 2.72$) & “I think my coaches prejudge my abilities based on my identity/ background” ($M= 2.61$) are both statements that are more directly correlated with the general climate of the athletic department rather than the climate concerning LGBT+ issues.

Inferential Statistics

The Qualtrics Data and Analysis included on their website (qualtrics.com) was used to perform the appropriate Chi-square tests in order to analyze results. More specifically, Chi-square tests were used to compare means and cross-tabulate variables for the given hypotheses. An alpha level of .05 was used to assess null hypotheses. If the significance level is $p < 0.05$ then the relationship between the two variables will be considered significant. The research from this study tested the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes sexual-orientation and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues
2. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes gender and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues

3. There is no significant relationship between student-athletes Nationality and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues

For the first hypothesis, responses for each question were separated into two categories: “heterosexual student-athlete” and “LGBT+ student-athlete”. Following the Chi-square tests, with sexual-orientation as the independent variable, the null hypothesis was rejected for 6 items. Therefore, the hypothesis, that there is a significant relationship between sexual-orientation and student-athletes perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues was accepted for these 6 questions, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8.
Hypothesis One Chi-Square results

Questions	X^2	DF	Sig.
Overall how comfortable are you with the climate of your athletic department?	18.8	4	0.00086
I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ topic	12.52	4	0.01
Within the past year how often have you observed within the athletic department gay women harassed due to their sexuality	9.81	4	0.04
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination”	13.24	4	0.01
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Harassment	11.79	4	0.02
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Indifferent – Concerned	10.75	4	0.03

These survey questions show a significant difference between scores of both groups. Further evaluation of mean scores revealed that overall, heterosexual athletes and LGBT+ athletes had a generally positive perception of athletic department climate, scoring only within the mid-range or lower. That being said, based on chi-square results we can

conclude that LGBT+ student athletes are less comfortable with the climate of their athletic department when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Whereas, heterosexual student-athletes scored lower ($M= 1.81$) than the group of self-identified LGBT+ student-athletes ($M= 2.39$). LGBT+ student athletes also were more likely to disagree with the statement “I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ topics”, scoring much higher ($M =3.39$) than heterosexual student-athletes ($M= 2.85$).

LGBT+ student-athletes were also somewhat more likely to have witnessed gay women harassed due to their sexuality and believe that the athletic department does not positively respond to incidents of LGBT+ harassment in a positive manor, comparatively to the experiences and beliefs of the heterosexual student-athlete participants. LGBT+ student athletes were also more likely to view the overall climate of the athletic department as “indifferent”, whereas, heterosexual student-athletes perceived the athletic department as more “concerned”. That being said, heterosexual student-athletes were more likely than LGBT+ student-athletes to disagree with the statement “The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination”. The Mean scores for all of these items a represented in table 9.

Table 9.
Significant Sexual-orientation *M* Scores

Question	Heterosexual (<i>M</i>)	LGBT+ (<i>M</i>)
Overall how comfortable are you with the climate of your athletic department?	1.81	2.39
I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ topics	2.85	3.39

Table 9. Continued

Within the past year how often have you observed within the athletic department gay women harassed due to their sexuality	1.20	1.87
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination”	.88	.65
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Harassment	.86	.87
Please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: Indifferent – Concerned	2.26	2.86

Similar Chi-square tests were run to explore hypothesis 2. Results showed less significant variations across sub-groups when gender was the independent variable, however, some important differences should be noted. Specifically, the null hypothesis was rejected for 3 separate items on the survey; revealing that there is a significant relationship between gender and student-athletes perceptions of the LGBT+ climate of their athletic department. These results can be observed in the following table.

Table 10.
Hypothesis Two Chi-Square Results

Question	X^2	DF	Sig.
I feel valued by my coaches on the field/ court	9.27	4	0.05
How safe is the athletic training room for LGBT+ members	10.0	4	0.04
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination”	11.6	4	0.02

Correspondingly, Table 11. illustrates the following observations. First, female student-athletes ($M=2.5$) are less likely to feel valued by their coaches than male student-athletes ($M= 1.8$). Second, male student-athletes ($M= 2.2$) were the only ones to identify the athletic training room as more “unsafe” for LGBT+ members and were less likely to

believe that the athletic department would positively respond to LGBT+ discrimination ($M= 1.98$). However, mean scores revealed that in general, female athletes had a more negative overall outlook on certain aspects of the athletic department's climate when compared to male-student athlete's perceptions.

Table 11.
Significant Gender M Scores

Question	Female (M)	Male (M)
I feel valued by my coaches on the field/ court	2.5	1.8
How safe is the athletic training room for LGBT+ members	1.98	2.2
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination"	0.64	1.2

Lastly, there were no significant scores between USA student-athletes and international Student-athletes. Because p-values were all above .05 we fail to reject the null hypotheses for all items. This result indicates that there is most likely no difference at all in perceptions of athletic department climate and LGBT+ issues. However, it should be noted that for all of the independent variables, especially Nationality/ citizenship, there is a possibility for further potential significant scores. Unfortunately, the expected cell counts at times were less than five which most likely impacted results. This issue will be further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study focused on the perceptions of student-athletes from a Southeastern Division I University regarding LGBT+ climate within their athletic department. More specifically, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between several independent variables (sexual-orientation, gender and citizenship) and student-athletes attitudes and perceptions. Only a handful of studies to date have addressed LGBT+ climate in regards to student-athletes attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, this chapter will interpret and discuss the findings of this study and their significance as it pertains to not only the athletic department climate overall, but will also look to examine if there was any existing relationships between various independent variables (sexuality, gender and citizenship) and athletes expressed perceptions of their university's athletic department. All of the data for this study was collected using an adapted version of Rankin (2003) survey "Assessment of Campus Climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons instrument" along with a specific set of demographic questions compiled for this study. Results from both the survey and demographic questions were used for data interpretation; the results substantiate existing research, while further adding to climate literature by exploring new variables. This section also contains limitations faced during research and outline possible recommendations for future studies and athletic department improvements.

Descriptive Statistics

The first portion of the survey administered to student-athletes was composed of a sample of demographic questions which allowed researchers to better assess why student athletes may have had certain attitudes or perceptions of their athletic department climate. These demographic questions asked student-athletes to state their gender, race/ ethnicity, sexual identity, citizenship and religious beliefs.

Of the 287 current athletes at the division I university, a total of 99 student-athletes completed surveys (34.49%). The majority of the student-athletes that participated in the survey identified themselves as heterosexual (76%), white (75%), and USA citizens (80%). The overall majority also considered themselves to be religious (70%); mainly practicing various forms of Christianity. Male and female student athletes were more equally represented, however, female athletes (61%) still responded at a higher rate than male athletes (38%). While this may be seen as a misrepresentation of the actual student-athlete population at the university (more male student-athletes than females student-athletes); it may be a direct correlation to the higher than expected number of LGBT+ student-athletes who completed the survey. For instance, Rankin and Merson (2012) had only 5% other participants identify as LGBQ whereas nearly 40% of participants from this study identified themselves as LGBT+. However, it is important to note that this study also had a higher response rate from female athletes cooperative to male athletes whereas Rankin and Merson (2012) found opposite results. This is important to note, because female athlete's were the only participants in this study to identify as LGBT+ . This however was no a surprise as previous research trends have

continued to show higher proportions of female student-athletes identifying as LGBT+ compared to male athletes (Campus Pride, 2010).

Overall, results indicated no significantly negative mean scores. The majority of Mean results fell within the mid-range or low end of the scale. This indicates that student athletes perceptions of their athletic department in regard to LGBT+ climate is mostly positive and somewhat neutral. Results were similar across all subgroups as well, with no high scores for any of the survey items. However, there is significant differences among the subgroups according to the Chi-square tests results. This was discovered by organizing the collected data based on categorical variables in order to create cross-tabulation tables. In doing so, Chi-square statistical tests were performed (significance level of .05) to assess whether or not an association existed between the two variables (e.g. men and women). Note however, that chi-square approximations may be inaccurate as some of the expected frequencies were less than 5.

Inferential Statistics

The first set of variables examined were based on athlete's sexual identity, which was provided during the demographic portion of the survey. Athletes originally had several options to identify themselves (gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, asexual or straight). Athletes were then grouped into either heterosexual or LGBT+ based on the information they provided in order to properly determine and assess the first null hypotheses which states:

There is no significant relationship between student-athletes sexual-orientation and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues.

The null hypothesis was rejected for 6 items, indicating that there is a significant relationship between sexual-orientation and student-athletes perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues. In fact, data revealed that LGBT+ athletes are less comfortable with the climate of their athletic department than their heterosexual peers, $X^2 (4, N= 81) = 18.80, p < .001$. This is similar to the findings of Rankin and Merson (2012). Within their 2012 LGBTQ National College Athlete Report, they claimed that not only do “LGBQ student-athletes generally experienced a more negative climate than their heterosexual peers” but within their study “LGBQ student-athletes reported lower scores on four climate variables: Perceptions of Climate, Perceptions of Respect, Athletic Department Addresses Discrimination, and Diversity Leadership from Athletic Personnel”. This to align with similar results found within the Southeastern University. For instance:

1. LGBT+ student-athletes are less likely to believe that the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ topics, $X^2 (4, N= 77) = 12.52, p= 0.01$.
2. LGBT+ student athletes have also witnessed women who are not heterosexual being harassed due to their sexuality at a more frequent rate then their heterosexual peers, $X^2 (4, N=79) =9.81, p= 0.04$.
3. LGBT+ students tend to report higher rates of discrimination or harassment (Campus Pride, 2012). Finally, also in line with current literature the
4. LGBT+ student athletes also believed their athletic department climate to be less “concerned”, $X^2 (4, N=77) = 10.75, p= 0.03$.

These results support past and current literature (Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Merson, 2012; Rankin et al, 2011) that suggest LGBT+ members experience a more negative climate than their heterosexual peers.

That being said, heterosexual student athletes actually perceived their athletic department as responding to incidents of LGBT+ discrimination in a negative fashion, $\chi^2(4, N= 80) = 13.24, p= 0.01$. Assumptions being that athletes clearly are able to understand that discrimination based on sexuality is not only a punishable offense but should be taken seriously. This result may be indicative of subsiding homophobic trends within college athletics. Interestingly, past literature supports the notion that sexual prejudice specifically among male athletes is declining (Southall et al., 2009).

The second set of variables used to assess the data were student athlete's gender. Specifically, this study aimed to determine whether or not there is significant relationship between student-athletes gender and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues. Throughout literature, gender has been identified as constant predictor of LGBT+ perception and attitude outcomes; through the use of chi-square tests, this study supports those findings as well. For 3 separate survey items the null hypothesis "there is no significant relationship between student-athletes gender and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues" is rejected, as significant relationships were identified.

As previously discussed female student-athletes were less likely to feel valued by their coaches, $\chi^2(4, N= 83) = 9.27, p= .05$. This could in part be explained due to the fact that female athletes in general tend to associate less with their "athletic" identities and tend to experience college athletics very differently than male athletes (Rubin &

Moses, 2016). Furthermore, behavioral and leadership expectations of coaches vary by gender (Fehr, 2017). Coaches who are unable to adhere to the different needs of athletes risk affecting overall coaching satisfaction (Fehr, 2017) and thus negatively impacting athlete's attitudes and perceptions.

Interestingly, literature has repeatedly identified "male athletic culture [as] significantly more homophobic than the female athletic culture" (Southall et al., 2009; p.74), however the male student-athletes of this study believed that the athletic department did not respond positively to LGBT+ discrimination, more so than the beliefs of female student-athletes. This may be an early sign that male student athletes are becoming increasingly accepting of different sexual orientations (Southall et al., 2009).

Finally, male student-athletes were also found to believe that the athletic training room was not a safe space for LGBT+ members, $\chi^2 (4, N=83) = 10.00, p=.04$ and. This is an interesting outcome, especially considering it was the only location identified as an unsafe space. A study done by Ensign, Yiamouyiannis, White, and Ridpathhas (2011) stated that the majority of athletic trainers held positive attitudes towards LGBT+ student-athletes; they also noted that 15% of total athletic trainer participants held negative views of LGBT+ student-athletes. While 15% generally isn't considered a high percentage; in the case of discrimination and negative attitudes, this certainly is way too high. However, the majority of participants in this study were most likely not privy to this information, therefore it would have had little causation effect. It is however possible that while current literature describes male athletes as generally more homophobic, it also suggests that female athletes will generally have a more positive perception of their

climate. Therefore, these findings do in fact remain consistent with current research tendencies.

Lastly, Student-athletes were categorized as either US citizen or international students. Overall, the data collected between these subgroups showed no significant differences between the perceptions of international and US citizen athletes. Therefore we must accept the null; there is no significant relationship between student-athletes Nationality and their perceptions of athletic department climate regarding LGBT+ issues. However, it should be noted that very few student-athletes participated in this study. This is most likely due to distance barriers and/ or possible language barriers as well. Further exploration into this variable is needed in order to properly form a well-rounded opinion. In fact, due to the significantly smaller sample size of international student-athletes it is possible to assume that given a greater number of respondents, significant results may have occurred. Future studies should consider including this as a variable.

Future Recommendations

The main objective of climate research is to serve as a basis for institutional change. While data revealed that there is a general consensus among the university's student-athletes that the athletic department climate concerning LGBT+ issues is positive (84% of males and 71% of females); there were still several items of concern within the athletic department climate. Several opportunities exist to correct and address all issues. For instance, a possible opportunity would be for the athletic department to consider various avenues in which their athletic program could offer a visible and supportive presence within the LGBT+ community. Events such as LGBT pride, National Coming

Out Day and/ or even rainbow colored gear and ribbons are all different ways in which the athletic department can ensure their presence is known and that they foster an accepting and diverse community. In doing so, the athletic department would potentially become an ally and example for not only their own student-athletes and staff, but stand to inspire university campus climate as a whole and possibly the surrounding community as well. Other ways to address LGBT+ concerns would be to simply increase awareness within the athletic program. Research has shown that individuals are more accepting and tolerant when they are familiar with one or more LGBT+ people (Morales, 2009; Ensign et al., 2011). Using different LGBT+ guest speakers would be another way to help familiarize athletes with LGBT+ members.

Finally, in regard to future research, it is evident that further exploration of independent variables needs to be addressed. There is a laundry list of variables that can affect the way in which a student athlete perceives their climate regarding LGBT+ issues. For example, the number of years the student-athletes has been a member of the team would impact attitudes and beliefs of the athlete. Freshman and transfer students will have spent the least amount of time immersed within the university and athletic department's culture. This could have either a positive or negative impact on of the student-athletes perceptions of their athletic department and LGBT+ issues, especially dependent on team culture and chemistry. Another example is athletic ability and playing time player's athletic ability, playing time and perhaps even scholarship amount could possibly impact their attitudes and perceptions toward not only the athletic department but also teammates and coaching staff as well. Furthermore, past research has observed a relationship between athlete's familiarity and connections with an LGBT+ community

member. . Each one of these variables will have an impact on how student-athletes perceive their athletic department climate and experience their college careers. .

Therefore it is essential to continue analyzing greater sample sizes, and determining a wider array of variables such as age, class, and even playing time would be essential to continue the progression within athletic department LGBT+ research.

Furthermore, obtaining similar data from not only athletes but also from all personal within the given athletic department would allow to see if trends were the same within various levels of hierarchy within the institution.

Evidently, further studies of this kind are essential to track of athletes' responses and trends, in order to continually reevaluate progress. One of the main characteristics of climate is that it is both ephemeral and malleable which means there is a lot of great opportunity to promote positive change. While the NCAA and university both have policies in place to promote inclusiveness it is up to the administrators to become more proactive within their programs and continuously re-examine the effectiveness of their practices. It is vital to not only educate themselves or their staff but all athletes as well. Research has shown that educational programs on this topic can be extremely beneficial when advocating and creating inclusive environments. While the athletic department's climate is currently viewed as positive toward LGBT+ topics, administrators must remember that there is always room for improvement!

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Assessment of Athletic Department Climate for LGBT+ issues

Q0: As a Middle Tennessee State University student-athlete, you are invited to participate in a study regarding athletic department climate for LGBT+ issues. For purposes of this study, LGBT+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual. Participating in this study is voluntary and should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer fifteen questions as part of an online survey. Risk is minimal should you choose to participate in the study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study but your participation will help us to develop cases studies and a workshop about treating LGBT+ issues. Your responses to the online survey will remain confidential. We are not asking for any identifying information and will not document IP addresses. Non-identifiable demographic information will be collected. You are allowed to skip any question that you do not feel like answering. There are no alternatives to participation however, refusal to participate or withdrawing from participation at any time during the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. There is no compensation for participation and MTSU will not provide compensation for study-related injuries. For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU IRB Office at (615) 494-8918.

By selecting “Yes” and clicking "Next," I verify that I have read the above information. I have reviewed and understand the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study. I give my informed and free consent to be a participant in the study by filling out the survey on the following page.

By selecting “No” and clicking “next”, you chose to not participate in the study and will be directed to the end of the survey.

Yes

NO

Demographics:

Q1 What is your birth sex?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q2 What is your race/ Ethnicity?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (please specify) (6) _____

Q3 Which term best describes your sexual identity?

- Asexual (1)
- Bisexual (2)
- Gay/ Lesbian (3)
- Questioning (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) _____

Q4 What is your citizenship Status?

- U.S citizen (1)
- Dual citizenship (2)
- Permanent resident (immigrant) (3)
- Permanent resident (refugee) (4)
- International (F-1, J-1, H, A, or G visas) (5)
- Other (please Specify) (6)

Q5 Are you religious?

- No (1)
- Yes (please specify) (2) _____

Q6 Overall, how comfortable are you with the climate in your athletic department?

- Very comfortable (1)
- Comfortable (2)
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable (3)
- Uncomfortable (4)
- Very uncomfortable (5)

Q7 If you would like to elaborate on your response in question 7, please do so here.

Q8 Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Don't know (0)
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I feel valued
by my
coaches on
the field/ court
(1)

I feel valued
by my
teammates on
the field/ court
(2)

I think faculty
are genuinely
concerned
with my
welfare (3)

I think my
teammates
are genuinely
concerned
with my
welfare (4)

I think my
team staff is
genuinely
concerned
with my
welfare (5)

I think athletic
administrators
are genuinely
concerned
with my
welfare (6)

I think my
coaches pre-
judge my
abilities based
on my identity/
background (7)

<p>I perceive tensions in the locker room discussions regarding LGBT+ issues (8)</p>						
<p>I believe the athletic department climate encourages free and open discussion of LGBT+ issues and topics (9)</p>						

Q9 Within the past year how often have you observed the following within your athletic department?

	Never (1)	1-2 times (2)	3-5 times (3)	6-9 times (4)	more than 10 time (5)
<p>Men who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality (1)</p>					
<p>women who are not heterosexual harassed due to their sexuality (2)</p>					

Q10 If you would like to elaborate on your observations in question 9, please do so in the text box below.

Q11 Related to real or perceived sexual identity, use the following scale to rank how safe the following locations are for LGBT+ members
1- These spaces do not feel safe because I, or someone I know experienced harassment or maltreatment there
2- These spaces do not feel safe, but nothing has happened to me or anyone I know there
3 – These spaces feel safe, but a negative incident did occur
4 – Very Safe
5 – Not applicable as I do not spend much time at this location

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (0)
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Student-athlete enhancement center (1)					
Locker room (2)					
Hall of Fame (3)					
Athletic department offices (4)					
Ticket sales offices (5)					
Faith-based organizations (FCA) (6)					
Playing Field/ court (7)					
Athletic Training Room (8)					
Weight room (9)					
Coaches office (10)					
Team bus/ Plane (11)					
Team hotel (12)					

Q12 Has the athletic staff used derogatory words such as "fag", "pussy", "homo", or "dyke" when referring to a lesbian, gay man or bisexual woman or man?

- Yes (1)
 No (2)

Q13 Select the option that best applies

	Strongly agree (1)	agree (2)	disagree (3)	strongly disagree (4)	don't know (5)
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The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Discrimination (1)					
The athletic department positively responds to incidents of LGBT+ Harassment (2)					

Q14 Using a scale of 1-5, please rate the overall climate of your athletic department on the following dimensions: (Note: As an example, for the first item, "hostile- Friendly", 1= very hostile, 2= somewhat hostile, 3= neither hostile nor friendly, 4= somewhat friendly, 5= very friendly)

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
Hostile - Friendly (1)					
Indifferent - concerned (2)					
uncooperative - Cooperative (3)					
Regressing - Improving (4)					
Not welcoming - Welcoming (5)					
Disrespectful - Respectful (6)					
Negative for people who do not identify as heterosexual - positive for people who do not identify as heterosexual (7)					

Q15 Provide one suggestion that you would recommend to your athletic department do in order to improve its climate concerning LGBT+ issues

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
IN THIS SURVEY**

APPENDIX B: COACHES' CONSENT

Dear Coach,

As I am sure you are aware, an increased openness of LGBT+ members has become more prevalent in today's society. More professional athletes than ever before have stepped out of the closet and onto their respective playing fields; thus creating an open dialogue within sport. However, literature suggests that despite the positive shifts in attitudes toward sexual minorities within society and the workplace, discrimination still exists on US college campuses to date.

While previous research has focused on campus climates of Institutions as a whole regarding LGBT+ issues, there is no research to date on athlete's perceptions of athletic department climates. Athletics is considered to be not only one of the most influential groups on college campuses but also one of the most diverse. Therefore, the purpose of my study will be to assess current athlete's perceptions of their athletic department's climate regarding LGBT+ issues.

With that being said, sexuality is a very personal subject and I understand you may have reservations. However, this research is simply to assess player's perceptions and attitudes about their athletic department's climate using a 15 question survey. No identifying information will be gathered and participants will remain anonymous. Furthermore, the name of the University and sports in which these athletes play will be left out of the research. Results, of course, will be shared with you and your players.

The data will be collected through the "Assessment of Athletic Department Climate for LGBT+ issues" survey and demographic questions. Data collection should take no longer than 10 minutes. If you chose to have your team participate, I ask that you provide an email roster for your team as of 2016-2017 season. Players will receive an email providing them with a link to the online survey. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Kelsie Roberts by phone at (615) 556-8608 or by email at knr3c@mtmail.mtsu.edu. Thank you for your contribution in making Division I college athletics a continued success.

Sincerely,

Kelsie Roberts

APPENDIX C: STUDENT-ATHLETE EMAIL

Dear MTSU athlete,

As I am sure you are aware, an increased openness of LGBT+ members has become more prevalent in today's society. More professional athletes than ever before have stepped out of the closet and onto their respective playing fields; thus creating an open dialogue within sport. However, literature suggests that despite the positive shifts in attitudes toward sexual minorities within society and the workplace, discrimination still exists on US college campuses to date.

While previous research has focused on campus climates of Institutions as a whole regarding LGBT+ issues, there is no research to date on athlete's perceptions of athletic department climates. Athletics is considered to be, not only one of the most influential groups on college campuses but also one of the most diverse. Therefore, the purpose of my study will be to assess current athlete's perceptions of their athletic department's climate regarding LGBT+ issues.

With that being said, sexuality is a very personal subject and I understand you may have reservations. However, this research is simply to assess player's perceptions and attitudes about their athletic department's climate using a 15 question survey. No identifying information will be gathered and participants will remain anonymous. Furthermore, the name of the University and sports in which you play will be left out of the research. Results, of course, will be shared with you.

The data will be collected through the "Assessment of Athletic Department Climate for LGBT+ issues" survey and demographic questions. Data collection should take no longer than 10 minutes. If you chose to participate, you may either follow this link:

https://qtrial2017q2az1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2tWjfujBTIWzoNf

Or if you prefer you may contact me and take the survey in person. Regardless, if you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Kelsie Roberts by phone at (615) 556-8608 or by email at knr3c@mtmail.mtsu.edu. Thank you for your contribution in making Division I college athletics a continued success.

Sincerely,

Kelsie Roberts

APPENDIX D: ONLINE CONSENT MESSAGE

Assessment of Athletic Department Climate for LGBT+ issues

Q0: As a Middle Tennessee State University student-athlete, you are invited to participate in a study regarding athletic department climate for LGBT+ issues. For purposes of this study, LGBT+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual. Participating in this study is voluntary and should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer fifteen questions as part of an online survey. Risk is minimal should you choose to participate in the study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study but your participation will help us to develop cases studies and a workshop about treating LGBT+ issues. Your responses to the online survey will remain confidential. We are not asking for any identifying information and will not document IP addresses. Non-identifiable demographic information will be collected. You are allowed to skip any question that you do not feel like answering. There are no alternatives to participation however, refusal to participate or withdrawing from participation at any time during the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. There is no compensation for participation and MTSU will not provide compensation for study-related injuries. For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU IRB Office at (615) 494-8918.

By selecting “Yes” and clicking "Next," I verify that I have read the above information. I have reviewed and understand the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study. I give my informed and free consent to be a participant in the study by filling out the survey on the following page.

By selecting “No” and clicking “next”, you chose to not participate in the study and will be directed to the end of the survey.

APPENDIX E: PAPER CONSENT

As a Middle Tennessee State University student-athlete, you are invited to participate in a study regarding athletic department climate for LGBT+issues. For purposes of this study, LGBT+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual. Participating in this study is voluntary and should you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer fifteen questions as part of an online survey. Risk is minimal should you choose to participate in the study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study but your participation will help us to develop cases studies and a workshop about treating LGBT+ issues.

Your responses to the online survey will remain confidential. We are not asking for any identifying information and will not document IP addresses. Non-identifiable demographic information will be collected. You are allowed to skip any question that you do not feel like answering. There are no alternatives to participation however, refusal to participate or withdrawing from participation at any time during the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. There is no compensation for participation and MTSU will not provide compensation for study-related injuries. For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU IRB Office at (615) 494-8918.

By checking “I Accept” I verify that I have read the above information. I have reviewed and understand the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study. I give my informed and free consent to be a participant in the study by filling out the survey on the following page.

By checking “I Do Not Accept” you have decided not to participate in the study and may place your survey in the envelope and return it to the administrator.

- I Accept
 I Do Not Accept

APPENDIX F: IRB CONSENT FORMS

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129

**IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE**

Wednesday, June 07, 2017

Investigator(s): Kelsie Roberts, Dr. Helen (Joey) Gray, Dr. Nicky (I-Chun) Wu, Tara Prairie
 Investigator(s) Email(s): Knr3c@mtmail.mtsu.edu, Joey.Gray@mtsu.edu, Nicky.Wu@mtsu.edu, Tprairie@mtmail.mtsu.edu
 Department: Health and Human Performance
 Study Title: An Athletic Department Climate Assessment regarding LGBT+ issues of a south-eastern NCAA Division I University
 Protocol ID: 17-1254

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (2) *Educational Tests*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	EXEMPT from further IRB review***	
Date of expiration	NOT APPLICABLE	
Participant Size	293 [TWO HUNDRED NINETY-THREE]	
Participant Pool	Adults	
Mandatory Restrictions	Identifiable information may not be collected or stored with participant responses Participants must be 18+ Informed consent must be collected from all participants prior to participation	
Additional Restrictions	None at this time	
Comments	None at this time	
Amendments	Date	Post-Approval Amendments
		None at this time

***This exemption determination only allows above defined protocol from further IRB review such as continuing review. However, the following post-approval requirements still apply:

- Addition/removal of subject population should not be implemented without IRB approval
- Change in investigators must be notified and approved
- Modifications to procedures must be clearly articulated in an addendum request and the proposed changes must not be incorporated without an approval

IRBN007

Version 1.2

Revision Date 03.08.2016

- Be advised that the proposed change must comply within the requirements for exemption
- Changes to the research location must be approved – appropriate permission letter(s) from external institutions must accompany the addendum request form
- Changes to funding source must be notified via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- The exemption does not expire as long as the protocol is in good standing
- Project completion must be reported via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- Research-related injuries to the participants and other events must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to make the following types of changes to this protocol without the need to report to the Office of Compliance, as long as the proposed changes do not result in the cancellation of the protocols eligibility for exemption:

- Editorial and minor administrative revisions to the consent form or other study documents
- Increasing/decreasing the participant size

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all applicable post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website](#). Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, current & past investigator information, training certificates, survey instruments and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on exempt procedures can be found [here](#).