

THE EXPERIENCES OF FULLY DISCLOSED COLLEGIATE STUDENT-
ATHLETES WHO IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,
OR TRANSGENDER:
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

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I dedicate this paper to my partner and best friend, Justin, and to my Pond. Justin, you have continuously supported my dream to make a lasting impact with those who strive for equality. You and Banzai keep my life full of fun, curiosity, and love. And to my Pond: I would not have made it here without you ladies, and I will be forever grateful for our friendship.

I also dedicate this to the student-athletes who have felt courageous enough to be themselves in an arena of uncertainty, to the student-athletes who may not yet feel supported to be their true self, and to all those who stand with and beside them.

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[RIP. DPB and WGR]

ABSTRACT

In the United States, there has been an increase in acceptance of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) through modern culture and society (i.e., Adams, Andersen, & Fetner, 2008; Herek, 2000; Schafer & Shaw, 2009; Treas, 2002). However, sport and athletic arenas have yet to fully accept their non-heterosexual counterparts (i.e., Roper & Halloran, 2007). With the historical component of sport as a gender normalized, heteronormative, and male-dominated space (McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 2009), the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identified as LGBT during their collegiate sport careers. Four participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview process. Through the use of MAXQDA, their interviews were coded and analyzed through a phenomenological lens and a liberal feminist lens. While the experiences of all athletes were unique in their own right, there was an overwhelming consensus from all participants regarding the need to increase awareness and support of student-athletes who identify as LGBT within collegiate athletics and athletic departments. These suggestions can be implemented as steps to ensure safety and support of these athletes within collegiate athletics.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

There is an increase in the acceptance of homosexuality in modern culture and society within the United States (Adams et al., 2008; Herek, 2000; Schafer & Shaw, 2009; Treas, 2002). In conjunction with this upward positive shift, the outlook toward those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) has been shown to be a more positive transition than the attitudes toward any other sexuality issue, such as premarital sex (Treas, 2002). There are, however, areas in which acceptance of individuals who identify as LGBT has yet to be fully reached.

LGBTQIAA

The acronym LGBTQIAA represents the community of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer, intersex, asexual, or ally. This term has a number of variations, some that include or exclude specific letters. For example, LGBTQIA neglects to include the additional “A”, for ally. In using LGBTQIAA, it is important to note the meanings behind the letters and how they differ from identifying as heterosexual and/or cisgender. Someone who identifies as cisgender is a person who identifies as their natal gender, or their gender at birth (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Someone who does not gender identify as cisgender would be an individual who is LGBTQIA-identifying. Furthermore, according to the American Psychological Association (2008), heterosexuality refers to “an enduring pattern of emotion, romantic, and/or sexual attractions” (Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality, para. 2) to someone of the opposite sex. Therefore, an individual who does not identify their sexual orientation as a heterosexual would also typically utilize letters within LGBTQIA as self-identifiers.

As marginalized in their orientations, both gender and sexual orientation alike, individuals who identify as LGBTQIA have been the subjects of research regarding counselor education, social work, mental health, psychology, and sociology (i.e., Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Herek, 1984, 2000; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Treas, 2002). There has been limited research regarding individuals who identify as LGBTQIAA in sport, and therefore, this study looked to address this need.

LGBT Study Specifications

For the purpose of this study, individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender were the target participants. The reasoning behind addressing LGBT, and not LGBTQIAA, was due to the amount of research available at the time of the study. In regards to sport, the presence of fully disclosed non-heterosexual identifying athletes is scarce, and therefore the present study attempted to investigate the more commonly researched areas of LGBTQIAA, that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). With this study being one of the first of its kind, in interviewing fully disclosed collegiate athletes about their experiences, the hope was for a research line of interest to be initiated and acted upon through the current study's analysis and discussion. As discussed in detail in later chapters, the participants of this study only reflected the "L" and the "B" in LGBT.

LGBT in Sport

The arena of sport and competitive athletics has argueably yet to fully accept those who do not identify as heterosexual, enabling the presence of homonegativity and homophobia (Roper & Halloran, 2007). As one examines related sport contexts, the physical education environment can be argued and viewed as a close relative to that of

competitive sports and athletics. These two areas of athletics and fitness share historical backgrounds as heteronormative, male-dominated spaces (i.e., McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990), and the research regarding inclusion and acceptance of athletes who identify as LGBT has only recently been growing.

The limited literature investigating the attitudes of athletes and team personnel that does exist strongly coincides with that of the non-sport context research (i.e., Herek, 1984, 2000; Herek & Capiano, 1996; Lim, 2002; Osborne & Wagner, 2007). The existence of athletes who identify as LGBT is apparent and present, yet they are not as publically accepted as their heterosexual counterparts. This phenomena could be explained given the lack of previous discussion of LGBT athlete existence in sport prior to more recent generations. Given the upward trend of more positive attitudes toward individuals who identify as LGBT, there is a scarcity in sport research to support this trend. The need to expand and venture further into the research within a sport context is warranted and a necessity.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was multi-faceted. There were three primary goals that the primary investigator attempted to answer. The current study (a) investigated the emotions, thoughts, and experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identified as LGBT within their sport structure, (b) explored their perceived acceptance within that sport structure as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and (c) examined the perceived needs of student-athletes who identify as LGBT within athletic teams to increase or establish comfort and acceptance.

Research Questions

To delve into each participant's subjective experience, the following questions were established as the study's research questions:

1. What are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences?
2. How do fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender perceive their acceptance on their respective collegiate athletic teams?
3. What are the needs of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to increase or establish comfort within their respective teams and/or athletic departments?

Importance of the Study

This purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as LGBT within the athletic and sport context and to assess how organizations, institutions, and health professional can further awareness and acceptance of these individuals. This study sought to establish a plan of action to combat and reduce or eliminate these issues for current and future generations of student-athletes who identify as LGBT. The potential significance of the study was founded around the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population, specifically those who played, play, or will play competitive sports. This investigation allowed for an increased awareness in an area where LGBT individuals are not fully accepted as equals to their heterosexual counterparts. Furthermore, because of the heteronormative history of sport,

this study could provoke and stimulate discussion about changes that should and can be made to help student-athletes who identify as LGBT feel more comfortable and welcome within their teams, athletic departments, or sport in general. In addition, the increased acceptance that may arise from this study could positively influence the self-esteem and self-confidence of already at-risk individuals who identify as LGBT.

Operational Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were presented so that the occurrence of specific terms or acronyms was understood. Unless noted through citation, the primary investigator was the creator of definitions.

- *LGBT*: individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (NLGJA Styleboob on LGBT Terminology, 2008).
- *Nonheterosexual*: An individual who does not identify as a heterosexual individual, whether by orientation or identity; can be gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or a variation of identities. (Dilley, 2002).
- *Heteronormative*: The normalcy and commonplace of hetero (male-female) based roles in life (Warner, 1991).
- *Homonegativity*: The prejudice, discrimination, or negative emotions, attitudes, and thoughts toward or about those who identify as homosexual or nonheterosexual (p. 220, Hudson & Ricketts, 1980, as cited in Lottes & Grollman, 2010).
- *Transgender*: “individuals whose gender identity does not match the gender identity commonly experienced of those individuals’ natal sex” (Buzuvis, 2011).

- *Bisexual*: an individual who is attracted to and/or engages in intimate relations with same-sex individuals and opposite-sex individuals (Rust, 2000).
- *Sexual fluidity*: “situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness which may manifest in changes in sexual orientation identity over time” (Diamond, 2008, as cited in Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2015, p. 1460).
- *Fully disclosed*: An individual who identifies as LGBT who has spoken freely about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- *Cultural norm*: “a shared expectation that people use to identify what is acceptable and unacceptable in a social world” (Coakley, 2009, p. 157)
- *Sport structure*: locker rooms, teammates, coaches, other team personnel.
- *Triangulation*: strategies for reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis (Patton, 2002).
- *Narrative research*: “the study of how human beings experience the world, and narrative researchers collect these stories and write narratives of experience (p. 2, Gudmundsdottir, 2001, as cited in Moen, 2006).

Limitations

The limitations of the study were taken into consideration during the discussion of the results. The following limitations were utilized in the study:

- Narratives provided were accurate representations of the true and honest experiences of the individuals interviewed.
- The participants were limited to their personal experiences as an athlete who openly identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The narratives will

not take into account situations outside of sport as a student-athletes who identify as LGBT.

- Investigator biases; however, appropriate measures were taken to best eliminate any biases that may have arisen.
- The use of the telephone for interviews was a limitation, as crucial nonverbal communication could not be assessed during these times.
- Sample size was a limitation, as this study only investigated the experiences of four individuals.
- Due to the low number of participants, saturation was also a limitation.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study were used to determine the population sample and the justification for such a sample. The following delimitations were used in the study:

- Deliberate sampling technique, with the use of snowballing technique.
- Participants were those who were fully-disclosed as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and who were currently competing at the collegiate level (NCAA or NAIA) or had played in the past five (5) years.
- Limited to NCAA or NAIA athletes; does not represent all levels of competition.
- Participants had at least one year of collegiate sport experience.

Summary and Organization

This present chapter introduced the primary foundation of problem at hand: the necessity for research in sport regarding the experiences and needs of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Furthermore, research questions

were created in order to address the problem and the significance of the study, important definition of terms, delimitations, and limitations of the study were addressed. The following chapter addressed the literature that surrounds the purpose of the study. The literature reviewed historical aspects of sport and homosexuality, the research within that of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sport contexts and team personnel, and current trends within homosexuality and sport environments. In chapter three, the methodological framework, the interview protocol and procedures were discussed. Following the collection of data, chapter four revealed the analysis and results from the completed interviews. Also, chapter four consisted of an in-depth discussion of the results in conjunction with previous research. Finally, chapter five was a comprehensive conclusion regarding the study's findings and recommendations for future research directions.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

The acceptance of homosexuality in modern society has arguably increased in the recent years (Adams et al., 2008; Herek, 2000; Schafer & Shaw, 2009; Treas, 2002). In June of 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled for the legalization of same-sex marriage throughout the United States. While acceptance has increased, current research has been consistent in regards to the trends of acceptance. These trends have shown that female acceptance of homosexuality is higher than that of males, and younger individuals being more accepting than those of older generations (Herek, 2000). In addition, those who have personal connection with someone who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) have shown more approval of their counterparts than those who are not acquainted with one (Herek, 2000). Furthermore, current trends have shown that the changes in attitude toward those who identity as LGBT have been “much greater than the changes in attitudes toward any other sexuality issue (e.g. premarital sex)” (Treas, 2002). This change may be influenced by the increase of visibility of LGBT individuals both in popular media and also within political and cultural changes (Adams et al., 2008). Regardless of reason, the shift in attitudinal change has been occurring in recent years and the necessity of research in the area is expanding.

With this changing landscape, the growing population of LGBT has arguably helped more individuals become open about their life. However, while trends have been shifting, there are still fears of victimization and bullying that hold back individuals from acknowledging their sexuality freely. Research has shown that many LGBT adults and LGBT youth suffer from physical and verbal assault and bullying, shame and isolation,

thoughts and attempts of suicide, and sexual risk-taking due to their sexual orientation (i.e., Anderson, 2002; Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kosciw & Dias, 2006).

Barber and Krane (2007) argue the need for positive climate for youth who identify as LGBT within the school systems. They highlight the historical implications that LGBT youth face and how the support within educational classes and athletic arenas is lacking, saying that these students “feel least safe and least supported” (p. 6) in those specific environments. Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) examined middle school climate and homophobic teasing and their results suggested that there is a drastic reduction of negative outcomes in LGB youth in school where there was low homophobic teasing and a positive school climate. Additionally, compared to their LGB or heterosexual classmates, students who were questioning their sexuality were at a significantly higher risk of negative outcomes such as truancy, depression, suicidal thoughts, and illegal drug use. Birkett and colleagues' study (2009) suggests that schools need to heavily consider and take responsibility for those who are sexual minorities within their schools, a suggestion echoed with Barber and Krane (2007).

Furthermore, Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keiling (2004) found that college students who identify as LGBT, as a whole, remarked that they perceived their campus climate to be less welcoming than that of their heterosexual counterparts. It was found that all of their participants thought that anti-LGBT attitudes were present on their campus. This perception supports the notion that, while trends are shifting in a more positive direction, the presence of discrimination is noticed in educational institutes from youth to college.

LGBT youth are at a crossroads of inclusivity. The inclusivity of students who identify as LGBT extends beyond traditional educational courses, but also to that of youth sport and physical education. Physical education and sport are closely related, historically, as heterosexual, male-dominated spaces (i.e., Messner & Sabo, 1990), and one area in which research regarding LGBT individuals is lacking and necessary would be that of the world of athletics and sport. In his book *It's All for the Kids: Gender, Family and Youth Sports*, Messner (2009) integrates social and gender theory with personal experiences of coaching and first-person interviews with coaches to address the gendered trends of youth sport. He concludes that although there has been positive shifts, gender boundaries are still present within youth sport and youth sport coaching, suggesting that continued work to alter this is warranted throughout sport. Sartore and Cunningham (2009a) also echoed the need for continued research and change in youth sport, finding that parents were less likely to allow their child to play for a coach who identified as LGBT, basing their reasoning on negative stereotypes.

Sport and competitive athletics have yet to fully accept individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (Anderson, 2002), allowing homonegativity and homophobia to remain present (Roper & Halloran, 2007). While there has been a relative positive change in sport over the past decade (Anderson, 2002, 2005; Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Southall, Nagel, Anderson, Polite, & Southall, 2009), one cannot ignore the longstanding negativity that still remains at all sport levels, including recreational sports, physical education classes, high school sport, collegiate sport, and also professional leagues and athletes (i.e., Ensign, Yiamouyiannis, White, & Ridpath,

2011; Herek, 2000; Mennesson & Clement, 2003; Roper & Halloran, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham; 2009a, 2009b).

Cultural norms may play an important role in how one views various issues within society, such as that of athletes who identify as LGBT. Coakley (2009) states that a norm “is a shared expectation that people use to identify what is acceptable and unacceptable in a social world” (p. 157). With this information, one could infer that information learned socially, through avenues such as sport, influence the perspectives one has on particular issues and topics. The positive shift in attitudes toward individuals who identify as LGBT that has been seen in the last decade could help to explain how a cultural norm can also shift, given its definition is subject to acceptance within the social world. In this instance, the social construct of sport is examined.

Southall et al. (2009) found that, while there was a decreasing landscape of homophobia and sexual prejudice in male collegiate athletes, there was still 28% of participants who were homophobic. Furthermore, as Anderson (2002) argued for a changing landscape in college, contrasting research has shown parallel to the longstanding homonegative stigma in sport (Brown et al., 2004; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006), more predominately seen in male sports. Delving further into the research allows one to see that with the ever-changing shift at both large cultural and smaller organizational levels, sport and athletics could potentially follow suit (Cunningham, 2012a).

High School Sports and Physical Education

Research has shown us that these attitudes in sport settings may begin before or during high school (Osborne & Wagner, 2007) and within physical education settings

(Morrow & Gill, 2003; O'Brien, Shovelton, & Latner, 2013; White, Oswalt, Wyatt, & Peterson, 2010). In physical education, there has been evidence of homonegativity and homophobia (Morrow & Gill, 2003; O'Brien et al., 2013). In the first phase of their study, Morrow and Gill (2003) examined the professionals within the physical education setting and determined that while the majority (84%) of teachers witnessed heterosexual behaviors "a lot", more than half of the teachers did not confront the homophobic and/or heterosexual behavior. Through not confronting these behaviors, educators are become enablers of the behaviors. Educational techniques, however, may not be available to all physical education teachers during their education. White, Oswalt, Wyatt, and Peterson (2010) looked to assess the attitudes of students who were planning on becoming physical education teachers. While a moderate outlook was discovered, the necessity of further educational components was noted. O'Brien and colleagues (2013) echoed this sentiment, finding that pre-service physical education teachers had greater prejudice toward lesbians and gay males, stemming from conservative ideological traits. Due to the negative risk-taking behaviors of LGBT youth and the positive effect that physical education and fitness can have on individuals' psychological needs, educators should be given all necessary components to address the issues faced by these youth to promote a positive and quality physical education environment. Yet still, the majority of LGBT students feel unwelcome and unsupported within their educational climate (Rankin, 2003).

Physical education class is one of many adolescent areas that need to be examined. Osborne and Wagner (2003) determined that male high school sport participants on core team sports were three times more likely to have homophobic beliefs

than those who did not participate on these teams. For Osborne and Wagner's study, core sports were operationally defined as team sports of football, baseball, basketball, and/or soccer. Individual sports, non-core team sports, and female participants did not show the same homophobic tendency as their counterparts. Osborne and Wagner highlight the probability that, in male high school core team sports, negative attitudes about those who identify as something other than heterosexual is evident and may begin or grow in high school settings.

With a perceived unsafe space in physical education for LGBT youth (Barber & Krane, 2007), the barriers to address and overcome these issues remains paramount. Teachers are not well-prepared to discuss certain topics (Kosciw & Dias, 2006; White et al., 2010), and therefore there is the silence from those who are afraid to speak up about their sexual orientation or gender identity describe by Barber and Krane (2005) as "the elephant in the locker room". Barber and Krane (2007) suggest educators and coaches become self-aware, to monitor their behavior within their educational settings, and to learn about the LGBT community. In order for students to feel safe, educators and coaches must become responsible "for the climate in their classes, on their teams, and in their schools" (p. 52). Corbett (2006) suggested similar measures be taken to support those who identify as LGBT by the use of visible signs to support and acknowledge these individuals.

Team Personnel

Attitudes toward LGBT through investigation of athletes and other team personnel is limited, at best. However, the literature that does exist strongly parallels what non-sport context literature has also uncovered (i.e., Herek, 1984, 2000; Herek &

Capiano, 1996; Lim, 2002; Osborne & Wagner, 2007). Roper and Halloran (2007) asked collegiate student-athletes about their attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and found a higher degree of negative attitudes in the male student-athletes. In addition, those who had contact experiences with a gay man and/or lesbian showed more positive attitudes than those who did not know one. Furthermore, it should be noted that a portion of the participants in the study were currently playing for a coach who identified as gay, which may have influenced the results, although it was not statistically determined.

Cunningham (2012a) suggested through his analysis of a multilevel LGBT sport participant experience that sport managers and personnel would benefit from the article's resources as a way to effectively address the prejudice in sport. In addition, he suggests that there be efforts that "reinforce progressive climates of diversity and inclusion" (p. 15) so that the experiences of LGBT sport participants are supported and positively received.

In a study of team's certified athletic trainers (ATCs), the majority of ATCs showed a more positive attitude toward LGBT individuals, while 15% of ATCs expressed more negative viewpoints (Ensign et al., 2011). In Europe, while fans expressed their general positivity toward full disclosed athletes who identify as gay, it was suggested that agents and team personnel continued to encourage athletes to not disclose their sexual orientation due to possible negative attention they might garner, both from potential employers and from fans (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011).

As temporary team personnel, sport psychology consultants can be integral to a team or individual's mental state. However, there has been a call for more inclusive and culturally competent components within the consultant role that have been severely

lacking over the years, especially regarding gender norms and sexual minorities (Krane, 2001b).

Male Athletes who Identify as Gay in Sport

Prior to the past decade, the amount of research circulating involving gay males in sport was scarce (Anderson, 2002), with the majority of research on those who were not fully disclosed to their teammates as gay. Historically, there has been a longstanding stigma that sport turns “boys into men” and that sport is historically viewed as masculine, tough, and strong (i.e., Messner & Sabo, 1990). These statements speak to the strong connection between culture and homophobia in sport. On one national sports team, heterosexual males defended their common use of homophobic jokes as “central to this culture” (Lilleaas, 2001; p. 49). Furthermore, a teammate of this particular team had openly spoken about being gay. In response to the use of homophobic jokes, the teammates’ response suggested that the communication of the team should not be subject to change because of one person and that the one who was gay should make adjustments.

In one of the first investigations of male athletes who are fully disclosed as gay, Anderson (2002) found that the majority of his participants were “generally surprised by how well they were treated” (p. 873), but also fell into line with the heteronormative aspects of athletics. Also, Anderson contested that the acceptance of these gay male athletes by their heterosexual teammates was tolerated if they held the overarching goal of winning. To speak to the current positive shift in attitude, Anderson (2011) conducted a follow-up study with 26 male athletes in high school and college who identified as gay. In this follow-up, Anderson found that the athletes had less fear about opening up about their sexuality than those in 2002. The 2011 cohort felt accepted for their sexuality and

did not feel excluded or marginalized by their teammates. These findings could support the change in cultural norms seen in recent years.

This homonegativity in sport is not subject to the athletes themselves, either (Cashmore & Cleland, 2011). In a study about football (European) fandom in Europe, Cashmore and Cleland (2011) uncovered that fans are generally maintain a positive attitude toward gay soccer players and also believed that an “out” player would benefit the league. However, regardless of this, the continued use of homophobic slurs was discussed and defended; the slurs were seen as more of a form of trash talk to the opposing players and not a direct reflection of a sexual orientation discontent.

A changing landscape in some sports regarding masculinity has occurred, which contrasts what has been seen previously in research (Adams, 2011). Adams (2011) found that a soccer team consisting of males who identified as heterosexual showed a shift in their ideals of traditional masculinity, “hugging and talking about their emotional issues with their male friends” (p. 590). Parallel to this was what Anderson (2009) deemed as inclusive masculinity, a redefining of how males should or must act within their social contexts.

Female Athletes who Identify as Lesbian in Sport

In addition to gay men, investigation regarding lesbian experiences in sport have shown similar struggles. Mennesson and Clement (2003) noted that while female soccer players compared their fellow teammates to that of family, there was tension with heterosexual male coaches and homosexual female players. Kauer (2009) discusses not only women in sport as “trespassers into male territory” (p. 312), but also the issues of which coaches who openly identify as lesbian face in the athletic world. Through a

feminist-queer framework, Kauer was able to explore the ways in which lesbian coaches experience and combat the heteronormative space of sport.

There is a stereotype of being a female in sport. Many females face negative consequences associated with sports, regardless of sexual orientation (i.e., Kauer, 2009; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 2001a; Krane & Barber, 2003; Krane et al., 2004; Krane, Surface, & Alexander, 2005; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009b; Shaw, 2010). Females are faced with issues such as conforming to traditional gender roles (i.e., ideal body type, femininity), addressing stereotypical assumptions of females as lesbians in sport, and masculinity. Should a female not conform to feminine gender roles, they potentially face consequences such as “negative treatment by administrators and coaches, verbal harassment by fans, lack of media attention and endorsements, sexist and heterosexist prejudice, and even negative bias by officials or judges during competition” (Kauer, 2001a, p. 118). Additionally, if a female participates in a sport that is deemed manly, they are subjected to a stereotypical label of butch, masculine, or lesbian, (Kauer & Krane, 2006). Kauer and Krane (2006) found that female athletes, regardless of sexual orientation, were categorized as the “jock girls”, “a bunch of dykes”, and “lesbos” (p. 46). Kauer (2001) referred to females as having to “perform femininity” (p. 120) in order to be protected from prejudice and discrimination.

In a study comprised of 21 female collegiate athletes, Kauer and colleagues (2004) identified the struggles many face as a female in sport. While all these participants identified as heterosexual, the issues addressed, such as ideal body, femininity versus masculinity, and being muscular, were paralleled with concerns and issues of female athletes who identify as lesbian. Sartore and Cunningham (2009b) echoed this sentiment

by conceptualizing a lesbian stigma model focused on female athletes in sport, across any and all sexual orientations. Their model proposed eight propositions as to justify the struggles all females face within the sporting world, ranging from stress and identity management to stereotype threats. The juxtaposition of competitive athleticism and traditional femininity can arguably become a conflict for many females in sport, regardless of sexual orientation. One might then question or argue why female athletes who identify as lesbian choose to disclose their sexuality or not.

Little research has investigated the lesbian sport disclosure experience (Anderson, 2001; Griffin, 1998; Stoelting, 2011). While some athletes felt no issue in being fully disclosed with their collegiate teammates, there were some who felt that the consequences may outweigh the benefits. Anderson (2001) found that issues of harassment, property damage, and hostility from both teammates and other players were among the reasons why females felt compelled to not disclose their identity. Furthermore, the choice to disclose was found to be partially dependent upon the tolerance of the athlete's sporting environment and also their perceived importance to team success. Krane and Barber (2003) argued that "young lesbians in sport learn that the behavioral norm is to conceal one's lesbian identity at all costs; to reveal it may result in more detrimental outcomes" (p. 336). With a heteronormative environment on which sport was built, further research may need to be done in order to determine the needs of athletes who identify as lesbian, especially in regards to comfort in disclosure.

There are other factors that influence disclosure (Stoelting, 2011). Stoelting (2011) looked at the motivation behind disclosure and additional factors affecting the discloser. It was suggested that some of the most prominent motivating reasons for disclosure are

“to be perceived as honest people, achieve further self-acceptance, normalize their sexual identities, establish close relationships with teammates, and maintain already close relationships” (p. 1206). From her study, Stoelting argued that the disclosure of athletes is a “very complex decision that is situated within a specific time and place” (p. 1207).

In one of the first studies investigating experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian, Krane (1997) interviewed 12 athletes who self-identified as lesbian and were, at the time, no more than five years from their career. The individuals, however, did not have to have been fully disclosed during their career, a contrast to the present study. Krane uncovered three ways homonegativism infiltrates female sport: a discomfort of females who are not following traditional gender roles of being feminine, the application of a lesbian label, and the distancing from lesbian label. It is strongly suggested that those who are leaders (i.e., administrators, coaches, etc.) be prepared to assist in these situations and also to feel “ethically obligated to address these issues in a constructive and proactive manner” (p.160). As this study was conducted in 1997, the sweeping passage of years has yet to see these suggestions come to full fruition.

Research regarding the experiences of athletes who openly identify as lesbian is limited, at best (Anderson & McCormack, 2015). Fink and colleagues (2012) conducted a qualitative investigation of 14 female athletes who identified as lesbian or bisexual regarding their experiences. In this study, the females spoke to the older teammates who identified as lesbian or bisexual, referred to a “trailblazer”, and that, without them, “the decision to be out would have been much more difficult” (p. 90). This finding was supported by a previous study (Shaw, 2010), in that many participants who had teammates who self-identified as lesbian felt that it created a more “positive view of and

knowledge about lesbians” (p. 38) within the team. Also, Fink and colleagues (2012) found that the women struggled with the stereotypes in sport and the traditional gender roles. An overwhelming trend from the participants focused on the lack of support from the athletic departments regarding how they felt excluded and unsupported. A call for reform was discussed as well. Furthermore, having one ally within the athletic department, as some did, was deemed an important support system for them. Comparative to the present study, no age limitations were employed, with participants ranging in age from 20 to 35 years old. This range could speak to a variability in experience consistent with the changing shift in culture (Treas, 2002).

Athletes who Identify as Bisexual in Sport

The literature regarding bisexuals in sport is limited, at best. Historically, the statistics about bisexuals in general has been difficult (Rust, 2000). While LGBT advocates have assumed the role of dismantling the binary of male/female sexual identity and orientation, bisexuality has since become a challenge to the binary of homosexuality or heterosexuality. Therefore, it brings one to ask: what is bisexuality? Is bisexuality a heterosexual who partakes in various homosexual engagements or is bisexuality a homosexual who also engages in relations with those of heterosexual orientation?

The concept of fluidity within sexual orientation has helped to better understand bisexuality. Sexual fluidity has been defined as “situation-dependent flexibility in sexual responsiveness which may manifest changes in sexual orientation identity of time” (Diamond, 2008, p. 3). This essentially means that an individual may have erotic and intimate feelings and connections to someone of the same-sex or someone of the opposite sex at any given time or situation. Sexual fluidity supports the notion that orientations are

not binary, individuals are not subjected to selecting either heterosexual or homosexual identities. This definition may help others who do not identify as bisexual to gain a firmer grasp on the context of what it means to identify as bisexual.

Past research has been differing in the discussion of defining bisexuality (Rust, 2000), but the presence of victimization is still present for those identifying as bisexual. Ochs (1999) examined the discrimination of bisexuals, citing hostility from both heterosexuals and homosexuals. In addition, coming out as a bisexual has seen both positive and negative experiences for males. Older males have been seen to experience more hostility than that of younger cohorts (McCormack, Anderson, & Adams, 2014). This could be explained through the current positive trends of an attitudinal shift toward sexuality. Furthermore, through criticism of past literature, Rust (2000) has pointed out the mishandling and misinterpretation of bisexuality, which can be attributed to the lack of substantial statistics and research within the field.

The dearth in athlete bisexuality research makes it difficult to understand the experiences of bisexuality in sport. However, what does exist helps to see what has been done and the direction in which needs to be taken as researchers. Anderson and Adams (2011) interviewed male United States college soccer players from various geographic regions and concluded that the majority of their 60 participants showed positive views and stances toward bisexuality and also recognized sexuality on a continuum, even for the participants themselves. Interestingly, only 12 of their 60 student-athlete participants identified as completely 100% heterosexual. While 48 participants acknowledged their own potential for bisexuality, no athlete self-identified as a bisexual. Elling and Janssens (2009) found that self-identified Dutch homo/bisexual females were just as likely to be

involved in mainstream club sports as their heterosexual counterparts, whereas homo/bisexual males were not as present as heterosexual males in the same sports. However, the majority of Dutch homo/bisexual males and females were involved and active in sporting contexts, regardless of type.

With the limited research, one could question the reasoning behind it. The term “LGBT” is meant to be inclusive to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. It should be noted, however, when researching the sole term of “bisexual” or “bisexuality” in conjunction with keywords such as sport, athletes, and/or athletics, the more board term of LGBT remains the basis for conducted research and articles, with little emphasis on the term “bisexual”. In stark contrast, while using key terms of “gay”, “lesbian”, or “transgender” in association with sport, athletes, and/or athletics, more specific and detailed titles and articles are presented. These articles represent the individual researched: gay, lesbian, or transgender. The same cannot be said with such assurance for bisexual. With the ambiguity of bisexuality in general (Rust, 2000), it can be argued that the realm of sport may also fall into the same misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the “B” in LGBT. Griffin (2012) speaks to this as she says that “efforts to differentiate biphobia from homophobia and the experiences of lesbian and gay athletes or coaches from those of bisexual athletes and coaches are rare” (p. 10). As the field has shown it’s limitation of research regarding bisexual individuals in sport, the investigation of these individuals is greatly warranted.

Athletes who Identify as Transgender in Sport

The battle for acceptance to play on the team with which the athlete identifies their gender began the discussion for transgender policies in sport. Transgender athletes

have been present in professional sports as early as 1977 (Buzuvis, 2011), with the presence of male to female transgender athletes more visible than that of female to male transitioned athletes. The gender-normative beliefs of binaries (male or female) has influenced the way in which we culturally view sports, thus placing transgender athletes in a complex situation with sport participation (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012). Research has shed light on the personal issues that transgender athletes experience, including feeling shamed and isolated by others, personal issues of normality as a transgender and fitting into the traditional roles that have been culturally set through sport history, presumed genetic advantages or disadvantages of transitioning, appropriate locker room debates, and the resistance of gender acceptance by fellow teammates and/or competitors (i.e., Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Krane, Barak, & Mann, 2012; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012; Tagg, 2012).

As a method to address some of these issues, Lucas-Carr and Krane (2011) argue the benefits of sport psychology for athletes who identify as transgender athletes, discussing how one can assist with more inclusive environments for players to understand and embrace their teammates who identify as transgender teammates through a process of “queering sport psychology” (Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Semerjian, 2010, p. 154). Furthermore, sport psychology consultants can also utilize their mental skills and diversity training to assist athletes who identify as transgender to achieve their optimal performance goals as a player. Thus, while obstacles do exist, the increase in transgender discussion has helped to create transgender policies in sport. These athlete policies, while still needing work, have given rise to the issue from both organizations and fellow competitors (Buzuvis, 2011, 2012).

It wasn't until 2003 that an athletic organization created and adopted an inclusion policy regarding athletes who identify as transgender. The first organization to do this was the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Buzuvis, 2012; Sykes, 2006). This policy, however, has received backlash due to its conditions of inclusion, with a major concern of the necessity for sex reassignment. In 2011, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) introduced a more inclusive policy (Buzuvis, 2012). A sex reassignment was deemed unnecessary as long as cross-sex hormone treatments were taking place and had been for at least one year. However, this policy still excludes those who have not been undergoing expensive treatments for at least a year. The most inclusive policies to date are ones from high school athletic governing boards in Washington and Massachusetts. Both Washington and Massachusetts allow individuals to participate in sports based on how their chosen gender identity, with Massachusetts going as far as enacting a statute in 2012 (Buzuvis, 2012). In the LGBT world, there has even been some discussion and disagreement about transinclusion policies in contexts of lesbian organizations, where the gender binary has become a challenge in policy writing (Travers, 2006). While there have been state strides, the overall inclusion policies for transgender student-athletes fall short (Buzuvis, 2012; Sykes, 2006).

Collegiate Athletic Departments

As previously mentioned, educational environments have been shown to influence the experiences of LGBT individuals (i.e., Klem & Connell, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004). One could argue that collegiate athletic departments within post-secondary institutions fall under the umbrella of educational environments. Seen as leaders of their universities (Estler & Nelson, 2005), athletic departments are faced with the growing

social and cultural shifts of the campus culture, including that of the attitudes toward LGBT. For example, it was found that two coaches who were verbally against any athletes who were fully disclosed as gay or lesbian as members of their respective teams received immense negative attention, both within their institution and nationally (Jacobson, 2002; Lederman, 1991).

Positive Sport Changes

There has been some promise within the past decade regarding shifts in sport and LGBT athlete acceptance (Kirby, Demers, & Parent, 2008; Zeigler, Carroll, & Griffin, 2012). In countries such as Canada, there have been proactive measures taken to create a more inclusive environment for both disabled and LGBT athletes. These proposed measures are working to ensure safety and aid for those athletes who may feel marginalized or unwelcome due to their sexual orientation (Kirby et al., 2008). Furthermore, with the inaugural LGBT Sports Summit held by Nike in 2012, a banner year for LGBT awareness was seen (Zeigler et al., 2012). Slurs, silence, and discrimination was seen as no longer commonplace or cultural norms within many athletic venues. In addition, the Gay Games, initiated in 1982, has created an inviting space for any athlete, LGBT or non-LGBT, to compete amongst and against one another in a welcoming environment. It has become a national, yearly occurrence and has grown substantially in attendance and participation.

Advocate agencies regarding LGBT inclusion in sport have also sprouted up throughout the United States, such as the You Can Play Project, Athlete Ally, and Campus Pride. Furthermore, the introduction of transgender policies within the IOC, NCAA, and state-level organizations has provided a stepping stone for the discussion of

equality for all athletes (Buzuvis, 2011, 2012). Given the increase of awareness and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, it can be argued that the realm of sport will follow suit. However, given sport's history of being a male-dominated, heteronormative, and homophobic venue, the needs of these non-heterosexual athletes is essential to examine.

Summary

With the current research presenting a current positive trend in attitudes toward LGBT individuals, it is necessary to further delve into the realm of sport, where the existence of LGBT athletes is present, yet not as publicly known and accepted as is their heterosexual counterparts. With the mental and emotional obstacles LGBT athletes may face with their own disclosure, it is crucial to determine what athletics and sport can do to help these individuals feel as welcomed into sport as their heterosexual equivalents. As such, the present study sought to gain an understanding of experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as LGBT within the athletic and sport context and to assess how organizations, institutions, and health professional can further awareness and acceptance of these individuals. As such, the present study strived to gain an insight into three specific and personal areas of LGBT athletes: 1) the emotions and thoughts of collegiate athletes who identify as LGBT, 2) the perceived acceptance of these collegiate athletes who identify as LGBT, and 3) the needs of collegiate athletes who identify as LGBT to increase or establish a sense of comfort and acceptance within their respective collegiate team and/or their institution's athletic department.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as LGBT within the athletic and sport context and to assess how organizations, institutions, and health professional can further awareness and acceptance of these individuals. The primary investigator examined the emotions and thoughts of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender within their sport structure (teammates, locker room, coach, etc.), and also investigated their perceived acceptance within that sport structure as a fully disclosed lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Furthermore, the study explored the perceived needs of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender within athletic teams to increase or establish comfort and acceptance.

This study was based around a narrative approach. The primary investigator used a qualitative, semi-structured interview approach, which allowed the primary investigator to explore the emotions and experiences of each individual participant. An initial set of questions was used for each interview. Each question was specifically targeted at one of the three purposes of the study. The questions reflected emotions and thoughts of the athletes, their perceived acceptance, and also what the athlete would like to see within their athletic team or department in terms of acceptance and comfort.

While the questions allowed the primary investigator to gain a detailed experience for each individual, the use of this interview also allowed for an in-depth narrative given by each participant. Because of the subjectivity of the athletes' experiences, the narrative provided a comprehensive look at the different ways in which each athlete dealt with and handled their time as a student-athletes who identified as lesbian, gay bisexual, or

transgendered. The importance of the narrative approach rested on the ideals that the point of view of each participant is a unique story that must be given accurately by the person who experienced it first-hand (Moen, 2006) and that the use of a narrative “communicates the narrator’s point of view” (Chase, 2005, p. 656), which help to “express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations (p. 656). Furthermore, the narrative approach permitted the primary investigator to broadly examine experiences between the athletes to observe the commonalities and differences that surfaced.

A phenomenological perspective was employed for the analysis of the interviews. Phenomenology allowed the primary investigator to examine the lived experiences of the participants through their own words, feelings, and emotions. According to Crotty (1998), the lens of phenomenology encourages individuals to “place our usual understandings in abeyance and have a fresh look at things” (p. 80). Given the heavily engrained constructs of sport and the necessity of phenomenology to reassess our understanding of a certain entity, a change in viewpoint was warranted, giving this study an avenue in which to investigate. This study sought to uncover a new perspective on sport and its participants, particularly those who identify as LGBT. The phenomenological standpoint addressed a perspective that deviated from the constructs with which one associates to sport.

Interviews were conducted through telephone or face-to-face, whichever method was most convenient and comfortable for the participant. Ideally, each interview was to be conducted in person, but due to location of participants, it was not possible. Interviews were recorded for analysis. Following interviews, verbatim transcription of the interviews

took place. In order to ensure validity, triangulation was used through member checks, peer reviews, and research team review.

Bias Exploration and Bracketing Interview

In order to ensure unbiased analysis within the proposed study, the primary investigator explored their personal involvement within the research. While the primary investigator did not identify as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, it was important to understand the potential bias toward answers given by the participants. This exploration of biases helped to control for possible themes of which the primary investigator analyzed. The biases of the dissertation chair was also addressed for triangulation purposes.

As an ally for the LGBT community, the primary investigator felt as though it was their duty to be a voice for those who are marginalized in an area that has been rooted in its constructs, such as sport. Having grown up and around individuals who identify as LGBT helped to shape the primary investigator's self-awareness of privilege and given them a platform for justice. The primary investigator has participated in and helped to develop workshops addressing issues of social justice and inclusion in areas of sport and exercise psychology and also in physical education teacher education programs. The primary investigator has had an active role within their field's association that was connected to advocacy of LGBT topics, and was also SafeZone trained after the study was conducted.

Instrumentation

This qualitative study used the primary investigator as the principal research tool. The primary investigator conducted and facilitated all interview protocols. Regardless of

interview method (telephone or face-to-face), all interviews were audio-recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were destroyed after transcription of the interviews was complete.

Participants

Participants for the study included four student-athletes who identify as lesbian or bisexual. The participants were within five years of competition as a collegiate athlete, or a current member of a collegiate team. Participants were members of the various divisions within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The necessity for the athletes to self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender was pertinent to the given purposes of the study. An athlete who openly identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender on their team would have a different experience to narrate than that of an individual who had not publicly identified as such with their team. The purpose of the study was to examine these experiences of student-athletes who identify as LGBT and to determine measures needed to increase comfort and acceptance of these athletes.

Recruitment

The nature of the sampling was deliberate and snowballed. Due to the sampling style, the primary investigator attempted to interview a range of individuals who identify as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender in an effort to investigate the varying identities within athletics. The primary investigator spoke with personal contacts who had previously disclosed their sexual orientation as initial study participants. Those personal contacts communicated with others they knew who identified as LGBT for interest in study. Those other individuals were encouraged to contact the primary investigator for participation in the study.

Recruitment was also utilized through communication with contacts that did not identify as LGBT. In that respect, those contacts were asked if they knew of an individual who might be interested in participating in the study. If so, the contact was asked to inform the interested individual to contact the primary investigator for further discussion.

Lastly, the primary investigator contacted various organizations rooted in LGBT advocacy, both athlete and non-athlete related. In total, 12 organizations were contacted. Of the 12, there was no success in return response rate.

All participants were to have one year of collegiate sport experience and were to be fully disclosed to their team regarding their sexual orientation. All participants were to be within five years from their collegiate career or still active in their collegiate career. The anticipated goal was to recruit 12 participants: three male athletes who identified as gay, three female athletes who identified as lesbian, three athletes who identified as bisexual, and three athletes who identified as transgender. The recruitment process garnered four participants, two female athletes who identified as lesbian and two female athletes who identified as bisexual.

The discussion of participants is continued within chapter four. Furthermore, a limitation of saturation and participant number is later discussed.

Procedure

The primary investigator completed and submitted the appropriate forms to the host university's Institutional Review Board. After approval from the Board, the interviews took place. For phone interviews, the interviews took place in the home office of the primary investigator using their personal telephone device. The interviews were audio-recorded using two recording devices: two different computer recorders. Interviews

conducted in person were conducted in a pre-approved location that was comfortable for both the primary investigator and the participant. The in-person interviews were audio-recorded using three recording devices: a cellular telephone and two different computer recorders.

The participants were informed that all information from the study would be held confidential, secured in a locked cabinet at the primary investigator's institution, Middle Tennessee State University, and that their demographic information would remain coded as to eliminate any identification of the participants. Furthermore, they were informed of their choice to withdraw from the study at any time. Following the interview, the primary investigator transcribed the interviews verbatim. After transcription, the scripts were sent to the participants for review. Following review of the scripts, the primary investigator conducted the analysis of data.

Interview Protocol

During the interview process, the primary investigator examined the subjective experiences through which each participant went, as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender athlete. Prior to the interviews, each participant completed a demographic sheet that addressed various personal information such as their current status as a collegiate player, the sport, organization (NAIA or NCAA) and level (i.e., division) on which they play or played, the amount of years they have played in college, the years of their career that they were fully disclosed, their self-identified gender and sexual orientation, and their ethnicity. This demographic sheet can be found in the appendices. Interviews were given to each participant separately, as the need to uncover individual experiences was integral to the study. The primary

investigator used terms with which the participant was most comfortable based on their demographic selections, and used person-centered diction to promote a setting of comfort within the interview process.

Each participant was asked the same set of interview questions. All questions focused on the three purposes of the study: the emotions and thoughts, their perceived acceptance within their sport, and the needs of student-athletes who identify as LGBT within their athletic teams and athletic departments to increase or establish comfort and acceptance.

To delve into each participant's subjective experience, the following questions were established as the study's research questions:

1. What are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences?
2. How do fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender perceive their acceptance on their respective collegiate athletic teams?
3. What are the needs of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to increase or establish comfort within their respective teams and/or athletic departments?

To gain information regarding the research questions, the following interview protocol was established:

1. Research Question 1 – Interview Questions

- a. Tell me about your experience as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.
- b. What are/were some of the emotions that you experience/d as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- c. What are/were some common thoughts you had as you played sports as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- d. Do/did you view yourself as a role model for student-athletes who may fear or may have feared being fully disclosed?

2. Research Question 2 – Interview Questions

- a. In regards to acceptance on your athletic team, how well do you think you were accepted as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identified as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- b. What kinds of actions or words were used toward you or around you where you felt either accepted or unaccepted for being yourself?
 - i. Follow-up: Where and from whom?

3. Research Question 3 – Interview Questions

- a. Are/were there any resources available to you at your institution as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

- b. What types of resources would you have liked to have seen within your athletic team or department in order to increase or establish a sense of comfort for athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- c. What do you think athletic teams and departments need in terms of increasing or establishing acceptance of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, they were asked to expand on their responses with the use of probing questions, such as:

1. You mentioned _____. Elaborate further on that.
2. When you say _____, what do you mean?
3. Tell me more about _____.

If the athlete had already graduated from their collegiate team, the following question was asked to them as well:

1. Since graduating, what have you done or what are you doing, if anything, to increase the awareness and acceptance of athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

An additional question was also asked of the participants during the interview process that focused on the advice one might give to another student-athlete regarding being fully disclosed, the reasoning behind which is discussed in chapter 4. This question was given to all participants, regardless of their current status as a collegiate athlete:

1. If there was one piece of advice that you would give to a student-athlete who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender based off of your own personal experiences, what would you tell them?

Pilot Study

A pilot study was done with a former NCAA division one soccer player who self-identified as a lesbian. This individual did not fit the requirements necessary to be a participant, as they had not played collegiately for over five years. They were asked the same questions as the participants and then further asked about the questions' substance and if the questions were reflective of the study's goals. With additional edits, the final set of interview questions was created and used to interview the four participants of the study.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, transcription was conducted for each interview verbatim. During transcription, each participant was given a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. All discussion and analysis of participant experiences utilized the prescribed pseudonyms. Each participant received an electronic copy of their interview to ensure accuracy. At that time, the participant had the opportunity to determine if the interview provided a thorough and comprehensive narrative. Furthermore, the participant was able to edit, add, or modify any part of their story in order to feel as though their narrative was reflective of their experience. After the interviews were checked and accepted by the participants, data analysis continued with thematization of the information.

The primary investigator read the interviews multiple times to gain an understanding of the each participant's experience. As the primary investigator read through the interviews, key words and codes were examined and noted. Those words

were used to help create ‘meaning units’ within and between participants. Meaning units are clusters of similar phrases put together from different interviews.

The identified meaning units were separated into themes. A combination of all interviews key words and codes made up the themes. Each theme was unique to the differing themes created. The themes from the interviews were discussed with the research team and all themes were agreed upon given unanimous acceptance from the research team. After themes were established, they were discussed in conjunction with and applied to the research that has been gathered.

Research Team

A research team was assembled to help assist the primary investigator in the analysis and discussion of the data collected. The primary investigator transcribed and coded the interviews. The dissertation chair assessed the codes in relation to any bias that was bracketed from the primary investigator. This functioned as a means to keep biases and subjective reasoning under scrutiny in the analysis of the data. All interviews were coded as to keep personal identity of the participants confidential.

Credibility and Dependability

Results must demonstrate consistency across time and participants through rigorous techniques of learned interviewing methods and observations (Patton, 2002). In order to ensure credibility in qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the participants’ responses and narratives was necessary.

To increase dependability, the primary investigator utilized triangulation. The necessity of triangulation allowed the data to be as unbiased and honest as possible, reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis (Patton, 2002).

Assumptions

The study assumed that all participants answered questions regarding their experiences both fully and honestly. In regards to the humanistic approach being utilized within the study, an assumption was made about the narratives presented. That is, all participants were able to openly express their narratives and did not feel pressured or judged by social or cultural norms or by the standards of teammates, coaches, or other individuals. Furthermore, the assumption was made that all participants were able to give an accurate retrospective representation of their experiences as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Ethical Considerations

Given the research and the background of the primary investigator's committee members, all considerations were taken to ensure a safe and productive environment for those participating. Individual identities and any personal identifiable information regarding affiliated institutions were coded and kept confidential as to maintain the utmost privacy of participants.

The topic of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender was seen as a potentially sensitive topic to some individuals. However, the breadth of knowledge and research in this area was limited. The study looked to examine the needs and experiences of those who choose to play collegiate sport as a fully disclosed lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. This study will hopefully shed some light on the ways in which sport can aide those athletes as appropriately and comprehensively as possible.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to allow the primary investigator to gain an insight into the experiences of collegiate athletes who identify or identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender during their college career. Three research questions were used as a basis for the interview protocol for each athlete. After the interviews were conducted, an analysis of data was done. Using MAXQDA as the software for analysis, two theoretical frameworks were used in assessing the interviews: a phenomenological perspective and a feminist perspective. These two perspectives allowed the primary investigator to analyze the interviews from different lenses.

The participant pool for this study was limited, as student-athletes who identify as gay male or transgender were not found. Thus, the following results reflect those who were interviewed: two collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian and two collegiate female athletes who identify as bisexual.

Participant Pool

Male Athletes who Identify as Gay Participant Data

In an unfortunate event for this study, the acquisition of gay male participants was unsuccessful. The primary investigator reached out to many organizations and a variety of contacts, both personal and professional with no success. The study suffered from the lack of participants in this area, and future attempts to gain insight into the experiences of fully disclosed gay males in collegiate sport will continue.

In an attempt to gain understanding as to why the recruitment of male student-athletes who identify as gay, history of sport's homonegativity lends itself to potential explanations. Historically, the sporting world has prided itself in its heteronormative,

strong-willed, able-bodied, male-dominated ways. If there is an individual who goes against this foundation, they could be presented with some resistance and confrontation from their teammates, fans, and/or family. It could be argued that some gay student-athletes may not desire that type of conflict. They may fear being ostracized from their heterosexual teammates, thus changing the environment on the team, similar to what researchers uncovered in regards to the continued use of homophobic jokes within a team, even after a teammate openly identified as homosexual.

A fear of unwanted attention may also be an important factor to examine. With the continued spotlight on male athletes, both student and professional, who have become open about their sexual orientation, one also might assume a spotlight would be shone on an athlete's life. This attention would potentially redefine the student-athlete by his sexual orientation, as opposed to his talent. If a student-athlete has a hope to become a professional in their sport, they may want their talent to be observed first as opposed to their sexual orientation.

One could argue that there is a fear of repercussions, both personal and professional, that hold athletes back from being fully disclosed to their team. It was found that male football (European) athletes were strongly persuaded by their agents to remain silent about their sexual orientation, for fear that it might result in smaller or no contacts for their sport. An athlete could then potentially question whether it was his talent or his sexual orientation that hindered his professional progress. Furthermore, with agents suggesting that an athlete hide their sexual orientation, it supports the idea that sport is not okay with homosexuality yet, and until it is, one should remain silent or ambiguous to

the questions in order to strengthen their professional portfolio. Due to this information, the recruitment may have been stifled.

Athletes who Identify as Transgender Participant Data

In addition to the lack of fully disclosed gay male athletes, the study fell short on the attainment of collegiate student-athletes who identify as transgender, whether transgender male or transgender female. In this unfortunate case, gaining insight into the experiences of those who identify as transgender is still a primary goal for future studies and will continue to be a necessary component from which the athletic community can learn.

The limited research has shown the potential sporting conflicts of those who identify as transgender. With these situations, one might conclude that student-athletes who identify as transgender may not want to risk their safety for participation. The victimization of transgender individuals is prevalent throughout society, and the historically male-dominated sporting world may not be ready or accepting of those individuals.

In conjunction with safety, an unwanted spotlight on a collegiate athlete may also have hindered the ability to gain participants. Student-athletes who identify as transgender who have been accepted by their families, friends, and team may not want to have an additional spotlight on their career. The scrutiny from unwarranted media coverage or opinionated individuals could potentially detract from their athletic career and increase or establish some stress level that may not have existed. With the constant debates regarding locker room sharing and presumed genetic advantages and/or

disadvantages, potential participants may not have wanted to engage in a study that could trigger emotional or stressful situations or experiences.

Currently, there is no list or database that features student-athletes who identify as transgender. Furthermore, to assume a database exists is unrealistic. There is no database for those who identify as heterosexual and one would conclude a database such as that would be unrealistic as well. Without a personal contact or a way of appropriately finding student-athletes who identify as transgender, the recruitment potential was very limited from the study's onset. While the primary investigator understood this, the networking and contacting of individuals and organizations was not successful, but not without effort. Over fifteen organizations related to or involving the study parameters were contacted in relation to recruitment. This struggle to make contact could have contributed to the lack of participants in this category.

Female Athletes who Identify as Lesbian Participant Data

Student-athlete one, Becky, played soccer at a Southeastern NCAA Division I university. She identified, and still currently identifies, as a white lesbian and was open with her teammates about her sexual orientation at the very beginning of her collegiate career. Becky is now five years out of collegiate soccer, but continues to remain active within the soccer realm, both as a referee and a high school coach.

Student-athlete two, India, currently plays women's basketball at an NCAA Division II university in the Southeast. She previously played two years of her collegiate career in a Western state before transferring to her current institution in the southeast. As a self-identified black lesbian, she was fully disclosed to her initial team in the west and continues to be open regarding her sexual orientation to her current team.

Athletes who Identify as Bisexual Participant Data

Student-athlete three, Tiffany, is two years removed from her collegiate soccer career at a Southeastern NCAA Division I institution. As a four-year athlete, she was fully disclosed for her last three years as a collegiate athlete. Originally from the north, she continues living in the south and has plans to continue her post-secondary schooling in the near future. She identifies her herself as a white bisexual.

Student-athlete four, Jessica, ran cross country at a Northeastern NCAA Division III university. Jessica, a white female, had a collegiate career limited to one year, of which she was fully open with her teammates regarding her sexual orientation as a bisexual. While she does not currently still participate in competitive sport, she has become active within the LGBTQ community as a yoga and fitness instructor.

Phenomenology Perspective

In order to gain as much depth and insight from the analysis, the methodology of phenomenology was integral in assessing these narratives. The following analysis reflected the foundational principles of phenomenology, to understand the detailed experiences of the phenomena of being a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as lesbian or bisexual.

Themes

During the coding process, there were a variety of themes that emerged. The three research questions helped guide the development of the interview protocol from which the themes were identified. Themes recognized were: personal experience, emotions and feelings, thoughts, role model, perceived acceptance, perceived judgment, LGBT resources, personal LGBT action, advice, and sport. These themes emerged from the

eleven interview questions that were asked of each individual. Within the theme of “LGBT resources”, three categories were created from the responses: known campus-wide resources, known athletic department resources, and desired athletic department resources. It was important to include all three categories, as the participants had strong opinions on the current needs within the athletic departments. Within the theme of “sport”, two categories emerged: sport as an outlet and sport over identity. In conjunction with past research, these two categories are integral to many athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Personal Experience

For the four participants interviewed, personal experiences were seen as the time on their team as fully disclosed or their current time on their team as fully disclosed. The question asked of these participants was: could you please tell me about your experiences as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. This question was asked due to nature of the first research question: what are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences? The reasoning behind asking about their overall personal experience was to better understand their journey as a collegiate athlete who did or does not hide their sexual orientation from team or team personnel. As opposed to individuals who identify in a non-heterosexual manner but are not disclosed, this question highlights the experiences of someone who openly discussed or discusses their sexual orientation while they played or continue to play, regardless of potential judgment or prejudice. Furthermore, learning about their personal experiences could better explain their thoughts and emotions.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Well, I was umm, I feel like coming out of the closet so to speak is not one door – it’s more of a revolving door. It’s like you come out in high school and you’re out but then you go to a new location and it’s not that you’re not out, you’re just not saying anything. And that’s how it was at first. I just didn’t say anything. So I didn’t deny anything, but I would just choose very vague terms and everything. And then on our fir – one of our road trips, I was rooming with another, a goalkeeper, and she was a lesbian and she kind of asked me certain questions that got me to finally admit – yes, I was lesbian and it wasn’t that I was denying it. I just wasn’t publicizing it because I was kind of feeling the team out.”

This first segment was selected because it showed how Becky saw the coming out process from her own perspective and how it related to her journey. She was not hiding from her sexual orientation, but rather getting a feel for her surroundings. The “revolving door” symbolized a new process or new experience with each new environment and, as we spoke about later in the interview, continued to revolve in her life at the present time.

“I think I just didn’t want to be known for that. I didn’t want to be – I didn’t want to be, like, oh there’s Becky, the lesbian soccer player. I wanted to be Becky the soccer player and whatever else.”

The second segment eluded to the fact that she did not want her experience to be deemed one of a “lesbian soccer player”, but as a soccer player in general. She did not want her sexual orientation and her collegiate career to be mutually inclusive; she wanted them to be independent of one another. With the historical stereotype of females in sport as lesbians, one could argue that Becky’s desire to keep these two personal identifiers independent was extremely crucial to her journey in sport.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Umm, mostly it hasn’t been that hard. My teammates treat me well, they’ve open up to me – a lot. I haven’t had any bad experiences with it so far.”

With respect to India’s personal experience, it is important to note that she is the only individual within the present study that is currently playing at the collegiate level. Her experiences may continue to grow and change as she finishes her collegiate career. With this segment, it can be said that, as of the interview exchange, India’s experience had not been negative at all. This segment eluded to the idea that the interactions at both instructions for whom she played were positive and that her sexual orientation was not the primary cause of her transferring universities. Within our interview, she spoke about feeling welcome regardless of where she played and that her less positive experiences with sport reflected things associated with being a student-athlete, such as commitment to athletic engagements, study hall hours, practices, and games. This segment reflects the lack of negative experience in her current situation, which could reflect the sociocultural changes within the country.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“Yeah, umm, I would say being part of a team was – made it easier because I mean, you have a community already formed and people – division 1, especially too – because people are from everywhere, so you have all different types of cultures. So usually people, I feel like, on teams that are maybe it isn’t like that – like division 2 or division 3. But it was more of a diverse group of people in division 1 I think. We had people from [other country] and everywhere. So it was all different – all different types of mindsets. It was almost like made it easier to like, come out like with the team and everything. So it was a little easier, but being in [southern state] – it was also a shocker from [northeast state] so it was like a totally different culture, something I

wasn't used to. So it was a little hard to feel out, in the beginning, how people would react and everything but I felt like I was pretty comfortable with myself. I knew people – I knew I wasn't really alone in how I thought, especially coming from a different culture in [northeast state]. So it was, for me, personally it wasn't like a hard experience. It was a good experience. Everyone was pretty open – and that was just my team – everyone was pretty open.”

In this first segment, Tiffany spoke about her experiences in a sense that the cultural influences of those on the team were a positive contributor to her own experience and that the different mindsets enabled her to feel comfortable. Her personal experience was deemed a “good experience” and this could be supported by the amount of diversity she felt was present on her team. With a diverse group of participants, one could argue that the variety of opinion and backgrounds help others see ideas in a different perspective than that to which they are accustomed.

“I would say, umm, trying to feel it out and then yeah, that's probably why it took so long – just to see how – you know, just to feel out people. People are really into religion and their values on that so it's just kind of – once you get a chance to know people and make friends, you can really see and feel who you can communicate with.”

Here, Tiffany spoke about how her experience in a new culture may have influenced the fact that she was openly for three of her four years of collegiate soccer. In a new environment, one might feel uncomfortable expressing who they are until they better understand their surroundings. With Tiffany, this initial discomfort and hesitation showed that, as confident as she was with her own sexual orientation, she understood that different environments introduced new perspectives. It was important to her that she felt comfortable before expressing herself openly.

“I think as I got older, I was more confident and I honestly didn’t really care what people thought, so it was almost kind of nice and that frustration went away after a while.”

This segment was chosen because it reflects Tiffany’s growth as a person who identifies as something non-heterosexual. She was able to differentiate that there are people who do not share the same opinion as her, but that it would not stop her from being who she was.

“But I mean, but people think it’s one or other, you have to pick one. It’s like the same thing as going to – you know, you don’t know all the time. You have different experiences. People are constantly changing.”

This final segment regarding Tiffany’s personal experience showcased her own personal struggle with identification of sexual orientation. During the demographic aspect of the interview, Tiffany questioned whether or not she should identify as “homosexual” or “bisexual”. She eventually chose bisexual after some thought, but this segment showed how, even within her own journey, there is and always will be change. She acknowledged that she was still growing and learning.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“Um, yeah – I guess I can. I’ve never thought about this. ((pause)) I think, umm, most of my team was totally accepting. Umm, I guess at times, I felt some judgment from some of my teammates but I didn’t really take it in; it didn’t really bother me because I kind of had like a core group of girls that I ran with and hung out with and they all totally accepted me for who I was. So, it was never really an issue and if it had been, I think they would have my back. I think my coach also had my back. When I was running, I guess, I was like, one of the top two runners on our team and I wonder if I had not been placing in meets and had not been rookie of the week all the time if I would have had a harder time. Because that was what mattered above anything else, even my identity, so I think that’s

what people valued and I got treated a certain way because of that, if that makes any sense.”

Jessica had a more difficult time than the other participants with expressing what her experiences were like, which could be due to the fact that no one had ever asked her to recall this time in her life or due to the fact that her collegiate career was one year in length. This segment was chosen because it highlighted the basis of her year on the cross country team. As a top-tier runner, her experiences may have been reflective of her talent rather than her sexual identity, though her journey on the team would include some same-sex judgment based on her sexual orientation.

Emotions/Feelings

Emotions and feelings are representative of the personal experiences of the participants within this study. Feelings of frustration, anger, and discomfort were seen in multiple participants, while positive feelings were also addressed as well. The following statements reflect the question: what were some of the emotions you went through as a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender? This question was to further expand on the first research question of: what are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences?

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Umm, for parts of it, my team was really accepting but it was still frustrating at times – umm, just being at like, maybe, my college department award dinner, not being able to invite my partner to that awards dinner and things like that and it not being – it’s not that it was like frowned upon, I would say – or people would talk bad about me. It’s just, you just didn’t do it. You just didn’t bring them around, you know what I mean? So like, other people on the team,

it was perfectly fine to have their boyfriends around and be able to call them their boyfriends but it was kind of like unknown territory to when you could bring your partner around.”

“Umm, for parts of it, my team was really accepting but it was still frustrating at times.”

These two segments were chosen because it showed how the lack of recognition of anything other than a heterosexual relationship hurt Becky. While she maintained that she felt accepted by her teammates, she still could not help but express some discontent and frustration at not being encouraged to bring her significant other to things such as awards ceremonies or dinners. These statements reflected her struggle as an athlete who did not conform to gender norms and therefore, suffered the outcome of the continued heteronormativity in sport.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Uhh, I had my teammate come up to me and tell me their experiences with a girl but nobody else knew. And she came to me because I’m the only one like that on the team. Well I was the only black girl and lesbian on my team. I don’t know. I just, sometimes teammates feel more comfortable with telling me stuff – and I don’t mind it. I like it, personally. So it makes me feel good to know that they can come tell me.”

India’s statement was representative of her feeling as though her teammates trusted her, so much that they could tell her things in confidence, regardless of her sexual orientation. India further remarked about a teammate who came to her about something intimate and that she was the only one who knew and, with that knowledge, felt privileged that her teammate trusted her enough to confide in her. With a concern of being ostracized from teams due to sexual orientation, those who identify as LGBT may

feel a burden of anxiety being lifted when their teammates trust in them, as in this specific situation.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I think frustration was probably the biggest emotion. Frustration and kind like, I was angry a lot because you can’t force someone to think that same way that you do. You can’t change how people think and like, you know you’re a good person and what you’re doing is doing the best you can and it’s not a big deal to you but you can’t change how people think. So it’s frustrating to be around people.”

With this statement, Tiffany reflected on her big struggle with being a non-gender norm conforming individual. One could argue that her frustration and anger were brought on through the realization that not all people think the same way; she was born and raised in the Northeast and played soccer in the Southeast. Throughout the interview, she referenced culture and backgrounds, which may have played into her initial frustration and anger as a student-athlete entering a culturally different environment.

“I think if I was on a team were there was no one of that culture or that community on the team, it would be a lot different. I think the anger and frustration would have been a little bit more intense.”

Here, Tiffany reiterated her perceived acceptance from her teammates and the culture to which she credits their acceptance of her sexual orientation. Again, she continued to reference the community of the team and its culture that helped her experience a positive journey.

“I think as I got older, I was more confident and I honestly didn’t really care what people thought, so it was almost kind of nice and that frustration went away after a while.”

This statement was chosen because it highlights Tiffany's growth and progress in her own experience. Tiffany started her emotional journey frustrated and angry, but evolved in her thinking about how other's affected her, and she also gained a sense of pride and confidence that allowed her to appreciate her life and how she lived it.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

"I did once in a while feel like discomfort and judgment."

In this segment, one can see that, while Jessica felt accepted and respected by her teammates, she still felt uncomfortable and judged by those on her team regarding her sexual orientation. In her interview, Jessica stated that while she was unsure about discriminatory actions, the notion that something may have existed "still kind of hurt". While Jessica's statement reflected a negative experience within her collegiate career, she still credited her collegiate experience as a fully disclosed bisexual as "a relief to feel more accepted" than in high school.

Thoughts

The stream of thoughts of a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as something other than heterosexual can provide important insight into if they feel as though their sexual orientation influenced their experiences. The thought process for these four participants varied throughout their playing career. The question asked of the participants was: what were some of the common thoughts you had as you played college sports as an athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender? The research question to which this was aimed was: what are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences?

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Umm, like, should I even be doing this? Is this what I’m here to do?”

“Sometimes it gets stressful because of all the meetings and practices and it can take a toll on your body and you have to get up to go to class and act like everything is okay and then go out and play a big game, a big rival game.”

With these two segments, one could see that India was questioning her role of a student-athlete in the sense that she was unsure if she was going down the right path. While she remained adamant that her teammates were accepting of her, one could question whether she viewed her role as a student-athlete as independent of her sexual orientation in athletics. Furthermore, one could argue that the stressors of merely being a student-athlete were high. When asked about this, she mentioned that her sexual orientation did not add to her stressors as a student-athlete and that the main stress was the commitment regarding student-athletes.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I would sometimes wonder why there wasn’t anyone else who was out. Like, it seemed like everyone I knew was straight. But, I wondered if other sports were different . . . So I guess my only thought would be like, I wonder why there are no other gay or bisexual people on my team.”

Jessica discussed how she was curious about the lack of individuals in her sport that identified as LGBT. It also brought into question the idea that some athletes may not have felt comfortable being open, as she was, with her team. Furthermore, Jessica only ran one year in college and that may have influenced her ability to create or establish relationships with other runners.

Role Model

As fully disclosed student-athletes who identify or identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, it brought to light the possibility of these participants representing LGBT athletes in a positive manner, as role models for the community. The perception of their own role model image was asked with the question: do/did you view yourself as a role model for athletes who may fear being fully disclosed? This question furthered the examination of the first research question: what are some of the common emotions and thoughts that a fully disclosed student-athlete who identifies as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experiences? It should be noted that the term ‘role model’ was expanded upon by some to involve current role model status within the LGBT community and current lifestyle. Through the examination of their responses, this question allowed one to view the potential impact of those who chose to be open on their peers and their past and current environment.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I would say that I would be – I was a role model for my peers. Umm, but I wouldn’t say that I was a good role model for younger athletes, high school athletes or younger athletes because, even though I was a – as a college athlete, I was – everyone knew about me: my coaches, my professors, my friends – I still, I wouldn’t consider myself – I didn’t talk about my personal life when I was a coach – when I was coaching at the same time and had little younger girls around me and younger student-athletes – some of whom were probably gay and I don’t think I was a good role model for them because I wasn’t out to them – or I didn’t vocalize it.”

When speaking about her collegiate career, Becky felt as though she was a positive role model for those athletes at her playing level, but when she began mentioning

her coaching career, she felt that she was not as good of a role model as she could have been. One could reason that part of her struggle rested in the fact that there was a fear of repercussion from authorities and parents of players, in which case her sexual orientation would be a basis for judgment and not her talent as player or coach. It begs the question: what kind of impact could she have made on a young, confused athlete if given the opportunity to be her full self?

“I feel like I’m a role model to a certain extent, but I don’t feel like I’m a good role model for coming – for people coming out, because I don’t feel like I’m – I feel like I’m slightly ambiguous.”

“I feel bad again because I feel like I’m not the best role model available for kids because I can’t be 100% out because I feel like I can lose my job because of that.”

Becky brought up an important issue within employment and being open with her sexual orientation; based on her state laws, she could lose her job if someone in the school system found out and was displeased. The law did not protect her job status, which thus influenced her ability to reach a younger audience who may struggle with their sexual identity or orientation. This was an unfortunate realization at the career level, as her soccer career came to an end.

“But I do – there are a lot kids that will come and confide in me because I think they know and I just let them know that they’re fine. They’re normal and high school can be a very hard place. So I feel like I’m an okay role model and I feel like I just try to work with them and tell them and hint at my struggle without saying exactly. So I’m hoping one day I’ll be able to be a better role model.”

Although the prior segments reflected Becky’s current struggle, she did mention that she does have current students who confide in her with their sexuality topics. She

viewed this as the silver lining to her work situation and the ambiguity she maintained regarding her sexual orientation. Because of situations such as this, one could argue that, while Becky was able to reach some students, she could have a lasting impact on more students if given the opportunity and support from her current employment situation.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Yes, I feel like I do. I feel like I could give a lot of insight to them, and to say like... me, I feel like I’ve come a long way. So any athlete that does, I would say, ya know “just be yourself” because as soon as you’re yourself, that when you know you’re around people who really care. And if you’re faking it, you’ll never know.”

India, the only participant who was playing collegiate sport at the time of the interview, felt very strongly about her impact as a positive role model for her teammates and those in her athletic department. She exuded a sense of confidence in answering this question, which gave off the idea that she was proud of herself, both as a student-athlete and her sexual orientation in sport.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I would like to think so. I’m not really too sure.”

“And there have been other people who were like, ‘oh, I wish I could be as open as you’, ‘I wish I could, you know, just not care what people think’ but I guess it just comes with time. You just – you want them to kind of know that you can’t care what everyone thinks of you. You just can’t.”

With these two statements, Tiffany seemed to be ambiguous to the idea of her being a role model to her teammates, but this question may have been something no one had ever asked her and therefore her retrospective thinking may have been tested. Tiffany seemed to hope that her openness was viewed positively by her teammates and that she

was making a positive impact to those around her. She referenced multiple examples of where individuals praised her for being open, in which she may have felt a sense of pride and comfort knowing that a teammate had noticed and hoped to emulate her openness of sexual orientation.

“So for her to actually, I mean, I was the only person to know for two years – actually me and another girl who was part of the LGBT community on the team – were the only ones who knew, and so. It was hard, and like, I felt like I was trying to be a role model and trying to tell her, you know, like I felt like she couldn’t do it and I knew that she wanted to – but it was like, it was too hard and it was scary.”

This segment was chosen because it supported the previous mentions of Tiffany’s anger and frustration. Earlier, Tiffany mentioned her biggest emotion was frustration, and this statement showcased that while she worked to be a positive role model, she did struggle with trying to remain open-minded to others’ backgrounds and the realization that she could not force change unless it was wanted.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“Umm, yeah I think so. And I was also a little bit older than some of the people on my team, so I think there was probably an opportunity for me to – for me to act like a role model in certain ways and that could have made a difference to the team – whether or not people were out because they were a little bit younger.”

This statement from Jessica displayed her maturity and growth within herself and as a runner. Because of her age while running, Jessica felt that she had the opportunity to take on a role model position for younger and possibly sexually guarded individuals. This undertaking provided her a chance to potentially help change preconceived notions of those athletes who do not identify as LGBT.

Perceived Acceptance

As a member of a sports team, relationships are established, and the participants spoke to their belief of their acceptance on their respective teams. The level of perceived acceptance was asked of the participants, as the actual level of acceptance from teammates and coaches was not a necessity of the present study. The question asked of the participants was: in regards to acceptance on your athletic team, how well do you think you are/were accepted as an athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender? This interview question was used to delve into the second research question: how do fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender perceive their acceptance on their respective collegiate athletic teams?

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I mean, it was fine and I never really had any issues – no severe issues that I can think of right now.”

“But I think that they accepted me because I was and honest person and a good teammate and a loyal person. So I don’t feel like it really hurt me at all. I mean, I got – I was voted captain by my peers junior and senior year so...”

Becky remarked that her teammates and coaches were accepting of her regardless of her sexual orientation and that she felt judged based on her talent as a soccer player and not on her sexual orientation. Becky had previously mentioned that she wanted to be known as “Becky the soccer play” and not Becky the “lesbian soccer player”. She seemed to be adamant about keeping the two identifiers as separate as possible regarding her collegiate career.

“Umm, for parts of it, my team was really accepting but it was still frustrating at times.”

With Becky, this statement showed how, even with her accepting teammates, there were still issues within her that created a frustration as an athlete. Becky discussed the majority of these issues in regards to the lack of inclusivity she felt existed in her athlete department.

“In my third year - my final year, our coach was really open-minded and he could care less. He was from up north and so he made it feel really open and like we could bring anybody we wanted. And he would, he – and he actually talked about it. He was like, you can bring your boyfriend, girlfriend, I don’t care – ya know, that type of.”

This segment was chosen because it displayed the environment in which she was playing during her final year and how the change in coaching allowed her to feel more accepted and welcome. The language spoken by her coach was of inclusivity and was appreciated from Becky. With a coach’s verbal support, one could argue that an athlete would feel more comfortable and accepted with their sexual orientation on the team.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“But I went to a school, and it actually came about in a funny way – my teammates would always talk about their boy or boyfriends – boys, boys, boys all the time – and one day, I was just like, “well, I don’t know because I like girls”. And they were like, “oh, okay”. And then asked me all these questions so I was very open to them asking questions and it was funny because they were kind of shocked and surprised. But they took it very well. And they asked me questions and stuff. They didn’t mind. And I thought they would because it was like a Mormon town, so I didn’t know how they would take it. But they took it well, so...”

“Oh, yes completely. Completely. They’ll even, we’ll even have talks and they’ll be like, “how are you and your girlfriend”.”

These two statements by India were examples of her high perception of acceptance on her team as a fully disclosed lesbian. Even when she became open with her teammates initially, their responses of shock and surprise transformed into those of acceptance and not outright judgment. The initial ‘shocked’ reaction of her teammates did not surprise India, and the fact that they were curious about her lifestyle showed that they cared for her as a person, just as if she identified as a heterosexual.

“Previously, it was two years in [western state]. That was when I was the only black girl and lesbian on the team. And then I moved to [current state] where they were more accepting of it here. But in [western state], it was – it was like “how is your girlfriend” and stuff like that or “India, is she pretty” and so it was kind of interesting to see how they took it.”

India was a transfer student from a state in the West to a state in the Southeast. She reiterated and supported the notion that her teammates from both institutions were accepting of her, but stated that her current state was much more accepting of her lifestyle than her previous state. She attributed this to the culture and the environment from which she was coming. Regardless of location, however, India felt welcomed with her sexual orientation. By asking her questions and being curious about her partner and her life, her teammates showed that her sexual orientation would not take away their respect for her as a person.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I think I was really pretty much accepted. I didn’t feel any sort of outcast. I didn’t feel like an outcast or anything. People were very accepting.”

“Yeah, people were really accepting and we quite a few people from (current state), but a lot of them were from out of state, like Colorado, California, Florida, so...”

These statements by Tiffany highlighted her perceived acceptance on her team, and the continued multi-cultural impact of her team with regards to her acceptance. Tiffany continuously spoke of the diversity of the team and the accepting nature of her teammates and her coach due to this environment.

“And you just have to be accepting of yourself.”

This statement was chosen to represent acceptance because it showed how, even with the support and welcoming nature of a team, the acceptance of one’s self was crucial to Tiffany’s journey. As she was a native Northerner, her culture varied from that of where she played soccer, thus exposing her to a different way of life. She credits a lot of her growth to being on a team and having soccer as an outlet.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I think, umm, most of my team was totally accepting. Umm, I guess at times, I felt some judgment from some of my teammates but I didn’t really take it in; it didn’t really bother me because I kind of had like a core group of girls that I ran with and hung out with and they all totally accepted me for who I was. So, it was never really an issue and if it had been, I think they would have my back. I think my coach also had my back.”

“I think the majority, yes. I think there was probably a group of girls where that wasn’t the case”

These two statements were chosen because they displayed the disparity that was seen from Jessica’s eyes in terms of acceptance. While she felt accepted by her close friends and her coach, she also understood that there may be some resistance regarding her sexual orientation but others on the team. The interesting aspect of this realization was in that Jessica responded that she felt judgment specifically from the same-sex, as if the opposite gender was more accepting than her own gender.

“...it was kind of like a relief in college to feel more accepted.”

This statement reflected the notion that even though Jessica felt some judgment from a few members on her team, she still felt more open and accepted in her collegiate setting than that of her previous high school setting. She spoke about how she was not fully disclosed in high school and that it led to some unwarranted discrimination, but that in college, her openness regarding her sexual orientation enabled her to feel more accepted. This statement also speaks to the environmental differences from high school to college and how a change of environment could aide in one's journey.

Perceived Judgment

As with perceived acceptance, the participants were asked about any forms of judgment they may have felt toward them. The participants also spoke about the lack of judgment or the idea that the judgment was not a direct communication to their face. While acceptance is strived for, there lied a realistic understanding of potential judgment toward individuals who do not conform to societal gender norms. The question asked of these participants regarding judgment was: what kind of actions or words are/were used toward you or around you where you feel/felt either accepted or unaccepted for who you are? The research question that this was intended to explore further was: how do fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender perceive their acceptance on their respective collegiate athletic teams? While the majority of statements reflect the participants' sexual orientation, it is worth noting that judgment was seen by some as a broad term. The phrase “who you are” was used as a broad, general term encompassing both their sexual orientation and their life choices.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I just feel like I feel out the situation and maybe just keep my personal life personal when I feel like I need to, and let them get to know me as me so that they don’t judge me from the get-go. And then, when I feel that they’re ready or when the time comes that they’re just going to have to be forced – that I am – that they find out that I’m a lesbian, I don’t deny it. But I hopefully, they don’t judge me just for that.”

In this segment, Becky was referring to her current employment situation, where her sexual orientation could be grounds for dismissal, without question. This statement also showed how Becky protects herself from such judgment by keeping her personal life separate from that of her professional life. Furthermore, Becky understood the difference of opinions regarding sexual orientation and worked to highlight her personality before disclosing her sexual orientation and in doing so, she has essentially encouraged people to know her as a person before judging her based on her sexual orientation. Her goal was to help people open their minds and alter their preconceived ideas of sexuality.

“I feel that I was judged for my – for who I was as like, you know, as a soccer player and as a person, and not – nothing to do with who I was dating. I mean, I felt judged by my teammates but it was never because I was dating a female. And if they were judging me because of that, I never really felt that.”

During her collegiate career, Becky strived to be judged for her talent rather than her sexual orientation, and continued to establish them as two separate entities of her life. This allowed her to perceive any judgment as person/player-based and not sexual orientation-based. With her efforts to keep her sexual orientation (personal) separate from her soccer career (professional), one could argue that Becky was better able to differentiate from where and why the judgment, if any, came.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Oh no, never. Never. But I know one of my friends did have a situation, or incident, like that. I don’t remember how it was handled, but I just remember her telling me something about it and I was like, “wow! It never happened to me”. I don’t know why it didn’t. It just never did. I feel truly blessed that it didn’t.”

With India’s statement, it was clear that she had yet to experience much judgment regarding her sexual orientation. In saying this, she was grateful for her perceived lack of judgment and appreciated the fact that she had yet to go through an uncomfortable and victimizing situation. India was able to vaguely recall a friend’s experience in which they were discriminated against, which surprised India and also reminded her of how grateful she has been to not be on the receiving end of judgment.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“No one ever said anything or never to my face, I guess you could say. But there was – well cause I don’t really know if people said it or not but some of my friends would tell me that some people on the team felt uncomfortable being around me and my girlfriend at the time and they just felt it was weird to see us kissing – but that really isn’t that bad. It could have been so much worse.”

Tiffany spoke to the realistic idea that, although she was not discriminated against publically or in person, people may or may not judge your lifestyle in private. In a close-knit environment such as a collegiate team, one might question whether a communication barrier was built due to this hearsay. Although Tiffany did not feel the personal brunt of discrimination, she also was appreciative that the hearsay was as far as it would go and understood that it could have been a much worse scenario of judgment.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I did once in a while feel like discomfort and judgment.”

With Jessica’s statement, it showed how her experience, while mainly positive, was marred with spurts of discomfort or judgment from some of her teammates. Jessica spoke to the fact that she had a “core group of girls” that supported her and with whom she would surround herself, so one could argue that this support system provided for her during times of judgment.

“It was more like hearsay – oh this person said this about you. So I was never, I just tried to take those things with a grain of salt because I didn’t really know if the person said it but, I mean, at the time, it was definitely – it still kind of hurt.”

“I think I vaguely remember, umm, hearsay about – I feel like this is like a pretty normal thing for bisexual or gay women, but there was some sort of maybe discomfort about me being in locker rooms and around other girls.”

“Nothing to my face.”

These three statements were grouped together because it emphasized the lack of public discrimination toward Jessica, or any other participant in the present study. Jessica experienced hearsay, similar to Tiffany, but was never victimized for her sexual orientation in person or through a public medium. She also seemed appreciative that the potential, private discriminatory actions against her were not more severe. She also showed a sense of resiliency and forgiveness in the way she did not take the hearsay to heart or hold it against the individual because she was unsure of its truth.

LGBT Resources

In an attempt to assess the needs of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, questions regarding accessible resources were used. During the coding process, three subcategories were uncovered: known campus-wide LGBT resources, known athletic department LGBT resources, and desired athletic department LGBT resources. The desire to gain more insight into the resources needed for those student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender came to light in the absence of knowledge regarding the current availability of these resources, both campus-wide and student-athlete specific. These questions were focused on answering the third research question: what are the needs of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to increase or establish comfort within their respective teams and/or athletic departments?

Known Campus-Wide LGBT Resources

To gain an understanding for the known campus-wide resources for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the participants were asked: are/were there any resources available to you at your institution? This question was asked to learn if the athletes knew of or were aware of any resources available to the general school population. The following statements reflect resources available to all students, athlete and non-athlete.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I know there was one group on campus ... Lambda. I think it might have been Lambda but it was not very big and it was not very – I never, I never would have went to a meeting. I was friends with them and I was friends with like the group on Facebook but I never went to one meeting.”

Becky knew of one group that met on campus, Lambda, but did not make an effort to become part of the group or to attend meetings. She remarked that she wanted to be recognized for her soccer career and not her sexual orientation, which was a recurring theme within the interview. Becky maintained a private personal life from her professional one.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“Umm, there was one. It ended up being a pretty big group. I could never attend because I was always – it was umm, Gay Straight Alliance type group that would meet weekly I think. I was able to walk by once and see what was up, but I never really could attend because of soccer. It was during the same time. But it seemed like they had a big awareness around campus and stuff. But I only really knew – it wasn’t advertised as much it should have been because yeah, I think they could have doubled the size if they had – you kind of had to dig to find it ... Yeah, you kind of had to go through people and oh, there meeting at this time at night. It wasn’t really – no posters or anything, which was too bad.”

Tiffany mentioned a gay-straight alliance at her institution but was not confident on the appropriate name, and similar to Becky, did not make an attempt to join the group. She credits her lack of involvement to athletic engagements. She also spoke about the difficulty in locating the group and advertisements regarding meetings and events, which she deemed as unfortunate.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“Yeah, there was a center on campus called the Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity. But when I ran, it was on the other campus. It was on the [main] campus and not in [other campus] where I lived and practiced so I didn’t know it existed until years later. But I was there and they do like, all kinds of like, safe zone training and like trans-ally training and different events. Umm, so it’s a really cool center but I didn’t know it was there.”

Jessica attended an institution where there were two campuses, one on which she spent the majority of her educational and athletic career. She did learn of the center on campus, but only after many years. She researched the center about the things they offered and was pleased with its offerings, but commented on the unfortunate circumstance that she did not know about it while she was in attendance.

Known Athletic Department LGBT Resources

Within the coding process, the question of resources became divided. Resources were looked through two different lenses, the university student body resources and the athletic department resources. The following statements reflect the participants’ knowledge of the availability of LGBT-specific resources within the athletic department. The term ‘resource’ was extended to coaching staff and personnel, along with workshops or trainings. In the present study, it was determined that a coach or coaching staff’s support of the LGBT community was a known resource of support, as resources can come from a multitude of areas: trainings, counselors, coaches, etc.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“In my third year - my final year, our coach was really open-minded and he could care less. He was from up north and so he made it feel really open and like we could bring anybody we wanted. And he would, he – and he actually

talked about it. He was like, you can bring your boyfriend, girlfriend, I don't care – ya know, that type of.”

This segment was chosen because of Becky's coach. Becky felt that the coach in her final season was one with whom she felt most welcomed and supported. She appreciated his inclusivity within his speeches with the team, which showed his backing and acceptance of the LGBT players.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Oh, yes. I actually had this lady named Rita Corbett. I would go and talk to her sometimes because she was also a lesbian and she had a partner and they would come to the games and stuff. It was just nice to know that I had someone to talk to there, about it. She was open with it.”

“A lot of the student athletes came to see her. I think she was the counselor for the athletes. But I just know a lot of athletes would go to her for help with stuff.”

In this segment, India refers to a lady she deemed as her “counselor” and spoke about the comfort in which she had speaking with her about any sport or non-sport related situation. India's comfort may have been attributed to the similarity in their non-heterosexual orientations, but she also recognized that many of the athletes spoke with her counselor and that her support was noted throughout the athletes.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I know it also helped too that we had, for my four years of college, an atheist coach who was very – not like, he was anti-religion – not that has anything to do with it, but he was very supportive of the LGBT community. Love that! So he made it very helpful to come out and everyone ... He was really outgoing. He loved that sort of culture ... so he was the only one, at first, that I really connected with and that really helped because I think it would've take a lot more time if it wasn't for him to be okay and talk about with the team and stuff like that.”

In this segment, Tiffany referred to her coach as a supportive resource for her and someone with whom she immediately connected. This connection may be due to his native state being in a similar region to Tiffany's and also to his vocal support of the LGBT community. She credited her connection with and care from her coach as being a main reason she was fully disclosed to her teammates.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“No, no. I would say, I don't think so. I never heard of that before.”

“Yeah. I mean, I'm not aware of any, ya know, workshops for the athletic department to go and do or understand and abide by, you know. They can do whatever they want.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“No, I don't think so.”

These statements from both Tiffany and Jessica shed light on the perceived lack of available resources to the student-athletes who identify as LGBT. Both Tiffany and Jessica did not know of any available resources within their athletic department that would be recognized as a support for athletes who identify similar to them. The unavailability of these resources showed how necessary they were for former athletes and are for current athletes.

Desired Athletic Department LGBT Resources

Regarding the necessity for resources that enhance the athletic support for student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, the participants were asked two questions: 1) what types of resources would you have liked to have seen or would like to see within your athletic team or department in order to increase or

establish a sense of comfort for athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and 2) what do you think athletic teams and departments need in terms of increasing or establishing acceptance of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The following statements are representative of these questions regarding athletic department resources for student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Education

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“And talking about it. Maybe, maybe – administrators need to be spoken to about – to including, you know, even as simple as like, invitations, boyfriend or girlfriend. You know, its stuff like that. Or it’s spoken about so you don’t feel like it’s this hidden, secret thing.”

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Yes, they [workshops] would be great and for the coach to let them know that they’re there for them. Because that – not only let them know but show them that they care. ‘Cause a coach can tell them all this, but if you don’t show me, I’m not going to say anything to you ... and it’s one thing if your teammates are there for you but if your coach is there for you, I feel like that helps so much more.”

“Umm, maybe like the coaches and assistants and people like, take classes on how to handle this stuff – especially – with the men coaches because I hear some of the guys – about the stuff that they say and it’s like “wow, I can’t believe you guys would think like that” but you got to see what their person in charge is saying too. So, I would just like to see probably different trainings or something that they – about what happens if they do find out or what happens if someone’s teammate makes fun of them just because of it.”

“Umm, obviously I don’t think so [regarding if her athletic department has enough resources], but I do know there’s

LGBT people in sports in my school and I don't know how they deal with it, but my team is very open to it but I don't know how everybody else's team is – but I feel like if they had more of a – just situations on how to deal with stuff like this because everybody's not brought up the same way, everybody's parents might have not talked or said things about acceptance so they might be clueless to the fact that their words can hurt.”

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I think maybe just educating – people probably just have no idea how to go about it and maybe they just feel uncomfortable because they don't want to make the other person uncomfortable without confronting so it's awkward – ‘cause to me, it's just not a big deal but it could be a big deal too. Like, what if you come up to somebody and you're like ‘how's your girlfriend’ and she doesn't even have a girlfriend? It's like ahh, awkward. But, yeah I think people just don't need to feel like tiptoeing. I feel like it should be – like that's a good way to progress.”

“...people need to be aware of that – and not really deal with it because I don't think it needs to be dealt with but just, I guess, how to confront or be okay with it and accept it and stuff like that.”

“I think it's educating in the right way, especially in the sport world, because there are a lot of people who are in similar situations that no one will ever know about because they'll keep it a secret. Especially authority figures have a huge influence, especially like coaches. You're trying to impress a coach, but it's like, if they have a certain view, you might not, if ever, talk to them about personal issues or...”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I think umm, like having teams do safe zone training would be cool. So like, a safe zone training is just like basic “this is what it means to be this way” and “this is the difference between sexuality and gender” and like, “these are things that you definitely don't say” and “these are things to use that are fine” and – so something like that I think is always helpful.”

“I mean, I know it may be uncomfortable even though I’m not trans, but I think that some education couldn’t hurt ... especially for coaches and people in charge.”

One of the biggest suggestions from the participants of the present study regarding desired athletic department LGBT resources revolved around education in a variety of ways: trainings, workshops, and classes. All participants felt that some form of education was necessary to increase the awareness of the LGBT community. Suggestions included topics such as: proper pronoun usage, appropriate and inappropriate phrases and words, safe zone training, specific training for coaches and administrators, and broaching uncomfortable topics with teammates.

With basic education, one could suggest that proper knowledge could challenge some preconceived notions or expectations of teammates, personnel, and administration. With the accurate knowledge, one might be able to approach the LGBT community with a new perspective, or at least be aware of the correct ways to speak with those individuals who identify as LGBT.

Dialogue

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Umm, really I think people just talking about it. Like, it’s kind of like – people just didn’t talk about it. I don’t know. So if it was just talked about, it makes it feel better – normal.”

“Yeah, I don’t know what really could fix it besides people actually acknowledging its existence.”

“And talking about it. Maybe, maybe – administrators need to be spoken to about – to including, you know, even as simple as like, invitations, boyfriend or girlfriend. You know, its stuff like that. Or it’s spoken about so you don’t feel like it’s this hidden, secret thing.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“But yeah, so I think conversations in the biggest thing – umm, making sure, especially like if someone – a coach is aware of someone being on their team whose LGBTQ identified, like, listening to teammates, listening to folks, and making sure that these people are being respected and are comfortable and I guess there’s a whole bunch of ways to do that, but I mean, I think it takes awareness. It’s the number one thing, like “okay, this is not okay to say, this is” and yeah.”

These specific statements were gathered from the participants due to their focus on the increase of basic dialogue and conversation. The belief was that if a conversation can be generated and continued within the athletic department regarding the LGBT community, it would promote an atmosphere of inclusion and awareness. With this small step, student-athletes, coaches, team personnel, and those within the athletic department could learn to feel comfortable and less awkward regarding speaking with those who identify as LGBT or about issues surrounding the LGBT community. The concept gathered from these statements suggested that the mere introduction of a revolving conversation within athletics would be a small, realistic, and immediate step forward.

Visible Support

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I mean just being, or maybe the athletics supporting an LGBT event, you know what I mean? And then like that, in whatever, you know, large or small, at least it’s getting the LGBT athletes feeling like a part of – like their own athletic department is supporting them.”

“Yeah, I mean, because the athletic departments are always volunteering. I did a lot of volunteering during work as an athlete – as a student-athlete. We were constantly volunteering and building houses and helping kids and mentoring kids and doing little soccer camps. And so, why

weren't any of those events toward the LGBT community?
Not one."

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

"Umm, I mean, they could do like annual awareness – you know like they do games to benefit breast cancer awareness and stuff like that, or you wear a certain color and all this stuff. Maybe they do a game that benefits and goes to the LGBT community or the money that is spent on the game can go toward them. Or something like that, just support it."

"What else would be really awesome too would be – we were required to go to these speakers at [institution] when we were playing and every month there'd be a speaker come in, like a former athlete – maybe a female athlete and all the females would go watch them speak. It would be really cool if they had somebody from the LGBT community come speak and share their stories. It would be an easy way to get everyone together – all the female athletes or all the athletes together and understand a different perspective. That would be a good way to incorporate it. Yeah, just, that would be really cool. I really liked that. I mean, there's a lot of funding and there's a lot things people can do, we just need to branch out."

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

"And so I wonder, too, I guess, umm, that would be a potential – in college, like if a coach was LGBTQ, that they could come out and that might make the students on their team more comfortable coming out – but that's also their decision, so, yeah. That's some of what I do."

The previous statements were grouped together to recognize that there was a strong desire to increase the awareness and acceptance of student-athletes who identify as LGBT through visible support from the athletic department. This visible support varied in such that multiple ideas were generated, such as: the athletic department sponsoring an event recognizing the LGBT community, a coach being open regarding their LGBT

orientation, speakers who identify as LGBT for student-athletes, hosting or supporting an annual awareness for the LGBT community, or volunteering as an athletic team or department for or at an LGBT event. It is with this type of visible support that the participants felt the athletic department could show their backing for the student-athletes who are within their department.

Administrative and Team Personnel Support

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“And talking about it. Maybe, maybe – administrators need to be spoken to about – to including, you know, even as simple as like, invitations, boyfriend or girlfriend. You know, its stuff like that. Or it’s spoken about so you don’t feel like it’s this hidden, secret thing.”

“I mean just being, or maybe the athletics supporting an LGBT event, you know what I mean? And then like that, in whatever, you know, large or small, at least it’s getting the LGBT athletes feeling like a part of – like their own athletic department is supporting them.”

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Yes, they [workshops] would be great and for the coach to let them know that they’re there for them. Because that – not only let them know but show them that they care. ‘Cause a coach can tell them all this, but if you don’t show me, I’m not going to say anything to you ... and it’s one thing if your teammates are there for you but if your coach is there for you, I feel like that helps so much more.”

“Umm, maybe like the coaches and assistants and people like, take classes on how to handle this stuff – especially with the men coaches because I hear some of the guys – about the stuff that they say and it’s like “wow, I can’t believe you guys would think like that” but you got to see what their person in charge is saying too. So, I would just like to see probably different trainings or something that they – about what happens if they do find out or what

happens if someone's teammate makes fun of them just because of it."

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

"Honestly, I would day – I just think people – maybe not so much – people who are in charge or authority figures within the sport community be more open, I guess, with it. That would be a good start, I feel like."

"I think it's educating in the right way, especially in the sport world, because there are a lot of people who are in similar situations that no one will ever know about because they'll keep it a secret. Especially authority figures have a huge influence, especially like coaches. You're trying to impress a coach, but it's like, if they have a certain view, you might not, if ever, talk to them about personal issues or..."

"But I think coaches really need to express non-bias opinions to the team because that's a huge thing. It's just like working in a job. Like if your boss had anti-gay lesbian views, ya know, you wouldn't want to express anything to them so..."

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

"I mean, I know it may be uncomfortable even though I'm not trans, but I think that some education couldn't hurt ... especially for coaches and people in charge."

"And so I wonder, too, I guess, umm, that would be a potential – in college, like if a coach was LGBTQ, that they could come out and that might make the students on their team more comfortable coming out – but that's also their decision, so, yeah. That's some of what I do."

In terms of support, there was an overwhelming response to the necessity of support from all areas of the athletic department from administrative personnel to team personnel. While education was mentioned previously, all four participants strongly felt the need for those in charge to be supportive of the LGBT community. Administrative

and team personnel support was seen through various lenses with the participants, including: supporting an LGBT event, being educated through workshops, generating basic dialogue through the department, and using inclusive text with regards to athletic engagements and ceremonies.

Many of these statements reflected the interviews of each participant. Tiffany had previously spoken about the openness of her coach and how the connection with him encouraged her disclosure with her team. Furthermore, Jessica also spoke to the support she felt she received from her coach and that, should an issue arise, they would “have her back” in the situation. With the most open-minded of her coaches coming at the end of her career, Becky also previously mentioned the inclusivity of her coach’s speech and how he supported the LGBT community and athletes on their squad. India did not mention her own coach specifically, but spoke to the necessity of coaches’ actions reflecting their words and showing genuine care of and for their athletes.

With a positive influence of these individuals in charge, a collective sense of awareness and acceptance could be established throughout athletic departments. One could argue that the athletic departments must attempt to grow with the societal changes of the increasing acceptance of the LGBT community, and the visible support from the administration and from coaches could introduce a new era of inclusion within collegiate athletics – one of breaking down gender stereotypes and the heteronormativity that follow sport.

Unknown*Student-Athlete One, Becky*

“I’m not sure what would work yet. I don’t know.”

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“See, that’s the thing. I don’t know ... I just wish that it was a little bit more equal.”

These two participants’ statements were grouped together because, while Becky and Tiffany contributed a multitude of ideas, they were still willfully ignorant to what might actually work within an athletic department. The struggle in these statements reflected years of collegiate play without the necessary resources for Becky or Tiffany as fully disclosed athletes of the LGBT community. It highlighted the reality that without trying something to see if it succeeds or does not succeed, things will remain as they are or were.

Personal LGBT Action

Within this study, three of the four participants had since ended their collegiate athletic career and were members of different communities. These three participants were asked about their current advocacy roles within the LGBT community. They were asked to respond to the question: since graduating, what have you done or what are you doing, if anything, to increase the awareness and acceptance of athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender? The question was focused on delving further into the third research question: what are the needs of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to increase or establish comfort within their respective teams and/or athletic departments? This question was asked to assess how much, if any,

advocacy they were currently doing for the LGBT community given their full disclosure within their collegiate career and also given their expressed needs for within the athletic department for future student-athletes who identify as LGBT.

The responses varied greatly between the three participants, as the statements will show. At the time of the interview, India was currently still playing collegiate sport and therefore the question was not applicable to her at this time.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“But I do – there are a lot kids that will come and confide in me because I think they know and I just let them know that they’re fine. They’re normal and high school can be a very hard place. So I feel like I’m an okay role model and I feel like I just try to work with them and tell them and hint at my struggle without saying exactly. So I’m hoping one day I’ll be able to be a better role model.”

“So I think once you know that you can’t be fired, that that would help a lot too.”

In these examples, Becky reiterated her current struggle regarding the need to remain ambiguous about her sexual orientation due to the laws that could affect her position. However, it seemed as though she found a loophole within her employment and has since been seen as a confidant to some students who turn to her for advice. While she must protect her employment, Becky has found a way to remain supportive of the LGBT community.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I haven’t really – it’s too bad because I had a great connection with the team when I left.”

In this statement, Tiffany admitted to the fact that she had lost connection with the team and thus hadn’t been actively advocating for the student-athletes, even with the

multitude of suggestions she brought to light when speaking about desired resources for student-athletes who identify as LGBT.

“...but the only thing I can – I guess it’s more small scale and just things I wish people would have done to me – is I’ll see a couple out on the street or in the store and they have their arm around each other and there’s like a lesbian couple and you know, I’ll just kind of go up to them and just be like, ‘oh you guys are really cute’, ‘you guys are great,’ ‘this relationship is awesome’ ... I try to do it in front of other people to show like, it’s okay. It’s normal. It’s not a big deal. And people say that to heterosexual couples all the time, so I’m just trying to make it more... just for me, I just want them to feel like we’re all part of one big community and that they’re part of it too, so just on the small scale.”

Although Tiffany had not taken part in any advocacy for the LGBT community within sport, she stated how she shows her appreciation for the LGBT community through public acknowledgment. She spoke about how these actions were on the smaller scale but that she wanted to show couples that they were significant and a part of a greater community of relationship and love.

“But I do want to get more involved – I mean, I’m not really taking classes right now but I’m hoping that if I do take classes at another university, I want to actually start something up. I think that would be awesome.”

This statement reflected Tiffany’s aspirations to begin a student-athlete group on a campus, should she begin schooling again. Tiffany eluded to the idea of returning to school and if she did, she would like to use her experience to help other student-athletes within the LGBT community.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“Umm, I’m not – like I don’t participate in team sports anymore but I’m a yoga teacher so I work with a lot of athletes and I work specifically with a lot of LGBTQ folks and I’ll do LGBTQ specific classes. So it’s definitely sort of the same sort of people – people who are really body oriented and fitness oriented. I also teach fitness classes. And who are sometimes queer. Umm, so one thing I do is if I teach LGBTQ class, then I’m really aware of when I’m physically adjusting someone with my hands. Like, because often, trans folk have different surgeries or different, you know, different triggers in their bodies, and like, all people potentially have triggers, but I think especially with this population. So I’ll always ask before I touch someone. I make sure I know someone’s pronouns so if I’m not sure if someone goes by like, he or she or they, I will ask and then do my best to use the correct pronouns for them.”

“I think like LGBTQ people feel comfortable in my class because they also know that I identify in a similar way.”

Since leaving the team sport area, Jessica remained active in the physical activity realm, becoming a yoga instructor. She talked about how she currently leads specific classes focused toward the LGBTQ community and uses her knowledge, experience, and education to support her clients and make them feel comfortable in her class. These statements highlighted the ways in which she advocates for the community that surrounds her. Jessica felt proud of her current work and shared her appreciation for the current study in that she hopes it will bring further positive change to the LGBT community.

Advice

As collegiate athletes who were open regarding their sexual orientation, these participants were and are proud of being fully disclosed during their athletic career. Due to this, the primary investigator was intrigued to know what these participants might give for advice to other student-athletes. In this regard, the question they were asked was: if

there was one piece of advice that you would give to a student-athlete who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender based off of your own personal experiences, what would it be? It is important to note that the following statements may also reflect comments toward athletes who may fear being fully disclosed at this time.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I don’t tell people to come flying out of the closet and “be who you are” and “who cares about what everybody thinks” because it’s not a realistic view. Like if you actually care about what you’re doing and you want to be successful, you do have to feel people out and you do have, ya know, knowing who you’re talking to and if someone’s completely against gays and lesbians, you need to let them – you have to let them learn who you are and then once they know you and that you’re good person, typically... I have found that when they find out eventually that you are gay or lesbian they really don’t care and it changes their mind because its – a lot of these people are like “I never knew somebody” and so they had all these preconceived notions of what they were like. I feel like if you were to just come out of the closet without thinking and just being “here I am”, then they would automatically like build a wall and never gotten to know you. So I think you come out, you be who you are, but you just be mindful, you know, of – be mindful.”

In conjunction to Becky’s demeanor throughout the interview, her advice remained level-headed and realistic in regards to advice she might give to a student-athlete. One could assume that her personal experience and her current situation affected her potential advice. Becky was adamant about keeping her personal life away from that of her public or professional life, at least until feeling comfortable with her surroundings. Becky understood the potential resistance to being disclosed without warning to those around her and to her surroundings. Her advice suggested that an individual should assess their situation before exposing their sexual orientation, as to not receive unwarranted

discrimination. It was clear that Becky followed her own advice throughout her life and present career.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“I would probably say, talk to your teammates. They’re your sisters, they’re supposed to be your sisters that you can go talk to.”

India spoke to the relationship with the team and how an individual should be able to rely on their teammates as family, especially in a time where a personal and intimate situation such as disclosing one’s sexual orientation is at hand. This paralleled India’s remarks regarding the closeness and acceptance of her teammates with respect to her own sexual orientation.

“And I would say, I don’t know. Be careful. It’s not one of those things that is meant for everybody. You just have to be careful with it because a lot of people can’t handle it and you might not be able to handle their reaction to it. I mean, I’m a strong person but somebody else might not be as strong. So I would just say, be careful – about who you tell and how you tell them.”

In this statement, India was aware that, while some people may respect your honesty and your lifestyle, there will be individuals who will show judgment or resistance. Similar to the advice from Becky, India reiterated the need to remain cognizant of who you tell and how, as one should protect themselves from harm, both emotionally and in any other form.

“I would say sometimes we got to stand together, you know, because especially being a female athlete, everybody automatically assumes that you’re gay if you’re playing, like, basketball or something, but I don’t see it that way. I would say like, tell people to have an open mind, especially in men’s sports. You have to have an open mind – because it’s all manly, manly, manly, women, women, women. One

of my friends actually had a teammate, he played football, and he was like, ‘My teammate’s gay. Respect’ And I was like, ‘I’m glad you think that way but not everybody thinks that way’. So I would say, you know – stay strong and live your life because nobody’s living it but you. You’re the only person that can live your life.”

India stated that, as a community, people need to stick together and band together to support one another on their journey. India purported that if people were to have an open mind, the acceptance and support of student-athletes who identify as LGBT would be stronger within athletics.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I would say – I would say that it’s 100 times harder to keep it a secret and try and hide who you are. And kind of like that Eleanor Roosevelt quote, you can’t make everyone happy but as long as – there are going to be people who are accepting and there’s also going to be people who are not accepting. But you just gotta, you know – it’ll all be okay. You have to know that you’re going to meet people who love you no matter what and those are the people you want to keep in your life. And to sporting – I think the setting of being part of a sport or community is the best place you can come out, I think. To me, it was – it is kind of intimidating because you have people of all different ages – but you never, people are going to accept you. Like, you’re going to develop these strong relationships because you came out. People are really going to like you and love that you trust them and that really helps, I think, in terms of getting closer with people. And I don’t think you can – I think holding back is only going to keep you from having these great relationships with people.”

Tiffany was a supporter of both loving and accepting yourself and understanding that people will love you for your openness. Tiffany reasoned that being secretive is harder than being open, and that in being open, the relationships garnered will be more beneficial than that of hiding one’s true identity. Unlike her fellow participants, Tiffany

did not suggest assessing the surrounding area and people, which may reflect her free-spirited ideals regarding her cultural upbringing.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“...have faith and give people time.”

“So yeah, I would just say have faith and be patient and don’t give up who you are for anyone else. Or try to hide it.”

Jessica was of the belief that faith and patience would be key components to an individual’s disclosure. Jessica’s simple yet sound advice paralleled her own experience in sport, in which she felt more mature, as she was a bit older than other team members. One could argue that her continued work within the LGBT community exposed her to more experiences about connections and pursuit of happiness, which influenced her modest advice.

Sport

Sport, as a coding theme, emerged through the statements the participants used regarding their overall experiences. Seeing as how the participants were all collegiate athletes, the influence of sport participation was seen and noted. The code, sport, was broken down into two units: sport as an outlet and sport over identity.

Sport as an Outlet

The statements that follow were in response to personal viewpoints regarding the use of sport as it related to the experiences of these participants. Using sport as an outlet was seen through different angles from the participants.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I mean it was good because I kind of got to get my anger out and frustration while playing sports so that’s nice.”

Tiffany explained her participation in sport as an outlet for her initial frustration with people’s discomfort or lack of understanding regarding her sexual orientation.

Tiffany stated that as she matured and gained more confidence, the frustration subsided, but that sport was her vehicle for releasing any frustration or anger she may have felt.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“And to sporting – I think the setting of being part of a sport or community is the best place you can come out, I think. To me, it was – it is kind of intimidating because you have people of all different ages – but you never, people are going to accept you.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“So I think having an outlet, like a sport and having a team and people who support you could be instrumental in someone’s life while they’re coming out. So I just think it’s really, really important”

Both Tiffany and Jessica saw being part of a team or sport as one of the best settings in which to be honest and open with teammates and team personnel. With a community as great and as large as sport can be, it could be argued that this diverse atmosphere would be a prime environment for those to disclose their sexual orientation to what one might consider second family.

Sport over Identity

In relationship to sport success and competition, the following statements show how sport, team, and winning surpassed the participants’ identity and/or sexual orientations.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I was voted captain by my peers junior and senior year so – and I, ya know, I don’t think they – I think they were able to separate soccer from religion.”

Becky spoke to her ability to remain judged by talent as opposed to any other factor while on her team. This was evident when she was voted as captain her last two years of her collegiate career by her peers. This showed that regardless of other factors, her peers saw her as a leader for their team.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“You have to come together as a team anyways, so being friends is kind of natural.”

“Yeah, at that point no one really, your sexuality, anything doesn’t even matter, which was nice I felt like. People were really awesome.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“When I was running, I guess, I was like, one of the top two runners on our team and I wonder if I had not been placing in meets and had not been rookie of the week all the time if I would have had a harder time. Because that was what mattered above anything else, even my identity, so I think that’s what people valued and I got treated a certain way because of that, if that makes any sense ... So I think like, I got treated with a certain amount of respect because of that.”

In these statements, Tiffany and Jessica both displayed the understanding that, above all, winning and performing was key on their respective teams. Tiffany and Jessica believed that the overarching goal of team performance was deemed more important than that of someone’s sexual orientation. This was supported by Jessica’s sense of team respect as she remained a top-tier runner. In short, winning was still top priority.

Feminist Perspective

As this study was initially viewed from a phenomenological perspective to gain a grasp of the personal experiences of the participants, another perspective of analysis was taken using the feminist perspective. This perspective was utilized because of the subject matter of the study. Individuals who identify as LGBT have consistently combatted the gender norms that have been culturally and socially constructed. The interviews were analyzed using this perspective to potentially view issues under a different lens.

Themes

The focus of the feminist perspective was to investigate a possible variety of analysis from a lens that looks to deconstruct the gender norms of sport and the sporting experience. During the feminist perspective coding process, eight themes emerged, four being very similar, if not identical to that of the phenomenological perspective. Theme recognized were: personal experience, against the gender norms in sport, cultural impact, places of inclusivity, heteronormative sport trends, desired non-heteronormative sport needs, advice for athletes, and LGBT personal work. Within the code “heteronormative sport trends”, two categories were found: not fitting the sport norm and questioning ‘out’ athletes.

Against the Gender Norms in Sport

With the historical background of sport in society, the assessment of the gender norms was seen throughout the interview analysis. In this study, a dissent from the heteronormative gender norms of sport was assessed. The following statements were reflective of this specific analysis.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“One of my friends actually had a teammate, he played football, and he was like, ‘My teammate’s gay. Respect.’ And I was like, ‘I’m glad you think that way but not everybody thinks that way’. So I would say, you know – stay strong and live your life because nobody’s living it but you. You’re the only person that can live your life.”

India brought up a situation in which her friend, a male athlete, was openly supportive of his fellow teammate that identified as gay. With the historical stereotypes of males in sport, the open support of a male heterosexual teammate spoke volumes to deconstructing the gender norms of sport. Furthermore, India was well aware of the heteronormative nature in sport and felt appreciative that a fellow athlete would be as supportive of their teammate regardless of their sexual orientation, especially a male. It fought the notion that being open about your sexual orientation was a determining factor of respect in sport.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I would say being part of a team was – made it easier because I mean, you have a community already formed and people – division 1, especially too – because people are from everywhere, so you have all different types of cultures.”

“It was almost like made it easier to like, come out like with the team and everything.”

Student-Athlete Three, Jessica

“The process of coming out is really hard on people and we see it resulting in substance abuse and suicide. So I think having an outlet, like a sport and having a team and people who support you could be instrumental in someone’s life while they’re coming out.”

With these statements, Tiffany and Jessica reflected on that idea that being fully disclosed was made easier because of the environment of the team on which she played. Tiffany referenced the closeness that she felt amongst her teammates, which enabled her to feel most comfortable being herself. With the gender norms that have been culturally imposed in sport, one could argue that the sporting environment would be a scary and potentially harmful arena in which to be open about one's sexual orientation. Contrary to this notion, Tiffany and Jessica clearly did not feel that way with her teammates.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“Yeah, and some people don't know who they are – and I mean, that's fine – that's totally fine. But I mean, but people think it's one or other, you have to pick one. It's like the same thing as going to – you know, you don't know all the time. You have different experiences. People are constantly changing.”

In this statement, Tiffany was discussing the changes are constantly happening within individuals, both athlete and non-athlete alike. She was of the mindset that people change based off of their different experiences, and spoke to the fluidity of sexuality. In sport, one can argue that the stereotypes that flood female athletes comes in regard to their perceived sexual orientation. Tiffany pointed out the variability of this and broke down that specific gender stereotype.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I also think that the country is progressing and so I think that these conversations are happening and when I was running in college, I mean, it was only 5 years ago but it was still like just a different kind of vibe around the country. Like, we didn't have gay marriage in [northeastern state]. We didn't have it throughout the country. We didn't have a lot of conversations happening about trans folks. Like it was just a totally different atmosphere, but I think

now those things are probably coming out more often and hopefully being addressed more but I don't really know.”

This statement was important to note within this theme because, as research has shown, there has been a positive shift in acceptance of same-sex relationships over the last decade. Jessica lamented the fact that it was not so common when she was in college sports. With the increased attention to these issues, the awareness has indeed grown since she ran in college, which supports her hope that things are being addressed more openly now. It also allows one to better understand the environment in which Jessica ran, one where it was not as openly discussed. With this, one might assume that more athletes would have been comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation had the current issues been talked about during their tenure as collegiate athletes.

Cultural Impact

The environments and the ways in which one grows up can arguably play an important role in values, beliefs, reactions, and morals. The impact of culture and the positive shift that has been seen over the past decade regarding issues surrounding same-sex marriage could influence the outlooks of future generations. Throughout the interviews, the participants' continuously brought up the impact of culture or referenced the sociocultural nature of their experiences. The cultural impact theme was broken down into three categories: geographic location, religion, and team environment. The following statements reflected the cultural influence of their experiences.

Geographic Location

The history of acceptance of individuals who identify as LGBT has varied throughout the United States. However, for athletes looking to expand their high school

career into college, an athletic scholarship may be very appealing and also necessary for continuing with sport and education. An athlete who identifies as LGBT may consider specific schools based off of their open acceptance of those who identify similarly, but the acquisition of a scholarship may not come, regardless of that acceptance. Arguably, institutions and coaches recruit and invite the best players, talent-wise. The realization for some athletes could be that their top choice might not accept them as a player, not because of their sexuality. Should this be the case, the scholarship that one might receive could be from an institution in an area that has historically not been LGBT-friendly. The struggle could then be in asking one's self the importance of their future in sport. While these situations are simply speculation and subjective to each individual, the influence of geographic location was seen in all participants' experiences, and the impact is discussed.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I feel like I’m a role model to a certain extent, but I don’t feel like I’m a good role model for coming – for people coming out, because I don’t feel like I’m – I feel like I’m slightly ambiguous... I would say that I would be – I was a role model for my peers. Umm, but I wouldn’t say that I was a good role model for younger athletes, high school athletes or younger athletes because, even though I was a – as a college athlete, I was – everyone knew about me: my coaches, my professors, my friends – umm, I still, I wouldn’t consider myself – I didn’t talk about my personal life when I was a coach – when I was coaching at the same time and had little younger girls around me and younger student-athletes – some of whom were probably gay and I don’t think I was a good role model for them because I wasn’t out to them – or I didn’t vocalize it.”

“I feel bad again because I feel like I’m not the best role model available for kids because I can’t be 100% out because I feel like I can lose my job because of that. Now, I don’t like lying – you know I don’t really try to lie. I just try to say that’s my private life. So I think they fill in the

dots on their own and I know a lot of people, a lot of kids in the school pretty much know that I am a lesbian but I just won't confirm that because its – I don't want to lose my job. But I do – there are a lot kids that will come and confide in me because I think they know and I just let them know that they're fine. They're normal and high school can be a very hard place. So I feel like I'm an okay role model and I feel like I just try to work with them and tell them and hint at my struggle without saying exactly. So I'm hoping one day I'll be able to be a better role model.”

“I think that's going to help a lot. And just knowing that for sure about – they haven't – they don't have a [current location] nondiscrimination law. So I think once you know that you can't be fired, that that would help a lot too.”

Becky visibly struggled to answer the question revolving around her belief that she was a role model. This struggle stemmed from the geographic location in which she currently resides and where she played as a college athlete. While she was comfortable with her sexuality as a player and viewed herself as a role model for her peers, she hesitated when thinking about the impact she could have on youth who might question their own journey.

The unfortunate situation in which she currently finds herself is that her geographic location has played a significant role. Within collegiate athletics, she could not have been “fired”, so to speak, as a player who was open about her sexuality. As she progressed into her professional life after college, this reality became very real, which has hindered her ability to view herself a role model for those who might benefit from her story.

Student-Athlete Two, India

“They'll even, we'll even have talks and they'll be like, “how are you and your girlfriend”. This was at my old school, in [western state].”

“Yeah, and now I’m at the school in [southeastern state]. Previously, it was two years in [western state]. That was when I was the only black girl and lesbian on the team. And then I moved to [southeastern state] where they were more accepting of it here. But in [western state], it was – it was like “how is your girlfriend” and stuff like that or “India, she’s really pretty” and so it was kind of interesting to see how they took it.”

“In [western state], it was more of like a white international people there but in [southeastern state], it is all kinds of people – and I like that atmosphere. There’s no... well, in one of my classes, I was the only black person so, when they talked about racism, I was kind of like the only one who could answer. But in [southeastern state], its so many different opinions and its so many different people who can understand where you’re coming from because they’ve also seen the same stuff. So I think it’s the relatability of the situation.”

India’s situation was unique in that, at the time of the interview, she was the only one still playing in college and she had transferred between two different institutions within that time. It should be noted that the transfer was not related to her sexual orientation, which was questioned and refuted. However, the geographic locations of her two institutions were quite different, and in such, one might assume that of her experience. Contrary to the drastic change in location, India maintained that her experience had been a welcoming and positive one. She had yet to feel any form of victimization and maintained that her teammates were her family. Her statements reflect that which she felt. She was open with both teams and although her first institution was starkly different from her own personal background, she felt accepted and was even encouraged to talk about her relationship; her teammates would ask her questions about her partner, suggesting that they accepted her lifestyle and were genuinely interested in her personal relationships, regardless of sexual orientation.

India did observe that her move from the first institution to her current institution was demographically different. At her first institution, she remarked about being the only lesbian and black girl on the team, where her current school was not that way. She felt as though she was the only person who could talk about racism at her first school because of the lack of diversity, whereas she stated that her current institution had “so many different opinions” and “so many different people who can understand where you’re coming from”. India spoke about both institutions with pride, but recognized that her current institution felt “more accepting”.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Umm, I would say it got a little bit better but I also had a different coach almost every year so it kind of depended on the coach. In my final year, our coach was really open-minded and he could care less. He was from up north and so he made it feel really open and like we could bring anybody we wanted. And he would, he – and he actually talked about it. He was like, you can bring your boyfriend, girlfriend, I don’t care – ya know, that type of. So it was like, it wasn’t that in the past – in like the first couple years – it wasn’t like it wasn’t accepted or not accepted, we just didn’t talk about it. It was just, we didn’t talk about it. So I guess it got better because it was actually vocalized.”

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“Oh exactly, and he’s been to [northeastern state] and we have no one else on the team from [the northeast], let alone New York or anywhere up North, so he was the only one, at first, that I really connected with and that really helped because I think it would’ve take a lot more time if it wasn’t for him to be okay and talk about with the team and stuff like that.”

These two statements spoke to the cultural influence that a coach could and did have on an athlete’s overall experience in college. The coaching style was that of a man

who was from a northern state but was coaching in a southern location. Both Tiffany and Becky felt supported by their coach because of his openness toward the LGBT community. Being from the North, like her coach, Tiffany recalled a connection that helped her open up to the team, arguably from the presumed similar background and culture of the region. Becky was born and raised in the south and understood the cultural implications of that region in reference to LGBT acceptance. It wasn't until her last year that she was presented with a coach that vocally supported all relationships and even encouraged his players to bring their significant others to events and ceremonies. The geographic region of the coach's home state (in the northeast) could speak to his liberal outlook and vocal acceptance of those who identify as LGBT. Regardless, both Becky and Tiffany were appreciative of the support, with Becky praising her coach for changing the previously unacknowledged athletic environment of her previous years.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I would say being part of a team was – made it easier because I mean, you have a community already formed and people – division 1, especially too – because people are from everywhere, so you have all different types of cultures. So usually people, I feel like, on teams that are maybe it isn't like that – like division 2 or division 3. But it was more of a diverse group of people in division 1 I think. We had people from [another country] and everywhere. So it was all different – all different types of mindsets. It was almost like made it easier to like, come out like with the team and everything. So it was a little easier, but being in [southeastern state] – it was also a shocker from [northeastern state] so it was like a totally different culture, something I wasn't used to. So it was a little hard to feel out, in the beginning, how people would react and everything but I felt like I was pretty comfortable with myself. I knew people – I knew I wasn't really alone in how I thought, especially coming from a different culture in [northeastern state]. So it was, for me, personally it wasn't

like a hard experience. It was a good experience. Everyone was pretty open – and that was just my team – everyone was pretty open.”

Within Tiffany’s collegiate career, she was well aware of the differences in opinions from those on her team, as she mentioned the various locations from where people came. Her experience was rounded by these differences. She seemed relieved and happy that the diversity of teammates was so apparent because it helped her open up to her teammates. Tiffany admittedly felt some hesitation initially, which could be explained by the completely different geographic region and culture from which she was coming and to which she was going. However, the personal differences of her teammates helped her navigate her new environment to become comfortable with opening up about her sexual orientation.

“It does have a huge impact on me because even the Supreme Court ruling of, you know, law that it’s accepted. Now [southeastern state] is fighting back against that and protesting and not giving marriage licenses. It’s just like, it’s frustrating to be denied by your own state – that in itself is like outcasting. If I was going to, I would not want not be living in state where I couldn’t have the same rights. It just not supportive. It definitely affects what you want to do and where you want to live.”

This statement was taken from Tiffany because of the impact of the geographic location on her life as she ends sport. Tiffany was only one year out of college sports and remained located in the state where she played in college. She became a permanent resident of that state but understood the harsh reality of being fully disclosed in a state that was currently fighting a new constitutional right throughout the United States. She was strongly versed in the notion that being part of a state that did not support her would heavily influence her life choices and future family steps.

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I also think that the country is progressing and so I think that these conversations are happening and when I was running in college, I mean, it was only 5 years ago but it was still like just a different kind of vibe around the country. Like, we didn’t have gay marriage in [northeastern state]. We didn’t have it throughout the country. We didn’t have a lot of conversations happening about trans folks. Like it was just a totally different atmosphere, but I think now those things are probably coming out more often and hopefully being addressed more but I don’t really know.”

Religion

While this study did not look extensively at the variable of religion as an impact or influencer for the overall experiences of the participants, religion was acknowledged as a cultural component of the experience. The following statements reflect the impact that religion had within the experiences of the participants. It should be noted that these religious influences were also coupled in conjunction with the geographic region in which the participants were located.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Yeah, I think it’s because, umm, I was in the Bible belt and everybody goes to church on Sunday and they ask you where you go to church. And when you tell them you don’t, you don’t have a church, they’re already judging you. And just picking up, I’ve always lived in the south so I just kind of know that you have to listen and know people first before you, before you just say something – like before you give it, before you come out to them. So I never – I don’t think I’m not out – I just feel like I feel out the situation and maybe just keep my personal life personal when I feel like I need to, and let them get to know me as me so that they don’t judge me from the get-go. And then, when I feel that they’re ready or when the time comes that they’re just going to have to be forced – that I am – that they find out that I’m a lesbian, I don’t deny it. But I hopefully, they

don't judge me just for that. So it think that's kind of how I approach situations."

"I feel like I was more judged for maybe not being religious than anything."

"I never really – and I – they never really used their religion to judge me. I just felt, a little bit I guess, not a part of the group sometimes. But I think that they accepted me because I was an honest person and a good teammate and a loyal person. So I don't feel like it really hurt me at all. I mean, I got – I was voted captain by my peers junior and senior year so – and I, ya know, I don't think they – I think they were able to separate soccer from religion."

With these statements from Becky, it was evident that, while her whole life had been lived in the south, there was still a stigma she felt against her because she was not as religious as the majority of her team. As research has discovered, there is a strain between those who hold religion as a high priority and those who are accepting of those who identify as LGBT. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of being fully disclosed as LGBT and being a devout religious individual may have an impact on an individual's experience; one could argue that an individual may feel compelled to choose one or the other, but not both. With Becky, she was not religiously affiliated and felt that her teammates judged her based off of that instance, rather than her sexual orientation. If she was judged based on her sexual orientation, she remarked that it was not evident or clear to her.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

"I know it also helped too that we had, for my 4 years of college, an atheist coach who was very – not like, he was anti-religion – not that has anything to do with it, but he was very supportive of the LGBT community. Love that! So he made it very helpful to come out and everyone."

With Tiffany, her coach's lack of religious affiliation and vocal support of the LGBT community played an integral role in her experience. She discussed this further in saying that her experience could have been very different had she not had such a positive connection with her coach. The openness of his acceptance was something Tiffany mentioned as a key to her comfort level with being open about her sexuality throughout her career.

In regards to religion as a cultural impact to one's experience, one could further investigate the levels of acceptance on teams in regards to religious or non-religious affiliated coaches at the collegiate level. Furthermore, the experiences of those who play for religiously affiliated institutions, as these four participants did not, could produce interesting insight.

When looking at the statements from both Becky and Tiffany in conjunction with the previous category of 'geographic location', a potential relationship could be examined in future studies that would compare these experiences on a deeper scale than that of the present study, assessing the relationship of geographic location and religion on an individual's collegiate sport experience.

Team Environment

The environment that one experiences on a team can arguably hinder or help the process of being open regarding one's sexual identity and/or orientation. The way in which teams must come together could affect the comfort level of all athletes, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual and both cisgender and non-cisgender. The following statements reflected the way a team environment influenced a participant's experience throughout her career.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“...I think if I was on a team were there was no one of that culture or that community on the team, it would be a lot different. I think the anger and frustration would have been a little bit more intense. But I think that people – and like, some people you have to realize that they’re just not as educated – they’ve never been around that, they can’t handle it, they’ve been pushed to do things all their life from parental influences and stuff like that, so it’s just kind of , you have to be patient. That was probably one of the hardest things.”

“Everyone comes into the team kind of alone. You don’t really know – well some people knew each other but – so you’re almost kind of forced to be friends, but you do develop a really close relationship and I think people put aside all differences. You have to come together as a team anyways, so being friends is kind of natural.”

Tiffany spoke about the environment of her team and how the team’s culture was a positive influencer regarding her experience. Tiffany believed that, coming onto a team, the various backgrounds and experiences would be a positive element in terms of cohesion, learning, and acceptance. For her, she believed it helped open other people’s mindsets and potentially adjust some preconceived notions.

Heteronormative Sport Trends

This theme was uncovered with relation to the historical implications with which sport is associated. The participants discussed a variety of issues and topics within the heteronormative sport trend, supporting the notion that heteronormative actions and thoughts were still persistent, regardless of sexual orientation.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Yeah, because there’s a ridiculous amount of – especially female lesbians – I mean, in college athletics. And it was, I mean, we were all – I would say about 50% were out, 50%

weren't. There was a lot that weren't out and it's because I think they were just scared. I mean, they were out to their friends. They were out to a lot of us, but they weren't publically out."

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

"I would say, umm, trying to feel it out and then yeah, that's probably why it took so long."

In the first statement, Becky reflected on the necessity of some athletes to still stay undisclosed about their sexual orientation. This segment was relevant to this theme of heteronormativity because of the assumption of fear that would come with being fully disclosed to a team. If an athlete were to openly discuss their sexuality, they may receive resistance in the form of harassment or isolation. This real fear could hold individuals from being themselves to their teammates. Tiffany's statement echoes that notion because she spent her first season as undisclosed in her sexual orientation. Until she felt that team comfort, her instinct was to stay hidden.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

"Umm, for parts of it, my team was really accepting but it was still frustrating at times – umm, just being at like, maybe, my college department award dinner, not being able to invite my partner to that awards dinner and things like that and it not being – it's not that it was like frowned upon, I would say – or people would talk bad about me. It's just, you just didn't do it. You just didn't bring them around, you know what I mean? So like, other people on the team, it was perfectly fine to have their boyfriends around and be able to call them their boyfriends but it was kind of like unknown territory to when you could bring your partner around."

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

"I mean, people know heterosexual relationships, people know and people observe when they see people together

and they acknowledge ‘oh your boyfriend is so and so’ and they’re a female athlete. And they talk about it but like, I feel like when there were some lesbians on the team, I feel like the authority figures, like the athletic director like never really asked them how their significant other was when they know – they’ve seen them together. I just wish that it was a little bit more equal.”

These segments were a very real representation of the lack of acknowledgment that the athletes felt was commonplace within their athletic career. Becky commented on the fact that, while it was never explicitly stated, she could not bring her partner to events or ceremonies. The “unknown territory” of bringing a date that is the same-sex was not encouraged, therefore unrepresented. Furthermore, Tiffany echoed the sentiment when she stated that she wished that “it was a little bit more equal” for both heterosexual relationships and non-heterosexual relationships.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I hope it continues to gain awareness. I feel like it was just like, a secret group, you know. Like, the “gay athletes” and we all knew each other. We all hung out together but I just – it would be nice to not have to be so secretive.”

This statement from Becky brought to light the secretive nature of being something other than heterosexual in sport. While the athletes felt comfortable around similar people, the secrecy that was involved within sport was spotlighted. There was no sense of complete comfort in an area they spent a majority of their time as undergraduate student-athletes.

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I think I just didn’t want to be known for that. I didn’t want to be – I didn’t want to be, like, oh there’s Becky, the lesbian soccer player. I wanted to be Becky the soccer player and whatever else.”

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Umm, I would say sometimes we got to stand together, you know, because especially being a female athlete, everybody automatically assumes that you’re gay if you’re playing, like, basketball or something, but I don’t see it that way. I would say like, tell people to have an open mind, especially in men’s sports. You have to have an open mind – because it’s all manly, manly, manly, women, women, women.”

These two statements were indicators of the stigma of being a competitive female athlete, regardless of level of play. Being a female athlete, the stereotype of being a lesbian was already a battle to face, and both Becky and India did not want that to be their identifier. Becky was adamant about keeping her private life as such, and having her public or professional life revolve around her as a person and a soccer player, not her sexual orientation. One could argue that with the national attention garnered from being a fully disclosed student athlete would detract from a large reason one initially attended college: to play a sport. Here, Becky supported that notion that her talent was what she wanted to be known for, rather than her sexual orientation.

India spoke to the unity that athletes need to have as both heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. With the unified mindset, the stigmas and stereotypes could subside and the athlete’s talent would be the only true measure of them as a player.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“I would say being part of a team was – made it easier because I mean, you have a community already formed and people – division 1, especially too – because people are from everywhere, so you have all different types of cultures.”

“It was almost like made it easier to like, come out like with the team and everything.”

With these two statements, Tiffany reflected on that idea that being fully disclosed was made easier for her because of the environment of the team on which she played. She referenced the closeness that she felt amongst her teammates, which enabled her to feel most comfortable being herself. The reason behind these statements being representative of heteronormative sport trends was due to the nature of stereotyping of females in sport and the research that supports the family-like atmosphere amongst female teams.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“You have to come together as a team anyways, so being friends is kind of natural.”

“Yeah, at that point no one really, your sexuality, anything doesn’t even matter, which was nice I felt like. People were really awesome.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“When I was running, I guess, I was like, one of the top two runners on our team and I wonder if I had not been placing in meets and had not been rookie of the week all the time if I would have had a harder time. Because that was what mattered above anything else, even my identity, so I think that’s what people valued and I got treated a certain way because of that, if that makes any sense... So I think like, I got treated with a certain amount of respect because of that.”

These statements were selected because Tiffany and Jessica were speaking about the importance of performing and winning on a team. At some point in their experiences, it was clear that their sexual orientations were not an issue and that the overall goal was to perform as a team and to win games or place in races. This supports the notion that winning is essential and the overarching target of a team.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

Yeah, just so people can be like, ‘oh, what is that?’ and people coming to the games and are like, ‘oh, yeah’. I mean, some people don’t even know it exists or don’t even want to associate but it’s like, ‘we’re there’ and so...

Here, Tiffany eluded to the idea that there are people who do not even know that those athletes who identify as LGBT exist. She spoke on this matter when addressing the needs of student-athletes who identify as LGBT within athletic environments. This segment was representative of the theme “heteronormative sport trends” because of the lack of acknowledgement that was felt by Tiffany. This sentiment could argue that Tiffany would like the acknowledgement that her heterosexual counterparts receive, although that assumption is conjecture.

Not Fitting the Sport Norm (Judgment)

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“I feel that I was judged for my – for who I was as like, you know, as a soccer player and as a person, and not – nothing to do with who I was dating. I mean, I felt judged by my teammates but it was never because I was dating a female. And if they were judging me because of that, I never really felt that.”

Student-Athlete Two, India

“Oh no, never. Never. But I know one of my friends did have a situation, or incident, like that. I don’t remember how it was handled, but I just remember her telling me something about it and I was like, “wow! It never happened to me”. I don’t know why it didn’t. It just never did. I feel truly blessed that it didn’t.”

For these statements from Becky and India, they were not victims of harassment or victimization from their respective teams. Becky further discussed that the only

judgment she may have felt was religion-based, as she was not as religious as the majority of her teammates. India, who was still in her collegiate career at the time of the interview, had felt fortunate that she had not been exposed to harassment, but recalled the unfortunate instance of one of her peers. These statements fall under this particular category because of the participants' realization that there may have been and could always potentially be an instance of judgment. One could argue that the likelihood of a heterosexual receiving harassment for their sexual orientation over a non-heterosexual is minimal. These statements, while fortunate, allowed an insight into the very real possibility of such harassment these participants face or faced every day.

Student-Athlete Three, Tiffany

“No one ever said anything or never to my face, I guess you could say. But there was – well cause I don't really know if people said it or not but some of my friends would tell me that some people on the team felt uncomfortable being around me and my girlfriend at the time and they just felt it was weird to see us kissing – but that really isn't that bad. It could have been so much worse. But honestly to me, it's good that you're going to expose maybe that, but it didn't really make me feel bad.”

“I don't really know if people said it or not but some of my friends would tell me that some people on the team felt uncomfortable being around me and my girlfriend at the time and they just felt it was weird to see us kissing – but that really isn't that bad.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“I did once in a while feel like discomfort and judgment.”

“It was more like hearsay – oh this person said this about you. So I was never, I just tried to take those things with a grain of salt because I didn't really know if the person said it but, I mean, at the time, it was definitely – it still kind of hurt.”

“I feel like this is like a pretty normal thing for bisexual or gay women, but there was some sort of maybe discomfort about me being in locker rooms and around other girls. And to me, that was just like, silly and homophobic, but that’s all I really remember.”

“No, no. Nothing to my face.”

These segments spoken by Tiffany and Jessica highlighted the judgment that one might face when they are a fully disclosed student-athlete. The statements showed how, with the judgment they felt, there was never an instance of face-to-face harassment. If the hearsay was true, they were unaware, but still felt the sting of judgment from its possible existence. The mindset that they would potentially always have to deal with this possibility did not hinder them from being who they were, but the discomfort of knowing that someone judged them based on their sexual orientation was present.

Questioning ‘Out’ Athletes (Lack thereof)

Student-Athlete One, Becky

“Yeah, because there’s a ridiculous amount of – especially female lesbians – I mean, in college athletics. And it was, I mean, we were all – I would say about 50% were out, 50% weren’t. There was a lot that weren’t out and it’s because I think they were just scared. I mean, they were out to their friends. They were out to a lot of us, but they weren’t publically out.”

“Well there was one coach at our school for one of the sports that said he wouldn’t have any lesbians on his team. Now I didn’t hear this, but this is what they told me. He wouldn’t have any lesbians on his team and he actually would check to make sure this girl was not at this other house. And so, that team, they then, they all stayed in the closet it.”

Student-Athlete Four, Jessica

“Umm, I guess with like cross-country, I would sometimes wonder why there wasn’t anyone else who was out. Like, it seemed like everyone I knew was straight. But, I wondered if other sports were different. Umm, because I did have some queer identified friends on other teams but for some reason for cross-country, I think I was the only one in the LGBTQ spectrum. So I guess my only thought would be like, I wonder why there are no other gay or bisexual people on my team.”

These statements were representative of the overarching theme “heteronormative sport trends” because of the participants’ discussion of fellow athletes who identified as LGBT and their “nonexistence” within sport. Becky eluded to the fact that there was a coach at her institution who was adamant about not having any lesbians on his team and therefore athletes needed to hide their sexual orientation in order to play. The unfortunate instance of this particular situation highlighted the very real possibility that other coaches at other institutions may feel and act in the same way.

For Jessica, her struggle was in that there were no other cross-country runners who openly identified the same way as her. She essentially wondered if there were any at all and why they were not disclosed. This question could have many answers, of which Jessica was not sure. However, the comfort levels of being fully disclosed may have varied drastically to other individuals within her team.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Within the present study, the two perspectives used for analysis helped to better understand the experiences of fully-disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. As discussed in the previous chapter, the study was conducted with four participants: two self-identified lesbians and two self-identified female bisexuals. This study looked at breaking down and combatting the gender norms that have long since been associated with sport (i.e. Anderson, 2002; Southall et al., 2009).

Justification for Adjustment of Framework

As common within qualitative research, an adjustment to analysis was warranted based on questions asked and explored and real-time changes in the interview process (Savenye & Robinson, 2001). Prior to the investigation, the theoretical framework was geared specifically toward that of phenomenology, due to examining personal and subjective experiences. However, with a smaller sample size, the introduction of two theoretical lenses was presented: a phenomenological perspective and also a liberal feminist perspective.

A phenomenological framework allowed the primary investigator to explore the lived experiences of these student-athletes. Crotty (1998) suggests that with phenomenology, individuals should, to the best of their ability, “lay aside the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them” (p. 78, Crotty, 1996a, as cited in Crotty, 1998). With this mentality, the phenomenological approach to this study examined sport, an entity historically rooted in male dominance and heterosexuality, and sexual orientation, an emerging and sometimes misunderstood

phenomena, and sought to investigate the subjective experiences of those within these two constructs.

With the liberal feminist perspective, the primary investigator was able to attempt to understand the experiences of the participants through a lens that rooted itself in “the humanism of liberal political thought” (Crotty, 1998, p. 163). Crotty argued that liberal feminism works in order to provide and protect equality. The use of liberal feminism within the analysis of interviews showcased how these participants viewed their experiences not only as collegiate athletes, but also as females within sport. Sport’s historic male-dominance (Messner & Sabo, 1990) was examined through a lens that has worked to target the inequality as seen through sport and sexual orientation within sport.

Previous research within the medical field has supported the use of feminism and phenomenology (Goldberg, Ryan, & Sawchyn, 2009; Thomas-MacLean, 2004). Prenatal nursing has shown that the use of a feminist lens, feminist phenomenology specifically, coupled with queer phenomenology could provide prenatal nurses the ability to better understand and connect with their patients through nursing practice, research, and educational efforts (Goldberg et al., 2009). The purpose of the coupled frameworks addressed the social constructs of gender and family within a “heterocentric health care environment” (p. 546), and how mothers who identify as lesbian may feel overtly oppressed during their birthing process. Thomas-MacLean (2004) explored life after breast cancer in 12 women. Findings suggest that approaching the experience from a partnered feminist and phenomenological standpoint would be appropriate given the diverse group of participants and the variety of issues endured post-cancer. This research

suggests that experiences (phenomenology) can be rooted in a specific social context (feminism), which helps to support the framework used in the present study.

Sullivan (2000) argued that the feminist approach can be used in conjunction with phenomenology, inferring that there can be a symbiotic relationship between the two. While Sullivan insists that not all forms of phenomenology are appropriate for feminist approaches, she states that they work well together in appropriate research. The present study sought to bring these to frameworks together, as complements to their foundations of deconstructing norms and investigating the experiences of doing so in sport.

Utilizing a variety of frameworks in the narrative inquiry, such as was done with the interview process in the present study, has been supported throughout different disciplines (Chase, 2005). Based on different entities being researched, a combination of perspectives can be employed to gain a full understanding of the experiences of the participants. Thus, a feminist approach and a phenomenological approach was reinforced through these contexts of research.

Conclusions of Results and Discussion

There were no fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as gay males or transgender. The majority of research targeted at athletes who identify as gay males has been with those who were not fully-disclosed in regards to their experiences in sport (Anderson, 2002). This phenomena could be explained with sport history. Historically, the realm of sport has been a “man’s man” arena (i.e. Anderson, 2002; Messner & Sabo, 1990), a place where boys become men (i.e. Anderson, 2005; McKay et al., 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990), where women are stereotyped due to their competitive nature (i.e. Kauer, 2009; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 1997), and where college campuses are

not yet fully supportive of these athletes (i.e. Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2003). The fear of losing that “manhood” when opening up about one’s sexual orientation could hinder individuals from being fully disclosed to their teammates. Anderson (2002) found that those who had been open about their sexuality were taken aback by how well they were received by their teammates, but also indicated falling into line with heteronormative aspects of athletics. However, Anderson’s (2011) follow-up study with male athletes who identified as gay showed how the positive shift was occurring in male sports, with teammates being supportive and athletes feeling less fear of “coming out”. This follow-up study could be used as a platform for more research regarding the positive shift in the sporting landscape regarding sexual orientation in male athletics, and should furthered be examined. Anderson’s 2011 follow-up study brings to the forefront that many more studies need to be conducted and highlighted so that male athletes see the positive trend in sexual orientation acceptance in male sports.

The changing landscape of masculinity could also be noted, suggesting a change may be in the offing. Anderson (2009) suggested a change in masculinity deemed inclusive masculinity, one that supported the emotional and supportive bonding of males and acts of physical interaction, such as hugging. An instance of this was seen in India’s football friend who verbally supported the teammate who had recently opened up about his sexuality. While this was a small gesture of support, the action supports the notion of inclusive masculinity, a contrast to previous research of masculinity and sport (McKay et al., 2000).

Athletes who identify as transgender may have not received adequate knowledge about this study, although multiple avenues were taken by the primary investigator and

that of the committee chair to gain access to these individuals. Athletes who identify as transgender may also not feel as though sport is comfortable yet with their identity, as many individuals have experienced feelings of shame and isolation, struggles with fitting the traditional gender identity role, presumed genetic advantages or disadvantages of transitioning and transitioning as an athlete, and locker room debates (i.e., Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Krane et al., 2012; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2011, 2012; Tagg, 2012; Travers, 2006). Past sport psychology scholars have spoken to the necessity of addressing and working with athletes who identify as transgender within sport, as it would increase and/or establish awareness of these individuals in a positive manner (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012).

With policies of inclusion in their infancy (Buzuvis, 2011, 2012; Skyes, 2006), athletics may be making changes to inclusivity at a slower rate than that of changing societal trends. Additionally, given the heteronormativity of that in sport and on campuses, one cannot attempt to place blame on an individual who may not feel safe or comfortable within their surroundings, commonly seen in individuals who identify as LGBT, athlete and non-athlete alike (Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2003). With the positive shift in attitude, one can hope that these feelings of lack of safety and support are alleviated so that athletes and non-athletes may feel more comfortable on their campuses and in being who they are.

Learning about the experiences of the participants was key in assessing how their involvement reflected that of sport history and athletes who identify as LGBT. In phenomenology, gaining a grasp of the depth of the narrative is crucial to understanding (Crotty, 1998). The participants within this study provided an immense amount of detail

about their experiences, helping to better understand their situations and the needs of current student-athletes who identify as LGBT. From a phenomenological perspective, the participants' recount of their experience aided in analyzing how these experiences paralleled with the research that has been done regarding athletes who identify as LGBT.

The student-athletes who identified as bisexual expressed feelings of discomfort corresponding with that of research (Griffin, 2012; Ochs, 1999). This discomfort was reflected in statements about sharing locker rooms with the same-sex and the hearsay of other teammates feeling uneasy about their presence, and also the intimacies of a same-sex relationship with displays of affection such as holding hands or kissing, which are not uncommon discomforts for those who identify as non-heterosexual. These situations were not uncomfortable for the participants, but they did speak to the rumor that their teammates had spoken to others about their own discomfort. In a contrast to this hearsay, it was found that having a lesbian or bisexual teammate helped heterosexuals become more accepting (Kauer & Krane, 2006). It is important to understand that while the participants felt as though majority of the team was accepting, the mere mentioning that there were still those with different views supports recent research as well (Griffin, 2012; Southall et al., 2009). The experiences of the participants was not marred by the lack of acceptance, however, but was strengthened by those who supported them.

In an interesting similarity with the ambiguity of bisexuality in research (Rust, 2000), the two participants who identified as bisexual spoke to the slight confusion surrounding their own identity. This confusion was echoed by a Griffin (2012) essay, stating that athletes who identify as bisexual sometimes "feel forced to identify themselves as either lesbian, gay, or straight" (p. 10). The scarcity in research about

athlete bisexuality speaks to the experiences of these two participants, who saw their sexuality very fluidly throughout their personal lives. Consistent with the concept of sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2015), both participants understood the spectrum of sexuality within their own experience and were comfortable in knowing that sexuality did not define them, and furthermore, would not let its indistinctness influence their choice in partner, female or male. Within the sporting context, Griffin (2012) has suggested that “LGBT sports advocates need to do our homework” (p. 10) to be sure the “B” is being addressed appropriately and separately from that of those who identify as lesbian or gay.

Through the phenomenological lens, the significance of team and sport was seen for the participants. Mennesson and Clement (2003) found that female soccer players, regardless of sexual orientation, compared their teammates to that of family, which was supported through the statements from the present study’s participants. There were references from the participants alluding to being a family, being sisters, and confiding in one another. Furthermore, it was found that having bisexual or lesbian teammates helped heterosexual teammates become more accepting and open-minded (Kauer & Krane, 2006). This could help to explain why the participants’ experiences were seen as positive ones with the majority of their teammates, if not all.

Research has supported the notion that there is a stereotype toward females within sport as being lesbian and masculine in a collegiate climate that is both homonegative and heterosexist (i.e., Kauer, 2009; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 1997, 2001a; Krane & Barber, 2003, Krane et al., 2004). It has also been seen that lesbians in sport are more accepted than of their male counterparts, between both athlete genders (Roper &

Halloran, 2007). This phenomena could help to explain why the participants in this study were of the female gender and how comfortable they were in sharing their experiences. It could also explain the positivity that was found though the participants' experiences. It is worth noting that they all still felt a perceived lack of support from the athletic department, as heteronormativity was still commonplace for many of these campus climates (Brown et al., 2004).

There was an encouraging instance that occurred within the analysis regarding victimization of athletes who identify as something other than heterosexual. A commonality of harassment for both bisexuals and lesbians has been seen and noted (i.e., Anderson & Adams, 2011; Ochs, 1999). In sport, the acceptance of athletes who identify as lesbian has been more positive than that of male athletes who identify as gay, in both male and female sports (Roper & Halloran, 2007). There has been a dearth of research noting the heterosexual attitudes toward bisexuals in sport, however. With the noted history of victimization, one might assume that this would be seen in one of the participants. However, not one of the four participants felt any physical victimization from their teammates, stating that the only form of victimization was hearsay. This was one reassuring takeaway regarding the positive shift seen in acceptance, although not as surprising as this was in reference to females in sport. Furthermore, it should be noted that the saturation of data was not reached for this particular study, and therefore, one might argue that with a larger sample size, victimization may have been seen.

The depth of information from the participants was also surprising and the research in which to compare it to is limited. The amount of literature regarding experiences of fully disclosed athletes, at any level, who identify as lesbian or bisexual is

inadequate (Anderson, 2001; Griffin, 1998; Rust, 2000). Furthermore, with recent literature supporting the notion that athletes who identify as LGBT are no longer hidden (Anderson & McCormack, 2015), the increase of studies that examine the experiences of those fully disclosed in sport should be seen. The current study hopes to enable these future investigations.

The feminist analysis looked to deconstruct what has been binary boundaries set in sport by our societal and cultural norms. With four female participants, the experiences of these participants provided an immense amount of information to compare with that of what research has shown us. In contrast to viewing the interviews to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences, the feminist perspective showed how these four females went against the gender norms and broke down the stereotypes that seemingly follow women in sport (i.e. Kauer, 2009). Kauer described women in sport as "trespassers into male territory" (p. 312), citing that the discrimination for those open regarding their sexuality was at higher rate. Fortunately for the participants within this study, verbal and physical discrimination was not seen and in fact, a level of respect was shown for both Jessica and Becky. Jessica and Becky both mentioned how they felt respected on their team regarding their talent and ability, Jessica by continuously placing first in meets and Becky by being voted captain by her teammates in her last two years. Anderson (2001) spoke to the disclosure aspect of lesbians and argued the notion that perceived importance to team success could be a positive influencer in team acceptance. Becky and Jessica's perceived importance may have been a factor in their acceptance, as their significance on their respective teams was seen as integral to success.

Disclosure and choice to disclose was discussed by three participants. Stoelting (2011) stated that disclosing “is a very complex decision that is situation within a specific time and place” (p. 1207). Becky echoed this sentiment through her discussion about disclosure being a “revolving door” and that new environments and new situations are going to influence the decision to disclose one’s sexual orientation. Additionally, India stated that, while her experience has been positive, others may not be ready to hear what someone has to say yet and to be patient with those individuals. Similarly, Tiffany’s experience was positive in her mind, but also recognized that not everyone is the same and commented on having faith that the person to whom one discloses will accept them.

One of Becky’s keys to being a collegiate athlete judged on talent was her consistent stance on trying to distance herself from the label and stigma of being a lesbian in sport. She mentioned that, although she was disclosed to her teammates, it was not a known identifier for her throughout college. Krane (1997) discussed how female athletes felt a label was placed on them, regardless of truth, and that fighting that label went across the athletic department. Becky was the only participant to verbally discuss fighting this label throughout her career. This label can be deconstructed if athletic departments can look introspectively and understand how they perpetuate the stereotype through their own actions and adjust these actions (Sartore and Cunningham, 2009b).

Fighting the gender norms was also seen with the participants’ friends. India reflected on a situation with her male friend being a supportive and respectful member of his football team when a teammate opened up about his sexual orientation with his team. Historically, the culture of male sport is centered on being manly, strong, and heteronormative (i.e. Messner & Sabo, 1990) and in a male showing support for another

male, it contradicts the gender norm that men cannot care for one another's personal life and that men cannot be supportive of a different lifestyle than that of the societal norm. His actions reflect that of a change in traditional masculinity. Research has supported this shift (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009), suggesting that masculinity is being redefined in ways that support encouragement and acceptance of male friends in ways not traditionally seen in sport, such as talking about emotions and hugging. In addition to this situation, both Tiffany and Jessica fought the gender norm of sport when they mentioned the arena of sport as being beneficial in fully disclosing sexual orientation to the teams. As sport is seen as rigid and competitive, the belief that it is also a safe space for being open with teammates contradicts this rigidity.

Within a feminist perspective, one can also examine the sociocultural impact within the situation. In the present study, the impact of culture was seen largely throughout the experiences of all participants. The current literature surrounding the disclosure of sexuality in sport is scarce (Anderson, 2001; Griffin, 1998), but the impact of culture and society in sport has been researched. The past decade has increased the presence and support of non-heterosexual individuals, more so than any other issue regarding sexuality (Treas, 2002). With this information, it can be argued that the positive experiences of these participants may be of stark contrast to earlier generations when the fight against gender norms was less acknowledged. If a continued positive shift in attitude is seen, the implications for a decrease in feelings of isolation, shame, and depression for females in sport (Krane et al., 2005) may also be near.

The participants in the present study did address sociocultural issues such as geographical, religious, and demographic influences. Despite the overall positivity they

experienced, they still faced discrimination in regards to the perceived lack of acknowledgment they felt within the athletic department as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts. One area they wished to change was the acknowledgment from those within sport regarding their sexuality. While there has been a positive cultural shift in acceptance and acknowledgement of individuals who identify as LGBT (Adams et al., 2008; Treas, 2002), there may be a learning curve in heteronormative areas, such as sport. The hope was that this research will present the needs of the individuals to those within the sporting world and appropriate changes can be made.

In examining the two varying perspectives within the present study, the overall experience of the participants proved to be an informative story, showing the positives and negatives of being fully disclosed as something other than heterosexual.

There were commonalities in the analysis process when examining the two different perspectives. When considering both lenses, there was an overwhelming desire to spark change within the athletic departments, a change that would support and acknowledge the student-athletes who identify as LGBT. With individuals who identify as LGBT feeling less welcome than their heterosexual counterparts on college campuses (Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2003), addressing these discrepancies in safety and support was a prominent point by all participants in the present study. Understandably, it is important for universities to make changes and decisions that reflect the best interest of their school's integrity and reputation; these changes can be difficult to navigate in an ever-changing environment (Estler & Nelson, 2005). The positive shift in attitude toward the LGBT community (Treas, 2002) can help the athletic departments implement such changes to help all of their student-athletes, LGBT identifying and non-LGBT

identifying, feel comfortable and welcomed. However, as sport has still shown its heteronormative status (Anderson, 2002; Southall et al., 2009), even with the attitude shift, it cannot be unreasonable that this awareness and change might take more time within sport, particularly that of male sports (Gill et al., 2006), than other facets of society.

As such, parallel to past research (Shaw, 2010), all of the participants felt a lack of support from their athletic department. There was no dialogue or acknowledgement from administration, essentially reinforcing what Barber and Krane (2005) deemed the “elephant in the locker room”. However, in light of feeling marginalized, all of the participants offered steps in which the athletic departments could take in order to address the issues, which supports the research and suggestion of previous scholars in LGBT in sport (i.e, Barber & Krane, 2007; Corbett, 2006; Cunningham, 2012a, 2012b; Kauer, 2009; Krane, 1997; Shaw, 2010).

One instance of support was mentioned by Tiffany and Becky. Both athletes opened up about the support they felt from a coach and how that support increased the likeliness that they would be comfortable in expressing who they were to their teammates. This comfort of disclosure and expression of self can potentially be had for more athletes who identify as LGBT, if they feel the support and safety from their staff, such as coaches, team personnel, and administrators (Barber & Krane, 2007; Cunningham, 2012a, 2012b; Fink et al., 2012).

A change within the athletic department could support a change in mentality within sport. This change may also be supported through those working as temporary team personnel, such as sport psychology consultants. With research supporting the idea

that a bisexual or lesbian teammate help heterosexual teammates become more open (Kauer & Krane, 2006), the suggestion from Tiffany for speakers to address athletics could influence more positive outlooks of acceptance. Thus, if acceptance is increased and dialogue is enabled, utilizing sport psychology consultants as assistants to mental skills involving inclusion of athletes who identify as LGBT may improve sport performance. Krane has already called for more inclusive and culturally component components of mental skills consultants (2001b), which could help to incorporate topics such as athletes who identify as LGBT in sport. Although this is speculation, a relationship could be examined if steps within athletic departments are appropriately taken.

From both a phenomenological and a feminist perspective, participants recalled sport as being an outlet and environment for comfort. This speaks to the depth of the connection they made with their teams during their experience, and also the closeness of females on a team, similar to that of family (Mennesson & Clement, 2003). With the positive influences of physical activity on self-esteem and confidence, along with its ties to developing social skills, teamwork, and communication (Calfas & Taylor, 1994), these two lenses supported one another in learning about the encouraging experiences from the participants.

With the narratives from the participants, one could gain a better understanding from a varying perspective than that of their own. Furthermore, future directions can attempt to make the changes that were deemed necessary by the participants. The awareness of the presence of student-athletes who identify as LGBT will hopefully

deepen the shallow research pool of studies. With a more in-depth understanding of the experiences, effective changes can be made in a timely manner.

Future Study Recommendations

As this is one of the first studies to examine the experiences of fully disclosed collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian or bisexual, there are a multitude of options for that of future studies. An expansion of the present study might look at the differences more specifically between lesbian and bisexual. While commonalities and differences were noted, there was no specific layer of analysis for this variable.

Other variables that were not examined extensively would also be of interest. Age might be an important variable to examine. The age at which an individual decides to disclose their sexuality could prove an important factor in their experiences, within their collegiate teams and even teams prior to their collegiate career. In addition to age, the degree of religiosity as participants, institution affiliation, and teammates might provide insight into individual experiences. Religion was touched on by two of the four participants, and a future study that examined that more closely with fully disclosed student-athletes could prove beneficial.

As discussed earlier, there were no participants who identified as gay males or transgender. A future study might try to gain access to these individuals in hopes that one could learn about their experiences and the ways in which they were influenced. The lack of these participants within the current study suggests that one needs to expand the network further to find these participants. Their information would be valuable in assessing the needs of student-athletes who identify as gay males or transgender and would allow for better understanding for all of the student-athlete LGBT community.

A study regarding team climate with student-athletes who identify as LGBT would be an interesting subject. The environment in which someone plays sport and the connections with their teammates might influence their experience as a fully disclosed student-athlete. Campus climate for sexual minorities has been examined through much of Dr. Sue Rankin's research, and therefore a deviation in which one examines the team climate of fully disclosed student-athletes' would be of interest. A season-long (or longer) case study of a team could provide an insight into this phenomena.

Another area that would be of interest reflects that of the coaches' experiences. There are multiple areas in which this would be beneficial. Coaches who coached student-athletes who were fully disclosed as LGBT could provide an interesting perspective into the organization, management, and overall productivity of their team in relation to their student-athletes. Explorations might also bring to light some of the struggles coaches face if there is a difference in belief and how one might address that. Also, a coach who identifies as LGBT could delve into their successes and missteps as someone who is a sexual minority with their team and within their athletic department. It could also open up the discussion of student-athletes who turned coaches and identified as LGBT throughout their career or a stage of their career (student-athlete or coach).

In the event that the development of workshops or trainings were initiated by an athletic department, as heavily suggested by the participants of the present study, an analysis of its effectiveness would be largely warranted. The better implemented the workshop, the more effective it could be in establishing awareness and support for the athletes to whom it serves. The development of workshops specific to athletic departments would also be a project in which current research could investigate. A focus

group of various specialties such as current and former student-athletes (both LGBT identifying and non-LGBT identifying), diversity and social justice instructors, athletic department administrators, and coaches could come together to help create a space that is comfortable for all those involved within sport. The facets that could expand from the present study are seemingly wide open, and the need for further research has only been echoed by the findings presented in this study.

Final Thoughts

With this study, there is a hope that changes can and will be made to institutions and athletic departments across the nation. There was a strong urge from all participants that changes need to be made within the athletic departments in terms of awareness and support of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. With the findings of this study, realistic and immediate steps can be taken by athletic departments to meet these needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
Interview Protocol

1. Research Question 1 – Interview Questions

- a. Tell me about your experience as a fully disclosed lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender athlete in college.
- b. What were some of the emotions that you experience/experienced as an athlete?
- c. What were some common thoughts you had as you played college sports as an athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- d. Do/did you view yourself as a role model for athletes who may fear being fully disclosed?

2. Research Question 2 – Interview Questions

- a. In regards to acceptance on your athletic team, how well do you think you are/were accepted as an athlete who identifies/identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
- b. What kinds of actions or words are/were used toward you or around where you feel/felt either accepted or unaccepted for who you are?
 - i. Follow-up: Where and from whom?

3. Research Question 3 – Interview Questions

- a. Are/Were there any resources available to you at your institution?
- b. What types of resources would you have liked to have seen or would like to see within your athletic team or department in order to increase or establish a sense of comfort for athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

- c. What do you think athletic teams and departments need in terms of increasing or establishing acceptance of collegiate athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
4. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, they may be asked to expand on their responses with the use of probing questions, such as:
 - a. You mentioned _____. Would you be willing to elaborate further on that?
 - b. When you say _____, would you be willing to tell me what you mean?
 - c. Would you be willing to speak a little more about _____.
5. If the athlete has already graduated from their collegiate team, the following question will be asked to them as well:
 - a. Since graduating, what have you done or what are you doing, if anything, to increase the awareness and acceptance of athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?
6. If there was one piece of advice that you would give to a student-athlete who identifies as LGBT based off of your own personal experiences, what would you tell them?

APPENDIX B
Script for Recruitment

Script for recruitment through personal contacts:

I'm conducting a study that focuses on the experiences of fully disclosed student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Do you know of any potential individual who might fit that criteria that you think would be willing to participate? If you do, would you give them my contact information and have them contact me directly? That would be greatly appreciated.

The following is an e-mail for advocacy agencies for the potential recruitment of individuals. This e-mail will only be sent if deliberate sampling through personal contacts does not allow full recruitment of participants. The e-mail will potentially be sent to the following organizations: National Center for Transgender Equality, Trans People of Color Coalition, Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Human Rights Campaign, You Can Play Project, Athlete Ally, and the Gay and Lesbian International Sport Association.

To whom it may concern:

My name is Hannah Bennett and I'm a doctoral candidate at Middle Tennessee State University. I am e-mailing the listserv for the recruitment of potential participants. The study focuses on the experiences of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and are fully disclosed to their team and team personnel. All student-athletes must have one year of collegiate play, and furthermore, they must either still be playing or within 5 years of graduating. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the varying experiences of student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and to also determine what athletic departments and institutions can do to increase or establish awareness and support for these athletes.

Should you know an athlete who fits the study criteria and would be willing to participate, please feel free to forward them my contact information so that they may personally contact me. If you know of an organization or contact that might be able to further help in recruitment, please feel free to e-mail me as well. The study's e-mail is located on the bottom of this request.

Your assistance in this study is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Hannah Bennett

e: LGBTstudentathletestudy@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Hannah Bennett

Study Title: The experiences of fully disclosed collegiate student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender: a qualitative investigation

Institution: Middle Tennessee State University

Name of participant: _____ Age: _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

1. Purpose of the study:

You are being asked to participate in a research study because you have agreed to share your experiences of being a fully disclosed lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) individual within collegiate athletics. This interview will help to determine the needs and perceived acceptance of current athletes who identify as LGBT playing at the collegiate level. Your responses will be audio taped and/or videotaped.

2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:

Initially, this consent form is provided and described in detail. You have the choice to continue with the study. If you choose to continue, an interview will take place in which I will ask questions related to your experience as a student-athlete who identifies as LGBT. The interview will take between 30-45 minutes. After completion of the interview, you will be thanked for your time. The interview will be transcribed and sent to you for verification of information. At that time, you will be able to edit, add, or clarify your statements if they are not reflective of your experience or intended meaning. After approval, the interview will be used with all other participant interviews for data analysis. After analysis, all interviews will be discussed in parallel with research. If interested, you will be privy to viewing the final product of the study once completed.

3. Expected costs:

n/a

4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:

You may get emotional when sharing your experiences. We can pause to rest at any time during the interview or stop if you choose to do so. However, this is an opportunity to share your story helping to preserve the past and hopefully enjoy yourself as well.

5. Compensation in case of study-related injury:

n/a

6. Anticipated benefits from this study:

a) The potential benefits to science and humankind that may result from this study are the potential for establishing and/or increasing awareness of student-athletes who identify as LGBT, the acknowledgement of future steps within institutions and organizations to create a safer and more welcoming environment for future athletes, and to develop a foundation of knowledge of current and recent collegiate athletes who are or were fully disclosed as LGBT to their team.

b) The potential benefits to you from this study are potential feelings of satisfaction and acceptance as an individual who identifies as LGBT. You may feel encouraged knowing that your story may help another athlete feel more comfortable being who they are.

7. Alternative treatments available:

Should you feel the need to speak with a counseling professional before, during, or after your participation, the Middle Tennessee State University counseling services is located at Keathley University Center 326-S, and can be reached at: 615-898-2670.

8. Compensation for participation:

n/a

9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:

The primary investigator may withdraw you from the study should it be determined that you do not fit the study criteria. You will be notified should you be withdrawn from the study.

10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:

There is no penalty to you should you choose to withdraw from the study. You will be thanked for your time and your information and data will not be used for any analysis or other purpose. Any interviews and/or forms will be destroyed.

11. Contact Information.

If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Hannah Bennett at 207-745-1711, or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Donald Belcher at 615-898-2904.

12. Confidentiality. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU

or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board and/or the Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

13. **STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Date

Signature of patient/volunteer

Consent obtained by:

Date

Signature

Printed Name and Title

APPENDIX D
IRB Approval Form



5/26/2015

Investigator(s): Hannah Bennett, Don Belcher
Department: Health and Human Performance
Investigator(s) Email: hb2u@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: "The experiences of fully disclosed collegiate student-athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender: A qualitative investigation"

Protocol Number: 15-299

Dear Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRB has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants or that you have satisfactorily worked to minimize risks, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for 12 participants.

Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. **Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date.** Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires **5/26/2016**.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University