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## **A Case Study: Inclusion of Student-Athletes Who Identify as Sexual Minority at an NCAA Division I Institution**

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A Case Study: Inclusion of Student-Athletes Who Identify as Sexual Minority at an NCAA  
Division I Institution

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Health, Sport, and Exercise Science

by

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## **Abstract**

In comparison to heterosexual counterparts, sexual minority student-athletes are two times more likely to experience harassment, more negative climates, report feeling deliberately ignored or excluded from team activities and are subjected to orientation-based derogatory remarks via electronic means (Rankin & Merson, 2012). This particular population is 2-3 times more likely to experience anxiety and depression, nearly 14% will attempt suicide or acts of self-harm, and are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol (Cunningham, 2015). Non-inclusive climates negatively affect academic and athletic performance (Wolf-Wendel, Bajaj, & Spriggs, 2008; Turk, & Stokowski, 2016; Cunningham, 2015). The Athletic Equality Index (AEI) measures LGBTQ inclusion policies and practices in Power 5 conference athletic spaces. University fails to adequately meet 80% of the AEI criteria: non-discrimination policies, out or allied staff, accessible resources, collaboration with campus group(s), LGBTQ student-athlete group or initiative, pro LGBTQ equality campaign/statement, LGBTQ inclusive fan code of conduct, and guidelines for transgender inclusion (Athlete Ally, 2017). The AEI provides a tangible source of inclusion but does not measure daily efforts, or lack thereof, to foster inclusive environment for student-athletes. The NCAA recommends athletic departments offer support by developing inclusive policies, implementing educational initiatives and providing resources to support LGBTQ student-athletes but these recommendations are unregulated and athletic departments ultimately determine the resources provided. Informed by Brewer's (1991) model for Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), the purpose of this case study is to understand and describe inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. This study strives to answer the following research questions concerning inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at an NCAA Division I institution: (1) How does University athletic department address the issue of inclusion? (2) How do student-athletes

experience inclusion within University? Data collection includes: document review, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive journaling. This study explores the climate of inclusion for sexual minorities and how the athletic departments may better serve this particular population. Exploring and understanding athletic departments' role in inclusion is crucial in the development, construction, and preservation of inclusion within NCAA Division I member institutions.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Sherril Murrell, head women's basketball coach at Portland State University from 2007-2015, unapologetically agreed to include a family photograph of her, her wife, and two children on the athletic department website. In 2009, she became the first openly gay women's basketball coach within Division I. Despite other female lesbian and bisexual coaches reaching out to Murrell for advice and guidance on living open and authentically in collegiate athletics, there are many sexual minorities coaching within the NCAA membership institutions that have yet to come out. Regardless of sexual orientation, women in sport continue to feel the constant pressure to perform within the confines of traditional gender roles, embracing and displaying heterosexual and feminine characteristics (Melton, 2013).

Michael Sam came out to his University of Missouri football teammates in 2013 and became the first openly gay male drafted by an NFL team in 2014. Despite being named Defensive Player of the year in the prominent Southeastern Conference (SEC) during the 2013 season, Sam is not currently on an NFL roster. Looking back, Sam believes waiting until after a successful rookie season could have ensured a spot on an NFL roster and ultimately led to a greater impact for the LGBT community overall (Gibbs, 2016).

Brittney Griner, former basketball player of Baylor University under head coach Kim Mulkey, wrote a book titled *In My Skin*. The 6'9" woman described how she was encouraged to keep quiet about her sexuality due to the religious nature of the university due to university sexual misconduct policies but also for recruiting purposes. Mulkey, according to Griner, discouraged her student-athletes to be open about their sexuality in an attempt to avoid prospective student-athletes and their families to steer clear of Baylor University (Fagan, 2013; Griner, 2014).

Due to the discrimination and harassment that Derrick Gordon endured because of his sexual orientation while at the University of Massachusetts, Gordon was forced to transfer to the basketball program at Seton Hall (Gleeson, 2015). Scott Frantz, offensive tackle for the Kansas State Wildcat's football team, was in a team meeting in 2015 in which a motivational speaker encouraged each student-athlete to reveal something about themselves that no one else knew. Frantz broke down, comforted by one of his teammates, because he knew the secret of his sexual orientation was weighing so heavily on him. Frantz had known since fifth grade that he was gay, but failed to find acceptance until his junior year in high school. Even after coming out to his Kansas State teammates during the meeting, he waited an additional week before telling his family (Gartland, 2017).

Prior to March, 2017, only four college football players had come out publicly while active: Mason Darrow of Princeton, Mitch Eby of Chapman, Conner Mertens of Willamette, and Chip Sarafin of Arizona State. In the month of February, three *active* football players came out publicly. Kyle Kurdoziolek, a junior linebacker at the University of St. Francis. Darrion McAlister, a senior center for Marian (Ind.) University, and My-King Johnson, an incoming freshman defensive end at the University of Arizona. My-King Johnson has been out since he was 12 years old and was recruited by ten schools as an openly gay prospective student-athlete. In 2016, Johnson was named one of the best defensive players in the state of Arizona and is extremely comfortable speaking about his sexuality (Rosenblatt, 2017).

The experience of both male and female student-athletes who identify as sexual minority are influenced by many factors: individual, organizational, and societal (Melton, 2013). On the individual level, religious beliefs, mental health, peer relationships, and coming to terms with sexuality all play into the overall student-athlete experience (Greim, 2016; Melton, 2013). The

organizational level renders influence from coaches, teammates, parents, athletic department, and campus culture (Melton, 2013). Societal factors include the surrounding geographical region environment in regards to sexual minority, national acceptance or exclusion, and gender ideology. The experience of LGBT athletes has been well documented over the years with a variety of reports of a shift in the use of homophobic language, marginalization due to heteronormative environments (Anderson, McCormack, 2010), gender-specific discrimination based on masculinity and femininity of the athlete (Adams, 2014; Adams & Anderson, 2012; Kolnes, 1995; Schrack-Walkers, O'Donnell, Wardlow, 2009), a rise or decline in overt discrimination (Adams, 2014; Adams & Anderson, 2012; Bullingham, Magrath, & Anderson, 2014; Bush, Anderson, & Carr, 2012 Cavalier, 2011; Waldron, 2016), and the role of teammates in the experience of a sexual minority athlete (Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012). Though recent research reports a more positive overall climate for LGBT athletes in sport, athletes continue to experience marginalization due to sexual orientation (Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2010; O'Brien, Shovelton, & Latner, 2013; Rankin & Merson, 2013).

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at an NCAA Division I athletic department. The purpose of this single case study is to understand and describe inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. Understanding inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority would allow the athletic department to understand how to develop and implement policies and practices to ensure inclusion for this particular population. This research will employ a qualitative case study methodology to illustrate the phenomenon of inclusion. Participants of this study will include administrators, coaches, and student-athletes

within one NCAA Division I athletic department. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study is guided by three research questions:

- (1) How is inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA DI athletic department conceptualized?
- (2) How does an NCAA DI athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority?
- (3) How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department?

This study was approved by Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas. Semi-structured interviews, focus group, and document review served as the methods of data collection. The athletic department as well as each participant was given a pseudonym and all interviews (individual and focus group) were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Document review of media, website, institutional, departmental, and team documents (student-athlete handbook, athletic handbook, mission and value statements, policy and procedure manual, code of ethical conduct, Title IX statements, inclusion statements, athletic policy statements), as well as other documents that may have indicated inclusion or exclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority were analyzed. From this case study emerged eight findings: conceptualization of inclusion, representation, religion and sexuality, silence, team culture, accessibility, “acceptance,” and desire.

The goal of this study is to uncover factors contributing to the experience of inclusion for student-athletes who identify as sexual minorities and provide guidance for athletic departments to develop and implement inclusive policies and practices. These student-athletes continue to

experience more negative climates when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Rankin & Merson, 2012). Athletic departments and personnel representing the well-being of student-athletes should work to understand the experiences of student-athletes who identify as a sexual minority and create safe and inclusive spaces within offices, weight rooms, locker rooms, and the field or court of play. A better understanding of the experiences of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority may lead to the development and implementation of appropriate and inclusive policies and practices within one particular athletic department.

## Chapter II A: Review of Literature

### Student-Athletes who Identify as Sexual Minority

Many have defined the term “sexual minority” in fields of research, as Table 1 shows twelve different definitions over the past 17 years. For the purpose of this research, a sexual minority is an individual whose identity, orientation, or practices differ from the majority of surrounding society (Math & Seshadri, 2013). Though transgender individuals are included in some definitions of sexual minorities and grouped within the LGBTQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, asexual, allies, and others) research, no transgender individuals were interviewed during this study. To align with the aims of the current study, heterosexuality is the assumed majority within the collegiate athletic environment, as sport is said to be heteronormative (Anderson, 2002; Southall et al., 2009) and an individual who deviates from heterosexuality in terms of sexual orientation and practice is considered a sexual minority.

<b>Table 1. Definitions of Sexual Minority</b>	
Concept	Source
“heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, and not sure”	Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
“We use the term “sexual minority” because we do not know the sexual identity of the participants in the Add Health study, but their same-sex romantic attraction sets them apart from their peers both theoretically, and, as our study indicates, through their differential experiences at school.”	Russell, Seif, & Truong (2001), p. 112
“...sexual minority status, that is, whether one engages in same-sex sexual behavior, has enduring emotional or sexual attractions to the same sex (usually termed sexual orientation), or claims a same-sex sexual identity as gay, lesbian, or bisexual”	Russell (2003, p. 1241)
“Sexual minority youth—adolescents who self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB), who have same-sex romantic attractions, or who engage in same-sex sexual relationships”	Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer (2006)
“Difficulties in defining clearly the population(s) of focus manifest a central conceptual question in sexual minority research: Who, exactly, are sexual minority people? Perhaps because the evolution of this research has been characterized by samples expanded iteratively in...	Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger (2009, p. 6)

<b>Table 1 (cont). Definitions of Sexual Minority</b>	
Concept	Source
response to critiques of extant neglect, the momentum has been to extend the acronym umbrella (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007) continually toward increasing inclusion (e.g., LGBTQQA for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and ally). This is reflected in conceptualizations highlighting similarity among sexual minority groups, as, for example, Fassinger and Arseneau’s (2007) argument that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people share common experiences of gender transgression as well as societal sexual prejudice”	Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger (2009, p. 6)
“I’d like to further define that minority refers to a group of people who share a common characteristic that society perceives as inferior to the dominant group. Because of this social status, the minority group is subjected to discrimination and inequities in opportunities. We are familiar with the use of the term minority with racial and ethnic populations, as the reader points out. Similarly, our society, in which heterosexuality is the dominant sexual orientation, discriminates against individuals who engage in same-sex behaviors and those who do not identify as heterosexual. Therefore, anyone who does not conform to the societal dominance of heterosexuality is part of a minority group because of their sexual orientation.”	Boehmer (2012)
“Sexual minorities are a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society. Usually, Sexual minorities comprise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals”	Math & Seshadri, (2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refers to members of sexual orientations or who engage in sexual activities that are not part of the mainstream.</li> <li>• Refers to members of sex groups that do not fall into the majority categories of male or female, such as intersexuals and transsexuals</li> </ul>	Center for Educational Justice & Community Engagement (July, 2013)
“Sexual Minority: This is an umbrella term used to describe members of the GLBTQ community. GLBTQ: These letters are used as shorthand for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer and allied community. ‘I’ for intersex and ‘A’ for ally are often included in this ‘alphabet soup.’”	Cheney, LaFrance & Quinteros (2006, p. 1-2)
“Sexual minorities are groups of people whose sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual characteristics are different from the presumed majority of the population, which are male or female heterosexuals.”	Elizabeth Hartney, PhD; February 19, (2016)
“A development agenda for sexual and gender minorities”	Park, June 2016
In the report, sexual minority students were defined as those—who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; who had had sexual contact with only persons of the same sex; or who had had sexual contact with persons of both sexes.	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (August, 2016)

A recent Gallup poll reported 4.6% or around 10 million Americans identify as part of the LGBT community, steadily increasing .6% from 2012 (Gates, 2017). According to the NCAA Sport Sponsorship and Participation publication (2016), 177,673 male and female student-athletes participated at the NCAA Division I level in the 2015-2016 season. If consistent with the Gates' (2017) report of the US population, over 8,000 (8,173 to be exact) student-athletes would identify with as LGBT.

Understanding that over 4%, and potentially more, student-athletes may identify as LGBT provides incentive to understand sexual-minority student-athletes' experiences within athletic departments around the nation. Each concept factoring into the sexual minority student-athlete experience is important to consider and will first be explained in broad terms, then more specific to sport and athletes in general, and if research is available, applied at the level of the student-athlete.

## **A Shift**

In the 1980's, the number of individuals identifying as gay was increasing and homophobia was at its most heightened state, sending the US into homo-hysteria. Churches attempting to "cleanse" the US of homosexuality, political conservatism, and the rise of HIV/AIDS and its association with the homosexual community contributed to the immense homophobia within the American people (Anderson, McCormick, & Ripley, 2013). Attitudes toward and experiences of sexual minorities in sport seem to have progressed over the past few decades. In the 90's homophobia was required in sport (Pronger, 1990), homophobic attitudes were still held by heterosexual athletes (Hekma, 1998), homophobic language was still a form of overt discrimination (Plummer, 1999), and anti-gay language was frequently used (Hekma, 1998; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphey, 2001). In the 2000's, gay athletes still lived segmented lives

by not coming out to teammates out of fear of discrimination (Anderson, 2002), the culture of sports was seen as going “soft” because of the shift in acceptance of sexual minorities (Anderson, 2005), and there was a dismissal of the terms “gay” and “fag” as homophobic language because the social meaning of the language changed (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; McCormack, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). Though there has been a cultural shift in acceptance of sexual minorities since the 1980’s, the last ten years of research has shown the inconsistency of attitudes towards and factors effecting experiences of athletes who identify as sexual minority.

## **Factors of Sexual Prejudice**

### **Sexual prejudice.**

Sexual minorities are subject to sexual prejudice. According to Herek (2000), sexual prejudice is “all negative attitudes based on sexual orientation” (p. 19). Many researchers and practitioners are moving away from the common term “homophobia” which George Weinberg (1972) described as “the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals—and in the case of homosexuals, self-loathing” (p. 4). Homophobia itself focuses mainly on homosexuals, gay men specifically, and fails to encompass the spectrum of sexual orientations such as lesbian, bisexual, asexual, fluid, etc. that are also subject to societal prejudice (Herek, 2009). Herek describes his view on heterosexism:

Heterosexism can be understood as a cultural ideology that is embodied in institutional practices that work to the disadvantage of sexual minority groups even in the absence of individual prejudice or discrimination. It compromises the organizing rules that enforce and perpetuate sexual stigma in society’s institutions. As with institutional and individual racism, distinguishing between heterosexism and individual sexual prejudice facilitates the analysis of structural policies and individual attitudes as separate albeit interrelated phenomena. By embedding sexual stigma in society’s institutions, including religion, the

law, and medicine, heterosexism has historically justified the differential status of sexual minorities relative to heterosexuals – Herek, 2009, p. 442

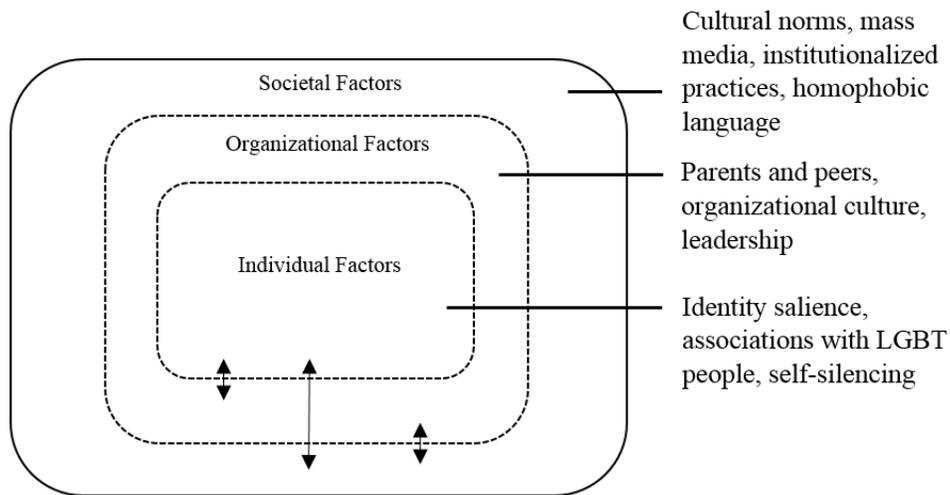
Heterosexism devalues nonheterosexuals' behaviors, identities, relationships, and communities by promoting the assumption of heterosexuality and the idea that nonheterosexuality is abnormal and deviant (Satore-Baldwin, 2013). The assumptions and stigmatizations associated with heterosexism reinforces the power and status differences between heterosexuals and sexual minorities (Herek, 2009; Link & Phelan, 2001). The negative attitude towards nonheterosexuality is simply a response to cognitive information from cultural and societal norms that individuals are exposed to in their lifetime. Heterosexuality has long been embedded and expected within popular cultural institutions such as religion, law, but especially sport (Satore-Baldwin, 2013).

Several authors have found sport to be heterosexist (Anderson, 2002; Connell, 1995; Hargreaves, 2000; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009a; 2009b) which influences sexual stigma and prejudice toward sexual minorities. The phenomena of sexual prejudice involves the macro (societal or cultural), meso (organizational or team), and micro (individual levels) levels and each factor at the societal, organizational, and individual levels influence one another. Each factor can be used to marginalize and discriminate against sexual gender and sexual minorities in sport.

## **Stigma in Sport**

### **Societal factors.**

Societal factors that influence sexual prejudice include cultural norms, mass media, and institutionalized practices, and homophobic language.



Source: adapted from Melton's (2013) Figure 1. Antecedents of the Lesbian Stigma in Sport

Figure 1. Antecedents of Sexual Minority Stigma in Sport

***Cultural norms.***

*Gender ideology.* According to Coakley (2014), gender ideology consists of “interrelated ideas and beliefs that are widely used to define masculinity and femininity, identify people as male or female, evaluate forms of sexual expression, and determine the appropriate roles of men and women in society” (p. 15). Dominant gender ideology is based on these central beliefs: (1) humans are male or female; (2) heterosexuality is the foundation of reproduction (any other expressions are deviant) and; (3) men are physically stronger and more rational than women which makes them more suited to possess power and leadership positions. Gender ideology encompasses sex roles, which are society’s expectations of the role a male or female is supposed to play (Moore, 2010), and gender-schemas, which provides insight into how individuals may organize the world in terms of their ideas and beliefs of male masculinity and female femininity (Paynem Connor, & Colletti, 1987). The combination of central beliefs, sex role expectations,

and gender ideologies (Coakley, 2014) serve as influences of the form identities, relationships, expectations, and reinforcements within our social world.

Gender has typically been differentiated in bipolar terms; masculine and feminine (Constantinople, 1973; Spence, 1984). Traditional, or orthodox, gender ideology defines gender in bipolar terms of masculine and feminine (Constantinople, 1973; Spence, 1984) and non-conformers are seen as “out of bounds” (Coakley, 2014). Thinking in terms of gender dichotomies endorses homophobia (Griffin, 1998) and provides an opportunity for others to hold views and engage in sexual prejudice against sexual minorities. Traditional masculine characteristics, in which males are expected to engage, include aggression, power, strength, assurance, muscularity and self-confidence while traditional feminine characteristics, in which females are expected to engage, include passivity, nurturance, softness, slenderness, and a tone physique. Traditional gender ideology believes that in order for women to be feminine, they must be attracted to men, and in order to for men to be masculine, they must be attracted to women (Krane, 2001). From a young age, males are aware of the necessity to convey masculinity and feel restricted to behave in such manner (Griffin, 1998; Harry, 1995; Messner, 1988, Zipp, 2011). Girls have a little more freedom of behaving in both masculine and feminine ways and the behavior is more accepted (Griffin, 1998; Harry, 1995; Messner, 1988, Zipp, 2011). Women are more likely to push gender boundaries than men in instances in which these traditional gender prescriptions are prevalent. “Gender benders,” push traditional gender boundaries and “gender defenders” defend and enforce traditional gender boundaries, both of which are often in competition with each other for power in social situations (Coakley, 2014). If gender defenders are in leadership positions, individuals are likely to suppress self-expression among the group whilst if “gender benders” occupy leadership positions, individuals feel safer to be their authentic

selves. Due to the reinforcement of traditional ideologies of gender and sexual orientation, anyone challenging the patriarchal ideals such as crossing gender boundaries or engaging in behaviors associated with nonheterosexuality, prejudice is often the result (Anderson, 2002; 2005a; Coakley, 2014; Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1997).

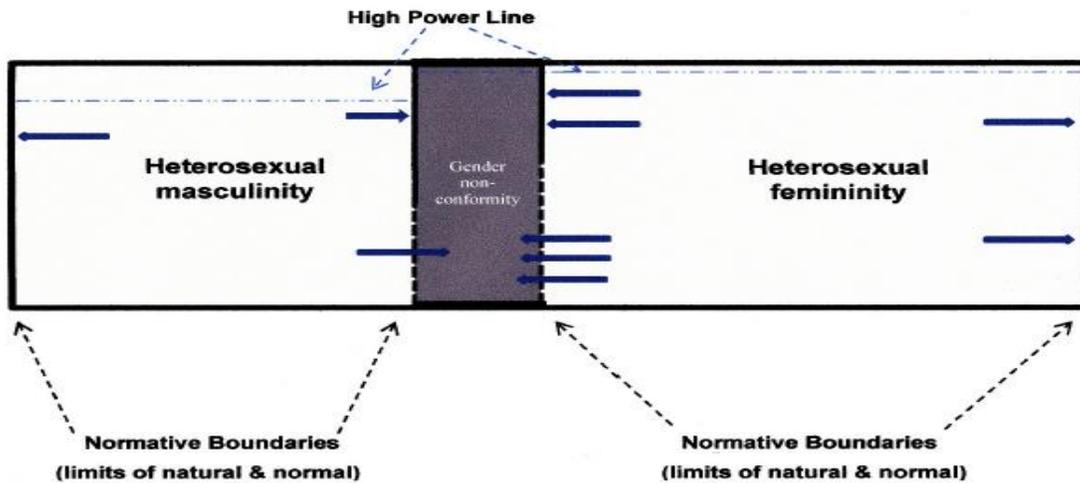


Figure 2. Note. Adapted from *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* by J. Coakley (2014)

These views also carry over into the sport context (Krane, 2001; Melton, 2013) and gender roles are reinforced through sport for both sexes and for all ages (Griffin, 1998; Harry, 1995; Pronger, 1990). Satore-Baldwin (2013) stated that “many of the ideas that surrounded ancient sport still surround modern sport, which to a large extent remains stratified by and structured around ideological belief systems” (p. 4) such as the traditional gender ideologies of masculinity and femininity. For example, females are expected to participate in sports that accentuate the hegemonic feminine characteristics of grace and beauty (e.g. gymnastics, dancing, figure skating) and males participate in sports of aggression and strength (e.g. football, wrestling, rugby). Gendered norms within sport also promote the avoidance of those activities that may go against societal expectations of men and women. Men are expected to avoid sports with limited

physical contact (e.g. dancing, figure skating) and women are expected to participate in such sports with limited physical contact (e.g. tennis, golf, volleyball). Any individual differing from the hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity emphasized in sport deems as incongruent with the stereotypes reinforced within the sports realm (Satore-Baldwin, 2013). Nonconformers, both men and women, are stigmatized and devalued for not following the traditional orthodox gender ideologies of femininity and masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995; Griffin, 1998; Kolnes, 1995; Krane and Barber, 2003; Shaw and Hoerber, 2003). Gareth Thomas, a Welsh rugby player, announced that he was gay in 2009 and was the only openly gay male professional athlete still participating in a professional team sport at the time. Thomas was known according to traditional gender roles, he was overly aggressive, powerful, intimidating, and became a master of disguise feeling he needed to convince everyone he was masculine and heterosexual (Satore-Baldwin, 2013).

Sexual minority males may also use their athleticism in an attempt to avoid homophobia because adhering to traditional gender norms reinforces male superiority, female subordination, and norms of heterosexuality (Krane, 2001). For example, males who are gender nonconformers often join sports teams to avoid being labeled as gay. Blake, a participant in Anderson's (2005a) study stated "I was actually more interested in books, but that's not really cool. I mean I really hated basketball; I'd rather read a book, but other boys didn't do that. Everybody played basketball and I wanted to fit in, so I did too" (p. 77-78).

*Stereotypes.* A stereotype is a "set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people" (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979, p. 16) and contribute in devaluation, negative attitudes, and discrimination with specific groups and identities (Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al., 1996; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Fiske, 1998). Stereotypes are

practiced and reinforced through cognitive energy by categorizing or grouping individuals with similarities so that recall of information is automatic and stereotypes are automatically activated (Devine, 1989; Fiske, 1998; Rush, 1998). Specific stereotypes of gay men include: promiscuity, femininity, flamboyance, sexual obsession, and perversion (Bernstein, 2004; Simon, 1998) and lesbians: masculinity, aggressiveness, and sexual seduction (Satore & Cunningham, 2009; Eliason, Donelan, and Randall, 1992). A national survey demonstrated that heterosexual men were more likely to believe gay men were pedophiles, that homosexuality was a mental illness, and were less supportive of gay rights (Herek, 2002). Heterosexual men continue to hold the most negative attitudes toward sexual minorities of all genders and orientations (Herek and Capitanio, 1999; Shang, Liao, & Gill, 2012; Herek, 2002). Perhaps strictly enforced male gender norms contribute to heterosexual male's attitudes toward sexual minorities (Bosson et al., 2006).

Stereotype threat is simply the risk of conforming to or confirming negative stereotypes about a group based on the individual's behavior (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele and Aronson, 1995; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). The higher the awareness, there more likely the behavior consistent with stereotype is to occur (Satore-Baldwin, 2013). Sexual minorities choose not to disclose sexual orientation due to the stereotype threat (Sartore & Cunningham, 2010).

In sport, men are assumed to identify as heterosexual and women are assumed to identify as homosexual (Griffin, 1998; Satore-Baldwin, 2013). Negative attitudes toward sexual minorities in sport has been continually documented (Anderson, 2005; Gill et al., 2006; Gill & Shang, 2012; Griffin, 1998; Krane and Barber, 2003, 2005; Plummer, 2006). Satore and Cunningham (2009) examined the influence of gender on sexual prejudice and participation in sport as well as the degree of sexual prejudice influencing sport participation decisions. Results

indicated if a coach identified as gay or lesbian, athletes were less likely to participate, parents were less likely to allow their children to participate, and participants justified nonparticipation with recall of sexual stereotypes toward nonheterosexuals. Men exhibited more sexual prejudice than women and gay coaches were seen more negatively compared to lesbian counterparts.

*Stigmas.* Smith and Ingram's (2004) "felt stigma" is the expectation that prejudice affects health and well-being negatively and can have a negative influence on the individual's personal life (Brooks, 1981; Crocker & Major, 1989). Identity management is a common way for sexual minorities to cope with the expected threat of discrimination and stigmatization (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Major et al., 1998; Pinel, 1999; Pinel & Paulin, 2005; Satore-Baldwin, 2013). Stigma consciousness is where individuals focus on the stereotyped status (Pinel, 1999) and is the response to the degradation of identity and preservation of stereotype in a particular environment (Herek, 2009). Sexual prejudice is strengthened by sexual stigma in which individuals who identify as nonheterosexual experience negative labeling, stereotyping, loss of status, and discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Link & Phelan, 2001)

Compared to sexism and racism, sexual prejudice is more acceptable to engage in (Herek, 2007; 2009). Within the sport context, athletes hold more negative views of sexual minority student-athletes and about playing for LGBT coaches. Parents are disinclined to allow their children to participate on teams in which players or coaches identify as LGBT (Satore & Cunningham, 2009a) and LGBT labels negatively affect the hiring of LGBT coaches and administrators (Cunningham, Satore, & McCullough, 2010).

There is a culture of silence for lesbians in sport, fearing being negatively labeled that may lead to stigmatization, negative recruiting, being outed, or job termination (Krane, 1997;

Griffin, 1998; Satore & Cunningham, 2009). Women in sport are seen as invaders (Coakley, 2014), violators of patriarchal ideals, and are often the target of discrimination and stigmatization (Melton, 2013). The “lesbian label exists within sport’s heterosexist and heteronormative context as a means to subvert women’s status, power, influence, and experiences” (Satore & Cunningham, 2009b, p. 289).

According to Waldron (2015), ideologies in sport such as the “myth of the lesbian athlete” validates social inequalities through institutional practices. This myth stabilizes lesbianism in the display of masculinity alone and fails to acknowledge gender and sexuality as performative acts. Exclusion, marginalization, and silencing of LGBTQ+ community is validated through institutional practices (Waldron, 2015). Female athletes often overemphasize femininity by wearing makeup, bows, accentuating traditional femininity, and distancing themselves from lesbians or sexual minority athletes to avoid being labeled a lesbian (Krane, 2011; 2004). Some research may have found that young girls are freer to express masculinity (in this sense, athleticism) and femininity compared to young boys (Griffin, 1998; Harry, 1995; Messner, 1988, Zipp, 2011), but other research suggests female athletes are automatically assumed to be a lesbian; “If you’re an athlete, you must be a lesbian” (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Turk & Stokowski, 2016). Physicality and appearance, hair, clothing, etc., often serve as a source of stereotypes for sexual minorities (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Turk & Stokowski, 2016). According to Sartore and Cunningham (2009), “gays and lesbians continue to suffer a bleak and complex existence in sport, as heteronormative ideology, gender norms, and gay and lesbian stereotypes remain prevalent and influential in the decision-making process” (p. 110). Despite the progress in attitudes toward and experiences of sexual minority athletes, discrimination toward the population is still very prevalent in the sporting world.

Table 1  
*A Framework For Conceptualizing Sexual Stigma*

Level of analysis	Cultural		Individual	
	Heterosexism	Enacted stigma	Felt stigma	Internalized stigma
Definition	Structural sexual stigma; a cultural ideology embodied in institutional practices that work to the disadvantage of sexual minority groups even in the absence of individual prejudice or discrimination.	The overt behavioral expression of sexual stigma by individuals.	An individual's knowledge of society's stance toward nonheterosexuals, including expectations about the likelihood of stigma being enacted in a given situation.	An individual's personal acceptance of sexual stigma as a part of her or his own value system and self-concept.
Examples	<p>Sodomy laws</p> <p>"Defense of Marriage" laws</p> <p>"Don't Ask, Don't Tell"</p> <p>Lack of legal constraints on discrimination</p> <p>Religious teachings that categorically condemn same-sex relationships</p> <p>Consistently negative media portrayals of sexual minorities</p> <p>Pathologization of homosexuality</p>	<p>Shunning and ostracism of (perceived) sexual minorities</p> <p>Use of antigay terms and epithets</p> <p>Employment and housing discrimination</p> <p>Hate crimes</p>	<p>Avoidance of gender nonconformity</p> <p>Avoidance of same-sex physical contact</p> <p>Public declarations that one is heterosexual to avoid stigma</p> <p>Enactments of sexual stigma to avoid being labeled nonheterosexual</p> <p>Hiding one's homosexual or bisexual identity</p>	<p><i>In heterosexuals:</i> Negative attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual minorities (sexual prejudice)</p> <p><i>In sexual minorities:</i> Negative attitudes toward oneself as homosexual or bisexual (self-stigma)</p> <p>Negative attitudes toward homosexuality &amp; sexual minorities (sexual prejudice)</p>

Figure 3. Herek, Gillis, & Cogan (2009) *A Framework For Conceptualizing Sexual Stigma*

*Homophobic language.* Homophobic language and its ordinary use within sport regulates male behavior “and men avoid any connotation with femininity or homosexuality,” (Anderson, McCormack, & Ripley, 2013) limiting expressions of male athletes may wish to partake in, contributing to gay male athletes staying in the closet. Kimmel (1994) states “homophobia is often concerned with regulating gender rather than sexuality” (p. 38). Gay athletes acknowledged the use of hostile language but dismissed as habitual and not necessarily anti-gay sentiment (Hekma, 1998; Prince, 2000). Actually, many athletes claimed that words such as “gay” and “fag” had significantly different meanings within a sporting context than other situations and that homophobic language was an accepted element of competition (Prince, 2000). Many athletes to this day use homophobic language, anti-gay slurs to gauge inclusivity and comfortability with

sexual minorities within an athletic setting (Anderson, 2002; 2005a; Anderson et al., , 2013; Walker & Melton, 2015).

### *Mass media.*

With growing attention to social and mass media outlets for quick, at-your-fingertips information comes the influence of those ideologies of the individuals producing the information. Kane (1988) stated “the mass media have become one of the most powerful institutional forces for shaping values in modern culture” (p. 88-89). Though numbers of female participation and accolades continue to rise, and progress has been made, the media coverage for these athletes and women’s sports in general does not reflect the progress (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013; Fink, 2015; Lumpkin, 2009; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008).

Practices such as “gender marking” (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993) continue to render female athletes and women’s sports as secondary to male athletes and men’s sports. For example, collegiate women’s teams are often referred to as the “Lady” mascot to differentiate from the defaulted men’s mascot (e.g. Lady Razorbacks vs Razorbacks; Lady Baylor Bears vs Bears). Men’s teams and sporting competitions are not referred to as the Men’s NCAA Final Four (as opposed to the Women’s NCAA Final Four), defaulting women’s competitions as the “other” (Messner et al., 1993). Heterosexuality and hyper-femininity are endorsed and made the most salient aspects of the female athletes’ identities within the media. For example, coverage of female athletes often focuses on their life outside of sport such as roles in the family as a girlfriend, wife, or mother (e.g. Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Wensing & Bruce, 2003), emphasizing heterosexuality within women’s sports. Just a year ago during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, the Chicago Tribune tweeted “Wife of Bears’ lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics” following trap shooter Cogdell-Unrein’s bronze medal

performance. Cogdell-Unrein is a three-time Olympian who *happens* to be married to Chicago Bears lineman Mitchell Unrein (Telegraph Sport, 2016).

In the 2016 Olympics hosted by Rio de Janeiro, a compilation of athletes of all shapes, sizes, sports, genders, and orientations resided within the Olympic Village. Nico Hines, a reporter for the Daily Beast, published the article “The Other Olympic Sport In Rio: Swiping” where he used Bumble, Grindr, Jack’d, and Tinder to meet up with Olympic athletes. His article focused specifically on gay athletes, including identifiers for some of the individuals he met up with (country of origin, sport, etc.). Some of the countries these athletes were competing for still believe homosexuality is punishable by death. The article was removed by The Daily Beast on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016 with a note from the editors apologizing for the unintended harm or degradation of members of the LGBT community. Nico Hines is currently the London editor of The Daily Beast. (Mandell, 2016)

### ***Institutionalized practice.***

Once habits, customs, and traditions are standardized within an organization, they are then said to be institutionalized (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Members of the organization or team begin to accept and reinforce the norms without question because it’s seen as “the way we do things around here” (Scott, 2005; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Within sports, and especially collegiate athletics, “gender discrimination is said to be institutionalized because of the history, tradition, prevailing stereotypes, and lack of legal enforcements” (Melton, 2013; p. 17). Pat Griffin, a forerunner in LGBT athletes’ rights, expressed her disappointment in the silence of heterosexual coaches and athletes of women’s teams in her blog (2010):

I’ve been noticing lately how many heterosexual men in sport—coaches, athletes, pro team GMs [general managers] have been speaking out to support LGBT athletes, school

anti-gay bullying programs and broader LGBT issues like marriage rights. NFL players, Brendan Ayanbadejo, Scott Fujita, Antonio Cromartie, Drew Brees; NBA players, Manu Ginobili and Steve Nash; MLS player, Mike Chabala; Ohio State Football coach, Jim Tressell, NCAA Wrestling Champ, Hudson Taylor; Toronto Maple Leafs GM, Brian Burke; former NFL commissioner, Paul Tagliabue; and others I have missed have all spoken out publicly. When I try to name one heterosexual coach of a woman's team or college or professional athlete who has spoken out in similar ways, I am stumped. The silence is deafening. (Griffin, 2010)

### **Organizational factors.**

Organizational factors that operate at the group level that influence experiences of sexual minorities within sport are parents and peers, organizational culture, and leadership itself.

#### *Parents and peers.*

Parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are incredibly influential during the child's development as an athlete. Some parents may forbid or restrict their children from participating in gender-inappropriate sports (girls participating in masculine sports such as football and rugby and boys participating in feminine sports such as dancing and ice skating) and playing on teams with sexual minorities athletes or coaches (Ezzell, 2009). Women's coaches at the NCAA Division I level often claim their programs to be "family friendly" or not having a "lesbian problem" (Cyphers & Fagan, 2011) to appeal to recruit's families.

Social influences assist in the development of attitudes and beliefs of gender norms and sexuality (Kandel & Andrews, 2009). For student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, there may be a wide variety of interactions and experiences with peers based on sexual orientation. Coming out may draw gay athletes closer to teammates because they are authentic and no longer living segmented lives (Anderson, 2011). College coaches and administrators often suppress athlete's sexual orientation to avoid gossip from coworkers (Melton & Cunningham, 2012; Sartore & Cunningham, 2010), and student-athletes may experience sexual orientation guilt or

shame when teammates are unapologetically vocal in their religious beliefs and condemnation of homosexuality (Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

The older generation may not understand sexual minority athletes who come out. One of Anderson's (2011) participants recalled a conversation with an athletic director in which he asked "why don't you just choose to be straight?" (p. 263). Similarly, Turk and Stokowski's (2016) participant, Penelope, claimed that within "the younger generation, it's more normal, it's not so much a minority, but for the older population, it's just something that didn't happen very often when they were growing up."

### ***Organizational culture.***

Organizational culture has a great influence on employee's and especially newcomer's attitudes and behaviors. Organizational culture is often referred to as a complex set of shared values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, and symbols that its members develop over time (Schein, 1990). In organizations that diversity is not a valued characteristic of the team, the members will adopt those norms and preferences (DeSensi, 1995; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999). Unsupportive working environments within sport lack policies and practices supporting sexual minority inclusion. Sexual minorities do not feel comfortable discussing their sexual orientation with coworkers, emphasize other social identities (e.g. dog lover, political affiliation, team identification), present heterosexual images adhering to traditional gender roles, experience diminishing experiences within non-inclusive athletic departments, and even pretend to have significant others of the opposite sex for better chances of promotion (Fink et al., 2012; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Schmidt et al. (2011) states that "social support plays a critical role in career indecision and college adjustment for LGBT undergraduates" (p. 304). Social support is a crucial aspect of the experiences for sexual minorities. Those with strong social

support may have a better experience and are less likely to be adversely affected as opposed to those with little or weak social support (Harek & Garnets, 2007; Meyer, 2003).

### *Leadership.*

As Bandura's (1986) social learning theory states "virtually all learning phenomena, resulting from direct experience, can occur vicariously by observing other people's behaviors and the consequences for them" (p. 19). Leaders who overtly display negative attitudes and beliefs toward sexual minorities give way for others within the organization to do so as well. The leadership of coaches and administrators at the collegiate level play a crucial role in the perpetuation of sexual minority stigma in sport. Coaches have threatened to "out" players to parents if grades were not raised within a particular semester and implemented dress codes and team policies only allowing opposite-sex partners to attend team events (Krane & Barber, 2005; Melton 2010a; Melton & Cunningham, 2012; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012; Turk & Stokowski, 2016).

Coaches and administrators may also play a big role in the acceptance of sexual minority student-athletes at the collegiate level. George, a participant in Turk and Stokowski's (2016) qualitative study on student-athletes coming out stated "when all your coaches are gay I guess it really doesn't matter...they're probably more understanding when they find out and probably could connect to you almost a little more than when they didn't know."

Ivory (2005) emphasized the importance of visible LGBT faculty, staff, and administrators in which students could model. Without such role models, the students may feel as though they have little or no value to the institution and never come to accept themselves for who they are. The role of mentors and allies of LGBT student-athletes should address

discrimination and homophobia through conversation. Barber and Krane (2007) suggested self-reflection of biases and behaviors through training sessions and LGBT literature.

**Individual factors.**

Individual factors include identity concerns, within the social categorization perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), associations with LGBT people, and self-silencing.

**Identity concerns.**

Figure 4 displays identity concerns for student-athletes who identify as LGBT. As shown, the identity is composed multiple facets ranging from specific to broad: human beings, college students, white students, LGBT students, student-athletes, and students of color. Each of these identities encompasses its own concerns and rates of development.

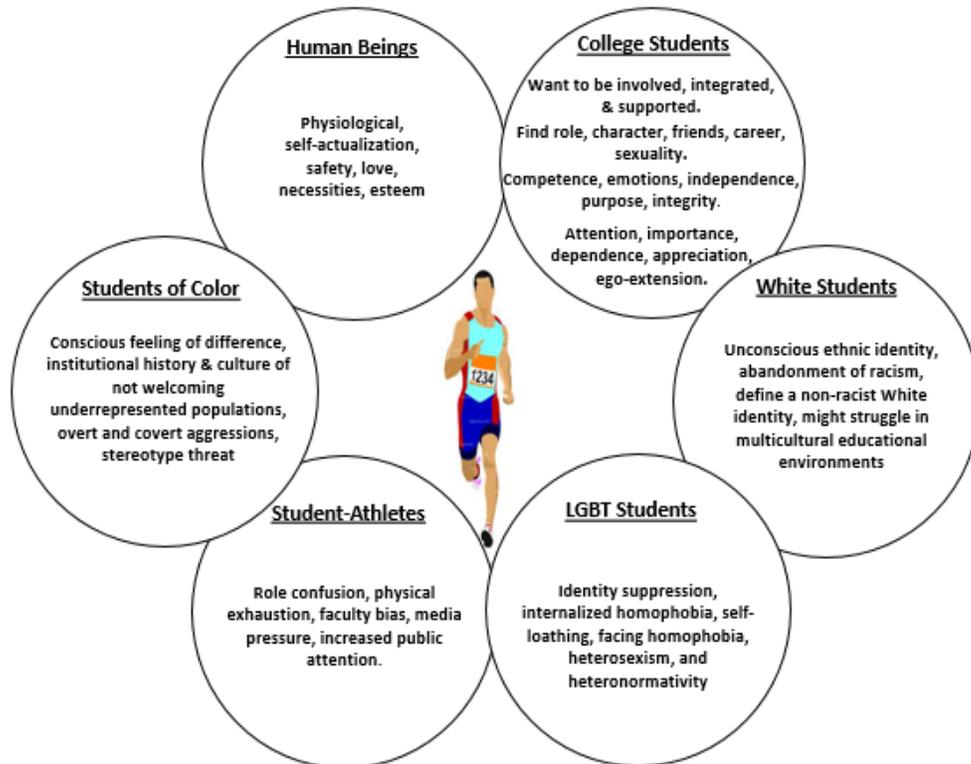


Figure 4. *Source:* Greim (2016) Identity concerns for collegiate LGBT Student-Athletes

*Human Beings.* Maslow's (1943) Theory of Human Motivation revealed the hierarchal model of human needs. The foundation is physiological, safety next, love/belonging following, esteem, and self-actualization rounding out the top (Erikson, E. H., 1968; Maslow, 1943). Erikson (1968) discussed identity crisis in which the individual struggles to find his or her own character, sexuality, career trajectory, and navigate relationships with others.

*College Students:* Student-development within the collegiate environment encompasses a wide variety of identity concerns for students: desire to be involved, integrated, and supported; aspire to find their individual role, character, friends, career, and sexuality; exploring competence, emotions, independence, purpose, and integrity; and experiencing attention, importance, dependence, appreciation, and ego-extension. (Astin, 1977; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Greim, 2016).

*White Students.* White, Caucasian, or non-Hispanic individuals work through unconscious ethnic identity, abandonment of racism, defining a non-racist White identity, and might struggle in multicultural environments (Blanchard, 1992; Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Greim, 2016)

*Students of Color.* Students of color experience conscious feelings of difference, are integrated into an institutional history and culture that is not welcoming of underrepresented populations, overt and covert aggressions, and stereotype threats (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Greim, 2016; Quaye, Tamnascia, & Talesh, 2009).

*LGBT Students.* LGBT students experience identity confusion, comparison, tolerance, and finally acceptance within themselves coming to terms with their sexuality (Cass, 1984). Identity suppression, internalized homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity are common

experiences among the LGBT population throughout Cass's (1984) six-stage model of identity acquisition (Greim, 2016; Moradi et al., 2010). During the years of identity development, much of which takes place in a collegiate setting, LGBT individuals are subject to harassment, suppression of sexual identity, and internalized homophobia mirroring societal attitudes and homonegativity (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Smith, Oades, & McCarthy, 2012; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007; Flood, McLaughlin, & Prentice, 2013; Jordan & Deluty, 1998; Reilly & Rudd, 2006; Rankin, 2006).

*Student-Athletes.* Student-athletes face a plethora of challenges at the collegiate level such as role confusion, physical exhaustion, faculty bias, media pressure, and increased public attention (Engstrom, C. M., & Sedlacek, W. E., 1991; Greim, 2016; Griffith & Johnson, 2002; James, 2005; Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen & Kao, 2012; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphey, 2001; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, M. A., 2014).

Multiple identities but one in particular may hold more weight in any given situation or context. For example, female, Christian, religious, and athletic identities as particular representation of their social identity are more likely to engage in sexual prejudicial behaviors and reject individuals who identify as sexual minority (Bush, Anderson, & Carr, 2012; Melton, 2013; Satore & Cunningham, 2010). Sexual minorities who attend institutions that promote heterosexuality, religious beliefs, and conservatism experience higher levels of internalized stigma (Herek, 2009).

#### ***Associations with LGBT people.***

Allies, family members, teammates, etc. may also experience "courtesy stigma" due to their associations with an LGBT individual (Goffman, 1963). Courtesy stigma involves negative

attitudes and discrimination toward those individuals who speak out in support of the LGBT community. Many coaches and administrators choose not speak out in support of the LGBT community within the sport context for fear of holding inconsistent views with their colleagues which may lead to stigmatization (Avery, 2011; Cunningham & Satore, 2010). To avoid becoming an out-group member, heterosexual individuals may refuse to overtly support LGBT rights and may even distance themselves from those who identify as sexual minorities.

Roper and Halloran (2007) found that student-athletes who have had experiences or contact with gay men and lesbians hold more positive attitudes toward those individuals. Shang, Liao, and Gill (2012) found that past contact experiences were predictor's of attitudes toward sexual minorities. Past contact experiences predicted male and female athletes' and male and female coaches' attitudes toward sexual minority athletes.

### ***Self-silencing.***

Athletes often "self-silence" and choose not to discuss relationships or desires with heterosexual teammates even if their heterosexual counterparts may be oversharing (Anderson et al., 2013). Athletes in the early 2000's and still today do not fully understand that self-silencing is segmenting one's own sexual identity and choosing not to speak of experiences only contributes to the culture of silence of sexual minorities (Hekma, 1998).

A participant of Anderson's (2011) study claimed to not broadcast his sexuality to avoid causing discomfort to others such as teammates, coaches, even friends and family members. Catherine claimed "I never deny my sexual orientation but I don't outwardly offer the information to people" (Turk & Stokowski, 2016). Sexual minorities also muffle or water-down their individual's preferences, desires, and ultimately sexual identity. Many of the participants in

sexual minority athlete and student-athlete research wished to avoid causing discomfort to those around them, so they kept quiet. There is also a muffling of their identities and lives in which Gwen, also a participant of Turk and Stokowski (2016), explains further:

the wording I would use is like, it wouldn't be like my girlfriend. I wouldn't use that word in front of them. So if I were just to use [girlfriend's name], so I would never use those kinds of labels on anything, ever, around them just so they didn't feel uncomfortable. Because they knew her and they knew of her and they knew what she was. But if they just didn't hear that, then it made them more comfortable.

Gwen, who was openly out to her teammates still refused to use the identifier "girlfriend" for fear of causing discomfort. She filtered her nouns and pronouns carefully to ensure those around here were not offended. According to Anderson, McCormack, and Ripley (2013), "the combined effect of attempted silencing of gay identities within sport, and the willful promotion of heterosexuality, served to privilege heterosexuality while marginalizing homosexuality, and prevented the association of homosexuality as being compatible with sport" (p. 37) Traditional orthodox gender ideology, incompatibility of sexual deviance with sport, factors of sexual prejudice all influence the experiences of sexual minority student-athletes during their time competing for NCAA sponsored institutions.

### **Experiences of Sexual Minority Student-Athletes**

Sports are significant influencers of what an individual believes his or her role in society is (Messner & Sabo, 1990) and student-athletes' construct of gender is significantly influenced by team climate (Messner, 1989). Student-athletes who identify as sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.) generally experience more negative climates compared to heterosexual

counterparts. Negative climates, though not specifically identified in Rankin and Weber's (2013) report, could include experiencing non-inclusivity at the team, athletic department, as well as institutional levels. For example, LGBTQ student-athletes reported low tendency for athletic departments to address discrimination against the population which played a role in their negative experiences.

The accuracy of percentage of sexual minority student-athletes is wavering due to hidden sexualities within athletic departments and sports teams (Walker & Melton, 2015). In 2002, sexual minorities in sports reported more harassment than heterosexual counterparts in the form of favoritism (43%), exclusion (42%), or derogatory remarks (38%). Of the harassment reported, 64% took place at practice or during an athletic competition (Griffin et al., 2002). Around 85% of sexual minorities reported receiving discrimination in an athletic setting in the form of verbal slurs (i.e. faggot and dyke), 70% of athletes find homophobia (or sexual prejudice) worse in sports than in surrounding society, and 84% have witnessed or experienced homophobia first hand in sport (LGBT SportSafe, 2016). Denison and Kitchen (2015) conducted an international study including nearly 10,000 participants of all sexualities: gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, and other. Of those nearly 10,000 participants, less than 1% believe sexual minorities were completely accepted in sport and 46% believe sexual minorities were only partially accepted or not at all accepted in sport. Also, 78% claimed those sexual minorities open with sexual orientation would not be safe as a spectator of sport.

Recent research illustrates prejudicial attitudes and unwillingness to play for a sexual minority coach (Satore & Cunningham, 2009), parents holding anti-LGBT attitudes are less likely to allow their children to participate in teams coached by sexual minorities (Cunningham & Melton, 2012), homophobic language is still used but not considered derogatory (McCormack,

2012), playing experiences are affected when individual sexual orientation are still directed towards sexual minority student-athletes (Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2012; Skogvang & Fasting, 2013). Roper and Halloran (2007) assessed male and female attitudes toward both lesbian and gay athletes and found that male's held more negative views toward both groups than females. Athletes with past experience with non-heterosexual individuals held more positive attitudes toward both lesbian women and gay men in general, not just sport specific. Football recruits who were both gay and feminine were more derogated and more likely to be perceived as threats than any other group (feminine and straight, masculine and straight, and masculine and gay) (Maxwell, 2015).

Anderson and Bullingham (2013) explored the experiences of twelve lesbian student-athletes, of which ten reported support, two reported discrimination and hostility in the form of property damage and physical assault. The assault reported in the interviews with the lesbian student-athletes was the first time primary researcher Anderson had encountered such overt hostility even in the 100+ gay male athletes he'd interviewed in about ten years. The authors found that coaches' attitudes influence the team's response, athletic value may ease the coming out process, the individual may have to come out multiple times within collegiate NCAA eligibility, and homophobia is still quite prevalent in women's athletics.

Pennsylvania State University women's basketball coach, Rene Portland was at the helm of the program for 27 years before resigning in 2007. During her reign, she implemented training rules for her student-athletes: "*No Drugs, No Drinking, No Lesbians.*" She was unashamed in using this policy as a recruiting tool, gearing it towards parents of recruits to ensure she would keep their daughters on the straight and narrow while playing for Penn State. Jennifer Harris, a highly recruited and talented basketball player sued Penn State based on sexual orientation

discrimination by her head coach. Though several players spoke openly in the documentary *Training Rules*, only Harris filed suit.

Twins Christine and Corinne Gulas were verbally harassed and threatened by their coach of one year, claiming that if she'd heard about engagement in any lesbian sexual activity, they would be kicked off, scholarships revoked, and she would make transferring impossible. The twins decided not to try out for the team the following year because they believed they would not survive in such an environment. Cindy Davies, also a former Penn State basketball player, was warned by graduate assistant that coach Portland was going to have a conversation with her about her relationship with the team manager. When Davies met with coach Portland, she questioned her relationship with the manager, explained that the manager was no longer a part of the team, and that if the rumors were true about her relationship, nothing could stop her from going to the university, media, and Cindy's parents. Portland later explained that Cindy had left the team for academic reason after she revoked her scholarship.

Lisa Faloon lied about having a boyfriend at home, made phone calls from a phone booth, and closeted herself for her entire time at Penn State. Courtney Wicks was an African American student-athlete who was encouraged by Portland to meet with a mentor. Once Portland found out that Wicks' mentor might be a lesbian, she pressured Wicks to terminate her mentor-mentee relationship with the individual.

After an article was published in *The Chicago Sun-Times* quoting Rene Portland about her no lesbian policy, "I will not have it in my program...I bring it up and the kids are so relieved and the parents are so relieved. But they would probably go without asking the question otherwise, which is really dumb" (June 16, 1986). The case was settled out of court but the suit and resignation of Rene Portland illuminated the open, and often promoted, hostile treatment of a

collegiate student-athletes based on sexual orientation (Hohler, 2006; Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008; Sternod, 2011). The suit, in addition to protests on campus, resulted in the addition of sexual orientation to Penn State's discrimination policy and a mandating of sexual discrimination workshop for all coaches within the athletic department. *Training Rules* also interviews two NCAA employees who explain that the NCAA is a governing body that establishes an overarching umbrella set of rules for all member institutions. The NCAA does not deal with institutions on an individual basis and ignored Jen Harrison's complaints made about Rene Portland's behavior, offering no response to the Harrison family's pleas. Individual institutions are responsible for the type of environment promoted within the athletic department for all races, genders, and orientations.

### **Concerns of Sexual Prejudice and Discrimination**

Sexual minority stigma plays a crucial role in the prevalence of mental health issues such as LGB individuals as 2-3 times more likely to experience anxiety and depression, up to 14% attempting suicide or acts of self-harm, the average age of the first suicide attempt at the age of 16, and nearly half transgender individuals attempt suicide in their lifetime (Cunningham, 2015).

Negative climates may adversely influence athletic identity which is most profound for sexual minority student-athletes. Negative climates may also influence academic success; which sexual minorities also show lower levels of compared with heterosexual student-athletes (Rankin & Weber, 2013). Athletic departments that promote inclusive, nondiscriminatory environments find that LGBTQ individuals are more likely to disclose sexual orientation and the likelihood of sexual minorities experiencing discrimination is reduced. Sexual orientation diversity can substantially improve organizational performance, but only in an organizational context that values diversity and inclusion (Walker & Melton, 2015). Though the field has scratched the

surface of sexual minority administrators and coaches working in athletic departments, the current inclusion of sexual minority student-athletes have yet to be explored in depth.

Not being able to “come out” has potential harmful and psychological effects. Athletic and academic performance may suffer from student-athletes being closeted, either by themselves or by others (Wolf-Wendel, Bajaj, & Spriggs, 2008; Turk & Stokowski, 2016). Sexual minority student-athletes are subject to more negative experiences than heterosexual counterparts and receive lower perceptions of respect from teammates and coaches. They also have double the chances to experience harassment, over 1 in 5 have actually been targets of cyber-discrimination, and half of sexual minority student-athletes feel ignored or excluded on basis of their sexual orientation (Rankin & Merson, 2012). Student-athletes who identify as sexual minority report higher levels of illicit drug use, prescription drug use, and alcohol use than heterosexual counterparts (Kroshus & Davoren, 2016). There are significant relationships between student-athlete sexual orientation and mental health and substance abuse, sexual minorities experiencing more substance abuse and more negative mental health outcomes. Negative mental health outcomes include as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness. More significantly, sexual orientation of student-athletes is positively related with mental health harm outcomes such as intentional self-harm, consideration of suicide, and attempt of suicide (Kroshus & Davoren, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

There are inconsistencies of sexual minority athletes and student-athletes literature in regards to their experiences and effects of positive, negative, or neutral environments on academic and athletic performance. We explored sexual prejudice from societal, organizational, and individual levels. As a reminder, the societal level encompassed: cultural norms, mass

media, institutionalized practices, and homophobic language; the organizational level: parents and peers, organizational culture, leadership; and the individual level: identity salience, associations with LGBT people, and self-silencing. The differences in sexual minority student-athlete positive and negative experiences stem from traditional gender ideology and the factors of sexual prejudice discussed. It is important to understand “entrenched power dynamics and social processes operating within school and sport settings have shaped – and continue to shape – the identity development, health, well-being, safety, privilege and prospects of same-sex attracted young people” (Carless, 2012, p. 608). In order to ensure each individual student-athlete identifying as a sexual minority experiences acceptance and inclusion within his or her team, athletic department, and institution, coaches and administrators should understand that “community is not only a process of stressing what is common to the group, but also of accepting differences within the group” (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001, p. 371).

## Chapter II B: Review of Literature

### Inclusion and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

#### Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion have been discussed interchangeably but we've learned that the relationship between the two is unclear and difficult to define. Diversity is a collection of identities, artifacts, personalities, cultures, and ideologies. An optimist finds diversity as the provider of variation in perspectives generating greater creativity while a pessimist perceives diversity as the benefactor of divisions at the social level (Mannix & Neale, 2005). Inclusion is not as concrete as an all-encompassing "co-exist" sign and is experienced in many different ways that may be unspoken, unseen, and felt at the individual level. There are inconsistencies in the literature investigating the relationship between diversity and group, team, organizational, etc. performance. Mannix and Neale (2005) found that context may be the key to understanding the effects of diversity (Horowitz, 2007; Jackson & Joshi, 2011; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Kochan et al., 2003). As Miller and Katz (2002) so eloquently state, "if an organization brings in new people but doesn't enable them to contribute, those new people are bound to fail, no matter how talented they are. *Diversity without inclusion does not work*" (p. 17, italics in original).

Inclusion encompasses the ability for an organization or team to promote connection and belongingness to the group without losing individual uniqueness (Ferdman, 2010). Inclusion reevaluates who defines what it means to be an insider within the group or team to ensure that all members contribute to building the group culture (Ferdman & Davidson, 2002). The dynamic process of inclusion involves constantly reevaluating the values and the norms of the group or organization (Ferdman, 2014).

<b>Table 1.1 Concepts of Inclusion</b>		
<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Source</i>
<b>Individuals</b>	“Inclusiveness encourages individuals of all identity groups to contribute all their talents, skills, and energies to the organization, not merely those that could be tolerated or accepted within a narrow range of monocultural style and expectations.”	Miller and Katz, 1995, p. 278
	Inclusion is “the degree to which individuals feel part of critical organizational processes,” indicated by their access to information and resources, work group involvement, and ability to influence decision making.	Mor-Barak and Cherin, 1998, p. 48
	Inclusion is “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system.” Used “three inclusion indicators: (1) decision-making influence, that is the influence that an employee has over decisions that affect him/her or the work that s/he does . . . ; (2) access to sensitive work information, that is the degree to which an employee is kept well-informed about the company business objectives and plans; and (3) job security, that is the likelihood that an employee will retain his/her job.”	Pelled, Ledford, and Mohrman, 1999, p. 1014–1015
	“One’s experience of inclusion in the collective is a powerful determinant of action. . . . One’s sense of feeling included is most critical because it strengthens affective commitment to the organization. If one feels included, one perceives oneself as psychologically linked to the organization, experiencing the successes and failures of the organization as one’s own.”	Davidson, 1999, p. 172
	There is “a range of aspects of the experience of inclusion, such as feeling validated, accepted, heard, and appreciated; using one’s talents and making a difference (including being part of something that is working and doing a meaningful task); having some work autonomy; receiving feedback; having one’s input solicited and used; involvement in collaboration; openness for dialogue; and wanting to learn from others. . . . [W]hile there are commonalities or general themes in terms of what people experience as inclusion—feeling valued, respected, recognized, trusted, and that one is making a difference—not everyone experiences these in the same way.”	Ferdman and Davidson, 2002b, p. 81
	Inclusion is “an individual’s collective judgment or perception of belonging as an accepted, welcomed and valued member in the larger organization units, such as a work group, department, and overall organization.”	Hayes and Major, 2003, p. 5
	Defines “belonging” as having two related aspects: “The first is social connection or affiliation, including bonds of love, friendship and shared purpose, as well as the basic ability to	Hubbard, 2004, p. 218

**Table 1.1 (cont). Concepts of Inclusion**

<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Source</i>
	communicate and relate to others. . . . The second aspect is social acceptance, which enables a person to be with and among others with a sense of comfort and entitlement, or in short, a sense that she belongs and that she has a rightful place in the world.”	Hubbard, 2004, p. 218
	“Workplace Social Inclusion . . . captures the extent to which employees have informal social ties with others at work and feel as if they belong and are socially included by others in their workplace.”	Pearce and Randel, 2004, p. 84
	“Inclusion represents a person’s ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization.”	Roberson, 2006, p. 215
	“An organization is inclusive when everyone has a sense of belonging; feels respected, valued and seen for who they are as individuals; and feels a level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues and others so that all people—individually and collectively—can do our best work.”	Miller and Katz, 2007, p. 2
	“We define the experience of inclusion in a workgroup as individuals’ perception of the extent to which they feel safe, trusted, accepted, respected, supported, valued, fulfilled, engaged, and authentic in their working environment, both as individuals and as members of particular identity groups”	Ferdman, Barrera, et al., 2009, p. 6
	“[I]nclusion involves both being fully ourselves and allowing others to be fully themselves in the context of engaging in common pursuits. It means collaborating in a way in which all parties can be fully engaged and subsumed, and yet, paradoxically, at the same time believe that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up any part of themselves. Thus, for individuals, experiencing inclusion in a group or organization involves being fully part of the whole while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness.”	Ferdman, 2010, p. 37
	“We define inclusion as the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness.”	Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265
<b>Leaders</b>	“Managers and leaders routinely use a variety of techniques, such as encouraging informal social interaction and creating and maintaining strong organizational cultures, to help people feel a part of the whole organization.”	Davidson, 1999, p. 172
	Leader inclusiveness: “words and deeds by a leader . . . that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others’ contributions. Leader inclusiveness captures attempts by leaders to include others in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent.”	Nembhard and Edmonson, 2006, p. 947

**Table 1.1 (cont.). Concepts of Inclusion**

<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Source</i>
	“Building a culture of inclusion involves a new set of leadership qualities and skills including flexibility, fluidity, self-awareness and mindfulness, courage, and the capacity to be vulnerable in a powerful way.”	Wasserman, Gallegos, and Ferdman, 2008, p. 180
<b>Groups</b>	“Inclusive groups encourage disagreement because they realize it leads to more effective solutions and more-successful adaptations to a changing environment. Instead of pressuring members to leave their individual and cultural differences outside, inclusive groups ask everyone to contribute to the full extent of their being.”	Miller, 1994, p. 39
	“Inclusion is the practice of embracing and using differences as opportunities for added value and competitive advantages in teamwork, product quality, and work output.”	Katz and Miller, 1996, p. 105
	“[I]ncreasing inclusion would require developing the skills to allow ourselves and others to see more of the complete and complex picture of our intergroup realities, as these are expressed in our everyday collaborations. It is about allowing for both similarities and differences at both the individual and the group levels at the same time that we are joined together in a common endeavor. . . . [It is about avoiding fusion, in which I act as if we are the same, as well as avoiding disconnection, in which I believe and act as if we are completely different.”	Ferdman and Davidson, 2004, p. 33–34
	“We define Collective Experience of Inclusion as the overall or additive sense of the extent to which people in a group feel accepted, engaged, safe, and valued—essentially the aggregated experience of inclusion across all individuals in a group.”	Ferdman, Avigdor, et al., 2010, p. 16
	Members are “treated as . . . insider[s] and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.”	Shore et al., 2011, p. 1266
<b>Organizations and Complex Systems</b>	“ . . . from the perspective of the moral imperative, inclusion implies not only eliminating barriers to opportunity based on group differences but also supporting every individual to reach her or his full potential . . . without requiring assimilation.”	Ferdman and Brody, 1996, p. 286
	“Inclusion as seen from the perspective of legal and social pressures primarily involves removing illegal barriers . . . or obstacles perceived to be unfair. . . . [This] approach tends to be primarily reactive . . . ”	p. 287
	“From the vantage point of business success, inclusion is about making sure the organization uses all productive capacity and potential to the full extent. . . . [It] is not limited to particular groups or categories of people. All individuals must be included in their full uniqueness and complexity.”	p. 289
	“Institutional and systemic bias can also serve as an impediment to cultivating an inclusive environment.”	Davidson, 1999, p. 172

**Table 1.1 (cont.). Concepts of Inclusion**

<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Source</i>
	”The inclusive workplace is one that: values and uses individual and intergroup differences within its work force; cooperates with and contributes to its surrounding community; alleviates the needs of disadvantaged groups in its wider environment; collaborates with individuals, groups, and organizations across national and cultural boundaries.”	Mor Barak, 2000b, p. 339
	Inclusion addresses the degree to which (a) employees are valued and their ideas are taken into account and used, (b) people partner successfully within and across departments, (c) current employees feel that they belong and prospective employees are attracted to the organization, (d) people feel connected to each other and to the organization and its goals, and (e) the organization continuously fosters flexibility and choice, and attends to diversity.	Gasorek, 2000
	“Experiences of inclusion result when policies, structures, practices, and norms of behavior are aligned in such a way that every member of a given collective (community, organization, or network) has a fair and equal opportunity to access the joint resources of that collective.”	Davidson and Ferdman, 2002, p. 1
	“A culture of inclusion requires . . . a new set of actions, attitudes, policies, and practices designed to enable all people to contribute their energies and talents to the organization ’ s success. Conflict becomes constructive debate. People are sought because they are different.”	Miller and Katz, 2002, p. 16
	“Inclusion in multicultural organizations means that there is equality, justice, and full participation at both the group and individual levels, so that members of different groups not only have equal access to opportunities, decision making, and positions of power, but they are actively sought out because of their differences. In a multicultural, inclusive organization, differences of all types become integrated into the fabric of the business, such that they become a necessary part of doing its everyday work.”	Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands, 2004, p. 248 (italics in original)
	In an inclusive organization, “the diversity of knowledge and perspectives that members of different groups bring . . . has shaped its strategy, its work, its management and operating systems, and its core values and norms for success. . . . [M]embers of all groups are treated fairly, feel included and actually are included, have equal opportunities, and are represented at all organizational levels and functions.” Diversity is woven “into the fabric of the organization.”	p. 249
	In a culture of inclusion, “differences are recognized, valued and engaged. Different voices are understood as being legitimate and	Pless & Maak, 2004, p. 130–31

<b>Table 1.1 (cont.). Concepts of Inclusion</b>		
<i>Level of Analysis</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Source</i>
	(cont) as opening up new vistas; they are heard and integrated in decision making and problem solving processes; they have an active role in shaping culture and fostering creativity and innovation; and eventually in adding value to the company ' s performance. . . . [A culture of inclusion is] an organizational environment that allows people with multiple backgrounds, mindsets and ways of thinking to work effectively together and to perform to their highest potential in order to achieve organizational objectives based on sound principles. In such an environment different voices are respected and heard, diverse viewpoints, perspectives and approaches are valued and everyone is encouraged to make a unique and meaningful contribution.”	Pless & Maak, 2004, p. 130–131
	Inclusion is “the way an organization configures its systems and structures to value and leverage the potential, and to limit the disadvantages, of differences.”	Roberson, 2006, p. 221
	“Inclusion is the set of organizational norms and values that promote the development of an institutional culture in which diversity is valued and promoted and individuals feel empowered within an atmosphere of trust, safety, and respect. An inclusive work place is one that: accepts, values and utilizes individual and inter-group differences within its workforce. A warm and welcoming atmosphere eases the process of ‘learning the ropes’ for the new member and aids in making the member comfortable in the new group environment.”	Future Work Institute, n.d., p. 6
	“For us, a culture of inclusion recognizes, respects, values, and utilizes the talents and contributions of all the organization ' s people—current and potential—across multiple lines of difference [ . . . ]. In organizations with cultures of inclusion, people of all social identity groups have the opportunity to be present, to have their voices heard and appreciated, and to engage in core activities on behalf of the collective.”	Wasserman, Gallegos, and Ferdman, 2008, p. 176

According to Ferdman (2014), inclusion’s main ingredient is *experience of inclusion*, how individuals experience inclusion individually and collectively. The experience encompasses the behavior of those surrounding the individual (i.e. coaches, teammates, trainers, advisors, professors, etc.), attitudes and behaviors (i.e. gender ideology, sexual orientation, etc.), and “values, norms, practices, and processes that operate in the individual’s organizational and

societal context” (Ferdman, 2014, p. 4) (i.e. athletic department policies and procedures, team guidelines, implied rules, verbal comments, etc.). Inclusion may be experience on individual, group, behavioral, leadership, policy, and societal levels.

Inclusion and the practice of inclusion is complex. A sense of belonging should not be seen as the lone predictor of the individual’s experience of inclusion because it fails to address multiple identities of the group as well as the individual (Ferdman, 2014; Greim, 2016). For example, a female volleyball student-athlete on a team is hesitant to disclose certain aspects of herself that may be misunderstood or undervalued by her teammates and coaching staff (i.e. religious affiliation, sexual orientation, etc.). The consideration of multiple identities within an individual’s experience of inclusion would be to understand that all individual identities are in play: gender, student, athlete, volleyball student-athlete, race, college student, sexual minority or LGBT, as well as the distinctive configuration of each of those unique identities (Ferdman, 1995; Greim, 2016). Within diversity and inclusion literature, several authors have described what they found to be elements of inclusive behavior. Table 2 shows four authors’ findings of elements of inclusive behavior.

**Table 2 Elements of Inclusive Behavior**

<i>Element of Inclusive Behavior</i>	<i>Source</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authentically greeting other people</li> <li>• Fostering a feeling of safety</li> <li>• Listening and understanding</li> <li>• Communicating clearly and honestly</li> <li>• Working through and learning from conflicts</li> <li>• Seeking and listening to multiple voices and perspectives</li> <li>• Noticing when exclusion occurs and intervening to address it</li> <li>• Being intentional about individual and collective choices when working in groups</li> <li>• Being courageous</li> </ul>	Jenson (1995); Katz and Miller (2011)

**Table 2 (cont.). Elements of Inclusive Behavior**

<i>Element of Inclusive Behavior</i>	<i>Source</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen to all individuals until they feel understood</li><li>• Accept others' references as true for them</li><li>• Be honest and clear</li><li>• Build on each other's ideas and thoughts</li><li>• Take risks</li><li>• Speak up for oneself</li></ul>	The Hartford, 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Showing respect and empathy;</li><li>• Recognizing the other as different but equal;</li><li>• Showing appreciation for different voices, e.g. by<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Listening actively to them;</li><li>– Trying to understand disparate viewpoints and opinions;</li><li>– Integrating different voices into the ongoing cultural discourse</li></ul></li><li>• Practicing and encouraging open and frank communication in all interactions;</li><li>• Cultivating participative decision making and problem solving processes and team capabilities;</li><li>• Showing integrity and advanced moral reasoning, especially when dealing with ethical dilemmas'</li><li>• Using a cooperative/consultative leadership style [p. 140]</li></ul>	Pless and Maak, 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating safety</li><li>• Acknowledging others</li><li>• Dealing with conflict and differences</li><li>• Showing an ability and willingness to learn</li><li>• Having and giving voice</li><li>• Encouraging representation</li></ul>	Ferdman, Barrera, et al., 2009

Ferdman's (2014) work on inclusion included the consideration of inclusion at multiple levels: individual experience, individual inclusive interpersonal behavior, groups and teams, leaders and leadership, organizational, and societal.

### **Individual Experience.**

Experiences of inclusion at the individual level result when the individual and similar others "are respected, honored, trusted, and given voice, appreciation, power, and value" (Ferdman, Barerra, et al., 2009, p. 6).

### **Inclusive Interpersonal Behavior.**

Individuals experiencing inclusive interpersonal behavior seek out information about their teammates, other student-athletes, etc. and vice versa. For example, a student-athlete's teammate asks him about his hobbies, family back home, and possibly past relationships. The teammate is seeking out information about the student-athlete and giving him an opportunity to share details about his life that the teammate would not have access to without those particular inquiries. Table 3 provides a list of inclusive behaviors for all to engage. These behaviors help promote inclusion and aid in the individual experience of inclusion.

**Table 3. Inclusive Behaviors for Everyone and for Leaders; Inclusive Organizational Policies and Practices**

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#### **Inclusive Behavior for Everyone**

Acknowledge, connect, and engage with others  
Listen deeply and carefully.  
Engage a broad range of perspectives.  
Openly share information and seek transparency.  
Be curious.  
Lean into discomfort.  
Increase self-awareness.  
Be willing to learn and be influenced by others.  
Be respectful and demonstrate fairness.  
Foster interdependence and teamwork.

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Source: Ferdman (2014)

### **Groups and Teams.**

Groups and teams often come up with values for the program or specific team that season or academic year such as respect, confidence, preparation, collaboration, etc. During the off-season or the beginning of the season, coaches often provide players the freedom to choose goals for the season. Though goals are often outcome related such as win a specified number of games

or a conference championship, intangible goals are also encouraged. These goals may come in the form of respect, collaboration, confidence, honesty, etc. Teams may also emphasize the importance of “working through conflicts productively and authentically” (Ferdman, 2014, p. 18). Groups and teams should create “localized operational definitions” customized to the group and the aspects of inclusion they’ve designated as needing improvement (Ferdman, 2014, p. 34). For example, some teams have trouble listening to each other, while others approach conflict ineffectively, and other groups may face issues with gender or racial discrimination.

### **Leaders and leadership.**

In order for coaches to promote inclusive practices, there needs to be a connection of the team mission, vision, goals, and inclusion. Coaches may do this by holding others accountable for their actions, and strictly enforce the vision of the team through members’ behavior. Team rules barring homosexual acts between team members (Turk & Stokowski, 2016) and formal or informal rules requiring females to appear feminine and males to appear masculine on the team may discourage sexual minorities and gender non-conformers to suppress parts of their identity. Table 4 includes inclusive behaviors specifically for leaders: accountability, engagement, authenticity, transparency, and connection.

**Table 4. Inclusive Behaviors for Everyone and for Leaders; Inclusive Organizational Policies and Practices**

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#### **Inclusive Behavior for Leaders**

Hold oneself and others accountable for creating an inclusive culture.

Invite engagement and dialogue.

Model bringing one’s whole self to work, and give permission for and encourage others to do so.

Foster transparent decision making.

Understand and engage with resistance.

Understand and talk about how inclusion connects to the mission and vision.

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Source: Ferdman (2014)

## **Organization.**

Within the organization, or in this case athletic department, inclusive policies, practices, and climates play a crucial role in the individual experience of inclusion. Organizational culture, structures, and systems provide an environment in which leaders, teams, and individuals “interact with and interpret their experiences” (Ferdman, 2014, p. 19). Components of the organizational culture, structures, and systems include institutional or departmental non-discrimination policies towards sexual-orientation, recruitment and selection of employees and coaches, how the athletic department or university itself interacts with its’ surrounding community. Table 5 provides policies and practices at the organizational level, focus on environment, assessment and implementation, support and sustainment of inclusion, collaboration, responsibility, transparency, promotion of teamwork, creation of diversity, and continuous learning and growth as an organization.

**Table 5. Inclusive Organizational Policies and Practices**

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### **Inclusive Organizational Policies and Practices**

Create an environment of respect, fairness, justice, and equity.  
Create a framework for assessing and implementing organizational policies and practices.  
Build systems, processes, and procedures that support and sustain inclusion.  
Enhance individual and collective competence to collaborate across cultures and groups.  
Define organizational social responsibility (internally and externally).  
Foster transparency throughout the organization.  
Promote teamwork.  
Create a diverse organization.  
Foster continual learning and growth.

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Source: Adapted from Ferdman (2014)

## **Society.**

The most distant component of the individual experience of inclusion is the surrounding society, which is often larger than the surrounding community and may include the state, region, or entire nation in some cases.

As we have seen from the ample definitions of inclusion, there is no most appropriate or best approach to promoting inclusion, it changes depending on the individuals, the group members, leadership, as well as the context in which the individual and group are in. Exhibit 1 provides questions to generate the co-construction of inclusive behavior and organizational practices which Ferdman (2014) emphasizes as crucial to reach inclusion within the team, group, or organization. When members generate behaviors, policies, and practices within an organization, the experience of inclusion is much more meaningful across the board.

**Exhibit 1. Questions to Generate and Co-Construct Descriptions of Inclusive Behavior and Inclusive Organizational Practices**

- What behaviors—from yourself or from others—help *you* experience more inclusion?
- What behaviors help *others* around you experience more inclusion?
- Imagine that you’ve waved a magic wand and now everyone in the world behaves inclusively, in a way that brings inclusion to life in every encounter with others. What *inclusive behaviors* do you see around you?
- Imagine the most inclusive organization in the world, one in which everyone’s talents, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities, and ways of living—their uniqueness—is engaged, valued, and leveraged. What are one or two vital *inclusive organizational policies and practices* in that organization?

Figure 5. *Source:* Ferdman (2014)

The six operational elements of experience of inclusion Ferdman and his students identified are as follows: feeling safe, involvement and engagement in the workgroup, feeling respected and valued, influence on decision making, authenticity/bringing one’s whole self to work, and diversity is recognized, attended to, and honored (Ferdman, et al., 2009; Hirshberg & Ferdman, 2011). Table 6 also provides some examples of issues addressed in coordination with

the elements of the experience of inclusion. Psychological safety, introduced in Table 6 is “feeling able to show and employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). The self-efficacy of showing one’s worth provides employees with comfort in risk taking, feelings of personal value and contribution, and is essential to work satisfaction (Ferdman, 2014). Sport organizations are concerned with employee diversity and the promotion of inclusivity but fail to ensure employee value and safety within the organization (Walker & Melton, 2016).

**Table 6. Elements of the Experience of Inclusion**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Examples of Issues Addressed</i>
Feeling safe (self and group)	<p>Do I feel physically and psychologically safe?</p> <p>Do I feel secure that I am fully considered a member of the group or organization? Can I move about and act freely (literally and figuratively)?</p> <p>Can I (and others like me) share ideas, opinions, and perspectives—especially when they differ from those of others—without fear or negative repercussions?</p> <p>Do I believe that others who share one or more of my identity groups are also safe from physical and/or psychological harm in the group or organization?</p>
Involvement and engagement in the workgroup	<p>Am I treated as a full participant in activities and interactions? Am I—and do I feel like—an insider?</p> <p>Do I have access to the information and resources that I need to do my work (and that others have)?</p> <p>Do I enjoy being part of the group or organization?</p> <p>Can I rely on others in my group or organization (and they on me)? Do I feel like we are part of the same team, even when we disagree?</p> <p>Can I (or people like me) succeed here?</p>
Feeling respected and valued (self and group)	<p>Am I (and others like me) treated in the ways I (they) would like to be treated?</p>

**Table 6 (cont.). Elements of the Experience of Inclusion**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Examples of Issues Addressed</i>
	Do Others in the group care about me (and people like me) and treat me (and them) as a valuable and esteemed member(s) of the group or organization? Am I trusted? Am I cared about? Are people like me trusted and cared about?
Influence on decision making	Do my ideas and perspectives influence what happens and what decisions are made?  Am I listened to when weighing in on substantive issues?
Authenticity/bringing one's whole self to work	Can I be truly myself around others in my group or organization? Do I need to conceal or distort valued parts of my identity, style, or individual characteristics? Can I have genuine conversations with others without needing to involuntarily hide relevant parts of myself?  Can I be open, honest, and transparent about my ideas and perspectives? Can I make my contributions in ways that feel authentic and whole?
Diversity is recognized, attended to, and honored	Am I treated fairly, without discrimination or barriers based on my identities?  Can I (and others) be transparent about and proud of my (our) social identities?  Can we address differences in ways that lead to mutual learning and growth?  Does the group or organization notice and values diversity of all types?

### **Optimal Distinctiveness**

Optimal Distinctiveness theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991, 1993) is a social identity theory built off concepts within social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). Social identity theory considers group membership as a primary component of an individual's social identity in which gives the individual a sense of belonging socially. Tajfel's (1981) theory also encompasses ingroup preference and outgroup prejudice in which individuals vilify or apply negative characteristics to another group in order to enhance one's

own, or own group's, image. Self-categorization theory considers circumstantial group memberships of individuals within hierarchical levels of self-categorization: human (self as human being), social (self as member of organization), social (self as team member), and personal (self as individual) (Turner et al., 1987).

Brewer (1991), although influenced by SIT and SCT, felt the motivational component of the need for distinction and inclusion within a group was missing from both social theories. Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) was developed to fill the gap and address the motivational component that both SIT and SCT were lacking. ODT was influenced by social identity and ethnocentrism, social dilemma and collective decision making, as well as the level of analysis and downward causation. The most salient aspect of social identity and ethnocentrism inspiring Marilynn Brewer's ODT (1991) was the differentiation within the group and distinction from other groups. Social dilemma and collective decision making yielded the importance of group welfare over individual needs and the incorporation of the human motivational system within group identification. Evolutionary, biological, and behavioral studies of group selection-ideas (Maynard Smith, 1964; Williams, 1966), *The Evolution of Individuality* (Buss, 1987), multilevel evolutionary theories (Maynard Smith and Szathmary, 1995, Sober and Wilson, 1998; Buss, 1987), the role of group selection in human evolution (Brewer and Caporael, 2006), and "downward causation" within the dynamics of multilevel selection (Campbell, 1974; 1990) have all contributed to the understanding of human nature. There exists a tension between individual and group survival in which social motives reflect (Brewer, 2012).

Brewer's (1991) model for optimal distinctiveness encompasses two opposing or competing drives: need for assimilation and inclusion and the need for differentiation or opposition. The two essential needs constantly engage in a balancing act to ensure optimal

experience of inclusion for the individual. It is important to understand the three important principles ODT: optimal distinctiveness is context-specific, a dynamic-equilibrium, and identity motives vary across situation, culture, and individuals (Brewer, 2012).

### **1. Optimal distinctiveness is context-specific.**

Consider, for example, a high school soccer student-athlete attending a summer camp at a nearby university for the first time. Categorization as an “athlete” is far too inclusive and a subcategory such as “soccer student-athlete” is more likely to be optimally distinctive. An even further differentiation within the soccer team in which this student-athlete is visiting would be to refer as the student-athlete in terms of his or her position (i.e. striker, defensive back, goalie, etc.). On the other hand, say the soccer student athlete returns to high school in the fall. Within the general high school setting, his or her identity as a striker, defensive back, or goalie is too specific and distinctive. Instead, categorizing the individual as an “athlete” or “student-athlete” is optimal. The individual identifying his or herself as an athlete places him or her in a social group with a significant number of other members in the school yet distinguishes from other high school members who belong to other groups, clubs, or organizations such as a foreign language club, band, student-council, or National Honor Society.

### **2. Optimal distinctiveness is a dynamic-equilibrium.**

Intentions and motivations are subject to temporal influences and changes over time. When a student-athlete enters a new team, say as an incoming freshman or transfer student, the need for assimilation or inclusion may be higher as opposed to his or her need for distinction or differentiation. The new freshman or transfer feels as though he or she should fit in to the team as much as possible. The individual may suppress aspects of his or her personality to remain

within the boundaries of the group. As time passes and the student-athlete is a part of said team for a second or third season, inclusion is often met and the need for differentiation and distinctiveness become more important to the individual.

### **3. Optimal distinctiveness identity motives vary across situation, culture, and individual.**

Brewer (2012) compares inclusion motive to hunger motivation, emphasizing the variation in motivation and need, whether referring to food, inclusion, or differentiation. For example, the motivation to eat changes depending on the last point of food consumption. An individual who has experienced deprivation of food for one hour in comparison to twelve hours will not have the same hunger motivation. According to Brewer (1991, 2012), the same applies. The need for inclusion varies based on satiation or deprivation and may change from day to day or year to year. College athletic teams experience high turnover of team members each year, due to graduating seniors, transfer student-athletes (in and out), athletes quitting, removal of team members and/or coaching and training staff. Each season, a new compilation of individuals and their characteristics make up a team and no two are ever the same. Thus, the optimal distinctiveness on that team varies across each situation, culture, and individual. Figure 6 is the original model of ODT (Brewer, 1991).

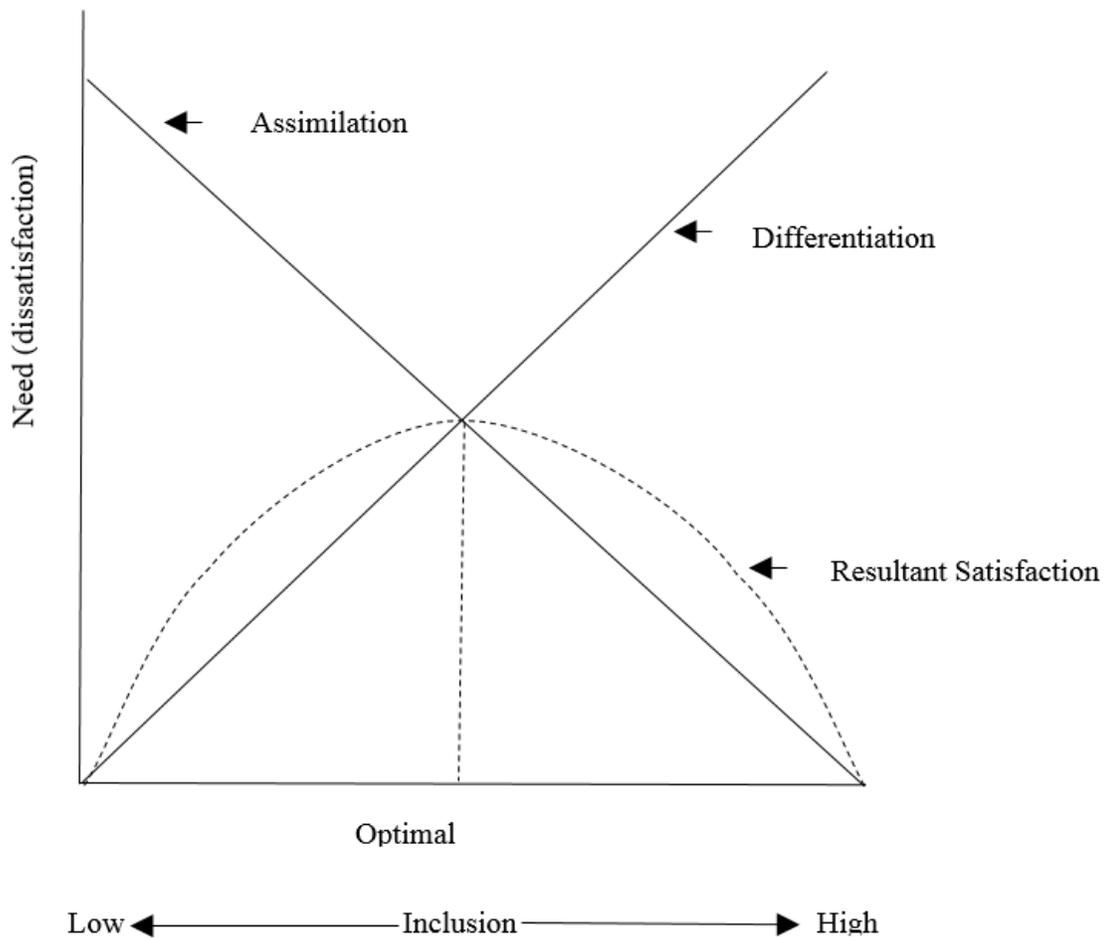


Figure 6. The optimal distinctiveness model (from Brewer, 1991)

As we know, Brewer portrays assimilation and differentiation as opposing ideals, straying from traditional continuums presented in social identity theories. Within these continuums, reaching inclusion indicates a shift from the individual *I* to the collective *We*, most likely resulting in depersonalization of the individual and a depletion of differentiation within the group. ODT emphasizes the importance of distinctiveness an individual established social identity within a group. Shore et al., (2011) built upon and adapted Brewer’s ODT model, conceptualizing inclusion through the framework of ODT but with two basic human needs in a group setting: need for belongingness (also referred to as validation, similarity, and assimilation) and need for uniqueness (or differentiation, individuation). Four concepts were presented within

the proposed inclusion model: exclusion, assimilation, differentiation, and inclusion (the optimum).

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Exclusion</b></p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Assimilation</b></p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness</p>
High Value in Uniqueness	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Differentiation</b></p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/organization success</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group</p>

Figure 7. Inclusion Framework (Shore et al., 2011)

In group environments that are low in belongingness and uniqueness, employees are experiencing *exclusion*. They do not feel as insiders or feel that personal contributions are assets to the company but can obviously see others' contributions are. *Assimilation* results in low emphasis on uniqueness and high emphasis on belonging, promoting conformity within the group or team. The individual is part of the group and welcomed on the basis of conformity but uniqueness is not valued within this setting. All members are to contribute similarly.

*Differentiation* results from low emphasis on belonging and high emphasis on uniqueness.

Unique character is seen as an asset to the group but employees do not feel as insiders and are not called upon regularly. When optimal levels of belongingness and uniqueness are displayed

in a group setting, *inclusion* is the result. Individuals in an inclusive environment feel like an insider and is treated as an important part of the group while simultaneously encouraged to display personal uniqueness

### **Inclusion within Intercollegiate Athletics**

Athletic departments are one of it not the most diverse group on the majority of college campuses (stats). One of my aims is to understand inclusion from the perspective of the sexual minority student-athlete so that athletic departments, coaching staffs, and teams can beneficially utilize individual differences and enhance the experience of the collective.

Cunningham (2015), guided by Ferdman's (2014) work on inclusion and Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, explored coaches' and administrators' conceptualization of inclusion, factors that influence LGBT inclusiveness, and outcomes associated with LGBT inclusiveness. As coaches and administrators pieced together inclusion, community and cohesion, respect and inclusion, and success oriented departments were commonalities from each of the 17 interviewed, websites, university materials, and external publications of Division III athletic departments (see Figure 7).

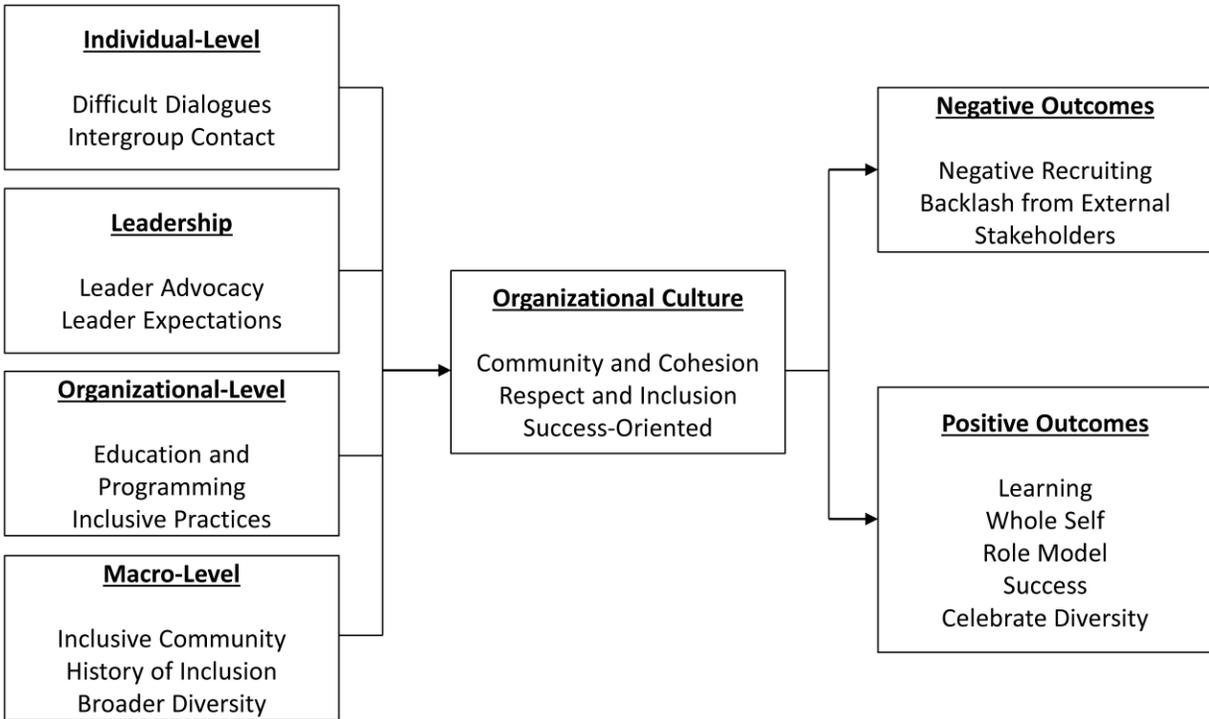


Figure 8. Summary of Relations from Cunningham (2015) Creating and Sustaining Workplace Cultures Supportive of LGBT Employees in Collegiate Athletics.

Figure 8 shows the results from Cunningham’s (2015) qualitative study on inclusion for LGBT employees in collegiate athletics. Factors contributing to the organizational culture of the department were found within the individual, leadership, organization, and macro or societal levels. Difficult dialogues about sexuality, contact with dissimilar groups, leader advocacy, leader expectations, education and programming for athletic department staff and student-athletes, inclusive practices, inclusive communities within the athletic department, on campus, as well as in the surrounding area of the campuses, history of inclusion and broader diversity formed the antecedents of LGBT inclusion theoretical construct.

When it came to the departments’ organizational culture, community and cohesion, respect and inclusion, and success-oriented workplace culture were crucial in promoting inclusion for LGBT employees in collegiate athletics. Community and cohesion came in the

forms of cooperation, positivity, resources, and connection. Respect and inclusion were found of all sexualities and the vast majority of departments were hard working and committed to success. Positive outcomes of inclusion were learning, the ability for LGBT individuals to bring their whole selves to work, be role models for student-athletes, success in doing the right thing, and celebration of diversity. Negative outcomes included negative recruiting due to openly gay coaches and the use of sexuality against them and backlash from external stakeholders such as parents and the student body.

Student-athletes are one of the most diverse groups on campus. Many come from different racial, political, religious, socio-economical, and ideological backgrounds yet are expected to represent the institution's values and convictions. Creating a sense of community within the athletic department on campus can serve as inspiration for the institution as a whole (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). Wolf-Wendel and colleagues (2001) give us insight into the creation of that sense of community within athletics on campus:

These bonds link students across most differences, including race, socioeconomic status, and geographic background. Student-athletes, coaches, and athletics administrators suggest several ways that participation fosters community for members of teams. Those who participate in intercollegiate athletics recognize the following traits as facilitating intergroup cooperation:

- Sharing a common goal
- Engaging in intense, frequent interaction
- Sharing adversity in the form of hard work, suffering, and sacrifice
- Having a common "enemy"
- Recognizing that each individual has something important to contribute
- Holding team members accountable
- Having coaches who guide them
- Exposure to difference from an early age (pp. 376-377)

The last six years have shown growth in the national acceptance of sexual minorities (specifically referred to as the LGBT community). The banning of gay men and women serving in the military, "don't ask, don't tell," was repealed in 2011; US Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner announced his intended transition to Caitlyn Jenner in April, 2015; the Supreme Court

ruled that states cannot ban same-sex marriage in June, 2015; and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro summer Olympics had a record number of “out” athletes. The growth seemed to come to an abrupt halt when President Trump’s administration took over in January, 2017. All LGBT related articles and resources on the US government’s website were removed immediately following the president’s inauguration. Transgender individuals were banned from serving in the military just prior to the initiation of this case study (July, 2017), and the fight to ban same-sex marriage again has been proposed in the first year of the administration’s reign.

*Now* is the time to examine inclusion within collegiate athletics. Sports are seen as a social agent for change (Cunningham, 2015) and individuals identify strongly with universities with successful athletic departments. Athletic departments may serve as the biggest advocate for sexual minority inclusion. What will happen to sexual minorities and how will they be protected? What are athletic department administrators, staff, and coaches doing currently that is promoting or hindering inclusion? What could they be doing better? How do sexual minority student-athletes wish to be treated by their teammates, coaches, advisors, fellow student-athletes, and administrators? These are the questions we should be asking.

### **Chapter III: Method and Data Analysis**

The purpose of this single instrumental case study is to understand and describe inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. I believe a better understanding the phenomenon of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority would allow athletic department personnel (administrators, coaches, academic advisors, learning specialists, trainers, student-athletes, etc.) to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of development and implementation of inclusion within athletic departments. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study is guided by three research questions:

(1) How is inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA DI athletic department conceptualized?

(2) How does an NCAA DI athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority?

(3) How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department?

The chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes the following: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of research sample, (c) summary of information needed to adequately answer research questions, (d) overview of research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) data analysis, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, (i) limitations and delimitations, and (j) chapter summary.

## **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design.**

I believe utilizing a qualitative approach grounded in constructivist approach to eliciting the rich data necessary to address the inclusion phenomenon of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Based on the preceding purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and goals, both phenomenological *and* case study approaches are the most appropriate for this research study (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology research primarily utilizes structured and semi-structured interviews for data collection to understand the experience of the participants. According to Ferdman, (2014), “inclusion should be conceptualized phenomenologically” (p. 15) and not many studies address inclusion based on the perceptions of those within an athletic department. MacIntosh and Doherty (2010) also promote phenomenologically examining the construct of inclusion within the workplace, allowing participants to perceive and interpret inclusion. Cunningham (2015) used a phenomenological approach to examine LGBT administrators’ and coaches’ conceptualization of inclusion in college athletics.

Case studies utilize multiple data sources and ensure triangulation of sources as well as perspectives, which is elaborated within the ethical considerations section. My intent was not to develop new theory, but to understand the participants’ experiences and perspectives of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within one particular case, University. The study is most suited for a phenomenological case study design due to its’ analysis of inclusion as a phenomenon within the athletic department social unit and system (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1994, 1995, 2000, 2001). According to Merriam (1998):

A case study design is employed to gain an in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights

gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

Comparing this case study's research findings to trends within current literature may prove useful for analytic generalizations as opposed to universal generalizations (Yin, 2003). The present research aims to understand the experiences and the factors that contribute to inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. A better understanding has potential to lead to policy development and practice to ensure inclusion of this particular population within the athletic department.

### **The Research Site**

The university selected (University) offers undergraduate, graduate, and law degree programs for over 25,000 students and was founded over 100 years ago. *Carnegie classification*. University is a predominantly white institution (PWI) but has international diversity in student body with over 40 countries represented. Students identify as the following races: white/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Black or African American, Non-resident Alien, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and other. Students enrolled at University mostly range from 18-22 years of age but also include non-traditional students under 18 or over 22 (College Factual, n.d). The athletic department offers over 15 men's and women's varsity sports for more than 400 student-athletes.

Academically, University student-athletes recorded program records of departmental Grade Point Average (GPA), term GPA of 4.0, and personal best GPA. In the 2016-2017 academic year, over 50 student-athletes recorded 4.0 GPA, and 65% of all student-athletes earned a 3.0 or higher. University Academic Progress Rate (APR) was also a record high and graduation success rates continues to grow as does graduation success rate. Athletically,

University consistently finishes within the top 100 Directors Cup, which tracks collegiate athletic programs' performances throughout the year (Learfield Director's Cup, n.d.) with appearances in a bowl game, appearances and victories in conference championships, regional championships, and national championships in a variety of men's and women's sports. Several University student-athletes competed at the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games in summer 2016. University fan base consistently turns out for athletic events, setting attendance records in more than five sports in the 2016-2017 season (both men's and women's). Financially, University's private gift support, revenue, and fundraising rank in the top of Power 5 conference athletic departments. In the past 10 years, 17 University athletic department facilities have been updated, renovated, or built with 5 other projected plans within the next 5 years, totaling over \$200 million invested. In accordance with environment for inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, University was one of the 65 institutions within the Power 5 conferences examined by Athlete Ally, an organization committed to ending homophobia in sport and "to activate the athletic community to exercise their leadership to champion LGBTQ equality" (Athlete Ally, n.d). The Athletic Equality Index measures LGBTQ inclusion policies and practices in Power 5 conferences institution athletic spaces. The particular institution of interest fails to adequately meet 80% of the Athletic Equality Index (AEI) criteria which includes non-discrimination policies, out or allied staff, accessible resources, collaboration with campus group, LGBTQ student-athlete group or initiative, pro LGBTQ equality campaign/statement, LGBTQ inclusive fan code of conduct, and guidelines for transgender inclusion.

This case was chosen after discussions with multiple sources from several Power 5 institutions about willingness to participate in a case study exploring phenomenon of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Conveniently, University was relatively

accessible and happened to score on the low end of the AEI, indicating lack of overt inclusion. As will emerge throughout the findings, the AEI does not fully or accurately describe the climate within University's athletic department and this detailed case study "uncover[s] rare, remarkable, or atypical insights" (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000).

### **The Research Sample**

This study utilizes purposeful sampling procedures to select the sample for this study. Purposeful sampling is a common sampling technique within qualitative research to include information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). The intention is to select participants (groups and individuals) that are familiar with the inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study also employs convenience sampling which began with the recruitment of participants by developing a list of institutions who might be willing to provide insight and access to current sexual minorities at their respective institutions. This procedure is similar to Walker and Melton's (2015) approach to their study on lesbian, bisexual, and gay college coaches and athletic administrators. LGBT SportSafe is a newly launched entity which assesses inclusion within athletic and sport-related academic departments and could suggest potential institutions willing to participate in the study. There is currently a LGBTQA+ committee within the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics that is composed of sexual minorities and allies that were willing to provide insight and access into their athletic departments. In addition, GO! Athletes, Athlete Ally, and LGBT SportSafe, networks for LGTBQ athletes of all ages and levels, were contacted to aid in recruitment of athletic departments. Sources such as email, LISTSERV, word of mouth, and social media announcements were exhausted to find the current case for this study.

After solidifying a case site, I sought to locate a variety of individuals from the NCAA Division I athletic department, University. I worked with the athletic department personnel to ensure following of protocol and arranging either a campus visit or contacting participants to schedule interviews. The initial athletic department IRB request was denied with no explanation of rejection. The second athletic department IRB request was also denied with no explanation of rejection. After digging further into reasoning, an athletic director of high status informed myself and my advisor that the protocol was particularly in place for the athletic department to protect personnel from “extensive participation” in the form of interviews and to promote or arrange participation in the study. Survey studies were more inclined to be approved by the athletic department IRB committee. This athletic director explained that support staff, coaches, and student-athletes were consenting adults and could choose to participate on their own and that the athletic department would not stop the research from being conducted. After consulting the athletic department staff directory and team rosters, I created a list of possible support staff, coaches and student-athletes to contact. Participants were contacted via email or phone and asked their willingness to participate. The participant base was extended by using snowballing methods. Snowballing is a method of recruitment where participants refer an individual who may fit the criteria for participation, and that individual may refer an additional individual, and so on (Vogt, 1999; Glesne, 2011). Following the completion of interviews, participants were asked if they knew anyone else who may be willing to participate in an interview and any individuals identified were contacted. All who responded agreed to participate in an interview. All interviews took place in person during the site visit or over the phone. All participants fit selection criteria below:

- Support Staff
  - Have worked within the athletic department for at least 1 year
  - Have contact or working relationships with student-athletes
  - Sport affiliation
- Coaches
  - Have worked within the athletic department for at least 1 year
  - Associate, assistant or head coaching responsibilities
  - Strength staff or athletic trainers also included
- Student-athlete who identify as heterosexual
  - Have competed for the athletic department for at least 1 year
  - Are familiar with the LGBTQ/sexual minority community
  - Current student-athlete competing for the athletic department or are no more than 1 year removed from competing
- Student-athletes who identify as sexual minority
  - Have competed for the athletic department for at least 1 year
  - Identify as or engage in behaviors consistent with sexual minority (in this case, anything other than strictly heterosexual)
  - Current student-athlete competing for the athletic department or are no more than 1 year removed from competing
- Campus Personnel
  - Have worked within the university for at least 1 year
  - Involved in LGBTQ/sexual minority initiatives, groups, or training on campus

Although the participants are all from the University, there were differences along the following parameters: length of time spend in athletic department, sport association, gender, age, occupation, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity. The research sample included 35 participants from University campus and athletic department. The sample represented 13 of the men's and women's varsity sports and 2 participants on main campus. The sport associations include the following: basketball (men's and women's), cross country (women's), football, gymnastics (women's), lacrosse (men's), soccer (women's), spirit squad (men's and women's), swim and dive (women's), tennis (men's and women's), track (men's and women's), volleyball (women's). The research sample also consists of two participants from University's main campus who are involved in LGBTQ initiatives (psychologist and professor). The participant roles differed tremendously with participants identifying as: student-athlete (heterosexual and sexual minority), support staff (academic advisor, learning specialist, sports psychologist, student-athlete development) coach (sport, strength, or athletic training staff), campus personnel (individuals involved or participating in LGBTQ support group) and two experts. The sample included eleven current student-athletes, three coaches, seven support staff, four campus personnel, eight students from the LGBTQ support group and two experts. Of the thirty-three participants, nineteen participants identified as sexual minority or engaged in behaviors consistent with such. University is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and the sample reflected such with twenty-four participants identifying as white, four identifying as fully black, two identifying as Latino/Hispanic, one identifying as black and Latino/Hispanic, one identifying as White and Latino/Hispanic, and one identifying as multi-racial.

**Table 7. Participant Demographics**

<i>Participant (by pseudonym)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Sexual orientation</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Classification /Occupation</i>
Beyoncé	23	Female	Bisexual	White	Student-athlete
Biggie Smalls	21	Female	Heterosexual	White	Student-athlete
Brittany	21	Female	Gay	Black	Student-athlete
Chris	21	Female	Heterosexual	White/Latino	Student-athlete
D	21	Male	Heterosexual	Black/Latino	Student-athlete
Flo	22	Female	Heterosexual	White	Student-athlete
Jessica	22	Female	Hetero (has gf)	White	Student-athlete
Mark	23	Male	Bisexual	Multi-racial	Student-athlete
Michael	20	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Student-athlete
Sue	23	Female	Heterosexual	White	Student-athlete
Sydney	20	Female	Heterosexual	White	Student-athlete
John	23	Male	Heterosexual	White	Coach
Mandy	24	Female	Bisexual	White	Coach/former student-athlete
Mia	35	Female	Gay	Black	Coach
Beth	23	Female	Heterosexual	White	Coach
Courtney	29	Female	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Daniella	24	Female	Pansexual	White	Support Staff
Jimmy	43	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Support Staff/student-athlete
Phil	24	Male	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Robert	24	Male	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Selena	28	Female	Heterosexual	Latino/Hispanic	Support Staff
Jordan	29	Female	Trans	White	Support Staff
Mallory	37	Male	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Millie	32	Female	Lesbian	White	Campus Personnel
Obadiah	36	Male	Gay	White	Campus Personnel
Blake	30	Male	Trans	White	Campus Personnel
Catherine	22	Female	Lesbian	White	Campus Personnel
Jack	19	Male	Gay	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Kaylin	20	Female	Trans	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Lacey	21	Female	Lesbian	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Lila	32	Female	Bisexual	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Taryn	22	Female	Lesbian	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Whitney	20	Female	Lesbian	Latino/Hispanic	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Callie	30	Female	Lesbian	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Margaret	33	Female	Lesbian	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
					Expert
					Expert

## **Information Needed to Conduct the Study**

This single instrumental case study focused on the testimonies of 35 individuals from University main campus, athletic department, and experts in the field. In seeking to understand inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, three research questions were explored to gather the information needed. The information required to answer the research questions included contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical categories. The information included:

- Athletic department background, history, and structure; mission; values; vision; organizational culture; leadership; staff and site description;
- Athletic department descriptive informational documents such as academic, athletic, and financial success
- Descriptive information regarding participants such as age, sex, gender, ethnicity, tenure, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sport affiliation, classification, and occupation;
- Participations' descriptions and explanations of their experiences as it relates to inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority; and
- An ongoing review of literature providing the theoretical grounding for the study

## **Overview of Research Design**

The following list summarizes in-depth discussion of the steps utilized to carry out this research:

- An extensive review of literature was conducted to study theoretical applications of inclusion (including Optimal Distinctiveness Theory), inclusion within athletic

departments, policies and practices guidelines set forth by the NCAA, and student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experiences.

- Following the proposal defense, I acquired approval from University of Arkansas IRB.
- Potential athletic departments were reached by email or telephone.
- Document review of media, website(s), institutional documents, departmental documents, and team documents was analyzed and compared to NCAA best practices guidelines.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with support staff, coaches, student-athlete who are familiar with the LGBTQ/sexual minority community, and student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at the NCAA Division I athletic department.
- Interview data responses were analyzed within and between groups of participants.
- A focus group was conducted with the on campus LGBTQ+ support group through campus psychological services.

## **Literature Review**

Two main topics of literature were identified: inclusion and factors contributing to the student-athlete experience. The focus of the review was to gain a better understanding of optimal inclusion within organizations, the factors contributing to inclusion, and the experiences of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within sport.

## **Data Collection Methods**

The use of multiple methods and triangulation offers differing perspectives (Flick, 2014) from a diverse sample of participants will bring about applicability of experiences in other context with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Utilizing semi-structured interviews, a focus group, document review, and a reflexive journals add rigor and depth to this study and

provides corroboration between the analyzed data (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study included multiple data collection methods including a demographic survey, interviews, focus group, document review, and a reflexive journal.

## **Document Review**

Content analysis of participants' specific athletic department's archived data included but official documents and popular culture documents: student-athlete handbook, athletic department handbook, individual team handbook, mission and value statements, policy and procedure manual, code of ethical conduct, Title IX statements, inclusion statements, exclusion statements, athletic policy statements, and any other documents that may indicate inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Specifically, any documents pertaining to coaching personnel, athletic academic personnel, and student-athlete development will be analyzed. For example, Turk and Stokowski (2016) found exclusion statements aimed at sexual minority student-athletes in team handbooks that indicate rules related to no dating within the team. Also, one participant discussed a no significant other attendance rule for family and/or team functions due to the risk of a same-sex significant other attending. Content analysis of athletic departments has been used to explore congruence between mission statements and athletic department diversity (Bernhard, 2016), perceptions of social media policies within NCAA member institutions (Sanderson, Snyder, Hull, Gramlich, 2015), as well as mission statements and missions and strategic plans of athletic departments (Ketterer, 2015). Cunningham (2015) conducted a collective case study of two NCAA athletic departments including individual interviews and athletic department documents exploring supportive cultures of LGBT employees in college athletics. To the best of my knowledge, content analysis of

athletic department archived data has not been explored in reference to inclusion of current student-athletes who identify as sexual minority.

## **Interviews**

Participants completed a demographic survey prior to interview asking age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, sport (or sport affiliation), classification or occupation, tenure, and family structure. Interviews were the primary method of data collection in this particular study and are considered an “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; p. 1). Semi-structured interviews were administered through the constructivist-interpretivist lens which suggests the ever changing nature of reality (Glesne, 2011). Semi-structured interviews are common in studying student-athlete sexual minorities (Fynes, 2014; Wolf-Wendel, Toma & Morpew, 2001; Waldron, 2016; Krane & Barber, 2003; Anderson, 2011) as well as coaches and administrators in collegiate sports (Cunningham, 2015a, 2015b; Walker & Melton, 2015; Wolf-Wendel, Toma & Morpew, 2001; Krane & Barber, 2003). The sexual minority student-athlete population is subject to a unique stigma (Meyer, 2003) and examining this particular population could provide interesting insight on the relationship between the intersection of athlete and sexual minority identities and their experiences relative to an inclusive environment. Sexual minority student-athletes experience more negative climates (Rankin & Merson, 2012) and their experiences should be explored in the process of constructing inclusive collegiate athletic departments. I believed the best way to represent the sexual minority student-athlete inclusion experience is through interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately following the interview and participants were addressed by a pseudonym in an attempt to protect identity and promote anonymity. The institution was assigned the pseudonym, University and

was described in general terms rather than specified identifiers. Any documentation from websites or document releases were paraphrased and not verbatim to protect anonymity. All documents, including surveys and transcripts, and recordings were housed on a password protected computer or in a locked drawer in the primary researcher's locked office to ensure confidentiality. If requested before interviews, interview questions may be shown to the participants prior to meeting with the researcher (see appendix A for Interview Protocol).

These interviews have potential limitations. The participant may be unwilling to cooperate fully or articulate his or her particular experience with inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. My role in the interview process requires skill, attention to detail, and ability to listen to the participant and provide guidance for staying on the task of answering the interview questions fully. The interviews are an interaction with the participant in myself, potentially influencing the participants' disclosure (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Schwandt, 1997).

### **Focus group.**

The focus group was used to facilitate group discussion (Kreuger & Casey, 2000) in regards to inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. The focus groups provided an opportunity to hear differing perspectives that added to the interviews and document analysis, provided insight into the experiences of general students who identify as sexual minority at University, and find emergent themes among all three data sources. The focus group consisted of ten individuals, eight current students who identified as sexual minority and two graduate-level facilitators who also identified as sexual minority. Upon speaking with the counselor in charge of the LGBTQ+ support group, Mallory informed the group of the current research study. I then received an email about a week

following our conversation inviting me to speak with the group at one of the subsequent meetings. The purpose of the focus group was to ensure triangulation of the data sources and to expose myself as well as participants to differing perspectives on the phenomenon of inclusion.

Participants were asked the following: (1) describe your own experiences at University, (2) What do you believe facilitates or hinders inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within University campus (obstacles and challenges)? (3) What would an inclusive environment look like for those who identify as sexual minority on University campus?

### **Reflexive journal.**

I continuously engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process to mitigate and embrace bias in the data. As in qualitative research, I am the instrument and the data collection tool and it is important to make “experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 295) throughout the research process. This structured reflection process included thoughtful questions and interpretations about the phenomenon of inclusion itself, the access process, interview process, and the analysis process. The process also included reflexivity of my own personal experiences, biases, positionality, views, and ideologies in regard to the process of exploring the phenomenon of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Engaging in reflexivity is not an attempt to control or remove researcher bias (Denizin, 1994) but instead makes my ideologies and potential biases visible throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). Each journal explored my current perspective, acknowledgement of biases, and thoughts moving forward. These journals ranged anywhere from 1 to 4 pages single spaced and bullet pointed. Prior to the interview process, I completed four separate reflective journals. After each day interviews took place, I completed eight additional reflective journals.

## **Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis**

The target number participants was ten per participant group (Creswell, 2013), but due to restrictions, difficulty recruiting, and time-constraints not each group included the target number. I happily interviewed additional participants, particularly student-athletes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by myself, my advisor, an additional researchers, and also sent out to Rev.com once awarded a departmental grant. The additional researchers included four graduate students, 3 masters students and 1 PhD student, within the Recreation and Sport Management department at the University of Arkansas. Each of the masters students were in their second year of coursework and the PhD student had completed a qualitative data course. Data was collected and analyzed through inductive and narrative analysis (Creswell, 1998). Narrative analyses of participants' descriptions of their personal experiences allowed for the participants' voices to be heard within the data (Creswell, 1998). Inductive data analyses allowed the development of final themes to emerge from the data and allow for the participants' experiences and perceptions to speak for themselves (Saldana, 2016). Inductive data analysis involves the condensation of raw data, clear linkage of research questions and findings, and creation of a framework of experiences exposed in the data (Thomas, 2006).

I along with four graduate student researchers began clustering initial or preliminary meaning units throughout the transcriptions using Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis software. Quirkos allows the researcher to organize, analyze and find insights in qualitative data such as interviews, focus groups, and document review. I coded each of the 28 interviews, documents, and journals while I assigned 6-7 interviews to each graduate student. The research team met a total of four times over the span of three months, the first beginning with the initial description of the study purpose, goals, research questions, and methodology. The next meeting consisted of an

overview of information collected. For the first interview, all researchers analyzed separately then met to discuss preliminary meaning units. The third meeting was to ensure calibration among each of the analysts for that one particular interview. Doing so allowed the graduate researchers to become familiar with the coding process, discuss potential meaning units and findings, and introduce the format of upcoming conversation about each individual's insight after analyzing the data. In the third meeting, I introduced the qualitative data analysis software, Quirkos, and demonstrating the software. The fourth meeting involved discussing individual and group data analyses for over two and a half hours, condensing and compiling analyses until the 300+ meaning units were grouped into forty-eight subgroups. The forty-eight subgroups were then condensed and compiled again leading to the development of a final set of eight themes representative of the data. This final step of data analysis produced the final set of eight themes through verbatim data (in vivo coding) as well as concepts from the literature. Narrative analyses will allow those voices to be heard within the data. Inductive analysis will allow the development of final themes to emerge from the data and allow for the participants' experiences and perceptions to speak for itself.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Credibility.**

Credibility was established by clearly stating the procedures in which the study was conducted and how the conclusions are drawn (Patton, 1999). Dialogic engagement through the integration of a four additional researchers who understood the methodology and the data analysis process served as an additional form of validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants were asked to provide member checks (or participant validation) for authenticity to ensure transcriptions are verbatim and representative of their experiences and opinions (Barbour, 2001).

Any corrections or clarifications were expounded in the transcriptions to be coded. It is extremely important for the transcriptions and data to be representative of the participants' experiences and/or perceptions of inclusive athletic departments. Four graduate-level researchers participated in document analysis.

### **Dependability.**

Inter-rater reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was established by using multiple individuals to code transcriptions and documents. The researchers met regularly before and after coding transcripts to discuss the study methodology, data analysis, and data interpretation. Each individual analyzed the data separately with myself coding all data collected while the other researchers overlapped, coding 6-7 each. I documented the evolution and rationale of my thinking in terms of the research process decision making (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Confirmability.**

Confirmability was met through the researchers' separate analyses of the data leading to findings. The researchers analyzed the data separately before coming together on multiple occasions to condense, compile, and discuss final findings (e.g. constant comparison of condensing and compiling data) as mentioned in the data analysis section above. Researchers employed reflexive engagement throughout data collection and data analysis. In order to do so, researchers consistently reflected on whether the data is aligning with the research questions, identify possible bias role, and refer to field notes, post-interview memos, as well as precoding memos. The structured reflection process included thoughtful questions and interpretations throughout the study and included reflexivity of my own personal experiences, biases, positionality, views, and ideologies in regard to the process of exploring the phenomenon of

inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Each journal explored my current perspective, acknowledgement of biases, and thoughts moving forward.

### **Triangulation.**

Methodological triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) was met through the form of semi-structured interviews, focus group, document review, and reflexive journals. Data and perspectival triangulation will be met through the targeted sample of male and female participants, differing roles within athletic department (administrator, coaches, and student-athletes), differing sport affiliation, and main campus perspective (personnel associated with LGBTQ/sexual minority initiatives). Interviewing individuals from such diverse experiences will contribute to the authenticity of this study. Such a diverse sample will most likely bring about applicability of experiences in other contexts with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and serves as triangulation of differing perspectives (Flick, 2014) of student-athlete participants. University and athletic department documents (i.e. student-athlete handbook, athletic handbook, mission and value statements, policy and procedure manual, code of ethical conduct, Title IX statements, inclusion statements, athletic policy statements, and any other documents that may indicate inclusion or exclusion of sexual minority student-athletes) served as an additional source of data to consider in data analysis.

### **Transferability.**

Thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the context of the study (i.e. the institution demographics, location, enrollment, diversity, etc.), participants (age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, family information, etc.), and documents are described in as much detail as possible without providing identifiers of University or participants. Each individual *and* the athletic

department were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Any identifying feature of an individual or institution were brought to the attention of the particular individual and needed approval to include in the final report. Any identifying feature of the athletic department or institution was paraphrased to ensure anonymity. Numerous quotes and/or excerpts are provided to support conclusions that are drawn. Thick descriptions and direct quotations provide confidence in the transferability of the research (Bryman, 2008).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Though this research is trustworthy through the data collection and analysis processes mentioned above, there are several potential limitations. First, the student-athletes who identify as sexual minority may not have been “out” to the athletic department, which may affect the individual conceptualization of inclusion. A second limitation is convenience sampling. Listservs catering to student-athletes who identify as sexual minority may over-recruit individuals who are open and comfortable discussing their sexual orientation. Those who are struggling with accepting their sexual orientation may not be as comfortable or willing to discuss experiences and perceptions as openly. Third, the interviews will ask what a perfectly inclusive athletic department *would* and *should* look like. This can limit the transferability of the data collected from the interviews specifically. Fourth, NCAA Division I institutions are not all alike, the experiences of student-athletes who identify sexual minorities are not likely to be similar at every institution. Athletic departments across the nation differ in demographics, size, geographic regions, number of varsity sports, athletic budget, athletic resources, athletic programming, etc. Fifth, institution, athletic department, and team documents may not tell the full story of inclusion so the researcher must ensure that participants’ experiences with and conceptualization of inclusion is heard (Creswell, 1998). Lastly, the aim of this study was to recruit ten

administrators, ten coaches, ten student-athletes allies, and ten student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, but those group numbers were not met. I attempted to follow all leads throughout the semi-structured interviews to recruit fellow student-athletes, support staff, or coaches.

Division I athletic department documents differ tremendously from institution to institution. This was a complex process of interviewing support staff, coaches, and student-athletes and cross-referencing their experiences, perceptions, and ideas about their athletic department. In addition, this study has the potential to evolve into several case studies which may affect the credibility and dependability of the research design and data analysis. Differentiating the experiences and perceptions of these participants is crucial. The transferability of this study may be limited due to the aforementioned limitations such as closeted student-athletes, convenience sampling, demographics, individual perceptions of inclusion, and differing experiences of participants. Researcher bias may come into play as I attended a religiously affiliated institution that instated policies discriminating against sexual minorities. These particular policies uniquely impacted my experience as well as those around me. It is crucial to engage in reflexivity, reflection, and embrace dialogic evaluation to combat the potential researcher bias. Because of this, the reflexive journals were essential in acknowledging and mitigating biases throughout the research process.

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. This qualitative single instrumental case study methodology explored inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within one NCAA Division I athletic department. The participant sample consisted of support staff, coaches, and student-athletes. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document review, and reflexive journals served as

triangulation of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. A review of literature was conducted prior to establishment of methodology to ensure an appropriate approach to this study. Interviews and documents were analyzed and are presented in the results section. The intent of this study is to positively contribute to the development and implementation of inclusive policies and practices of inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department.

## Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this single instrumental case study is to understand and describe inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. The triangulation of participant perspectives (administrators, coaches, staff, and student-athletes) provides insight into inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within one NCAA Division I institution. Thirty-three participants were interviewed about their perception of the current climate within University in regards to student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. The semi-structured interviews and focus groups provided an opportunity for each participant to explain what they believe inclusion is, what the climate is for this population of student-athletes, and how campus and the athletic department are addressing (or failing to address) inclusion. Due to the protection of confidentiality of the participants and the institution itself, a sufficient amount of description of the case and participants are utilized to help describe their perspectives. Names and revealing details are not disclosed.

After much research, Quirkos was chosen as the primary qualitative data analysis software. The awarding of a \$1,500 departmental grant allowed me to purchase a student license for two separate computers (office computer and personal laptop). Each of the graduate researchers downloaded the 30-day free trial of Quirkos to code the assigned interviews. Quirkos is a data management and analysis software that provides a visual and simplistic coding experience. I uploaded all sources: campus documents, athletic department documents, reflexive journals, and interview transcriptions. I was able to classify each type of document, categorize by participant type (support staff, student-athlete, coach, campus personnel), sort, file, and reconfigure the data as needed. Quirkos's codes, or meaning units, are referred to as "Quirks" in which is identified by title, description, and color. Each Quirk on Quirkos was identified by a

title, word(s) or phrase, and defined by a description. Quirkos allows researchers to share and merge their projects into a master project which was beneficial in the data compiling, condensing, and reducing portion of data analysis. The project was shared multiple times back and forth between all four graduate researchers and myself during conversational periods of data analysis to compare researcher coding. Quirkos has options to display the number of codes per each “Quirk” (or theme) to see the frequency of each. Reports include descriptions of sources (i.e. documents, interview transcriptions, and reflexive journals), Quirks summary (i.e. title, parent, grandparent, description, author, date, total codes), properties summary (i.e. sources and codes associated), and text by theme that breaks down each Quirk into the related quotes from interview participants.

This chapter presents key findings per each research questions obtained from twenty-eight in depth interviews, one focus group, over 50 documents (athletic department and campus combined), and 12 reflexive journals. Eight major findings emerged from this study: conceptualization of inclusion, representation, religion and sexuality, silence, team culture, accessibility, “acceptance,” and desire.

This single instrumental case study was guided by the following research questions: (1) How is inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA DI athletic department conceptualized? (2) How does an NCAA DI athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority? (3) How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department? The initial intention was to present the findings via each research question to clearly answer each individually. As the interviews developed, my reflexive journaling revealed the overlap between

the second and third research questions (athletic department addressment and student-athletes' experience).

From the twenty-eight interviews with experts, campus personnel, an LGBTQ+ support group, coaches, support staff, heterosexual student-athletes, and student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at University, the final eight thematic categories emerged: conceptualizing inclusion, representation, religion and sexuality, silence, team culture, accessibility, "acceptance" and desire. Consequently, the findings are presented uniquely by the first research question regarding the conceptualization of inclusion and then into the six final thematic emergent categories answering the second and third research questions. The aim is to completely address the climate of University athletic department and this seemed to be the best fit as far as presentation of findings is concerned. The remainder of the chapter is segmented via research question(s), final thematic categories, and subthemes within each category and respective documentation or participant quotations

### **RQ1: Conceptualization of Inclusion**

#### **Finding 1: Conceptualizing inclusion.**

Each participant was asked their own personal definition of inclusion. Some participants were unable to describe what inclusion meant to them as an individual without using the words "inclusion" or "inclusive." Brittany, a female student-athlete, referred to inclusion as just act[ing] the same" in all context with all individuals. Phil, an academic advisor, and Michael, a male student-athlete, both emphasized the importance of making sure people feel "a part of something" and that individuals did not feel left out. Mallory, a female psychologist discussed individuals having a "space carved out at the proverbial table" and the importance of

emphasizing diversity of perspective and experience. There were other participants who divulged particularly specific detail about inclusion. Beth, a female academic advisor, conceptualized inclusion as:

Treating others and making others feel welcome in an environment no matter what they believe in, who they are, how they represent themselves, and letting them know that they can confidently be that person that they are and not be someone else because society says so. – Beth

John, an athletic trainer, described inclusion as having “mutual respect” of all individuals and went into further detail about mutual respect:

Everyone getting a chance to be included with nothing to do with race, gender, identification or anything like that. Inclusion to me means putting that all aside and giving everyone the best chance to get along. – John

Daniella was a student-athlete at University and spent two years as a graduate assistant within the student-athlete development office. Her experience was unique as she experienced both sides of the student-athlete experience, understanding the inner workings of the athletic department.

Daniella elaborates on her definition of inclusion:

Inclusion, to me, is where any and all parties feel safe and respected. And included to a point that if they themselves want to be included. Because that’s a fine line where you don’t want to pull someone in if they don’t want to be pulled into anything. So I think that safe and respected piece of inclusion is something that’s extremely important. – Daniella

Jimmy has lived in the surrounding area for over 20 years, working on main campus as well as within the athletic department as an academic advisor. He provided his thoughts on inclusion:

Inclusion, to me, is just basically treating everyone the same and giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of...their race, of who they love, of their economic background...just accepting people for who they are. – Jimmy

Courtney, a sport psychologist who has worked within several campus psychological centers as well as sports psychological departments, provided the most in depth, eye-opening, comprehensive and telling conceptualization of inclusion:

Communicating and expressing either yourself or...your department in a way that doesn't just communicate tolerance of something, but acceptance...silence, or not talking about something is a very big indicator that it's not an inclusive or accepting environment. I think it needs to be proactively addressed. I think inclusion is letting people self-identify. I think it's having options, especially in entry paperwork to talk about sexual orientation, or self-identify or things like that. So opportunities for people to feel like okay, people might understand some facet of my identity here that doesn't feel like I'm being lumped into an everyday category.

This quote aligns nearly identically with some of the findings addressing the second and third research questions (how the athletic department addresses inclusion and how student-athletes experience inclusion).

## **RQ2: Athletic Department Addressing Inclusion**

Much of how student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion is related to how the athletic department addresses or fails to address inclusion of these student-athletes. Not only does it influence the experience of the student-athletes, but coaches, support staff, and student-athletes who have contact with a sexual minority in some capacity (close friend, teammate, coach, family member, partner, etc.). These themes reflect the second and third research questions: (2) How does an NCAA DI athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority? (3) How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department?

### **Finding 2: Representation.**

The representation finding emerged mainly from athletic department documents developed for student-athletes and from the interviews with student-athletes and support staff at University. The athletic department documents and semi-structured interviews indicated the athletic department emphasized the student-athlete's responsibility to represent University, the athletic department, their coaches, their team, their families, and themselves.

University athletic department and coaches placed a significant amount of performance on the playing surface and on within the classroom. One document in particular summarized the 2016-2017 academic year in numbers form. The annual report document comprised of academic and athletic achievements of men's and women's programs, championship tracking, financial reports of money raised and projects funded, and proposed or newly erected facilities including the monetary contributions utilized to accomplish such arms race goals. On the coaching level, a couple student-athletes discussed the emphasis placed on the business-like nature of being a student-athlete. Flo talks about how her coaches "are there for like business reasons. Like it's how you perform on the field and they don't care how you come about it as long as you are performing." When asked about her experience as a student-athlete, Brittany's initial, and quick, response was that being a student-athlete is a full-time job. Michael also talked about the business-like mentality of choosing a university to attend. Once here, the main emphasis of the coaching staff is to perform athletically and academically.

In addition to the student-athlete's responsibility to perform at a high level academically and athletically, which plays into the image of the athletic department and university at large, documents and participants touched on the responsibility of the student-athlete. This responsibility in particular is to represent the university in an accurate light. The student-athlete handbook of 2016-2017 academic year states "it is the mission of the Athletic Department to represent a positive image for the University by generating a sense of pride and enthusiasm among its student-athletes toward the goals of academic and athletic excellence," The document also goes into the responsibility of the student-athlete to represent the University in a positive way. Student-athletes are expected to hold exemplary behavior while a student-athlete at University and to at all times meet the expectations of their teammates, coaching staff, families,

the University, and the public. Near the end of the handbook is an excerpt on student-athletes' behavior potentially embarrassing themselves, families, teams, the athletic department, and the University and a reminder that the student-athlete is always in the public eye.

Phil is a male academic advisor who is a former student-athlete at a different institution. Phil works with several men's and women's teams at University. He describes how the athletic department and student-athlete have a responsibility to represent that state and college: "Athletics has a stage, and I think that with the state...the views of the state as a whole being represented by this college...because of their platform and how they represent the state as a whole." Beth, also an academic advisor and former student-athlete at a different institution stated that "being a student-athlete, and being the pedestal of the school, you're kind of expected to be perfect, and do everything right." Brittany, a current female student-athlete who identifies as gay describes how the athletic department and coaches make sure student-athletes understand the representation is not specifically for themselves but for the University and for their families. Also when asked about her experience as a student-athlete at University, she talked about how her role as a student-athlete was extremely job-like and she didn't have any free time. Jessica, a heterosexual female who is dating her female teammate stated "we have such a PR [public relations] image to uphold being the flagship school of the state" when asked about her experience as a student-athlete at University.

### **Finding 3: Silence.**

This particular finding emerged through campus documents (i.e. mission and value statements, college websites, diversity and inclusion documents and programming), athletic department documents (i.e. student-athlete handbook, team documents, administrative documents, website information, etc.), the focus group, and interviews with participants The

definition of silence refers to not expressing in speech, to prohibit from speaking, or an absence in words. An overarching theme of the interview data was a sense of don't ask, don't tell regarding sexuality, to keep quiet, to not discuss or acknowledge sexuality as an entirety. There was an overwhelming sense of silence when it came to the athletic department promoting inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority in the form of support groups, education and/or training for coaches and staff, support groups, visible signs or markers of sexual orientation inclusion, and language.

### *Campus culture.*

As a psychologist, an individual who identifies as sexual minority came to Mallory with questions about their physical and psychological safety on campus. Mallory didn't feel fully certain, therefore was not fully comfortable confirming that University campus is a safe place for the LGBTQ community. She claimed "campus is an atmosphere of don't ask, don't tell...they may not kill you anymore but don't be open or tell anyone." The term "accepting" is thrown around often throughout participant interviews. The definition of acceptance, as used within the final thematic theme of this case study, is the action or process of being received as adequate or suitable (Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary, n.d). According to the definition, the term was misused by many participants when in reality what kept emerging from University campus's culture seemed to be tolerance. Sue discusses the "don't ask, don't tell" mentality of campus itself and how some individuals do not want sexuality flaunted in their faces:

I think the university as a whole probably is accepting, but almost like don't ask, don't tell. Just don't. It's not gonna bother me unless you make a big deal out of- Like don't flaunt it, almost. I'm not gonna question you about it or care that you're that way if it's not bothering them. You know what I mean. Like, don't ask, don't tell. – Sue

Selena, an academic advisor for a few men's and women's teams within the athletic department said "the culture here isn't accepting. The culture here isn't accepting of anything of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual." Obadiah, a professor at University whose husband also works on campus, worked during his first semester to establish "Queer Beers," a social gathering for LGBTQ+ faculty and staff as well as allies. He also collaborated with Mallory to develop and implement an LGBTQ+ mentor program for students to be paired with *out* faculty and staff. At some point during the interview, Obadiah touched on how administration approached his advocacy:

No one's told me no, so that's been nice because I did ask because I wasn't sure especially in light of the political climate and especially losing gender neutral bathrooms and trans health care on campus. Even with all of that stuff happening, no one has ever said no to me for one of these things on campus. They've always given me support – Obadiah

*Athletic department culture.*

When asked about the culture of the athletic department itself, some participants responded vaguely while some provided significant detail on their perspective of the culture. As will be further described in the "Acceptance" theme, many of the participants claimed the surrounding area and athletic department were "accepting" or "progressive." Progressive refers to developing gradually or in stages, which compared to other parts of the state, is accurate. Compared to other athletic departments within University's conference and within the Power 5 conferences, University falls at the lower end of the "inclusive" spectrum. Many of the individuals I interviewed were aware that there was also a "don't ask, don't tell" feeling but there were people within the staff and administration that were wanting to make some changes. Mandy, a former student-athlete who competed at two different institutions and current strength coach, described her perception of the athletic department environment:

People were all kind of knew but it wasn't spoken about. It was like don't ask, don't tell, don't want to know about it. If someone asked me about it, I don't know anything about it kind of thing. It was definitely like hush hush, not a great environment. It didn't feel very safe, and unfortunately the person I was dating had a big mouth, and wanted to just talk about it with other people about it. Whereas like once again, in a position where you feel very vulnerable trying to figure out who you are, and you trust somebody and then that person just kind of goes and blows it out of proportion and talks to everybody about it. –Mandy [sexual minority strength coach; former student-athlete]

An interesting aspect of this case study was the incongruence of responses within and between participant interviews. Some heterosexual student athletes, support staff, and coaches stated inclusive and accepting environments while others disagreed and described an environment that could endanger the physical and psychological safety of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Sydney, an international student-athlete said this about the athletic department:

I think that they're also very accepting and I've never heard them say anything negative towards those people and I've also never heard them stand up and say okay, we're accepting everyone. We're welcoming everyone. But they also never said anything negative. I feel like they just kind of accept everyone for who they are and I actually know that there are a couple of girls in the swimming team I think that are dating. Then a couple of girls in track team that are dating. I mean I'm sure it's acceptable then because they post pictures on Instagram and so obviously their coaches know, so I guess it is acceptable. – Sydney [heterosexual student-athlete]

Biggie Smalls, a White heterosexual female student-athlete claimed that there was more good than bad happening within University athletic department:

I think with the LGBTQ side, we're pretty good. I think even with the race side is pretty good, but you always have ... I mean, this is throughout the whole country, you always have those little parts of the state that are pretty discriminatory and whatever, but I think people would be surprised to know there's more good people than bad. And then with the whole inclusion and tolerance, basically, I think there's, yeah, there's more good than bad. – Biggie Smalls [heterosexual student-athlete]

Roberto has worked with several sports during his time at University. He served as a graduate assistant for a women's team and moved to the role of a learning specialist within the

last year working with majority men's revenue producing sports. He talks about the women's team he worked with as being progressive but not quite having open discussions about sexuality:

I believe from the team that I was with, I see them being ... What's the word? Progressive towards it, like don't talk about it necessarily, but they're not going to hold that against you. But kind of keep it under ... You know what I'm saying? Don't flaunt it necessarily, but don't talk about it all the time or don't be extremely open about it. – Roberto [heterosexual support staff]

Selena, a heterosexual academic advisor described her fear of one of her student-athletes coming out to their specific team and how she felt as though it may ruin his whole experience at University. She is also one of the staff members in charge of the summer transition program for incoming or transfer student-athletes. During the interview, she began jotting down ideas on how to incorporate sexual orientation training into the program.

I feel like student athletes ... the ones that have a good relationship with their academic support staff, they can maybe come in and talk to them but outside of that I don't see them coming up to a SID or a football operations staff member and saying hey I wanna talk to you about something a little more serious. I don't see them coming to a coach or to our dietitian or team psychologist ... or not team psychologist ... I would say our program is not built with such wide open doors like that. ... So, yeah ... yeah I don't know it's just I feel like we're open and we're welcoming but there's still like a barrier there where I don't know ... just like the guys are the ... 'cause I deal with male student athletes most of the time. Like, the guys, it would ruin them if they came out like ruin them. Like, what would they do? Like, the guys would separate themselves from him and not shower, not change in front of him, like probably treat them different on the field ... like it would ruin them so why ... it's like for them I think why would I come out or say something if that's going to ruin my whole experience? – Selena [heterosexual support staff]

D, a heterosexual student-athlete on a revenue producing sport team, reiterated the importance of not asking and not telling when it comes to sexuality. He didn't understand why anyone would come out and that sexual minorities should keep their sexuality to themselves. D did not believe that the athletic department should promote inclusion of this particular population.

But that's how I see it. But it's like, you don't gotta announce nothing. You still can be mature about things, you know what I'm saying? You don't gotta say nothing, just come over here, and you can chit chat with us just like everybody else. It shouldn't be no inclusion for anything, man. What we gotta announce it for, you know what I'm saying? – D [heterosexual student-athlete]

Beth, a heterosexual academic advisor, discussed a disconnect between the culture of the athletic department and the desire of some staff to create a more comprehensively inclusive environment for student-athletes to exist:

I think we have people who want or are willing to try to make the change, and obviously everyone who works in athletics is there to support the student athletes, but I don't think it's just basically where we are culturally, that it's an easy dive-in project to do. A dive-in change...so I think we're at an interesting position. We want to be inclusive, and there's been a lot of turnover in staff kind of in recent, in the recent year. Always in an athletic department, but I'd be interested to kind of see because I think there's a few people who would be more interested in getting some of those services, or that visibility awareness, whatever, off the ground – Beth [heterosexual support staff]

Flo talked about the disconnect between how the athletic department promotes itself as diverse and inclusive but they're not outwardly promoting inclusion of this particular population. Flo also believes that if it was brought to the attention of executive staff in the administration or student-athlete development, that something would be done:

There is obviously is a disconnect I do not know where it's coming from...if you walk into the [athletic academic building] I do not think anybody would have a problem or would care. But I do not know why they would not do send out something...I do not think they think about. Like, you know what I mean if they realize it, that if you were to talk to people and was like hey you do not do this or you do not do that. That would be like oh, and they would go do it. Not immediate but they would work on it and that's what they did for the international students, we have like a women meeting and all of sudden out of the blue that made an international one and I assumed that would be because someone was like Hey I feel lonely can you start something here and like just talk – Flo

Jessica, a female student-athlete who identifies as heterosexual but is dating a female teammate, talked about the image the athletic department attempts to uphold. This was in response of being questioned on whether she felt the athletic department is inclusive, which she responded that there really wasn't a choice but to be inclusive.

You don't want to let anyone know that there's any tension...because you're always gonna be under a spotlight. As a coach or administrator, you don't want anyone to be able to say that you were like discriminating or prejudice or unfair towards one of your athletes because everyone's looking at you" – Jessica [sexual minority student-athlete]

Selena weighs in on the conversation of diversity but the lack of follow through when it comes to sexual orientation diversity. She recognizes the emphasis placed on racial diversity within the athletic department, but only at the support staff and lower administration levels. Selena is involved in the freshman immersion program in the summer to help acclimate incoming or transfer student-athletes to University campus. During our conversation, she questioned why sexual orientation diversity is not a subject touched on:

***Lack of Inclusive Language.***

Homophobic language wasn't as prevalent as anticipated but still present. A few participants spoke of the use of terms such as "you're so gay" and "you're a fag." John often heard "suck on this" when male student-athletes motioned toward their crotch when speaking to other male student-athletes. When asked if she'd heard homophobic language within her team and the athletic department, Biggie Smalls recalled a Mr. Chow "gayyyyyyy" vine that would be repeated over and over within the athletic department academic and nutrition buildings. Selena discusses how her student-athletes utilize "that's gay" and "he's gay" as an insult or a negative statement. These statements often came when male student-athletes engaged in feminine gestures or behaviors:

That's gay is like number one on the list. He's gay, that's probably number two on the list. Yeah, probably gay in any way, form, or statement. 'Cause I work with all young men and to not be ... or act like a young man whether it could be like a feminine gesture or feminine song that they like ... like I play music in here all the time, they'll be like that song's gay, change it. Why are you listening to this song, that's a dumb song, change it. So yeah – Selena [heterosexual support staff]

Daniella, who is a former student-athlete and worked within student-athlete development, discussed the intentionality within the student-athlete development office to utilize inclusive language such as “partner” or “significant other” as opposed to sex-specific “girlfriend” or “boyfriend.” The office found this important to be respectful of different sexual orientations within the room. That being said, the staff they trained to help facilitate certain programs and meetings would often revert back to the default “girlfriend” and “boyfriend” labels when referring to significant others and not put the effort into correcting this usage. Even with the intentionality of inclusion, it was not something that went unnoticed with student-athletes who identify as sexual minority.

It was definitely something that we thought long and hard about, and I would say in student athlete development we had a very educated group of leaders and employees that were very up to speed on ... kind of just like the changing times and what's expected this day, and what's going on in the world. Whereas, when we would bring in either academic advisors, or other people from the athletic department, they wouldn't always be in the conversations that we'd be having in student athlete development. So when we were talking through these planning meetings we would have to make sure that my mentor and I were very intentional on correcting them, so that when they were helping us facilitate that they would kind of slip up. So for the whole women's group especially, we were trying to make sure that inclusion was at the forefront. Because, I mean, I myself am a sexual minority, so it's a very important thing to me, and I've gotten more vocal about it. So, to me, I wanted to make sure that everyone felt included and not upset...It was more so ... we did not have any training on it. We would more so have inclusion talks, so how to say "partner" instead of "girlfriend" or "boyfriend" and how to use more inclusive language, I would say. – Daniella [sexual minority support staff; former student-athlete]

Mia, similar to Daniella, wishes for more inclusive language within the athletic department. As a sexual minority herself, she has heightened awareness of the terms “girlfriend” or “boyfriend” utilized as default with the respective men’s and women’s teams. She wishes for a mere acknowledgement that there are individuals who identify as sexual orientations other than heterosexual within the athletic department, whether it’s administrators, staff, coaches, or student-athletes.

Let's see. I mean, I guess the visibility thing is why I think just our language in general, in a situation where we'll have a meeting with women's sports athletes, I think a lot of time when they're addressing, whether it be domestic violence or whatever, they're like, "With your boyfriends." I think that we should say boyfriends or girlfriends, and I don't think that that language is something that we use here and not something that we use in very many of the schools I've ever worked for. But just on language and I think what I said earlier about just being more visible kind of touches on that. But just little things like that matter. Any time I reference this, it's taken a lot of practice, but every time I reference boyfriends, I say boyfriends or girlfriends. I just started a couple of years ago, because I've heard someone say it, and I was like, "Yeah, you should ... Yeah, I should be ..." It's not just that. I think the little things go really a long way, and I think our language can be a whole lot better and ... I don't know, and not making it such a taboo subject. But I don't know if like ... I don't know, more conversations about it in our staff meetings obviously. And just acknowledging that sexuality exists. We don't even acknowledge that it exists. We just assume that if you're a girl, you date guys and if you're a guy, you date girls. I just think that we assume that our ... And even the small things that come up in a staff meeting or just publicly. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

### ***Pushback and Backlash.***

When asked about the athletic department's willingness to promote inclusion and the effects of possible promotion, there were some interesting and unexpected responses. Courtney, a sport psychologist within University athletic department, talked about a pushback from somewhere in the athletic department but not quite knowing where it came from or why it was there:

But even asking around the department, and talking to some support staff, just less awareness of athletes who are even out here, out and competing. And it seems like this is an issue that they wanted to bring more to the forefront, but there's pushback from some powers at be somewhere about being more open and vocal about LGBTQ identity within the athletic department...I don't even know where it's from – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Roberto, from the state, talked about the pushback when student-athletes on a team took a stance on a specific current social issue. He discussed the boosters' sensitivities and responses directed at the athletic department, coach, and the student-athletes. Then he went onto describe how he feels as though the response to promoting inclusion of sexual minority student-athletes would result in backlash:

Well you're talking about [state] so deep [geographical region]. I feel like there'd be definitely a lot of backlash and pushback from that. I mean you saw what happened whenever the [team took a stance on a social issue]. I think that it would be definitely highlighted that these, a lot of big time boosters who are probably very insensitive and "It's wrong so we're not going to even talk about it" type of thing. ...A lot of bad emails if that was the case or coaches. I just feel like there'd be a lot of backlash from that...I can't remember anything specific that was said to any of those [student-athletes]. I'm just a big message board guy. I know I'm a nerd, but there was a lot of bad talk on there. "Those [student-athletes] shouldn't be on the [playing surface]." Then [coach] got a lot of heat too allowing them do that. – Roberto [heterosexual support staff]

Beyoncé is from one of the most liberal areas in the country when it comes to LGBTQ individuals and expressed her concern on personally standing up for differences in sexuality within the geographical area. She's unsure of what would happen to her based on what some fellow student-athletes experienced after taking a stance on a social issue within an athletic setting:

Backlash. I don't know ... with anything socially ... I feel like [state] is falling behind. Okay, last year when the [team took a stance on a social issue], it was this huge uproar. And donors are like, you're gonna [engage in behavior] on the game, I'm gonna [engage in behavior] on donating, in it was this huge big mess. That, to me, was the surrounding area not supporting their student athletes. That's kind of scary, cause like shit, what if I were to do something like that because of my sexuality? How would the outside world ... or just the surrounding [geographical area] perceive that? I don't know. – Beyoncé [sexual minority student-athlete]

#### **Finding 4: Accessibility**

Accessibility is the quality of being easy to obtain or use; easily understood or appreciated. Many participants were unaware of any resources on campus or within the athletic department even though they had all been exposed to someone who identified as sexual minority.

#### ***Exposure to sexual minority community.***

Michael talks about growing up with a mother who was married to a female and how he was exposed to the community at a young age. If any other kids said anything to him, he would combat with "my momma's woman making more money than your daddy is" and eventually

spoke with one of his friends whose mother also identified as lesbian. The two of them settled on the argument that they're getting paid, and nothing else matters. Michael, among many of the participants, talked about the normalization of same-sex relationships within society.

Yeah, that's why I'm like it's normalized, it's really not nothing... And it's like now I see the difference in like television, because also television, almost every show on like TV or something is something to do with LGBTQ. And I'm like, why you all doing that now? Why hasn't it been like this? And that's what kind of upset me – Michael

Roberto works with someone in the athletic department that is outwardly gay and works with several of the male student-athletes competing in revenue producing sports. He recalls on what some of his student-athletes have said:

But on the other hand...He's probably our best guy with a lot of the football players and basketball players, and I've heard them say before like "Hey, man. He can do what he wants to on the weekends. I'm cool with him as long as he doesn't try anything with me. I'm cool with it." I think it's just person by person. – Roberto

I think they don't do it because some people could feel uncomfortable. You know feel like oh, so we might have gays and lesbians on our team, I'm not cool with that. But personally for me, I really don't care. I think that everybody has a choice in their lives and it's just up to them who they like. – Sydney

Consistent with previous research, the past experience with exposure to the LGBTQ community had a significant influence on current attitudes toward sexual minorities. D, as outwardly spoken he is about sexual minorities in general, talked about an experience he had when he was a sophomore in high school. This experience was incredibly traumatic for D and definitely shaped his view on the community:

Because I had experience to where I was getting dressed one time in the locker room, and the dude walked past...and brushed my penis head with his hand. And we fought after that. Yeah, but from that point on, it's like I never could truly see them the same, because, "You was bold enough to do that."... And it bothered me. It kinda scarred me a little bit. And of course we fought after that bro, I'm not fixing to let that happen...I just can't truly just be around it...Because... You can't see me the same, bruh... You know? And that experience really hurt ... Bothered me. I was a sophomore in high school, and he was older and everything, and dude is gonna do that, while I'm getting dressed. And I'm not even thinking twice about it, I'm getting dressed in the locker room. So from that point on

I was uncomfortable with taking showers in the locker room, getting dressed in locker room. Every time I got to practice it was, "Get my stuff and just slide"...And it'd be like that til probably my freshman year in college. But it's just like a ... I can't ... I was never cool with him. I couldn't talk to him... Every time I'm on the field, all I wanna do is hurt him. And it's just cause you tried to ... In some type of way, you disrespected me by trying me like that...Thinking I'm going that way...that's my manhood. You ain't fixing to do that. That really hurt my pride, because you saw me like that...So it mean that whatever I'm doing right now, obviously I'm being too soft or something. Or what. But from that point on, I had to harden up a little bit, or whatever, because obviously I was too vulnerable as a man, I guess. Or whatever, to give you that reason. But I ain't handle that situation the best, and I don't think I'm gonna handle the situation the best if it happens again. – D

***Resources.***

University campus provided several resources and services pertaining to the LGBTQ community. Obadiah and Mallory created the LGBTQ mentor program between out faculty and staff and students, there is an LGBTQ support group run through the counseling center on campus, there is a Pride student organization, a Pride day during the spring semester, and Safe Zone training within the multicultural and diversity center. Obadiah discusses the mentor program and its growth over just the last year:

Basically we sent out a call, made an applications, another call for mentors and mentees and then that spring semester we started. I did a pilot program to see kind of test the waters. I think we had like 10 mentors and maybe like six or five students or something like that. In the program, the mentee and mentor meet once a month wherever, whatever they decide to do or how they decide to do it. Then we had a couple of intro meet your mentee match and then kind of an evaluation meeting. From that we learned a lot about how to make it better. The students really wanted monthly group events and so this year we're incorporating in that. We started this fall open to the public, I guess, as opposed to just doing the pilot study and I think at the moment we have something like ... I think we have like 39 mentees and 35 mentors. – Obadiah

Though these resources and policies are in place, very few participants are aware of the resources available. Those few had either known someone involved with the programs or had completed extensive research to find them. Even some individuals who sought resources and

groups were unable to locate resources on main campus. Mia discusses her frustration after her search for resources:

I've actually, because I was like, "Okay. Well, I wanna meet more gay people." And so last year I was like, "Well, maybe there's like ..." One of my friends that coaches at [other Power 5 institution] is the athletics representative for an allied group that they have on their campus. And so I was like, "Okay. Well, maybe there's something like that here for us that I can go and be a part of and meet more gay people, or people that are just gay friendly in general." So I searched far and wide for groups like and I couldn't find any. And I looked for alumni based groups, couldn't find anything or just student organizations. And then around that time, it's like ... I mean, at other places that I've been, you could get a safe space sticker and I can't find where or if we have anything like that in our, just school or department in general, where I can get one of those stickers or just a group that, a safe space group at all. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

University's Safe Zone ally training website provides little to no information on the training itself, directing individuals to the "It Gets Better Project" page for additional information. No email is provided, only a campus phone number to learn about the Safe Zone Allies program.

Within the athletic department, there is a blanket non-discrimination policy including sexual orientation and a transgender statement that is a three line section directing them to an Athletic Trainer, Sport Administrator, or Director of Clinical and Sport Psychology. Within the sport psychology clinic, Courtney describes the program's way of indicating a safe space to discuss sexuality in a way that doesn't suggest student-athletes are automatically struggling because of sexual orientation identity:

And again, I try to be thoughtful as a psychologist, at least in our website we mention reasons people will come to see us. And part of it I think is identity concerns, or identity questions. But wanting to use language that just because you have a minority identity, that means you're going to struggle with it, or have a problem with it. So I like the idea of maybe having it be situated more in maybe a collaboration between us and student athlete development, or just kind of a quality of experience rather than suggesting you're going to need support if this is part of who you are. So you'd have to think about that, and we currently run no groups, to give some context for that too. Within sports psych, yes. – Courtney

Similarly, Beth discusses the possible stigma of only having sport psychologist as a resource for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority looking for more community:

I know that they have psychologists, but I've heard a lot of student athlete aren't completely comfortable with going there, so finding a way, maybe have it to be a group setting, or whatever they're comfortable with. Finding a way that would best benefit them, instead of saying "Hey you need to go to a psychologist." Starting a support group, or having different groups discussing topics – Beth

Other than the non-discrimination policy, transgender statement, and inclusion of identity concerns within the sport psychology website for reasons to seek services, there are no resources within the athletic department available to administrators, staff, coaches, or student-athletes.

When Jimmy was asked about the resources he was familiar with on campus and within the athletic department, he didn't remember seeing any programming for student-athletes. He also discussed having support for other specific groups of student-athletes:

With our Athletic Department, I don't think that I can remember seeing a lot of programming to really address that. I don't think anybody is overtly prejudice against that, but I can't think of any direct programming that we do that addresses or that would ... I don't think we have direct support for that community, because we don't have any programming to kind of help them. We have first generation programming, so first generation students can go see other first generation students to connect, but I don't think we have any programs specifically here for the sexual minorities. – Jimmy [heterosexual support staff]

Selena discusses the other opportunities for many different support groups provided for specific groups within the student-athlete population except for LGBTQ+ student-athletes. She claims the athletic department, as a whole, doesn't acknowledge sexual minorities and does not recognize the group as one that may need support:

There might be. Like, there's so many different opportunities and so many groups that you can join. Actually, I think the development office runs those programming events and houses opportunities ... I am certain we don't have one for LGBTQ+ xyz period exclamation point, maybe. So, yeah, we don't even acknowledge that. Like, that's not a group we need to look at and support, no. – Selena

*Other athletic department and universities.*

Many of the support staff, coaches, and even student-athletes were a part of other universities. Compared to University, many of the other institutions had resources specific to sexual minorities on campus and within the athletic department for student-athletes. For John, heterosexual coach, he came from Penn State where the head women's basketball coach of 27 years, Rene Portland implemented training rules for her student-athletes: "*No Drugs, No Drinking, No Lesbians.*" When John attended the institution just a couple years ago, there were a bunch of clubs on campus and resources available to students. When asked if he was aware of any resources on University campus or within the athletic department, Phil responded citing the sport psychological staff as the only resource he knew of:

Working in the [athletic academic center], I would say that I know that we have a sports psychologist on staff, and I would think, first hand, that he would be one to ... if they had any issues about how they felt about being viewed, or mental health issues with that ... Am I framing that right? Do you get where I'm going? If they're struggling with feeling accepted, I would think that he would be the person that they would feel good to go to, and I think that they're aware of him. Programming, I'm not really sure. Then again, I don't really keep my head in the loop over there that much, in the programming area. – Phil [heterosexual support staff]

Mia has coached at several different institutions and recalls at least one of those institutions having safe space stickers and how the coaching staff was married and openly gay. Nationally, she was aware of other institutions having allied and/or groups within the athletic departments. Selena also came from a prestigious athletic department within the Power 5 conferences and talked about the differences between the previous institution and University:

Yeah. I will say the [previous University] was super liberal, very welcoming to any color, race, age, like people in my class looked totally different. Diversity there was really, really high. Topics discussed in class were very, very ... it was such a wide range. The support system for student athletes, it was a really, really strong program. Actually the director there of student athlete academics there, which is one of the best in the country, she's been the president of our national academic advisor's association. So she's really

well respected. So when I came in as a freshman, like again, I didn't know what I was doing or what this program was about. Come to find out she's like running one of the best shops in the country. But I can ... looking back I'm like yeah, she groomed all of us whether you were interim GA all the way to her more senior staff. She devoted so much time into her staff and programs to make it what it was... I would say one neat thing about that program is that she's always assessing success rates or deficiencies like where the areas are not getting a lot of student athletes to show up in or what are the areas that they tend to struggle in and how can we make those better? She's also changed her program around to revamp the staff structure a couple of times since from when I was there and then also from leaving there's been some staff restructure to help better her program but she's also such a very humble person. I feel like the staff that she hires, one they're really, really smart in their specific area. – Selena [heterosexual support staff]

Courtney discusses a previous institution in which she worked that had an athlete ally program within the athletic department and different initiatives in place to support LGBTQ student-athletes. She also emphasized the coaches being open to allowing athletes to come speak to the teams about LGBTQ inclusion:

They've really varied by institutions. The one that I would say was most, I hate to say progressive, but progressive. And not just saying "We're about inclusion," but kind of put it into action was when I was at [previous institution]. And at that time, they had an athlete ally program that was really getting off the ground, and a large part of that success is there was an athlete who was out on one of the teams, who serves as the President of that club, and was very motivated to bring awareness to the awareness of LGBTQ student athletes. And she worked with a committee to go out and speak with every team. They did marketing, they made kind of rubber wristbands people would wear. – Courtney on former institutions

### **RQ3: Student-Athlete Experience of Inclusion**

#### **Finding 5: Religion and sexuality.**

The most intriguing aspect of this thematic category is the unintentionality of this finding. The semi-structured interview protocol utilized for each interview had no mention of religion, nor did the demographic questionnaire the participants were asked to complete prior to the interview. Neither of these documents included any questions regarding religious beliefs, views, and/or experiences. Nearly all participants brought up religion and its' influence on beliefs and attitudes toward the sexual minority community or towards themselves. Heterosexual student-

athletes describe their religious beliefs and being close to some sexual minorities and student-athletes who identify as sexual minority describe the role of religion within their self-acceptance as well as their experience with religious individuals within the athletic department.

***Participant relationship with religion.***

For those who identified as religious or spiritual, of all sexual orientations, discussed the struggle of coming to terms with others' or their own sexuality and their personal religious views. Some grew up in rigorously religious homes, nondenominational environments, non-religious environments, and some experienced significant religious and spiritual freedom from young ages. Mia, an assistant coach, talked about her own sexuality and relationship with God. She identifies as gay and discusses how her perspective has changed tremendously over the years from when she was a teenager:

...so I thought that I needed to be something different than what I was in order for God to love me, which was completely opposite of how I feel now. But, yeah. So, I mean, that came from a genuine place. I wasn't saying that to them just to cover my own butt. I was literally telling them exact same thing I was talking to them about, and approaching my conversation with them the way that I approached a conversation with myself. – Mia [conversation with own athletes while coaching a 16U softball team and parents asked her to have conversations with their daughters.]

Sue just completed eligibility within cross country and talked about her two teammates (both female) dating each other. She talks about how she disagrees with same sex relationships religiously but feels conflicted because of the kind of people they are. That even though it's not what she believes, it's not her place to judge and would never say anything to them about her religious beliefs. It is evident in her tone and her words that she internally struggles with the acceptance and legitimization of the relationship. She yearns for better understanding and finding a balance between the categorization of religion and same sex relationships.

That's something that I even struggle with personally. I think it's hard to not ... I think sometimes when people say love them through it, not that we want to change ... It's weird because they are. They're like good, good friends, and it's not that I ... It's not for me to even approve. Would I wish they were like ... It's weird because they are. They're cool together. They're cool. They're better than a lot of couples... Religiously, I don't believe that it's right, but not everyone has the same religious values. I don't know how to put it in words, but there definitely is ... I wish it could be okay. At the same time, I'm not gonna approach them. Maybe that's wrong of me as a Christian not to- But I don't really- That's not the way I work, either... I wish that I believed it was okay, but I don't believe that it's okay as far as religion. I think that is a hang-up that a lot of people have, but we love them anyway. If they were to ask me if I think it's right or wrong, I would tell them, "No, I don't think that same-sex marriage and that kind of stuff is biblically what you're supposed to do," but that's not really my business either. I don't think of them really any differently, just ... I wish I could be okay with everything. I wish it would fit in all the circles and it doesn't. – Sue

Michael's story is incredibly interesting and powerful. According to Michael, he comes from a rough area in which he was fortunate enough to have sport as an outlet and ultimately a way out of his former lifestyle. There were points in his life where he'd been shot at, been around extremely hard drugs, and had several friends go to jail. He was adamant about how lucky he was to have earned the opportunities that he did. Through everything he's been through, he still holds onto the religious beliefs his grandmother instilled in him. He discusses his view on religion and sexuality:

And I feel like in my opinion no sin is greater than the other. So you can't say this person's living their life like this is worse than you lying every day, or you killing somebody. No sin is greater than the other... What I have thought of is if I have a son and that happens [son is a sexual minority], the only thing I can tell him is you're my son and I love you. Understand that the thing you're doing, cause if I have a son, he gonna be a child of faith, a child of God. I'll make sure he understand like the decision you're making. But I'll also tell him no sin is greater than the other. Just like I said, no sin is greater than the other. I'm gonna love you regardless, through everything. – Michael

Jimmy is an academic advisor for a couple men's teams and was one of the softest spoken yet passionate individuals about the topic of the sexual minority experience. As a racial minority himself, he'd been subject to microaggressions and unintentional exclusion at University since he stepped on campus 20+ years ago. Just through his diction and his

intentionality with his words, it was obvious he wanted to provide a fruitful, caring, and supportive environment for student-athletes of all gender identities, sexual orientations, races, backgrounds, and sport participation. He talked about his beliefs on sexual orientation and his religious convictions:

Just talking about how ... Just different people's ... Like the church, how I use that broadly view on it or perceived view on it and how my views are my views on it, like I don't believe because you're, as you describe, a sexual minority, that you can't go to heaven. I don't think God hates you, I think those scriptures that say things like that don't necessarily, I don't buy into that. I don't think ... I believe that if you live your life in the right way and you accept God into your life then you're going to be fine, so I don't believe that being a sexual minority disqualifies you from God's love. – Jimmy

Flo is from one of the largest populated cities in the United States. She is a heterosexual female with several close friends and former teammates within the sexual minority community. She contributes to the Equality campaign yearly and proudly displays her equality sticker on the notebook she brings to church. Flo discussed her view on religion and sexuality and how difficult it was to have conversations with religious individuals who were not open to having open dialogue:

I strongly disagree how they feel. I know that like, when I first got here I was ok with anything. And so, Like my especially my best friend, first girl I ever made here, is the strongest southern Baptist I ever met in my entire life, and was like so against it, and would talk like so bad about the sexual orientation aspect of things. And how God said it's not ok...it really confused me. Because it's nothing wrong with it. It does not change them because of who they are. It does not change them. It's like their choice; I think that, I don't know how to describe it. But I know its ok with me. So to hear that, I kind like knew would never bring it up with anyone from around here. Because I disagree so much about and it's such a bad conversation to have with someone especially if there is never going to change their views on it. But then as I started going I started attending [Church] and they're Baptist, but still to this day I think there is once a or twice a year they talk about it. I refused to listen, piss me off on how they view sexual orientation, how it's not ok. – Flo

Jessica's research was impressive. Her interview reflects the lengths she went to come to terms with her feelings and eventually her relationship with [Marissa]. Though she is still not

free from uncertainty, Jessica is more confident in her relationship with God and with [Marissa]. She researched language, social context, and biblical translations throughout history:

It wasn't until a couple months ago that I really did my research about how many times the Bible has been translated and what the climate was like socially whenever it was translated to English for the first time. The root words of the Greek, the Hebrew, the Latin, were words of some of the context when the Bible addresses homosexuality in the New Testament... While I'm not completely free from 100% uncertainty, I am much more solid in the belief that I'm not gonna go to Hell, where was originally, I wasn't really sure. When I first told my mom about six months after me and [Marissa] had been dating, she didn't take it well. She still doesn't take it well. She, coming from a religious standpoint, she made me panic and I really thought I was going to Hell. After time, I started actually like I said, doing some research and realizing that it's not that black and white. – Jessica

As consistent with much of the findings within this case study, each individual had differing beliefs and perspectives. Some were able to articulate their beliefs more eloquently than others. Some still struggle to take a stance.

### ***Religious athletic organizations.***

Though not affiliated with the athletic department directly, there are religious athletic groups that operate within the collegiate athletic setting and often meet within athletic department spaces or on campus. Two specific organizations were mentioned: Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Athletes in Action (AIA). Both Mia (coach) and Jessica (student-athlete) discussed their experiences within these groups and how their sexuality or relationship was addressed:

Within the AIA, yeah. Even though they knew because they could tell how me and [Marissa] interacted with each other. Once it became common knowledge, like all right, Jessica and [Marissa] are dating, they [teammates] still never called me out on it in front of the AIA crew, which was cool of them. They let me just do it at my own pace. Eventually, the AIA people did find out and that led to ... like my Discipler had some really hard conversations with me. They never ended well, they always ended in tears, they always ended in I would feel guilty. As it is right now, I go to church, but I don't go to AIA anymore, I don't participate anymore just because anytime I'm around one of the

AIA leaders for an extended amount of time, it always comes back to my relationship with [Marissa]...I don't get Disciplined anymore just because that one element of my life and that one element of the Bible always takes over, it dominates the conversation. I'm not able to have conversations with anyone in that community that I used to love being around because they're always trying to change what I'm doing and I respect them for ... they way they say it, they love me so much and they want me to be happy, that they are trying to change me from doing something that they think is wrong. Just like if my friend starts drinking excessively, I know that that's not good for her. She doesn't think that it's not good for her, but I'm still gonna try to change her mind. They see it the same way, if that makes any sense, if that analogy makes sense. I don't feel super judged by them because I know that it's coming from a place of love, but it's still uncomfortable. – Jessica

For Mia, her and her girlfriend, Linda, at the time attended this camp for Athletes in Action and were encouraged to meet with Stephanie, a self-identified reformed gay person.

Okay, so with [Linda], she was at this camp too, and we were both kind of going through whatever. So this one lady that worked with Athletes in Action but was our reformed gay person, led the whole thing. And so like after we got back from camp, it's like we need to call this lady...so, called [Stephanie], had a couple of phone conversations with her. And I look back now at some of the things that we talked about and things that she asked of me and [Linda], and it just blows my mind, little things like ... Like happened so many times a day that we could communicate or see each other, little stupid things like that, 'til I tried to make the feelings go away, stupid things like that. She was really the only person that I talked to about it. And that was obviously a very lopsided view... I tried up until probably I was 24 years old to not be gay.

– Mia

### **Finding 6: Team culture.**

Regarding student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, the culture and environment within the sport team was one of the most influential aspects of their experience. The culture within the team included the coaches' influence, relationships with coaches and teammates,

dating within the team, and the merging of an immensely wide variety of perspectives and beliefs.

### *Coaches' influence.*

Coaches played a significant role in the student-athlete experience, regardless of sexual orientation. Each student-athlete at some point within the interviews discussed the influence of their coaching staff on their overall experience at University. Some support staff individuals also acknowledged the position of power the coach holds and the significance of the coaches' influence. Sydney, whose coach is one of her role models here in the United States, discusses how her coaching staff hasn't discussed sexuality because people may feel uncomfortable:

Yeah, because our coaches never really talked about it to us at all just because I think he doesn't want to feel, like make anyone kind of uncomfortable because we did have people that do not like gays or lesbians, so that's why our coach just never even talked about it. Which makes sense, I mean everyone is different. – Sydney

Sue, whose two female teammates were dating, talked about how her head coach knew about the relationship but did not acknowledge it to anyone on the team. His primary focus was on performance and he would even go as far to call into his office male student-athletes who were dating female student-athletes to ensure the relationship wasn't going to affect the female athlete's performance:

At first we didn't know, does Coach really just not know? But Coach knew. Not that it was discouraged even. It's not encouraged, but it wasn't discouraged. Really, when it boils down to it, Coach just wants us to run fast... Like if it was distracting, and I think the same thing would go for a relationship between the guys and girls team. There's been guys that Coach calls into his office when they're dating one of the girls on the team, like, "Look here. Don't mess with her brain," because relationships are, it's part of your psyche, and it's so psychological... He'd be like, "Don't screw this up" – Sue

As a support staff member, Courtney has heard her share of complaints and praises about coaching staffs. She understands the influence of the coaches on the experience of student-

athletes, specifically marginalized populations such as sexual minorities. She asked her partner, a coach, if he'd understood what microaggressions were and if his staff would engage in training:

I'm trying to think about this too...because this is something we talked about at [previous institution], where I was last year about a lot too. About what would it be to make a more inclusive culture? And most of the complaints I've heard about from athletes haven't been about support staff, it's been about coaching, and coaches who make just not helpful comments, or micro-aggressions that can be unattended. And so I asked my partner about this because I was like "What would y'all be open to in terms of training." I was like "Do you know what a micro-aggression is?" And he was like, "No." And when I explained to him, he was like "Well yeah, I get that." – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Before the fall semester of her senior season, Jessica was asked to come meet with the coaches. She and Marissa had been more public about their relationship with their teammates and their friends and the coaching staff had become aware of their romantic relationship within the team. They only called Jessica in without Marissa and discussed what was going to happen moving forward through the next year. Jessica was given the responsibility to pass the information along to Marissa and the coaches never directly spoke with Marissa about the relationship:

Basically the nature of the meeting was like, "Hey, moving forward into this next school year, I just want to give you a heads up of how we're gonna handle y'all dating on this team. Here's some things. We want to treat you as if this was a men and women's program, and if a man was dating a woman. We're gonna give you the same restrictions. No being in each other's hotel rooms. You can't room together at swim meets anymore." That was really it, which I completely understood. I didn't feel in the least bit marginalize. I feel like that's like the epitome of equality. I feel like if you just treat us the same way that you could if we had both sex teams, those same rules would apply. That's been the only time that it's ever been ... I wouldn't even say that was an issue, it was just something that they were proactively addressing because would we have tried to room together at swim meets? Yeah, probably... They were just letting us know that, "Hey, in the spirit of fairness, just know that that's not an option." We were totally cool with it. She, I think because of the way she was raised and how her family views homosexuality, she doesn't like people to know about it because she knows that especially here in the Bible Belt, they're gonna judge you. The coaches had that conversation with me because I'm more candid than her, it would be easier to have a potentially hard conversation with me. They just asked me to pass the message along to her. When I passed the message on to her, she actually cried because she didn't know that the coaches knew and she just gets

embarrassed because she thinks people are gonna judge her. – Jessica [sexual minority student-athlete]

Mandy had a lot to say about her experience at University. She specifically remembers being warned about an assistant coach who would attempt to befriend student-athletes she assumed to identify as sexual minority and speak with them about religious convictions and slowly try to convert players. Mandy also discusses the affect such a religious and unaccepting coaching staff was to compete under:

As a student athlete at the university, I remember talking to some other girls in the team that identified as bi-sexual or gay. They were telling me to steer clear of the volunteer assistant coach, because the volunteer assistant coach sees it as a sin. She'll take you in and act like she's being your friend, but she'll try to slowly rid you of your sins basically, and try to make you very religious. She takes you in her wing, she will invite you to dinners and ask you to go to church with her, think that you'll really like the people that are there, that kind of a thing...As a freshman, that's what she'll do to people because when you come in, she thinks that you are going to get corrupted. Even though you are not corrupted; you are who you are, but you come in as a freshman and she'll try to slowly change you or convert you basically, is what the girls were calling it, that to like being straight or heterosexual, which I thought was insane. I didn't believe it until later on in that year ... well, the several of the girls I was talking to, had had experiences with that, where they don't speak to that volunteer assistant coach anymore, because of just how awkward it was...A lot of those girls already did go to church or had religious backgrounds, so the fact that she was using religion in a way that they were not, I guess didn't understand because they were religious themselves. Using it against them really obviously bothered them and turned them off to like even being wanting to be around this person. I don't know if this is even true but I also heard rumors that the volunteer assistant coach was not set in her own, like wasn't comfortable with her own self...That we all thought that she might be either bi-sexual or possibly gay. She was very closed off to that idea, but I have heard some rumors with her and one of the student athletes. That was a really tough freshman year... She did not want to talk about it, if you talked about like you liking another girl or you having feelings for both sexes, she didn't believe it. She'd get real uncomfortable and shut down and then she just wasn't open talking about that, or even talking about herself at all, so it was just a really weird situation. She lived with another female volunteer assistant coach, so it felt a little hypocritical, in like there is something going on but she used that opportunity. I don't know if it was her not being comfortable with herself, but she made everybody else uncomfortable or would attack other people, which was kind of awful my freshman year...It made it hard once again, to feel comfortable being yourself, because if you were being yourself, someone might come along and then try to change who you are. Or tell you it's wrong, or even use something that you might be uncomfortable with like your religion against you, which I thought was just horrendous...It felt like a religious cult in some ways with [University]

where we all had to take turns praying, even though if that's not what your beliefs were we went through that. It didn't feel like ... yeah, that's another story, but it didn't feel like a place where I felt comfortable being myself... When you're trying to figure out who you are, it's really difficult to do that and be comfortable with it. A lot of exploring in the dark, which is not fun – Mandy [sexual minority strength coach and former student-athlete]

Mandy also talked about the difference between competing for coaches at University compared to the second university she attended:

If the coaches had a standard it would be different. I will say my coaches at [second institution], although they were religious, and made it obvious that they were religious, she was wonderful and she was a good person. She knew that I had broken up with my girlfriend at one point because of the team talking, and overhearing and stuff, and she even made it a point of sending me a text saying that like, 'You are a great person. Like don't be upset by that. You will find whoever you were meant to be with,' like was very ... no it didn't say 'the guy that you are meant to'...nope, said, "You will find whoever you are meant to be with. Like don't get hung up on somebody that can't see how great you are." My coach who I know is probably very much like religiously against that, but as a person was able to bridge that gap. That was another step, but if more people ... if she could even have been from the get go, just somehow demonstrated openness like that, I think if all coaches do that, it would make a huge difference. – Mandy

Beyoncé, a sexual minority student-athlete who is dating her female teammate, responded to her experience as a student-athlete at University. Beyoncé recently transferred from a Power 5 conference institution to University and began dating her girlfriend shortly after. She discusses how her relationship with [Samantha] is ignored while her coaches inquire about her heterosexual teammates' partners in front of her.

I think its individual, based on who you are. They don't necessarily all have this one motto that they go by. You know? I feel like it's never even been talked about. I feel like that's another big thing, it's like, don't ask. Don't bring it up. Cause my coach absolutely knows that me and ... that's my girlfriend, but it's never been addressed. I think it's more of ... for me, from my personal experience, I think it's more an ignorance is their attitude. They just ignore it. – Beyoncé [sexual minority student-athlete]

### *Dating within the team.*

Flo played for two different coaching staff in her time at University. She discussed how her first coach would pull some of her teammates into a conversation about religion and the bible and sexuality. He also would ask roommates of individuals he suspected to be dating where they were staying at night. Coach A then instated a team rule that everyone was to sleep in their own beds every night. The second coaching staff did not acknowledge sexuality but didn't seem to care about the sexual orientation of the student-athletes:

It's been different I played for two coaching staffs. I played two years under [Coach A] and then three years under [Coach B]. It's been completely different from both of them. Different vibes from each of them. With [Coach A], typical male coach, he had very strict rules about family not dating family. Even make sure you stayed as a freshman, I had to stay in my dorm room no matter what. He would find ways to know if we were not...kind of odd to me but I did not have a problem with it...some people did. He would have ways to go about things like that. Kind of behind peoples back. Turning people against each other. And this currently, this coaching stuff is a breath of fresh air. And been really good about most things...Girls will tell me, [Coach A] would pull them over and talk about the bible and God thought about their choices in life like sexual and I just kind of thought that was odd. At the point, I did not go to church...But even like that stay over other people places was odd or not staying in your dorm room. He would ask, I could remember, it was before a game he asked [Alice] if [Jackie] had stayed in your room that night. [Alice] like well he probably knows the answer if he is asking me and then she did not want to get in trouble but she did not want tell on [Jackie] that she was not in the room. But she had to because she was like, I did not want to get in trouble so she came up to me I told him I just had to I could not lie. And then like I remember [Jackie] telling me later, that he had confronted her and then like you need to stay in your dorm room. Like, so he kind of turned people against people because [Alice] was like tucked in the corner – Flo [heterosexual student-athlete]

Daniella remembers the rule on her team of “family doesn't date family” and how the athletic department administrators at one point got involved when two teammates were dating.

The situation divided the team:

The only time I can really remember one of those conversations was when two teammates were dating on the team and kind of like ... because there's a rule in the handbook that said that family wouldn't date family, our coaches got members of the athletic department involved. And so, it was more so just talking about why that was

happening with my team mates. Was it fair? Was it not? How could we come back together as a team? Because it kind of divided the team a little bit, 'cause for the longest, they denied it. And so the team thought that they were lied to, and whereas the teammates didn't want to cause any problems and they just wanted to be in a relationship and not have to tell everyone about it. – Daniella

As a support staff member, Courtney was very aware of social issues within the athletic department. She discussed language, microaggressions, and the importance of providing a safe and supportive environment and when asked about having a no dating within the team policy, she responded:

I can understand why a coach would feel bias to do that. Same thing when you work in a place of employment, having to disclose if you're in a relationship with someone that is your same level or superior. I don't know if they get to say though, I don't think they do. I can see why they would want to prevent that entirely, but you're not going to. Just because there's a no dating rule, then you force it underground, it feels secretive. I feel like that is more potential for things to go negatively. Then it's like I can't be open about this, I can't get support if something goes wrong, or it's going really well. – Courtney

Jessica talked about the transition into dating within the team and how her teammates responded to learning about she and Marissa's relationship. There were a couple teammates who were unsupportive and worried about a messy break up and what would happen to the team morale. There were other teammates who were elated when learning about their relationship for the first time:

It, as a whole, was a really smooth transition. There were a few people who ... actually only really like two people who tried to say that teammates shouldn't date. I actually had to have a couple tough conversations with some of my closer friends on the team because one girl came at me as a, "You shouldn't date a teammate because if y'all break up, it could be a bad breakup, it could be a messy breakup. It might involve other people on the team, it might create a gap in the team." So I had to counter that with, "Okay, so you want me to not date someone because of these hypothetical chains of events that haven't even happened?" [Marissa] is the least dramatic person, she's super low key, she's quiet, she does gossip because she doesn't want... Right. She is not the kind of person to, even if we were to breakup, to involve ... and we never involved anyone in our relationship anyways. I would talk about my relationship with people who weren't on the team. I never went to anyone on the team to ... if it was a complaint, or if it was positive, we never talked about it with our teammates. We would talk to people who weren't on the team for obvious reasons, for reasons such as this. A couple of the teammates tried to say that they didn't think we should date because we were teammates, but when you started to

break it down, I feel like it was because they were uncomfortable with two girls. They're perfectly entitled to that opinion, and maybe three years ago I would have felt the same way. 'Cause it took my falling in love with someone who is the same sex as me to really see LGBT relationships as legit. It's been like a journey ... not to sound cliché or anything, but it's been a journey for me in more ways than one. It's been super eye-opening experience, and it's been a humbling experience, and it's been a learning experience in every single crossbeam... Back to the team, it was smooth. Some of the girls were like, "That is so freaking cute. I can so see it. Y'all are both so athletic and it's so great. I can totally see it." But then some girls were like, "(scream sounds)" luckily the ones who had reservations were a lot quieter than the ones who were supportive. – Jessica

Jessica also talked about the importance of having a teammate on she and Marissa's side, making conscious efforts to learn about each teammate as individuals. Her team captain, Caitlin was crucial in feeling accepted within her team and she's thankful for having someone in a position such as team captain to be so supportive of their relationship.

Our team captain, her name is [Caitlin], she is really good about that. She is like the least judging, she was one of the most supporting people whenever me and [Marissa] came out as a couple. She has made a point ... it's hard with such a big team and such a demanding schedule because she's also a double major, works during the school year and all that, but she has at least at some point over the last four years, gone with someone on the team ... and I don't even think she made a conscious effort to do this, I think it's just worked out like this. She's always done a special activity with someone on the team that is exclusive to what they like to do. If it's hiking or camping or going to an art museum, or going to a concert, or doing a day trip to [local attraction], it's something that she did with someone just off the top of my head. She's just really good about showing an interest in the things that interest the other people that they might not get a whole lot of attention for. She is immediately what I thought of whenever you started describing that ideal culture. – Jessica

Sue, who had two teammates on her team dating, talked about her initial reservations about being in the locker room: “honestly, I probably am not the only person that was almost like, "I don't know how I feel about this. I'm in the locker room changing. They're together, but would you be looking at me?" We'd run around butt-naked in the locker room. That was a weird- But you didn't think about it, really, but at the same time it was like, whatever.” She also discussed how it took a while for the team to find out about their relationship and how she remembers defending the two women saying “no, you're being crazy. They're just best friends”

to anyone who claimed they were dating. Sue also acknowledged that her coach knew but no one talked about their relationship.

John discussed dating within the team and how it was almost inevitable to happen because relationships naturally form when you spend as much time together as do student-athletes. He also recognized the coaching perspective and the “family” mentality and how not every relationship would end in a happy ending, causing issues within the team setting. Mandy, as a strength coach, dealt with a coach who made a scene in the weight room about two teammates dating. She describes the situation and her perspective below.

Never quite to that extent. We have teams that athletes are dating, and it's either made somebody uncomfortable or a comment was made and now the coach got involved, and it created an issue. Sometimes things were taken out of context, I think. We've got two swimmers that were together and the dive team, even though it's swim and dive, they're separate teams, and a coach heard a diver talking about this couple and took it out of context that this diver was uncomfortable. Then, made it into a huge ordeal, which was really just unfortunate, making that diver uncomfortable when she wasn't and kind of singling her out... Then the team's upset with her. It was just this huge ordeal, so I had talked to them a little about that when that was going on... I talked to the divers about that specifically. The girl that was singled out as being uncomfortable with that relationship when she wasn't, and she was upset about it. The relationship on the swim team I knew was on and off, and I think sometimes it affected the team dynamic. I know that the girls talked about that. Sometimes it affected the team dynamic when those two girls weren't dating or getting along. What happened with the diver, she made a comment about that. She wasn't uncomfortable with the relationship. She didn't care, but the coach took the fact that she was talking about it as a sign that she was not comfortable enough to say something, so then he was very outward and spoke up about how they shouldn't be dating, that it's wrong, that he doesn't want them around the divers because they're distracting and he doesn't want any of that. Then he was very quick to say that he has a cousin or a sibling that's gay, which was a bizarre way of trying to prove that he's not against sexual minorities or other people dating, which is not the norm. I thought that was just the weirdest thing in the world and just so awful... So basically what happened was the dive coach made a comment at practice that day in front of the divers, having overheard that and started to make a big deal about it. Later on that afternoon when swim came to lift, those two swimmers were together. They lift together. They hang out together because they're dating and they're on the same team... ever noticed it. He came in and started making a big deal about it, talking to me very loudly hoping that they would overhear how disapproving he is of it and how they made this diver uncomfortable and, you know, they're touching or the way they interact made her uncomfortable, and he

was speaking on her behalf. He made a big deal about it to me. I was infuriated by it because in the weight room, I've never seen them touch anyone else inappropriately. I just think that's a total bullshit line from someone who knows absolutely nothing about someone who is gay or someone who is bisexual or just I don't know, just so far away removed from that and can't comprehend that just because you're gay or you're bisexual doesn't mean you like everyone. That doesn't mean that you're going to be attracted to the diver. They have a partner for a reason, obviously, so it was just bizarre. He came in and made a big deal about it and said he didn't want the swimmers and divers lifting in the weight room at the same time anymore and blah, blah, blah, which never resulted to that. I was able to talk to the diver, and she was very upset. She's like that's not how I felt. He totally, which he does a lot, will take something that we say and blow it out of proportion and then make a big deal out of it, and put us in a really awkward situation. He's not a very good person... He liked them until he found out about that whole thing and found out that they were dating or they spend time together or they stay at each other's houses and stuff like that. ... After that, he just completely shut them out and treated them differently and had outwardly different viewpoints on them, which I thought was awful. – Mandy

As an assistant coach, Mia provides her stance on intrateam dating if she were ever a head coach:

So I just think that a team can ... I'm just not afraid of anything blowing up, the tension and potential team dynamic things that come up, I think are wanting opportunities. So it's like I'm not gonna ... My rule would be that if you ever have feelings for another teammate and you guys wanna date, that's fine. You just have to make sure that you guys are adults about it, and if things don't go well, that you protect our team chemistry in your decision and you guys are able to handle and handle it like adults, and it doesn't interfere with our team's chemistry. So, yeah. If I were head coach, I would have a very open conversation about there not being a rule against it but that you always make sure that with everything that you do, you're putting the team's chemistry as number one, and that doesn't ever interfere. – Mia

### *Sport specific.*

In line with much of the literature with sexual minority athletes in sport, there are sport-specific differences in perceptions of and attitudes toward individuals who identify as sexual minority. According to Michael, same-sex relationships is much more acceptable within female sports. When asked about intrateam dating, Biggie Smalls responded with “never in my sport. It's not really a thing in our sport [gymnastics].” Roberto discussed working with the softball team and then transitioning into working with men's high profile teams:

Whenever you first hear about softball, I think it has a very ... Everyone's just like "Oh, softball, lesbians." That's literally the first thing people think of... Whenever I would get

asked questions about like "Hey, what are you doing now?" I'd be like "Oh, I'm GA for the softball team." "Oh, no way. Blah, blah, blah." They'd be like "Oh, so how many of them are gay?" That's like their first question. It's like "What does that have to do with any ..." you know what I'm saying? What does that have to do with anything?... Why? What? I mean we have one, I think. Was she? Yeah, she was. It's just like why is that ... They're people. Why do you have to immediately jump to "Oh, are they all lesbian?" Why is that your first instinct to ask? Anyways, I digress with that. With saying that, I think some teams like softball just because it's kind of notion that a lot of softball players are gay then that might be more accepted in the softball world. But I think if you're on the football team then that wouldn't fly at all with any of those ... You know what I'm saying?... I think those guys would immediately judge you and think you were weird and it would be a completely different story whereas with softball or maybe with another female sport, it might not be the same case... Yeah. I just can't picture it going well especially with them being like "Man, he changes with us in the locker room" or- "... Man, that dude's weird. He likes boys." I can just hear them right now saying that's weird.

– Roberto

### *Teammates' perspectives.*

Along with coaches, fellow teammates were extremely influential on the student-athlete experience for those who identify as sexual minority. Within this section, several heterosexual student-athletes describe their perspectives on having a teammate who identifies as sexual minority. D was adamant about the unspoken rule of football players keeping their sexuality to themselves (if not heterosexual) and was the most vocal about his perspective on having a teammate who identified as sexual minority. His words speak for themselves:

I ain't gone lie, I look at all that. You know, it's just like ... I don't know. For example, man, the dude when you tackle him, man, you grabbing his balls, man. And it was just low and behold on camera. And those type of things, really can kinda mess with a man head who don't think like that. Because, I mean, yeah, you can say that you not like that and everything, but then who wanna have that conversation with you? You know what I'm saying? To talk about that. That's uncomfortable for us too. And it's like, if it do happen, maybe by accident, we're still looking at you like that, bro. Because you are like that. It don't mean that we hate you, or nothing like that, but it's like, "Man, I can't see you." You know what I'm saying? I don't know, I just can't see you as like a brother, you know? Like that, man. Because you don't believe in what we believe in. We can't the same conversation with you like we have with dudes regular. You know what I'm saying? You moving like a woman, bro. You know? And I don't feel like that's right. In my opinion, man, I don't feel like it's right, man... If one of my teammates told me that ... First thing I'd do, I wouldn't judge them like, "Bro, get out my face." Or nothing like that. You know, I would just talk to them, and give them my opinion on it. You know what I'm

saying? That's it. That's all I can do is give him my opinion, and just give him an understanding of the boundaries that I have. You know, if one of my friends did that, that would be crazy. But I'm not fixing to just shun you away, and just not hang with you because you are. But you gotta understand that it's a maturity level now. Like, certain things that ... How I move, I can't move the same with you no more like that. Just for uncomfortable as myself. And I love myself more than you, or anybody. –D

What's most interesting about D's perspective is the comparison to his teammate and fellow leader, Michael. Michael, whose mother has been married to two different females, claims that his voice holds weight because he's in a leadership position within the team. He would expect the team to follow his lead:

You got followers and you got leaders...If it was somebody to come out as oh yeah I'm open, what'll happen, no matter how they felt, they know it wouldn't be cool to treat that person a different way...But somebody like me, I feel like my voice hold weight. So you trying to clown this dude out, and they understand that's not cool. I feel like people, my generation is more of like, oh, he gay, all right. I feel like, just don't try me, just understand me and you just friends. You know what I'm saying? And it's okay. You gotta live your life...Yeah, bro we cool. Just know that we just cool friends...Yeah, people would accept it, for sure. I feel like somebody needs to try to be on somebody, ah, no bro you weird. And that'll bring the other thoughts out of people like, yeah, you weird bro you can't be around, you know what I'm saying. I feel like it can go either way – Michael

Sydney discusses why some teammates may be uncomfortable with having a teammate who identified as sexual minority:

Well, I think I was doing a questionnaire back in the summer about the LGBTQ community and there was something, well, what comes to my mind is that why people feel uncomfortable in front of, say lesbian, like why girls feel uncomfortable in front of lesbians is because they think they're going to start flirting with them and they don't want that. That's where it kind of can become a little bit complicated but here's what I think. If say you have a lesbian on the team but she knows that everyone else on the team is straight, why would she go flirt with you, right? Or at least I think she shouldn't try. But then if she does, then yeah, I agree. It's like, oh sorry. I'm not into that. That's where it can become complicated but at the same time I just feel if you, again are being open and just say the truth, then it should be fine. – Sydney

### **Finding 7: “Acceptance”**

Acceptance is defined as the process of being received as adequate or suitable. This theme may be misleading initially, but the readers will find that student-athletes who identify as sexual minority do not feel fully accepted within the athletic department. This theme describes the student-athlete experience in depth for each of the five student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, their perceptions on University athletic department’s inclusion, and overall takeaways for needs as student-athletes.

#### ***Brittany.***

Brittany is a female basketball student-athlete who identifies as gay/lesbian and is in a relationship. She didn’t have much to say and kept her answers concise for the most part. She talked about how her coaches and teammates knew about her girlfriend and how much they loved her. Brittany mainly keeps to herself and only utilizes athletic department resources when absolutely necessary, other than that she is on her own sleeping or hanging out at her apartment. She is unaware of any resources on campus but has not actively sought out that information. Her coaching staff has never addressed teammates dating within the team. When I asked if she felt accepted as herself within the athletic department, she said yes. Brittany also talked (kind of) about religion and how she hadn’t been to church in a while and that her family did not know she was dating a female but if they didn’t know by now, they’d never know. When asked if the athletic department should do anything differently, she claimed “I don’t know what’s being done. I don’t know” and would probably not go to a support group if there was one because her free time away from athletic and class obligations is valuable to her.

*Jessica.*

Jessica is a female swim student-athlete who identifies as heterosexual but is dating a female on her team. Jessica is extremely intelligent, well-versed in policy, and seems to know herself really well. She completed her eligibility in the semester of this interview. On a personal level, Jessica went to great lengths to find peace with her relationship with a female. She talked about the extensive research she conducted when she first had feelings for her same-sex partner: religion, bible, sexuality, roots of words in Hebrew and Greek, social climate when bibles were translated into different languages, etc. She was also aware of the legal discrimination of same-sex partners and initiatives/alliances in place around the country. Though there is a designated captain, Jessica claimed there was a “panel of leaders” consisting of the upperclassmen. The majority of the team was accepting of their within team relationship, though there were a couple that confronted Jessica about their concerns: that if something went wrong, it would involve other people on the team and there was a chance that it could adversely affect the success of the program. Jessica’s response was that they’re were coming up with a hypothesized chain of events that haven’t happened and weren’t going to happen (and didn’t happen while she was competing now that she’s a graduating senior).

When her coaches became aware of her relationship with her teammate, they pulled her (and her alone) into a meeting with all three of the coaches on staff. The meeting was to proactively address the upcoming season and how she and her girlfriend were not to room together on away trips/meets. She said she didn’t feel marginalized as a result of the conversation because of how the coaches discussed treating the relationship as if a male and a female were dating within a team: no rooming together. Because of all the coaching changes during her four years, the team leaders dictated the climate of the program more so than the coaching staff. I was

surprised at the coaching staff's response to the intrateam relationship and honestly surprised that there was only a conversation with one of the student-athletes as opposed to both, either separately or together. I think Jessica has a great perspective, she is someone who has never dated a female before, came from a religious background, and even admitted that she herself has engaged in behaviors that could be considered bigotry against the LGBTQ community in the past. When asked about athletic department inclusion, she discussed how she felt University was progressive for the geographical area but how resources would be beneficial for recruiting:

I feel like [University] is pretty progressive, so I don't feel like anyone would be blown away by that, or at least I hope. I would like to think that they wouldn't. From a recruiting standpoint, it would probably do some good. I know that there are a few basketball players that identify as gay, and I know that there's some softball players that identify as gay, and I know that there's some cross country runners that identify as gay. I don't know about any ... oh, and track men that identify as gay, too. I feel like it might change, it might not. I don't feel like it would be like, "Oh my God" ... I feel like we're pretty progressive despite being in [geographical region]. – Jessica

The interview with Jessica was probably the most intensive conversation about the experience of a student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority but felt that the overall interview was comprehensive and shed light on such a unique perspective.

### *Daniella.*

Daniella is a former softball student-athlete who then served as a graduate assistant for student-athlete development at University. Daniella identifies as a pansexual female and just recently graduated with her masters in higher education. She discussed her role within student-athlete development and how intentional the student-athlete development staff was to utilize inclusive language in workshops and programs. For example, University puts on a women's program to discuss professional dress, resumes, and practicing for interviews. They discussed relationships with coaches, teammates, and significant others and trained the staff members

assisting to use the terms “significant others” or “partners” instead of specifically saying boyfriend. Facilitators who were helping during these programs did not always stick to the neutral terminology the student-athlete development staff had requested. When asked of some specific ways the athletic department addresses inclusion, Daniella responded that “outside of student-athlete development it’s not addressed at all...maybe in sport psychology.” Daniella was aware of resources on campus because her partner had run the LGBTQ support group on campus at one point. She was also on the committee that began developing a transgender policy for the athletic department but said it had not been released or even discussed with the athletic department outside the small group. When asked about whether she perceives the athletic department as inclusive, Daniella responded:

I would say it's probably ... I would lean more towards no. I would say that individuals that work in like Student Development and Academics, yes, I would say that they're moreso inclusive than the entire Athletic Department as a whole. I think, once you get higher and higher up, you get older individuals, specifically older white males that don't really want to change their ways of thinking. – Daniella

***Mandy.***

Mandy is a female strength coach at University who was a former softball student-athlete before transferring to a second institution to complete her eligibility. She identifies as bisexual and is now engaged to a male. After the 1st interview with Mandy, she reached out and said she’d spent hours documenting her experience and wanted to meet a second time. The second interview lasted 90 minutes, totaling over two hours of conversation with Mandy. She is very passionate about her giving back to the student-athlete community and experience and wanted to make sure she’d written everything down she could possibly remember to help me understand her full experience at both institutions and how different they were. Mandy’s experience was incredibly eye-opening as she had two very different experiences at both of her institutions. She started at University and transferred out to another Division I, power 5 conference school. The

coaching staff at University (which is no longer at University) had a huge influence in her experience. A volunteer assistant coach was very religious and would have individual meetings with student-athletes she assumed was a sexual minority. The topic of conversation was always religion and sexuality, inviting the athletes to come to church with her, read bible verses about homosexuality, and Mandy claimed it felt as if she was trying to convert her (Mandy did not and does not consider herself religious). The individual she was dating also told many people about their relationship without Mandy's consent so she felt as though she was isolated, alone, and exposed without even having a say. In high school, Mandy's first relationship was with a girl from a religious family. Her parents found out about their relationship and confronted Mandy and her parents outside a facility with the rest of her team there. Mandy's parents were very accepting and understanding of Mandy and her sexuality but didn't want her to have to experience that humiliation ever again. Mandy's relationship in college shared some similarities as far as having her sexuality exposed without her consent. Her partner was openly gay and was telling her teammates and other student-athletes about their relationship without Mandy's consent. This caused Mandy to shut herself down when it came to building relationships with others. She felt isolated, alone, and like an outcast. Overall, her experience at University was not a positive one. She left after one year in the program and the next institution was much more accepting and open about her dating a female. Mandy's perseverance to tell her story and help change the culture of University is admirable and she truly desires that others in her position do not have similar experiences as she did. She doesn't buy into the culture of strictly performance-based evaluation and expectations and is leaving collegiate athletics in the near future.

As an employee of University, she felt as though her purpose as a strength coach within the athletic department was to serve as a buffer between student-athletes and coaches. The

specific teams that she worked with had some teammates dating each other and she even discussed the experiences she had with the coaches discussing the relationships. She thanked me for conducting this study and emphasized the importance of what I was doing. Mandy discusses navigating her identity no outside resources or visibility or support on campus, within the athletic department, and especially within her team:

When you're trying to figure out who you are, it's really difficult to do that and be comfortable with it. A lot of exploring in the dark, which is not fun. I feel like my experience would have been a lot better if there was more openness through the staff, in general, or just resources that they would at least point us towards. Things that would help us along the way, especially as a college freshman – Mandy

She had religious teammates that were not supportive of the same-sex relationships. Her partner was telling others about their relationship unbeknownst to Mandy. Her year at University was one of the most difficult years of her life. She experienced signs of depression and turmoil and I would consider many of the experiences as traumatic. When asked about the athletic department promoting inclusive values, Mandy responded:

Yeah there's a push to be like that but it's almost an image that they are trying to fulfill rather than...actually, taking ownership of that and doing that. You don't want to be looked at as a university that's not inclusive, so you are going to call yourself inclusive and you say we offer all these things but is there truly a feeling of inclusiveness here? No, which is disappointing....It's one thing to say it, it's another thing to actually...be able to follow through on that kind of stuff. One thing to provide all those resources, but then when I utilize them, am I going to be afraid to utilize them or be utilizing them...like taking that step, like we offer all the stuff but we are also accepting of it as well. – Mandy

***Beyoncé.***

Beyoncé is a cross country and track athlete who identifies as bisexual and is dating one of her former teammates. Both her and her girlfriend transferred from other institutions to come run at University. She has an incredibly supportive family who loves her girlfriend but has come into a little push back from a religious teammate. Going into the conversation, she knew that individual was going to have a conversation with her about religion and her relationship with her

girlfriend but said they came out of it better friends. They sat and listened to what each other had to say, learned the perspective of the other and in the end had a greater appreciation of what the other stood for. Beyoncé felt as though her teammate was genuinely listening to what she had to say. When asked if the coaches knew about her and her girlfriend dating, she responded with but the coaches knew about their relationship but it was never spoken of, that they don't room together. The first time their relationship was acknowledged by a staff member was when there was a mix up with the rooms during a trip, with one room having a king size bed as opposed to two queens. The director of operations, Rachel, called Beyoncé and asked if it was okay if she and girlfriend were comfortable rooming together on the road. Now, the Rachel asks about their relationship all the time. When asked about the athletic department's perceptions on student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, her response was interesting:

I think its individual, based on who you are. They don't necessarily all have this one motto that they go by. You know? I feel like it's never even been talked about. I feel like that's another big thing, it's like, don't ask. Don't bring it up. Cause my coach absolutely knows that me and ... that's my girlfriend, but it's never been addressed. I think it's more of ... for me, from my personal experience, I think it's more an ignorance is their attitude. They just ignore it.” – Beyoncé [sexual minority student-athlete]

She wasn't sure about any resources on campus or within the athletic department but was sure there had to be something. When asked how a promotion of inclusion would be received by the surrounding area, she responded:

“Backlash. I don't know ... with anything socially ... I feel like [University] is falling behind. Okay, last year when [team took a stance on a social issue], it was this huge uproar. And donors are like, you're gonna [take a stance on a social issue], I'm gonna [stop] donating, in it was this huge big mess. That, to me, was the surrounding area not supporting their student athletes. That's kind of scary, cause like shit, what if I were to do something like that because of my sexuality. How would the outside world ... or just the surrounding [geographical area] perceive that? I don't know.” – Beyoncé [sexual minority student-athlete]

She talked about how she wished her experience would have been a little bit different and how her head coach references her girlfriend as her “little friend,” “roommate,” “teammate,” and “training partner” so basically anything but “girlfriend.” She also discussed her opportunity to stay and continue to train with her head coach to go onto the professional level:

I think just in the ... because like I've said before, it's a lot of don't ask, don't bring it up. I see our coach or staff members ask other teammates, how's your boyfriend? Things like that. That sucks, cause it's like, I know you're genuinely ... maybe you are curious, I don't care, but I know you're just not asking me those same question. You're not treating me the same. I think if I was treated differently, I think I would fight to stay here next year. I have all these opportunities to go pro, and all these different places are talking to me. For me, its way more appealing to go to somewhere like Seattle or Portland where these running groups are like, come train with me, than to stay here with my coach and he's like, no I'll train you. That's definitely an option, he wants me, but I'm like, no. I don't want to stay here, just because of ... that's not the only reason, but sure that's a factor. Why would I stay with someone who doesn't even acknowledge a big part of my life is having a girlfriend? – Beyoncé [sexual minority student-athlete]

Finally, when asked if the athletic department was inclusive, her response was “I don't wanna say no, but like no...just due to my experience of not being treated the exact same as my straight peers.”

### ***Mark.***

Mark is a male international student-athlete who identifies as bisexual. He discussed his experience back home in Europe and how his mother left before he turned 5 years old and how his father was a religious man who attended church three times a week but was verbally and physically abusive to he and his biological brother. He had an interesting perspective on the relationship between parents and children in the United States:

Yeah, that isn't a thing over here. So you rely on your parents for a lot of things, which is just how the culture is which is, again, it's completely different to England. So, I feel like children want to make sure that they ... it's accepted in their parents eyes and you want to make your parents proud at the same time. It's just one of those things where individuals would rather live their parent's ideal dream for their children rather than them being what

they want to be. They want to be happy. Why would they want to do ... so it's different. It is different. – Mark [sexual minority student-athlete]

Understanding his perspective on the family dynamics of the United States, he discusses his relationships with his teammates and how he's a few years older than those within his classification. He genuinely believed there was a connection between the parent-child relationship and the way some of his teammates treated sexual minorities. When talking about the track team, he claimed there was acceptance and they won't shame you but there's a lot of negativity involved. Some individuals were not willing to share rooms with a gay teammate and would talk about badly about individuals based on their sexual orientation. Mark went onto describe how some of his teammates were still learning about society and exposure to different cultures. Mark said he'd hate to be a part of the football team "because I just feel like there is too much testosterone in there and there is probably ... I know where most of them come from so they probably have that narrow mind, so I wouldn't say the track team was anywhere near like as bad as so and so, like some other teams I could think of. But, as much as they are accepting they are still afraid of change or difference." The difference between a male and female sexual minority may be completely different and females aren't really talked about badly but the relationship is normalized. He feels as though two lesbians together is more acceptable than two gay guys. He talked about how guys on his team use personal or private information to roast other guys "to make other people laugh. So shaming to bring hilarity...you could say bullying. You could say it was bullying but again its boys and that's what boys do unfortunately." When asked about his experience and if he'd want anything to be different he responded

I mean as a society in the [geographical region], I think the [geographical region] still has a lot of work to do in terms of the whole ... they are not ... they are not the whole Chicago, they are not the whole San Francisco. It is one of those things where there are problems. I've seen like, I think they have Pride here sometimes and they have ... there are people who come in and say oh you're going to hell. Like it is one of these things

where my parents have always told me, if you have nothing nice to say just don't say it. Unfortunately, again, we're in the [geographical region]. I keep pointing out. It's going to take ... I feel like everyone is two steps in front of them. The [geographical region] is just two steps behind. They need to kind of catch up with the rest of society. And I mean it. It takes time for change. But I feel like it's going to take longer here. Like, do I need to change right now? I don't want to force things on people who don't believe in it, but I would like them to be able to see from a perspective of someone else and be able to understand what the other person sees. – Mark [sexual minority student-athlete]

### **Finding 8: Desire**

After inquiring about the resources on campus and within the athletic department, many of the participants discussed their desire for more: resources, policies, inclusive practices, etc. Some also discussed the ideal inclusive behaviors they'd imagine in such a supportive space and the perceived benefits associated with an inclusive athletic department.

#### ***Visibility.***

When I spoke with the LGBTQ support group on University's campus, visibility came up as a desire within the conversation. The LGBTQ support group wanted to know what it would be like to be 35 and out at work and be exposed to a community of grownups living happily and successfully within the working world. She also mentioned some upper level administrators were sexual minorities but were more "veiled in advocacy" and tentative in open settings to delve into more meaningful and in-depth conversations regarding the LGBTQ community on campus. The students on campus lack a front runner ally within administration and legislation to advocate for their needs. Courtney discussed promoting more awareness within University athletic department and the possibility of gaining traction:

And it would be interesting to see how could we kind of get some awareness around language and inclusive culture out there? Whether that's related to LGBTQ identity, or just minority identities, period. I feel like we might be able to get more of foothold to get that off the ground, to get that started. – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Mia also discussed visibility and awareness for the LGBTQ community in general and within the athletic department. She doesn't feel as though the athletic department, even as a staff member, is diverse in sexual orientation:

I just feel like more visibility of people that are openly gay, but then also people that are allies of gay people. I'm just thinking about my brother in general, he's a straight male but ... he's an ally for gay people. So it's like just, you don't have to. I mean, there didn't have to be more gay coaches in the athletic department but people that are open about being open to, accepting, and being an ally for these people. So I just think that more visibility of groups of people, or people in general that are supportive would be huge. And that's what it will look like for me, is just like actual language and conversation and visibility for people that are supportive and can be supportive for kids that need an outlet or someone to talk to... I don't think that there's a culture in this athletic department where being, like sexuality wise, diversity, I just don't think it's an area where people will feel very comfortable being out about it. I don't know of any other gay people in the athletic department. I know one administrator, but other than that, it's non-existent. I just think with statistics, there has to be more out there. But obviously, if I don't know about it ... They're not open enough to talk about it for me to know that they even exist. So I think, total I know two gay people in the athletic department total... Three including myself. Then I just feel like there has to be more... So for me, the fact that I just don't know of anybody else, I think number one, either, let's just say there is no one else. Well, that's a problem. Then thing number two is there are and they're not open about it. I think that people feel more, like I'm open about it with the staff that I work with and it's not even an issue. It's not even anything that I have to give an introduction to issue. It's like I am who I am and it flows freely, as freely as anything else about how a person feels. And so for there not to be other people that are openly gay in our athletic department, I think says a lot about the culture that we have here. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

When asked about sexual orientation diversity within the athletic department, Selena responded “That is a big strong heck no. No. You know what, now that I think of it I may think of one gentleman. He's an associate athletic director in our department. He may be gay and people have mentioned him possibly being gay but I've never seen him with another man. But that's the only person that comes to mind but other than that, no. Nobody here is anything else but heterosexual.” Jessica discussed if she had known about resources on campus or if there were resources within the athletic department, she may have utilized them, asked more questions, and sought out people who were comfortable and qualified to discuss sexual orientation identity:

I would definitely ask them about that. If I saw that, like an accolade or a certification of that nature. I would probably ask them about it. I would definitely be more inclined to go to that person than I would someone else. Just because I would assume that this wasn't the first conversation of that nature that they were having... If there had been a place that I knew could have helped me on campus, I do think I would go to them. It's hard to remember exactly how I was feeling this time a year ago, or actually more than a year ago whenever I was trying to figure out all that stuff, but I do think I would have gone to someone who would have at least known the right kind of thought provoking questions to ask. Someone who would know how to help a person. Not to tell them what they are or what they think they are, but how to help them figure out for themselves who they are. It wasn't a traumatic, painful process or anything, but it took a little bit longer than I would have liked and it was like I would have liked to just get it over with sooner and figure out ... get more of a sense of identity sooner. – Jessica [sexual minority student-athlete]

### ***Education.***

For many of the support staff members, coaches, and student-athletes there was a common desire for education and training. Courtney, trained as a sport psychologist to adhere to the needs of marginalized student-athletes, discusses the importance she places on inclusive language and allowing student-athletes to feel comfortable about being themselves within her office:

Here I don't use intake paperwork, so I sit down with athletes and kind of get to know them. I don't ask specifically how do you identify sexually or with gender, but through the use of using inclusive language, try to invite that, or at least create a safe environment where they feel like they can disclose in the future. And my experience working with athletes in the past is using terms like partner, or not when they say they're dating somebody, "Tell me about that person." Not making those assumptions, I've had people disclose later on like four or five sessions in, once they feel like this is safe and it could stay here, and I'm not going to be judged for that. – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Daniella, as discussed earlier, was involved in short trainings with the academic staff on inclusive language and utilizing terms such as “significant others” and “partners” as opposed to heteronormative terms such as “boyfriends” when speaking with female student-athletes and “girlfriends” when speaking with male student-athletes. She discussed how the staff members would often slip up while facilitating programs or group discussions and the inclusive language

was not seen as a significantly important factor to the other staff members. Daniella recognized the importance of utilizing inclusive language to serve as a marker of safe spaces for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority and suggested inclusive training seminars:

And the relationships that we had when we talked about relationships we would say "significant others" or "partners" specifically to not just say boyfriend. So if a student athlete had a girlfriend, or just a partner, that they wouldn't feel awkward if they hadn't come out yet or anything, to kind of make everyone feel safe... It was definitely something that we thought long and hard about, and I would say in student athlete development we had a very educated group of leaders and employees that were very up to speed on ... kind of just like the changing times and what's expected this day, and what's going on in the world. Whereas, when we would bring in either academic advisors, or other people from the athletic department, they wouldn't always be in the conversations that we'd be having in student athlete development. So when we were talking through these planning meetings we would have to make sure that my mentor and I were very intentional on correcting them, so that when they were helping us facilitate that they would kind of slip up... I think more just ... honestly, it has to start from the top of just having even just inclusive language training seminars to not be as offensive verbally because I feel like you have more control over the words that come out of your mouth than necessarily the automatic reactions that you have. If you become aware of the words that you're using, and if they're offensive or not offensive, that could lead to becoming more aware of any type of body language that you do have and any bias that you have, as well. – Daniella [sexual minority support staff; former student-athlete]

Mia referred to time as a student-athlete as an impressionable and developmental opportunity to educate student-athletes from diverse backgrounds. She believes that prioritizing education of sexual minority populations at University could help promote transferability within the student-athletes' themselves to educate those around them in other aspects of their lives such as friends, families, and future employers:

And then also, I just think from there, I mean, this is one of the most important times in a person's life. It's a big time for growth. I just think that would just create more inclusion posts, just the world would grow. We have this cluster or section of athletes or a group of young kids that we have an opportunity to educate. And so if we start making it a priority to educate these classes as they go through, I think it just ultimately is gonna spread into a bigger thing where the education just spreads from there. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

Beth suggested speakers and groups for not only student-athletes, but staff and coaches to ensure that everyone was on board with normalizing diversity within sexual orientation:

I think education is one of the biggest factors. And I think having opportunities like speakers coming in, student athlete groups, because I know these student athlete groups are all going to say have obviously helped with inclusion there, in all dimensions. I think even for not even just the student athletes, but having staff understand including in inclusion, just not for just the student athlete, but for everybody else. So, if everybody sees inclusion then ... or if the staff is involved with the inclusion, then more likely the student athletes think it's a normal thing – Beth [heterosexual support staff]

Biggie Smalls knows of many other institutions that treat LGBTQ individuals worse than University but suggested education when asked if she'd like to see any resources or programs implemented:

I don't know. I mean, it's kind of hard, since I'm not a part of LGBTQ. I mean, I think it would be good if they had, you know how they have sexual harassment classes, maybe having something for that, LGBTQ, and including everybody, just so ... I think, 'cause I don't wanna say it's not bad, 'cause I know there are places where they are treated poorly because of it, but just being educate d on it more. And I think it needs to be done with race issues, too, not just LGBTQ. – Biggie Smalls [heterosexual student-athlete]

Biggie Smalls, after suggesting education, went on to discuss whether or not student-athletes who identify as sexual minority would want their own day of appreciation within the athletic department but wasn't convinced that it was necessary:

For instance, if the athletic department put on a LGBT day, do you think they want that day? They don't wanna be like, "Oh, it's our day!" Same thing like straight people don't want a straight day. Why does that matter? So I think that's good that we've never, I guess, singled them out to make them feel welcome. They should already be feeling welcome. You don't have to single them out to make them feel welcomed. So we've never done anything like that as a department. We have culture day, and stuff like that. There's just never been anything like that with the LGBTQ community, which I think is good, because it doesn't ... But I don't know. I'm not gay. I don't wanna speak for people that are, 'cause what if they want that day? I don't know, but I think it would make them feel like, "We're not any different than you. Why do we need to have a special day?" sort of thing. So we've just never done ... Nobody's ever said anything never. Nobody's mistreated someone because of it, which I think is really good. So I think we're very welcoming. And we're such a diverse little group, though. I mean, we have people from all over the world. – Biggie Smalls [heterosexual student-athlete]

### *Safe space.*

Creating a safe space in which all student-athletes can authentically be themselves is important to many of the support staff interviewed. As for what an inclusive environment may look like, Phil described “friendly...openness, accepting,” as Mallory discussed an increased sense of belonging, sense of community, decreased feelings of isolation, safety, and opportunities to form meaningful relationships; and Beth mentioned “making students feel comfortable so they can become vulnerable.” Roberto talked about a deeper understanding of individuals who are different from yourself and Daniella hammered down acceptance. Jessica chimed in on her perspective of an inclusive environment, which included an active interest in others around you:

Lack of judgment, curiosity whenever someone mentions the things that make them unique, curiosity from the people listening, and interest ... curiosity, interest, same thing. An active interest, like if someone has a hobby or something that someone else on the team has never heard of or has never been exposed to, not only do they show an interest and not write it off as weird, but they also make an effort to learn more about it – Jessica

In discussing the benefits of an inclusive environment in general, Biggie Smalls responded:

But just more where you actually are together, coming together, you're learning about different sides and other people's experiences, and vice versa. I think something like that would be kind of cool and probably beneficial. But I don't know if it would upset some people, 'cause I'm sure it will. I mean, everybody gets upset about things that should or shouldn't upset them. But I think something like that could be beneficial to everybody, 'cause, I mean, it's not just the LGBTQ community that needs to know what the LGBTQs are going through. I mean, everybody needs to know. That way people can kind of sympathize. And same with straight people, too, is not always assuming that all straight people feel a negative way about it, or vice versa, and same with race issues and just kind of ...It just needs to be talked about more. People just need to talk about it more, 'cause nobody talks about it. Nobody knows, truly, unless you're good friends with that person, on whoever, whether its race or LGBTQ, you just don't really, truly know what they've gone through or what they've dealt with. So I think things like that would be pretty cool, but it's also like, you don't wanna offend anybody by being like, "Okay, we're all gonna

learn about the gays now." You know what I mean? (laughs) – Biggie Smalls  
[heterosexual student-athlete]

Mia believes that having a support group for LGBTQ student-athletes would be well-attended because individuals, both heterosexual and sexual minority, are looking for a community and to be a part of something bigger than themselves. She truly believes there is a large desire to have such a group within University's athletic department:

Yeah, I do. With the demographic of this part of the country, and just the city in general, I just don't think there's a lot of outlets for gay people in general. So I think that it would be really well attended because I don't think there's any competition, and I think everyone wants a community. So, yeah. I think it would be extremely well attended. I think it would take some time, because again, for it to grow ... I think it would be ... There's a lot of people that wanna be a part of it, but I'm not sure that right now with our culture, like it would take a little bit of time for people to feel comfortable to be a part of it. So I think that we're starting literally from the bottom. And so the desire for a group like that, would be through the roof. But then just actual participation, I think it would take a while, just because I think it's still in the shadows at this point. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

When asked about her relationship with her student-athletes as an academic advisor, Selena reflected on some of the conversations her male student-athletes have in her office, about sexual relationships with females. She would also like for individuals who identify as sexual minority to have the same luxury of talking about their romantic relationships:

I don't know, I want people to feel included. Like, the guys coming in talking to me about like "oh I slept with this girl this weekend, I might text her again" or like ... I mean why can't we have those same conversations and be open with them whether they're gay or lesbian, I don't know. I would want it to be an open space for them too. 'Cause who are we to judge other people on their preference? That's like saying everyone should like the color blue and if you don't you're weird and you can't talk about it if you don't like the color blue. So, what? Like ... yeah. I don't know ... I'm not, that's not ... I have a very sucky answer for that. – Selena [heterosexual support staff]

During the interview with Courtney, she was incredibly intentional about her responses to ensure she was utilizing inclusive language, answering the interview questions as thoroughly as possible, and providing honest and candid feedback. When asked about some of the benefits of

inclusive environments, Courtney discusses a couple things: the importance social support, of authenticity and being yourself, and the benefits of existing within a safe space:

Yeah. I think for anybody, that's something that we're always looking for psychological well-being, is do you have a few people you can talk to and be who you are with? And for more athletes than not, they would say "No, people don't really know me." I even have them like put a percentage to it at times. Like "How much am I getting to see of you in this moment in our interactions, and what about Suzie, what about your parents?" And it's amazing how much they feel like they need to keep hidden. And so that's something I'd want to talk to them about and "Do you have a few people who you feel like you can let in that you trust kind of with you who you are, where you let yourself be seen? And how do we keep you linked in with that group, where that's where your support and your connection comes from?" Because that can really help to mitigate some of the stress, and depression, anxiety, whatever can come along with that. And especially for some of our sexual minority, especially transgender clients, mitigating that suicide risk to be frank. Having some social support can really be a protective factor in coping with some of that.  
– Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Courtney goes on to describe her role as an ally and having to work through choosing to serve as a token representative of LGBTQ support. So as allies, it's also important to provide a safe space for someone who loves and supports a marginalized and discriminated population:

I feel like the biggest thing I talk to with people about all the time is being seen and heard for who you are. I think there's a big cost in not feeling like I can be myself and represent myself authentically and genuinely. So I think that's where a lot of the reward is. I think getting to be an advocate and someone who blazes the trail can be rewarding for some. Helping to de-stigmatize something, there's a lot of meaning based in that kind of work...I went through that in my own personal experience. Signing something as an ally, it's like if I sign this are people going to think that I identify as gay? And then I have to sit with like wait, why is that uncomfortable to me? So having to work through some of that, I can identify with a lot of the students who are first trying to figure out how will people view me if I come out as being visibly in support of this, if they want to be an ally...I do think having more visibility about how a space is safe, even if it's not department wide, but more people who identify as allies could mark that in some way, would be really helpful. Then an athlete doesn't have to sit with how do I ask these strategic questions without outing myself to feel this out...I think that's really challenging because it's like do I want to be the token representative of this? That holds a lot of weight, and this is something we struggle with too. We have clients here that really benefit from psychological treatment, whether it's for depression, anxiety, whatever. But thinking about if I ask you to give a testimony about this, what pressure does that put on you, what

attention does that draw, what are people going to assume about you in the wake of that?  
So really wanting to help somebody have informed consent around what would be  
entailed in that process and representing in that way. – Courtney [heterosexual support  
staff]

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

The purpose of this single case study is to understand and describe inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study is guided by three research questions: (1) How is inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA DI athletic department conceptualized? (2) How does an NCAA DI athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority? (3) How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department?

This chapter includes description, interpretation, and synthesis of major findings from the data collected. Over fifty documents were collected from campus, athletic department, and teams. National documents such as NCAA Inclusion Best Practices (NCAA, 2010), Champions of Respect (Griffinn & Taylor, 2010) and Athlete Ally's Athletic Equality Index (2017) were also included in the document review. As previously stated, a research team of four graduate students (three masters level and one doctoral level) and myself separately coded documents, reflexive journals, and transcripts of twenty eight interviews. I, along with the doctoral graduate student coded all twenty eight interviews while the masters graduate students coded 6-7 each. After the initial meeting, we met on four separate occasions to discuss the meaning units, subthemes, and final themes emerging from the data. Three meetings consisted of discussing meaning units from each of the documents and similarities between participant interviews. One meeting was designated to merging those meaning units into subthemes through condensing, compiling, and grouping similar meaning units. The research team engaged in two and a half hours of in-depth discussion regarding the meaning, interpretation, and overall importance of the findings in relation to University athletic department, athletic department personnel, allies,

heterosexual student-athletes and those student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Overall, from the four researchers' analysis of the data derived 300+ meaning units, merged into forty-eight subthemes and further condensed into the final eight themes. For this case study exploring inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at an NCAA Division I institution, the following themes emerged: conceptualizing inclusion, representation, silence, accessibility, religion and sexuality, team culture, "acceptance," and desire.

The research meetings consisted of describing the participant interviews, what stood out to each individual while analyzing the transcripts, and how the interpretations related to other participants' experiences. These conversations often consisted of dialogue back and forth between several researchers about the implications of the experiences, what their own biases were, how they either agreed, disagreed, or were not sure where they stood on a particular interpretation of the data. Each researcher separately coded data on Quirkos and those meaning units were merged into one blanket/father/uniform project. The meeting where the research team condensed the 300+ meaning units into subthemes consisted of: posting large post-it sheets around a conference room, each individual researcher documenting their perceived most common, most influential, and most important themes separately. We then read over each one of the subthemes post-it sheets, compared interpretations, discussed which subthemes shared similar characteristics and could be merged, and what each interpretation meant for our analysis of the data.

From the documents, focus group, semi structured interviews, and reflexive journals came eight findings which answered the three proposed research questions. From those eight findings came three analytic categories. The first analytic category aligns with the first research question (conceptualization of inclusion): "Acknowledging individual conceptualization of

inclusion, inclusive policies, practices, and behaviors.” Participants found a gap between the diversity and inclusion the athletic department promotes and the reality of the student-athlete experience. The second analytic category coincides with findings two (representation), four (silence), and six (accessibility): “Recognizing the gap between University athletic department’s emphasized values and actual practices and behaviors.”

The perceived disconnect between the athletic department’s promotion of diversity and inclusion and the actuality of the experiences of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority led participants to discuss the need for more effort, support, and resources geared toward this particular population. The final analytic category relates to findings three (religion and sexuality), five (team culture), and (“acceptance”), and eight (desire): “Understanding experiences of and leveraging inclusive support for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority.”

**Analytic Category 1: Acknowledging individual conceptualization of inclusion, inclusive policies, practices, and behaviors.**

The first research question sought to determine how well participants understood the definition of inclusion and what policies, practices, and behaviors were considered inclusive. Participants provided their own personal definitions of inclusion which included statements such as treating people normally, “including individuals...no matter what they are or what they do.”

Brittany refers to inclusion as acting the same and claims that her coaches and teammates do not act any differently around her and her girlfriend acting the same. Brittany, within the team setting felt accepted and had close relationships with her teammates. As Hubbard (2004) found

two aspects of belonging important within the experience of inclusion, Brittany inadvertently discussed social connection and social acceptance.

Biggie Smalls believes that not knowing about certain identities of individuals will help ensure that there will be no discrimination within an organization. D believes individuals who are not physically capable of doing things should have special needs but not sexual minorities because it is their own personal choice. Michael believes inclusion is bringing people in which touches on Pelled, Ledford, and Mohrman's (1999) definition of inclusion in which individuals are treated as insiders (Shore et al., 2011). John desires for others to put aside all differences and giving individuals the best chance to get along or be cordial with each other and engaging in mutual respectful behaviors. Though not completely encompassing some current research definitions of inclusion, John does touch on the respect aspect of the experience of inclusion (Ferdman, 2010; Ferdman, 2014; Ferdman & Davidson, 2002b; Miller & Katz, 2007; Pless & Maak, 2004). Jimmy believes inclusion is "basically treating everyone the same and giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of anything...accepting people for who they are...you should be judged on the person who you are." Jimmy's definition coincides with attempting to understand diverse perspectives and emphasizing the importance of the integrity and work of the individual as opposed to categorical representations such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. consistent with several recent inclusion literature (Ferdman, 2014; Ferdman et al., 2009; Pless & Maak, 2004).

The most comprehensive individual definition of inclusion came from Courtney, a sport psychologist who has worked within several athletic departments and psychological services around the nation:

Inclusion is communicating and expressing either yourself...or your department in a way that doesn't just communicate tolerance of something, but acceptance. I think silence, or not talking about something, is a very big indicator that it's not an inclusive or accepting environment. I think it needs to be proactively addressed. – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Courtney touches on more in depth aspects of the definitions of inclusion listed within the literature review. Such as the importance of acceptance and not just tolerance. Miller and Katz (1995) define inclusion on the individual level as “inclusiveness encourages individuals of all identity groups to contribute all their talents, skills, and energies to the organization, not merely those that could be tolerated or accepted within a narrow range or monocultural style and expectations” (p. 278). While this study merely focused on sexual orientation diversity in terms of student-athlete experience, the monocultural style and expectations could refer to the heteronormative culture of the athletic department and the stereotyped expectations of male and female student-athletes to adhere.

Pelled, Ledford, Mohrman (1999) touched three key aspects of inclusion on the individual level: decision making influence, access to information, and job security. For student-athletes, job security may refer to maintaining scholarship status. Sue, a heterosexual student-athlete with same-sex teammates dating, discussed her concern for what would happen to them if their relationship became public and was unsure of how the coaches and administration would handle the relationship. There was a concern about the consequences of dating within the team and same-sex relationship. Additionally, Mandy, a bisexual student-athlete turned coach, discussed her fear of losing her scholarship (job security) once her same-sex and intrateam relationship was exposed to the team and coaching staff.

On the group level, or in this case can be applied to athletic department or team, literature emphasizes the importance embracing diverse perspectives: “inclusive groups encourage

disagreement because they realize it leads to more effective solutions and more –successful adaptations to a changing environment. Instead of pressuring members to leave their individual and cultural differences outside, inclusive groups ask everyone to contribute to the full extent of their belonging” (Miller, 1994, p. 39). According to Shore et al., 2011, members are “treated as...insider[s] and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group” (p. 1266). Though participants did not quite touch as in depth as the research definitions of inclusion, they were only asked the overarching question of how they defined inclusion. When asked about ideal inclusive practices and behaviors within an organization, Jessica responded with “make an effort to learn more about...and showing interest in the things that interest other people.” Mia, a sexual minority coach responded with the desire for more visibility, allies, support, and acknowledgement that sexuality exists for those of non-heterosexual orientations. Holvino, Ferman, and Merrill-Sands (2004) describe inclusion as the organizational level:

Inclusion in multicultural organizations means that there is equality, justice, and full participation at both the group and individual levels, so that members of different groups not only have equal access to opportunities, decision making, and positions of power, but they are actively sought out because of their differences. In a multicultural, inclusive organization, differences of all types become integrated into the fabric of the business, such that they become a necessary part of doing its everyday work. p. 248

As stated within the findings section answering the second research question regarding how University athletic department addresses inclusion, readers will remember the perspectives participants had on the lack of resources available for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority and the lack of visibility within the athletic department employees as far as sexual orientation diversity.

## **Analytic Category 2: Recognizing the gap between University athletic department's emphasized values and actual practices and behaviors**

This particular analytic category corresponds with the second research question regarding how University athletic department addresses inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Overall, from the documents, focus group, interviews, and reflexive journals, participants felt that the athletic department did not overtly address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority in an overt way.

### **Representation.**

The athletic department did promote the importance of diversity and inclusion of employees and student-athletes alike throughout documents particularly within the student-athlete handbook. Specifically within the student-athlete handbook, student-athletes are bound with the responsibility of representing the university, athletic department, team, themselves and their families in a respectable and positive manner.

### **Silence.**

As for the finding of silence, the greater campus itself and athletic department failed to acknowledge sexual orientation diversity as a whole on several different levels. Cultural norms and institutionalized practices play into the sexual prejudice of sexual minorities both regular students and student-athletes. Sexual minorities are often held of less respect and value than other minority groups (Gill et al., 2006; Herek, 2009), and often lacks dialogue or acknowledgement of sexuality (Bennett, 2015). Upon surveying student-athletes from Division I Football Championship Subdivision, Greim (2016) found that those who perceived main campus as accepting environments for LGBT individuals were more likely to perceive the athletic

department as accepting. Participants discussed University's main campus as a "don't ask, don't tell" with Mallory powerfully stating "campus is an atmosphere of don't ask, don't tell...they may not kill you anymore but don't be open or tell anyone." This particular finding referring to the lack of acknowledgement of sexuality diversity within the athletic department setting is congruent with the Athletic Equality Index's assessment of Power 5 institutions inclusion of LGBT athletes within athletic spaces. University reported scores of zero in more than 60% of the criteria and the athletic department does not offer resources such as: campus-wide nondiscrimination policies, support groups for student-athletes, visible/out coaches or allies, a culture of collaboration, a transgender statement or guideline, regular education and/or training for coaches and staff, a fan code of conduct, and inclusive statements (Athlete Ally, 2017). Though the criteria hit on overt resources and practices, this study was particularly to explore the climate of University athletic department in addition to the AEI's assessment of those eight categories.

Institutionalized practices within University athletic department such as the promotion of heterosexuality within sport (Melton, 2013; Plymire & Forman, 2000) and the geographical area have played a factor into the experience of the student-athlete. When asked what the reaction to an LGBTQ inclusion initiative promoted by the athletic department, participants responded with backlash or push back from the upper administration in the athletic department as well as from donors, sponsors, and fans around the geographical area. Not only did student-athletes who identify as sexual minority recognize the unwillingness of the athletic department to provide access to resources let alone promote inclusion of LGBTQ student-athletes, their heterosexual counterparts did as well.

According to Melton (2013)'s chapter on the antecedents of the lesbian stigma in sport, organizational factors such as organizational culture and leadership play a significant role in the experiences of those involved within an organization or team. According to several researchers exploring diversity and inclusion within sport organizations, lack of value placed on diversity results in the organization revolving around the preferences of those holding leadership positions (Cunningham, 2015; DeSensi, 1995; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999). Daniella claimed that the higher ups within University athletic department are older white males unwilling to change their views of thinking or the culture itself. This leads to a lack of comfort in discussing all aspects of identity within the department (Melton, 2013), negative effect on overall experience (Fink et al., 2012), and an expectation to present oneself heteronormatively (Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

### **Accessibility.**

According to the finding accessibility, the athletic department referred to sexual orientation within the non-discrimination policy but failed to mention again. The athletic department spaces such as the academic success center, nutrition, several coaches' offices, fields, track, courts, etc. did not display any visible signs or markers of inclusion of sexual minorities. There were, however, religious markers within athletic department offices such as support staff and coaches. There are also support groups for international, first generation, and female student-athletes among other programs offered. According to the NCAA's inclusion of LGBTQ student-athletes and staff program guide, the NCAA deems the athletic departments responsible to provide and promote inclusive environments:

Athletics departments have a responsibility to ensure that all student-athletes have an opportunity to participate in a safe, inclusive and respectful climate where they are valued for their contributions as team members and for their individual commitment and

character, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. As an integral component of higher education, intercollegiate athletics departments are responsible for upholding existing institutional nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies, as well as enforcing laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. – Inclusion of LGBTQ SA Staff in NCAA Programs

Participants recognized the lack of support from the athletic department as well within other studies (Bennett, 2015; Shaw, 2013). Barber and Krane (2005) referred to sports organizations not discussing sexuality as the “elephant in the locker room” and participants in several studies organically offered recommendations of support (i.e. Barber & Krane, 2007; Bennett, 2015; Corbett, 2006; Cunningham, 2012a, 2012b; Kauer, 2009; Krane, 1997; Shaw, 2013).

### **Analytic Category 3: Understanding experiences of and leveraging inclusive support.**

Analytic category 3 encompasses the student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority experience, including religious and team influences as well as the desire the participants had for more resources and support for this population. The student-athlete experience is subject to influence from peers, coaches, teammates, past exposure, and individual factors.

#### **Religion and sexuality.**

Those teammates who identify as religious and vocalize their religious beliefs and condemnation of homosexuality influence student-athletes who identify as sexual minority who may experience guilt or shame as a result (Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Religion was one of the most surprising findings because religion was not mentioned in the interview protocol or demographic questionnaire. According to Halkitis et al. (2009), “religion often has been used to legitimize the ostracism of LGBT individuals” (p. 258). Sexual minorities discussed their struggles with their own sexuality as well as navigating relationships with religious individuals.

Heterosexual individuals within this study discussed their struggle with accepting same-sex relationships as “right” or “legitimate.” Religion, sexuality, and sport is well documented throughout the last decade in research. Several recent studies have examined the student-athlete experience within athletic departments, both within non and religiously affiliated institutions. Bennett’s (2015) participants discussed how anti-religious or agnostic individuals were more accepting of their sexuality and how exposure to an individual within the community helped garner acceptance. One participant, Jessica, discussed being in the Bible belt and how she was “judged for not being religious more than anything” but that her team placed a higher emphasis on talent than her sexuality and was voted team captain based on her performance.

Also consistent with the findings from this case study, Cunningham (2015) explored creating and sustaining inclusive athletic departments for a different population of LGBT employees and coaches. Cunningham found there was backlash from religious external stakeholders who saw homosexuality as a sin. There is a positive correlation between religious fundamentalism and sexual prejudice (Cunningham & Melton, 2013) so the present results are not surprising in terms of past literature. Barbour (2014) found that even participants who identified as sexual minority or engaged in such acts inconsistent with heterosexuality saw homosexuality as a sin, but had significant influence from family members and their backgrounds growing up. Grandparents of participants in Barbour’s (2014) study worried about the personal value of participants within the study, participants self-identified as a “gay in recovery” and that homosexuality was not what God planned. One father, a pastor, prevented his daughter from hanging out with other females in an attempt to prevent any same-sex romantic relationships. Barbour’s (2014) study took place within a religiously affiliated university which also did not provide support for LGBT students. Some participants claimed they did not have

negative experiences but went onto describe that people could not make accurate assumptions on their sexual orientation based on the way they dressed.

Coaches and their religious preferences were also a big indicator of student-athlete experience. Mandy discussed the differences between her coaching staff and University and her other coaching staff at the second institution she competed. Though not the primary factor of her more positive experience at the second institution, her coaches' approach to religious beliefs was a strong influence. At University, she felt as though her coach was attempting to convert her and she didn't feel comfortable with who she was with what she referred to as "a religious cult" in some ways. Her second coaching staff also identified as religious but approached conversations about her sexuality with inclusive language such as her coach saying "you are a great person...you will find whoever you were meant to be with" as opposed to University coaches claiming "you will find the man you're meant to be with." Adams and Anderson (2012) also found that some participants turned away from religion based on the experiences they had with religious individuals. Several recent studies have found that religious individuals are more likely to engage in sexual prejudicial behaviors, intentional or not (Bennett, 2015; Bush, Anderson, & Carr, 2012; Herek, 2009; Melton, 2013; Satore & Cunningham, 2010).

### **Team culture.**

Culture of an organization takes time to build (Schein, 1990). Though diversity was promoted outright at University in terms of gender and race, sexual orientation was not discussed. Coaches and teammates, regardless of sexual orientation seemed to revert to heteronormative expectations and preferences (Desensi, 1995; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999), not outwardly discussing sexual orientations other than heterosexual. Coaches and teammates are known to have an incredible influence on the student-athlete

experience (American Football Coaches Association, 2016; Barbour, 2014; Bennett, 2015; Soloman, 2016). Teammates and peers of student-athletes have great influence on the development of attitudes and beliefs of gender norms and sexuality (Kandel & Andrews, 2009). Coaches' attitudes tremendously influence the team's response to other student-athletes (Anderson & Bullingham, 2013). Beyoncé's coach referred to her known girlfriend as "special friend" and "roommate" while referring to known opposite sex partners as "boyfriend" or "girlfriend." Anderson (2011) investigated gay male athletes coming out in the early 2000's compared to 2010. The 2010 cohort experienced less homophobia and overall more positive experiences than the 2000's cohort. Anderson (2011) pointed out that these individuals interviewed were mostly "exceptional athletes among their peers and it appeared that the ability to come out was dependent on maintaining high sporting, and therefore high masculine, capital" (p. 251). About half the participants also reported competing within a don't ask, don't tell environment, similar to the current study's participants' descriptions of University campus and athletic department. Similar with both study's participants, there was push back from athletic directors or more powerful individuals within the athletic department, main campus, or surrounding area.

LGBTQ individuals often observe their environment prior to disclosing sexual orientation. Some participants talked about the importance of trusting those whom they decided to disclose. Mark touches on how only a few of his male and female teammates know he is bisexual. This could be attributed to the scanning of his environment for several variables: team climate, social support, coaches' attitudes toward sexual minorities, and many more factors that vary on an individual basis (Anderson, 2005b; Anderson, 2011). Anderson also discusses the shift in team culture and acceptance of sexual minorities within men's teams claiming "they no

longer use overt homophobia as a weapon of inter-masculine stratification, even if some elements of heterosexism and covert mechanisms of homophobia prevail” (2011, p. 266). Mark, being the lone male student-athlete in this study who identified as sexual minority, is well dressed, European, clean-cut and is an extremely competitive member of the track and field team at University. Mark discussed teammates being immature and talking negatively about men romantically engaged with other men. He did not indicate signs of physical risk but did not feel comfortable with teammates knowing about his sexuality because of the things that were previously said about others. So though overt homophobia may not be a factor within this study, covert or underlying heteronormative assumptions continue to drive the actions of teammates, coaches, support staff, and administration.

Roper and Halloran (2007) found those who have had contact with gay and lesbian individuals reported more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities in general. Shang, Liao, and Gill (2012) found past contact experiences, positive or negative, predict attitudes toward sexual minorities athletes. As mentioned within the results section, D had an extremely negative experience with a gay teammates and that has shaped his following experiences with gay males specifically. Sue, Biggie Smalls, Sydney, and Flo all talked about how they knew individuals who identified as sexual minority who they considered close. These student-athletes talked about those individuals with whom they were close’s quality of character as the most important aspect of their identity, regardless of religious belief.

Heterosexual teammates on both male and female teams discussed their perspective of having an out teammate. On males teams particularly, more athletes beginning to support of playing alongside a sexual minority teammate (Messner & Sabo, 1990) and there has been a shift in acceptance of certain behaviors such as displaying emotions and hugging (Adams, 2011;

Anderson, 2009). Even discussed within the literature review, the shift of the use of homophobic language and the perception of LGBTQ individuals, there are still some student-athletes who remain reluctant about sharing a playing field or a locker room with a sexual minority athlete.

For instance, D responding to how he would feel if someone on his team came out:

When you tackle him...you grabbing his balls...and it was just low and behold on camera. And those types of things really can mess with a man's head who don't think like that. Because, I mean, yeah, you can say that you not like that and everything, but then who wanna [sic] have a conversation with you? To talk about that? That's uncomfortable for us, too. And it's like, if it do [sic] happen, maybe by accident, we're still looking at you like that, bro. because you are like that. It don't mean that we hate you, or nothing like that, but it's like, "man, I can't see you." You know what I'm saying? I don't know, I just can't see you as like a brother, you know? Because you don't believe in what we believe in. We can't have the same conversation with you like we have with dudes who are regular...you move like a woman, bro. You know? And I don't feel like that's right.

Interestingly enough Michael and D are both football student-athletes, upperclassmen, and hold leadership positions on the defensive side of the ball. Michael's response was that as a leader, he would make sure everyone on the team knew that it wouldn't be acceptable to treat anyone differently if they came out.

Sue had two teammates who were dating within the cross country and track team. She claims "I probably am not the only person that was almost like, I don't know how to feel about this. I'm in the locker room changing. They're together, but would you be looking at me? We'd run around butt naked in the locker room...but you didn't think about it [until teammates starting dating]." Biggie smalls claimed "that's not really a thing in gymnastics" when asked about the possibility of having two teammates dating.

### **"Acceptance".**

This particular study's participants varied in the responses to the experience of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. Many responded with the athletic department being

“welcoming” and “accepting” but proceeded to discuss the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture and the avoidance from the athletic department toward sexual orientation diversity. As disclosed in the individual descriptions of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, these individuals did not experience inclusion by definition from past research or participants.

Greim (2016) utilized a modified Liddle et al.’s (2004) instrument and explored individual perceptions of the climate for LGBT student-athletes within their athletic departments. The combination of lived experiences and perceptions of climate factor into psychological well-being of these student-athletes and ultimately the experience of social integration into their environment (Greim, 2016; Woodford & Kulick, 2015). Greim found that there were no significant differences between the LGBT and heterosexual student-athletes’ perceptions of climate. Also surprising to Greim, there were no significant differences between more traditionally masculine sports such as football and basketball and those of less physicality such as tennis and swimming. Greim did not survey student-athletes within the Football Bowl Subdivision, the highest level of football competition at the collegiate level in the United States. University athletic department was within the Power 5 conferences and competed for championships within both men’s and women’s competition.

Greim (2016) found a significant relationship between exposure to a coach or teammate who identifies as LGBT and the individual perception of climate within the athletic department. Those who were unaware of a sexual minority within their team reported more accepting climates than those who knew of teammates or coaches who were out. Consistent with past research, exposure to LGBT community impacted the perception of climate and attitudes toward the sexual minority community. Similar to past research, past contact experiences with LGBT individuals predicted attitudes toward sexual minorities, both positive and negative (Bennett,

2015; Shang & Gill, 2012). Hekma (1998) discussed the segmentation of one's identity and how it contributes to the culture of silence of sexual minorities within heteronormative cultures.

### **Heteronormativity and Mental Health**

Shift in surrounding culture of attitudes toward sexual minorities but sport is behind the curve (Bennett, 2015). Within the athletic departments Bennett's participants competed for, there was a desire to spark change. There is an argument that it will take longer to shift the culture to inclusive rather than tolerant but may take longer within male sports (Gill et al., 2006). Sports continue to be identified as heteronormative (Anderson, 2002; Southall et al., 2009), and many participants within several studies still adhere to heteronormative actions, behaviors, and thoughts (Bennett, 2015). Coaches and administrators did not allow same-sex partners to team or athletic department functions but allowed opposite-sex partners (Bennett, 2015; Turk & Stokowski, 2016). Athletic departments within a couple studies failed to acknowledge sexual minority relationships and many student-athletes who identify as sexual minority scope out their social environment before coming out. This creates a secretive or underground mentality for these particular student-athletes to stay closeted to avoid resistance from teammates or coaches, isolation, or even harassment.

When discussing his experience working with the softball team at University, Roberto quickly mentioned the surrounding area's religious beliefs as a whole and how appallingly unwilling some individuals were to have a conversation about sexuality. He claims "I just feel like it's so highlighted in that it's like this big dark secret. It's like maybe if we were more accepting then more people would want to come and talk about it [referring to the intersection of religion and sexuality]." Mandy transferred from University to another institution and then returned to University for her graduate degree because she loved the terrain of the area so much.

In discussing her some of the differences between University and the second institution she competed for, she claimed:

We [Mandy and her then girlfriend] were very careful not to leave because we were afraid that somebody would see us out, and say something; it was sad. Unfortunately, with my experiences at [University], it kind of shaped me to react that way coming over here, and feeling like I had to like cover myself the whole time. My whole first semester, I felt like that, and it turned out that my team was full of girls from California in the Mid-West, who didn't have very strong religious backgrounds, unlike my experiences [at University]. In fact, a lot of them were atheists, a lot of them were open minded; it was a completely different experience when I got over there... So much secrecy to trying to be yourself, why? I don't understand that. Now I do. I get it looking back, and I hope that other people don't feel like they have to do that, because that's really disappointing when you can't just be open. I feel like at least now, it's a little bit better, like even like coming out to my sisters was really tough at the time. I just feel like it's more talked about now, which makes it a little bit easier – Mandy

Participants in this study did not report instances of physical harassment and acknowledged that their experiences could have been much worse within [geographical region] but still wished their experiences had been differently in regards to their sexual orientation. Brittany, Mandy, Daniella, Jessica, Beyoncé, and Mark all wished they had an opportunity for true authenticity within the team and athletic department setting but acknowledged how much worse it could have been. Even though they did not feel physically unsafe, for the most part, there were still difficult conversations with teammates and coaches in which they did not feel fully understood. For the athletic department as a whole, there were no signs of desire to support these student-athletes, even if they were not asked to take social media posts with same-sex partners down.

When asking the participants about the importance of an inclusive environment, mental health was a main point of emphasis. Ferdman and colleagues discussed the elements of the experience of inclusion: safety, value, authenticity, engagement, involvement, influence, respect, and recognition (Ferdman, Barerra, et al., 2009; Hirshberg & Ferdman, 2011). Within the focus

group and interviews emerged the importance of mental health and the effects of feeling excluded or not fully acknowledged, valued, and embraced. Several participants discussed the significance of existing within an inclusive environment and the impacts it may have on an individual or specifically had on themselves. As Michael claimed, “it’s human nature to want to feel wanted. It’s human nature to want to be around people. It’s just good for your health.”

Mallory, a licensed counselor and staff member responsible for the LGBTQ support group on campus, discussed some aspects of mental health sexual minority individuals often deal with such as anxiety and depression. In environments that aren’t overtly inclusive, there is a heightened fearfulness of safety of environment and questions raised such as “is campus homophobic?” or “I’m gay, will they hurt me?” She discussed the importance of acceptance and the need to feel as though one belongs and is not pushed to the outside. Obadiah, a professor on campus who worked closely with Mallory to create a mentor program on campus pairing out campus faculty with students who expressed interest in the program. When asked about the impact of the program, he responded with an explanation of a young man in a fraternity:

The student came in and met and he was in the closet. He was a junior. He was in a frat[ernity] and he talked about how it was just kind of eating away at his soul were kind of his words. He talked about he wanted to come out to his family, but he was afraid to and he was moving out of the frat house because it was just this constant homophobia and this constant kind of play, but kind of just wearing him down. We talked for an hour and as far as I know he's out. His family was cool with it. There were no issues. – Obadiah

Obadiah also created a social event for LGBTQ+ and allied faculty and staff to come together once a month mirrored/designed based on a similar program at Brown University.

Obadiah also discusses the risks associated with the LGBTQ community and how important it is to have perceived community or social support. Though he is hopeful, he is unsure of how effective the mentor program is through its inaugural year:

If you look at the CDC statistics on LGBTQ, it's, I think, half of the homeless kids in America are LGBTQ for example. Higher suicide rates, higher drug rates, higher relationship violence rates, so I think in a lot of ways we're trying to head off some of that stuff, and I'm hoping that maybe by normalizing it, maybe by providing some kind of community they're feeling more included in society or in the campus so hopefully, those things are less of a problem, but I have no way of knowing if we're effective or not. – Obadiah [sexual minority campus personnel]

Mia, an assistant coach for the women's softball team discussed how important mental health is to her and how there needs to be education put in place to create safer spaces for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority:

I mean, we're talking a whole lot about mental health in athletes, and I think that the sexuality piece of it is a gigantic portion of sexuality, not just for gay kids, for straight kids too. I think that there are obviously more outlets and conversations happening when it comes to male-female relationships. But I think literally, in general, I think it would just create, kids not feeling alone. I think there have been a lot of suicides and bad things that have happened to athletes in the last few years that was just a result of them feeling overwhelmed and alone. And so, I'm absolutely positive that there are kids in this country with the number of athletes that we have in NCAA that feel alone based on the topic of sexuality and we don't talk about it. I think literally, the mental health aspect of kids, I think us having more of an open culture about it would really contribute to them feeling more supported and just help in general. And then also, I just think from there, I mean, this is one of the most important times in a person's life. It's a big time for growth. I just think that would just create more inclusion posts, just the world would grow. We have this cluster or section of athletes or a group of young kids that we have an opportunity to educate. And so if we start making it a priority to educate these classes as they go through, I think it just ultimately is gonna spread into a bigger thing where the education just spreads from there. – Mia [sexual minority coach]

When asked about the differences between the first and second institutions she attended, Mandy talked about the effect of feeling secretive, hiding her sexuality, and having a coaching staff and teammates that were not accepting of her sexuality and her relationship with her teammate:

Completely different. Oh my God, depressed, anxious, felt very alone. I felt empty, I just felt like I was missing, literally missing human interaction because I had to be so secretive and so not open about who I was, and it made me sick. I just felt like I'd literally put on a mask every day and I'm pretending to be somebody who I'm not, and it drove me nuts. To be able to go there and have a completely different experience, totally changed me. Then I had to go through another experience to ... it was definitely like a

step up the ladder but then it was like still not done yet, crawling out of my hole so. I felt like I was literally like this completely underground, secretive, like dug myself a hole. I was able to surface a little bit at [second university] but then wasn't quite out of it, because I still had so much more that I needed to discuss or address and like to get out in the open...Literally, I just kept everything in the dark, in every bit and part of me. A little bit would come out, but it wasn't until everything was out when I started dating a guy again, for the first time. It was like 10 years of just chaos. – Mandy [sexual minority coach; former student-athlete]

Courtney, having much experience working within the mental health profession, honed in on the significance of psychological well-being and social support:

Yeah. I think for anybody, that's something that we're always looking for psychological well-being, is do you have a few people you can talk to and be who you are with? And for more athletes than not, they would say "No, people don't really know me." I even have them like put a percentage to it at times. Like "How much am I getting to see of you in this moment in our interactions, and what about Suzie, what about your parents?" And it's amazing how much they feel like they need to keep hidden. And so that's something I'd want to talk to them about and "Do you have a few people who you feel like you can let in that you trust kind of with you who you are, where you let yourself be seen? And how do we keep you linked in with that group, where that's where your support and your connection comes from?" Because that can really help to mitigate some of the stress, and depression, anxiety, whatever can come along with that. And especially for some of our sexual minority, especially transgender clients, mitigating that suicide risk to be frank. Having some social support can really be a protective factor in coping with some of that. – Courtney [heterosexual support staff]

Beth is currently an academic advisor but is a former student-athlete from an institution within a different conference than University. One of her friends created an initiative on campus following a teammate's suicide. Beth also had a teammate who identified as sexual minority who discussed some of the issues she'd faced so Beth was very aware of the risk associated:

Well, I think a lot of student athletes who are sexual minorities, they probably struggle with similar issues that are related to mental health, because they don't feel comfortable here to come out or to be comfortable in their skin and who they are, so like I was saying, my friend and teammate, she had depression and anxiety, because she said her sister wasn't accepting of her, and it was really hard at first to come out, but with all the support that she has in the athletic department there, she's doing a lot better as a person, if that makes sense. – Beth [heterosexual support staff]

According to Kroshus and Davoren (2016), the sexual minority student-athlete sample surveyed, 37% reported illicit drug use (marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines, amphetamines, sedatives, hallucinogens, steroids, opiates, inhalants, ecstasy), 14% reported prescription drug use without a proper prescription (antidepressants, erectile dysfunction drugs, painkillers, sedatives, and stimulants), 37% reported binge drinking (5+ drinks in one sitting) while 23% reported binge drinking within the last 14 days. This particular study reported significant relationships between student-athlete sexual orientation and mental health and substance use, sexual minorities experiences more substance use and more negative mental health outcomes. Compared to heterosexual student-athletes, sexual minority student-athletes “fare worse in terms of mental health outcomes” (Kroshus & Davoren, 2016, p. 376) and are more likely to experience mental health difficulties within the last year (Kerr, Santurri, & Peters, 2013; Kroshus & Davoren, 2016; Oswald & Wyatt, 2013). This population continues to experience negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness. More significantly, sexual orientation of student-athletes is positively related with mental health harm outcomes such as intentional self-harm, consideration of suicide, and attempt of suicide. The authors go on to describe the importance of sport environment: “even if the sport environment is not necessarily the primary cause of harm, as a primary social context for sexual minority student-athletes, it has the potential to play an important role in reducing overt and covert stressors experienced by sexual minority student-athletes” (Kroshus & Davoren, 2016, p. 377).

## **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

### **Practical Implications/Recommendations**

The Athletic Equality Index bases evaluation of inclusive athletic departments on the following: non-discrimination policy, out or allied staff, accessible resources, collaboration with campus group, LGBTQ student-athlete group or initiative, pro LGBT equality campaign/statement, LGBTQ inclusive fan code of conduct, and following NCAA guidelines for transgender inclusion (Athlete Ally, 2017). Based solely on the AEI, University athletic department fails on more than 60% of the criteria listed above. The purpose of this study was to explore the climate of University at a deeper level than the AEI's criteria. Overall, University athletic department is a tolerant environment for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority. The participants interviewed for this case study referenced the "don't ask, don't tell" climate on campus and within the athletic department. They also reported the desire for more resources, education, training, and visibility regarding sexual minority resources within the athletic department. In order for University athletic department to attain inclusivity of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, several changes need to occur. Practically, there are several implications for University athletic department, as well as other athletic departments looking to promote a shift in culture regarding sexual orientation of student-athletes. The first is revisiting the purpose and responsibility of the athletic department. Whose responsibility is it to promote inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority? Several participants from this study believe the upper administration, executive level administrators, and coaches are responsible for providing resources for this student-athlete population. The NCAA designates the responsibility to athletic departments:

Athletics departments have a responsibility to ensure that all student-athletes have an opportunity to participate in a safe, inclusive and respectful climate where they are valued for their contributions as team members and for their individual commitment and character, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. As an integral component of higher education, intercollegiate athletics departments are responsible for upholding existing institutional nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies, as well as enforcing laws prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. – Inclusion of LGBTQ SA Staff in NCAA Programs

In addition to upper level administration, support staff, coaches, and fellow student-athletes also hold the responsibility of creating inclusive environments for *all*. Based on this case study and other existing literature, inclusion is not a one-stop shop of recommendations that will ensure positive experiences for these individuals. If inclusion is not promoted across the board, the culture of University will not change. Student-athletes do not and will not feel safe in every space within the athletic department which potentially adversely affects athletic and academic performance. The NCAA promotes the opportunity for athletic departments to support diversity and inclusion:

In addition to this responsibility, coaches and student-athletes have opportunities to be visible advocates speaking out for diversity and inclusion and against bullying and other forms of harassment or discrimination. College sports teams compete in the public arena and coaches and student-athletes are highly visible members of the school and local communities. They are role models for young people and their beliefs and actions can be an effective force for valuing diversity, respect and inclusion in their schools and communities. As such, coaches and student-athletes have a unique opportunity to assist in broad-based community efforts to promote and encourage respect on and off the field. – Inclusion of LGBTQ SA Staff in NCAA Programs

An athletic department's core mission, values, and goals should include inclusion, not just celebrating diverse populations as many athletic departments promote. Once the diverse population is in place, what resources are available for those marginalized populations ensuring diversity within the department? Reinforcing *inclusion* at the administrative level through policies, practices, resources, and initiatives should be in place without fear of losing sponsors and donors. The protection of marginalized student-athletes and promotion of the well-being of

all student-athletes can be attained in several different ways: awareness and visibility, access, and policy development, and follow through.

Awareness comes in the form of acknowledging the existence of sexual minorities within the athletic department. Though a reliable estimate of percentage of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority does not yet exist, a recent study claims 6.2% of college students identify as LGBT (Oswalt & Vargas, 2013). To refuse to acknowledge or speak of this population could be potentially detrimental to student-athletes, as outlined within the mental health section. Athletic departments should provide training and education for all levels of employees as well as student-athletes. This training regarding diversity of sexual orientation and coexisting with individuals with differing identities can be crucial in promoting inclusive athletic department and team environments. According to Graziano (2004), “lack of proper training and resources on issues of differing sexualities by counselors, faculty, and staff can lead to confusion and anger among gay and lesbian students. University counselors, faculty, and staff should become more sensitive to and aware of gay and lesbian issues and pay close attention to the needs of gay and lesbian students” (p. 282). In terms of visibility, coaches and administrations are often reluctant to speak out in support of sexual minority population out of fear of being stigmatized by colleagues (Avery, 2011; Cunningham & Satore, 2010). Courtney mentioned the responsibility and consequences of holding a privileged position/identity as a heterosexual ally. Shaw (2013) recommended visibility through athletic departments taking a stance on social issues such as same-sex romantic relationships.

University has several resources on campus for LGBTQ individuals: support group, mentor program, and safe zone ally training. Unfortunately, many participants were unaware of these resources. Access to student-athlete specific resources is important to provide such as

sport-related sexual minority speakers, safe zone training for athletic department personnel, visible markers of inclusion, a student-athlete specific support group, visible allies, taking a stance on social issues, and policies. Policy development will not solely create cultural changes but can aid in the athletic department taking a stance, protecting student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, and creating consequences for those who discriminate against this historically marginalized community. In addition to these recommendations, I recommend further policy development in place for not only non-discrimination but repercussions of any discriminatory behavior of any level individual. Such policy has potential to positively impact University culture as well. It is important to keep in mind that policy development may not have full effect for 10-20 years so this culture change will take time as athletic departments just recently started incorporating allied or safe zone training (Wara, 2012). The visibility and awareness for sexual minority student-athletes will need to be done in singular steps over time. Courtney weighs in on the effectiveness of inclusive policies, practices, and initiatives within an athletic department:

I think it would be really important for us to have more training...I think we have to have some mention of it when our student athletes matriculate and enroll here. That's a good point to communicate that upfront, but ... like for it to be ideal it would have to be on several levels, but it just makes me realize how many baby steps we'd have to take to even really start to bring this into awareness...Especially for it to be sustainable, and not just this one time initiative or program that we do. It's something that is truly a part of the culture here. And in my experience here, I think it's tough, because I know people who are not out that work in the athletic department. And will disclose to individuals, but is like "That is not something I want colleagues to know here." So even staff members are dealing with that...And so I think it would be the same thing for an individual who's kind of out, especially in some of the more visible sports. Thinking what would come of that in this area with fans as crazy as they are. I mean as the partner of a [football coach] its unreal, I've never experienced something like that, ever. And they can be brutal for these kids for reasons that have nothing to do with a minority identity already. – Courtney

Particularly for athletic departments concerned primarily with athletic performance of student-athletes, there is a new rule going through the approval process within the NCAA at this time. The new transfer rule, if approved, will make it much easier for student-athletes to transfer

to other institutions. Student-athletes wishing to leave their current program will no longer be required to seek out a release from the head coach, and are able to simply request a release to transfer. Jimmy discusses the potential transfer rule:

I think it could influence those policies, because I think if you don't have those policies in place and you have some student athletes who identify as sexual minorities on your campus and they don't feel safe or included in the Athletic Department as a whole or on their teams, then I think they have ... It's easier for them now to kind of cut ties with the school and go find somewhere where maybe they do have those policies. And maybe they knew that coming in, but they thought, "It won't be that bad. I'll manage." And then you get there and you're like, "No, I can't. I don't like it here. I don't feel like I can be me," and you feel like you can somewhere else. So I think that can impact APR, it can impact a lot of things that might encourage schools to adopt those policies. – Jimmy

## **Future Research**

After conducting this case study, a plethora of research ideas have emerged. In terms of diversity and inclusion literature, a future study should explore the relationship between perceptions of diversity and inclusion and perceptions of coach effectiveness. In addition, a study should explore diversity and inclusion within the historically diverse population of football and the student-athletes' perceptions of sexual minority inclusion within a hyper-masculine sport. The coaches' perspective of intrateam dating should be explored quantitatively and qualitatively. Though some studies have touched on the importance of policy for sexual minorities, a content analysis of current policies within the power 5 conferences should explore language, consequential literature, promotion of inclusive practices and behaviors, etc. within existing athletic department policy. As for resources specific to student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, the long term effectiveness of these resources on mental health, substance use, athletic and academic performance, and overall experience should be further explored. The relationship between religion and experiences of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority should also

be investigated in more depth, particularly within universities that are not religiously affiliated. Lastly, the advocate or ally responsibility and experience is an important phenomenon to consider in future research, as this group plays an important role in the inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within athletic departments.

## **Limitations**

Though this research established trustworthiness through the data collection and analysis processes mentioned within the methodological chapter, there are several potential limitations. First, the student-athletes who identify as sexual minority may not have been “out” to the athletic department, which may affect the individual experience within the athletic department as a whole. Second, this particular case study is merely generalizable, not transferable to other athletic departments. Though some power 5 conference institutions may find similarities within this case, individual, organizational, and societal factors all play into the experience of the student-athlete. NCAA Division I institutions are not all alike, the experiences of student-athletes who identify sexual minorities are not likely to be similar at every institution. Athletic departments across the nation differ in demographics, size, geographic regions, number of varsity sports, athletic budget, athletic resources, athletic programming, etc. Third, institution, athletic department, and team documents may not tell the full story of inclusion so the researcher must ensure that participants’ experiences with and conceptualization of inclusion is heard (Creswell, 1998). Fourth, the aim of this study was to recruit ten administrators, ten coaches, ten heterosexual student-athletes, and ten student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, but those group numbers were not met. There was an honest attempt to follow all leads throughout the semi-structured interviews to recruit fellow student-athletes, support staff, or coaches but an increase in the number of participants for coaches and student-athletes who identify as sexual

minority would helped fully reach saturation. Fifth, this study was officially rejected twice by the athletic department studied, though eventually given verbal permission to proceed with interviews. An exhaustive investigation of documents and perspectives could have potentially impacted the findings of this case study.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This case study is unique in exploring in depth inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at a Division I Power 5 institution. The Power 5 institutions within this division have the most money, most opportunity to obtain and create resources, and arguably one of the strongest impacts on collegiate athletics. Despite the position of power within collegiate athletics in which University stands, the athletic department does not fulfill the requirements of inclusion but instead creates an environment of toleration. As we see youth, high school, collegiate, and professional athletes more openly discuss personal sexual orientations, failing to acknowledge orientation diversity will continue to affect these student-athletes in negative ways. Inclusion will be fostered once the entire culture of University shifts to a more inclusive, welcoming, and accepting environment for all diverse identities (i.e. racial, ethnic, gender, religious, orientation, etc.). Embracing the change will take time and inclusion may not be fully integrated until some upper, middle, and lower administrators are no longer representations of the athletic department. Hiring and recruiting individuals of high standards of morality, kindness, competition, integrity, and performance will play a pivotal role in the culture change within University athletic department. Athletic departments are considered the “front porch” (Stephenson, 2013, para. 9) of the university and hold incredible weight of representing academic institutions and are arguably the most diverse departments on campus (Cunningham, 2008), yet the sexual minority population at University is one that continues to go

unacknowledged. As pertinent through the representation, accessibility, “acceptance,” and silence findings from this case study, sexual minorities on University campus and within the athletic department are not placed of high priority for diverse or inclusive efforts. It is not the student-athlete’s responsibility to create an inclusive space for themselves, nor is it rational to expect a student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority to continue to scan each of her or his surrounding environments for signs of physical and psychological risk or safety. Athletic departments fearing backlash from donors, fans, and sponsors will lose the respect and trust of student-athletes of all identities, not just of those marginalized. What University athletic department is portraying is the emphasis of a heteronormative, academically, and athletically successful athletic department that will *tolerate* the presence of sexual minorities. As Courtney stated,

Communicating and expressing either yourself or...your department in a way that doesn’t just communicate tolerance of something, but acceptance...silence, or not talking about something is a very big indicator that it’s not an inclusive or accepting environment. I think it needs to be proactively addressed. – Courtney

So even though student-athletes at University will encounter a wide variety of diversity, inclusion is not at the forefront of the athletic department’s priority list. That being said, the final thought from this case study is “if an organization brings in new people but doesn’t enable them to contribute, those new people are bound to fail, no matter how talented they are. *Diversity without inclusion does not work*” (Miller & Katz, 2002, p. 17, italics in original).

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## APPENDIX A: IRB Letter of Approval



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**To:** Megan R Turk  
BELL 4188

**From:** Douglas James Adams, Chair  
IRB Committee

**Date:** 11/03/2017

**Action:** Expedited Approval

**Action Date:** 11/03/2017

**Protocol #:** 1710074685

**Study Title:** NCAA Division I Athletic Department Inclusion of Student-Athletes Who Identify as Sexual Minority

**Expiration Date:** 10/29/2018

**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Sarah Elizabeth Stokowski, Investigator

## APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

### Interview Questions:

Okay, pseudonym, I just need verbal confirmation that you've signed the consent form and agree to participate in this interview. We'll start with a few basic questions about yourself and then into a few questions about your experience as a student-athlete within your sport, your team, and your athletic department. Feel free to stop this interview at any point!

Today is date, time, we are at location with pseudonym. This is the first interview with pseudonym. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- Tell me a little bit about yourself
- Tell me about your experience as a student-athlete at the university
- And are you familiar with the term sexual minority?
- Do you or anyone you know identify as such?
- How would you say people feel about sexual minority student-athletes in general? At University?
- What does inclusion mean to you? What does it look like within an athletic department? A team?
- What do you believe your teammates, coaches, and athletic department consider inclusion?
- Describe some ways your institution has promoted (or failed to promote) inclusion. Athletic department? Team? (this should include knowledge of policies/rules for AD and team)
- How do you feel that has affected your experience here? Within your team? Athletic department?
- What are some pitfalls for an athletic department or team to have high sexual orientation diversity? What are ways to address these pitfalls?
- In a perfect world, on your team everyone's talents, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities, and ways of living – their uniqueness – is engaged, valued, and leveraged. What are some vital team policies and practices? Athletic department policies and practices?
- In a perfect world, everyone is inclusive on your team, your coaches, within your athletic department – what inclusive behaviors do you see around you?
- Anything else you'd like to add that would help me understand your experience?
- What behaviors – from you and others around you – help you experience inclusion?
- What behaviors help others around you experience more inclusion?
- How would you describe your experience as a sexual minority student-athlete at this institution?

### **Interview Questions:**

Okay, pseudonym, I just need verbal confirmation that you've signed the consent form and agree to participate in this interview. We'll start with a few basic questions about yourself and then into a few questions about your experience as a student-athlete within your sport, your team, and your athletic department. Feel free to stop this interview at any point!

Today is date, time, we are at location with pseudonym. This is the first interview with pseudonym. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- Tell me a little bit about yourself
- Tell me a little bit about the LGBTQ mentor program/support group on campus
  - o How did it begin?
  - o When did it launch?
  - o How many faculty/staff and students are involved?
  - o Rules/policies associated with the mentor program?
  - o Practices?
  - o Reasoning for starting program?
  - o Demographic? (age, major, race, gender, etc.)
- What type of feedback have you received?
  - o Campus
  - o Participants
- What impact have you seen because of this program?
- Have you had any contact with the athletic department in regards to this program?
- What are some benefits of having high sexual orientation diversity?
- What are some complications of having high sexual orientation diversity?
- What does inclusion look like to you?
- What would help you experience inclusion?
- What behaviors from others around you help you experience inclusion?
- What behaviors help others around you experience inclusion?
- What would you like to see from the university? Athletic department/
- What do you like about the progress Arkansas has made?
- Anything else you'd like to add that would help me understand your experience?

## **APPENDIX C: Reflexive Journal Template**

1. Current Perspective
  - a. What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
  - b. What did I learn?
  - c. What is my perspective? What sense can I make of the information?
  - d. What did I find frustrating?
  - e. What did I find pleasantly surprising?
2. Bias Acknowledgement
  - a. Acknowledge your baggage: assumptions, values, political leaning, culture
  - b. What led me to that perspective/perception?
  - c. What did I learn about myself?
  - d. What are some perceptions or interpretations others may have?
  - e. What influence might this have had on the interview? Your findings?
3. Moving forward
  - a. What went well? What could I improve?
  - b. Have your views changed on this subject?
  - c. Is my approach working out as expected?

## APPENDIX D: Participant Summary Form

Participant Name: Flo

Type of contact: In person

Contact Date: 1-31-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1:

“including people in everything that you do. Like does not matter what they are or what they do. Like being inclusive...treating people normally...they are not different...judging character based on judging race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, religious beliefs”

Research Question 2 & 3:

Flo is a female super senior softball student-athlete who identifies as heterosexual. She is a kinesiology major with a minor in business and has only competed at University. She donates to the Human Rights Campaign yearly and proudly displays her supporting sticker on her notebook. She's had former teammates who have dated in the past and discussed how significant of a role religion played in the coaches' and other student-athletes' responses to the intrateam (and same sex) dating. Flo provided some insight I hadn't considered such as social media, promoting inclusion individually and publicly, visible signs of inclusion such as stickers on computers, cars, binders, etc. She provided insight on her concern for the fan, donor, and sponsor responses if University were to outwardly promote inclusion through a public service announcement, through support groups, or resources. The surrounding area is religious and the donors specifically are overall pretty conservative. University's basketball student-athletes knelt during the national anthem in previous years and there was a lot of backlash and threats to pull funding. Flo talked about her former coach instating a “family doesn't date family” rule at the beginning of the year. When two teammates were rumored to have been together, a roommate of one of the females dating was asked into the coach's office. She was then asked where her roommate stayed the previous night, which the teammate felt pressured into telling on her teammate who was staying at her girlfriend's apartment. She also talked about religion and its influence on different people. Flo sees no problem with same-sex dating and thinks it's the person's choice to be in a relationship but knows that her perspective is not always shared. She even mentioned how difficult it was to have conversations with fellow heterosexual individuals. She also mentioned one of her teammates and how she believes “I don't think she would not include them, but she would judge them [sexual minorities].” She feels as though the athletic department itself, especially with academic advisors and learning specialists, is accepting and would do anything to help a student-athlete in need. She believes a support group would be beneficial and to have a representative from the team to serve as a resource. Flo also mentioned how if there were to be

visible support from the athletic department that someone would be upset about it and probably speak up against.

Participant Name: Sydney

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-5-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: NA

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Sydney is a female international tennis student-athlete who is a super senior and majoring in recreation and sport management. She has only attended University and is heterosexual. She came over to the United States when she was just 16 years old to start college. Sydney considers her coach to be a father figure and someone who has had great influence in her transition to America and her growth as an athlete and person. She doesn't have close friends that are sexual minorities but she's known a lot of people who are. What's interesting about Sydney is her home country is extremely judgmental towards the LGBTQ community and it is very underground and secretive. The United States, compared to [country] is welcoming and accepting. She believes the athletic department is "very accepting" and welcoming but that maybe there could be more promotion of inclusion at a visible level. She suggested mentioning it in during orientation when student-athletes first get to campus but thinks they don't because "some people could feel uncomfortable...so we might have gays and lesbians on our team, I'm not cool with that. But personally for me, I really don't care. I think that everybody has a choice in their lives and it's just up to them who they like." Sydney also claimed that higher ups in the athletic department should be the ones promoting and saying something about inclusion. At the end of the interview when I asked her for any final thoughts, she responded "I think there was the one point I wanted to tell you that like that's why straight people can feel uncomfortable. But other than that, not really. I can't speak for the guys team because probably there would be a gay person in the guys team, the guys would just completely abuse that person. Not hit him or anything, but they would just joke around all the time and even though they don't mean anything bad, that's just how they are. They're super sarcastic with each other and they always saying in jokes, but that's just guys. I don't know how that boy would feel if they would sort of abuse him like that."

Participant Name: Daniella

Type of contact: Phone

Contact Date: 2-18-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: “Inclusion, to me, is where any and all parties feel safe and respected. And included to a point that only if they themselves want to be included. Because that's kind of a fine line where you don't wanna pull someone in if they don't want to be pulled in to anything. So I think that safe and respected peace of inclusion is something that's extremely important.”

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Daniella is a former softball student-athlete who then served as a graduate assistant for student-athlete development at University. Daniella identifies as a pansexual female and just recently graduated with her masters in higher education. She discussed her role within student-athlete development and how intentional the staff was to utilize inclusive language in workshops and programs. For example, University puts on a women's program to discuss professional dress, resumes, and practicing for interviews. They discussed relationships with coaches, teammates, and significant others and trained the staff members assisting to use the terms “significant others” or “partners” instead of specifically saying boyfriend. Facilitators who were helping out during these programs did not always stick to the neutral terminology the student-athlete development staff had requested. When asked of some specific ways the athletic department addresses inclusion, Daniella responded that “outside of student-athlete development it's not addressed at all...maybe in sport psychology.” Daniella was aware of resources on campus because her partner had run the LGBTQ support group on campus at one point. She was also on the committee that began developing a transgender policy for the athletic department but said it had not been released or really even discussed with the athletic department outside the small group. Overall, Daniella does not believe the athletic department is inclusive outside student development and academics but once you get higher up, you run into “specifically older white males that doesn't really want to change their ways of thinking.” Her suggestion was inclusive training seminars.

Participant Name: Sue

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-12-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: NA

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Sue is a heterosexual female who ran cross country and indoor distance for University. She just recently completed her eligibility and is a graduate student in exercise science. She grew up in the state and always wanted to run track for University since she was little. As a student-athlete, she experienced disordered eating which significantly affected her performance and her experience within the athletic department and her team. Her coach used to call her “meat and potatoes girl” and at one point, had to meet up with the nutritionist several times a week. Some of her teammates also dealt with disordered eating and they would try to help each other out by only consuming salads or only half a sweet potato at dinner. When it comes to her coach, she respected him and even alluded to coaching as a difficult position to navigate those types of conversations. As far as the athletic department and inclusion of sexual minorities, she claimed the AD was progressive for the specific area and that they’re mostly accepted. She also said “I think the university as a whole is probably accepting, but almost like don’t ask, don’t tell. Just don’t. it’s not gonna bother me unless you make a deal out of-like don’t flaunt it, almost. “I’m not gonna question you about it or care that you’re that way if it’s not bothering them. You know what I mean. Like, don’t ask, don’t tell.” Two of Sue’s teammates were dating each other and she discussed the finding out about the relationship, her own struggle with religion and same-sex relationships but how they were better than most couples she had come into contact with. She even said “I don’t know how I feel about this. I’m in the locker room changing. They’re together, but would you be looking at me?” When they first came out publicly on social media, she was worried that they would get in trouble. When it came to her coach, Sue said that he knew and the relationship was “not encouraged, but it wasn’t discouraged. Really, when it boils down to it, coach just wants us to run fast.” Being religious and coming from a very small town in the state, Sue also discussed her struggle with religion and same-sex relationships: That’s something that I even struggle with personally. I think it’s hard to not ... I think sometimes when people say love them through it, not that we want to change ... It’s weird because they are. They’re like good, good friends, and it’s not that I ... It’s not for me to even approve. Would I wish they were like ... It’s weird because they are. They’re cool together. They’re cool. They’re better than a lot of couples. Religiously, I don’t believe that it’s right, but not everyone has the same religious values. I don’t know how to put it in words, but there definitely is ... I wish it could be okay. At the same time, I’m not gonna approach them. Maybe that’s wrong of me as a Christian not to- But I don’t really- That’s not the way I work, either.”

Participant Name: Biggie Smalls

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-18-2018

Today’s Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: “For me, inclusion is accepting it, and then making sure that that person is able to have the same opportunities you are”

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Biggie Smalls is a female student-athlete who competes in gymnastics as a senior. She majors in recreation and sport management. The thing that stood out most about Biggie Smalls was when she discussed having a pro LGBT day and how sexual minorities probably wouldn't want that. Biggie Smalls is also on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee “if the athletic department put on a LGBT day, do you think they want that day? They don't wanna be like, "Oh, it's our day!" Same thing like straight people don't want a straight day. Why does that matter? So I think that's good that we've never, I guess, singled them out to make them feel welcome. They should already be feeling welcome. You don't have to single them out to make them feel welcomed. So we've never done anything like that as a department. We have culture day, and stuff like that. There's just never been anything like that with the LGBTQ community, which I think is good, because it doesn't ... But I don't know. I'm not gay. I don't wanna speak for people that are, 'cause what if they want that day? I don't know, but I think it would make them feel like, "We're not any different than you. Why do we need to have a special day?" sort of thing. So we've just never done ... Nobody's ever said anything never. Nobody's mistreated someone because of it, which I think is really good. So I think we're very welcoming. And we're such a diverse little group, though. I mean, we have people from all over the world.” That being said, she discussed how student-athletes hold each other accountable for microaggressions and language such as using the n word and how other athletes have called peers out for using such language. She also talked about how having LGBT individuals around is kind of normalized and it doesn't really phase anyone anymore. In addition, when asked if the athletic department should do anything regarding inclusion of LGBT, she mentioned sexual harassment classes and education because people should be aware what this group is going through. She was sure to say that it shouldn't just be for LGBT but with race issues as well.

Participant Name: Brittany

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-19-2018

Today's Date: 2-20-2018

Summary of Information:

Brittany is a female basketball student-athlete who identifies as gay/lesbian and is in a relationship. She didn't have much to say and kept her answers pretty concise for the most part. She talked about how her coaches and teammates knew about her girlfriend and how much they loved her. Brittany mainly keeps to herself and only utilizes athletic department resources when absolutely necessary, other than that she is on her own sleeping or hanging out at her apartment.

Her coaching staff has never addressed teammates dating within the tea. She is also unaware of any resources on campus. When I asked if she felt accepted as herself within the athletic department, she said yes. Brittany also talked (kind of) about religion and how she hadn't been to church in a while and that her family did not know she was dating a female but if they didn't know by now, they'd never know. When asked if the athletic department should do anything differently, she claimed "I don't know what's being done. I don't know" and would probably not go to a support group if there was one because her time is valuable to her.

Participant Name: D

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-19-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: "So my thoughts on inclusion then, I feel like you should have inclusion for special needs, you know what I'm saying? If you're not physically capable of doing things that ... I'm not gonna say normal, but people who are capable of moving around normally, and can't do. Then I feel like you should have something for special needs, just because you are still a human being, and you could do nothing about this situation that you're in. You know what I'm saying? So, it's not right to just strip you away of that normality, because you can't do nothing about that situation."

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: D is a male football student-athlete who is a super senior and identifies as Black and Latino/Hispanic. He is a recreation and sport management major and has only competed at University. D's experience is incredibly unique. He is very adamant about the sin of homosexuality and how he wouldn't know what to do if one of his teammates was gay. He would expect his teammates to keep their sexuality to themselves (if non heterosexual). He talked about tackling, grabbing, and being physical in the game of football and how uncomfortable it would be to engage in acts like that with someone who is gay. He mentioned AIDS and if a gay teammate was bleeding...how big of a deal it was to be around someone. This misinformation of all gay males contracting AIDS was concerning but one that is still a belief. He said finding out one of his close friends was gay would change the way he looked at that individual, it would force him to create boundaries and that he couldn't see that individual as a brother anymore because of the romantic/physical attraction the other may have towards D. He talked about being gay on a football team being a distraction; that there was an unspoken rule, football is a macho man game; "no time for daisies"; that they could potentially lose their lives if they came in contact with the wrong individuals; AIDS; fake estrogen?; that these people are lost souls. He talked about sexuality attached to masculinity and femininity. That a gay male was

now a woman in his eyes, very feminine and how he couldn't wrap his mind around two masculine and muscular men being together. He was confident in his beliefs of the disgust he felt thinking about two men being together but then he mentioned something that happened when he was a sophomore in college. During D's sophomore year in high school, his senior teammate was an out gay male and a very physical running back. In the locker room after practice one day, D was getting undressed and the teammate talked by him and grazed his penis. This was one of the first, if not the first experienced he'd had with a sexual minority and he described the experience as uncomfortable and disrespectful. That this was a wakeup call for him that he needed to "harden up" and be more of a man so this wouldn't happen again. So he wouldn't be mistaken as someone who was into that kind of stuff (attracted to males). I can't even imagine how a 15 year old boy, who did not have a consistent and positive male figure in his life growing up, is supposed to respond to something like this. When I asked D about females who were attracted to females in some way, he had a much different view. He mentioned that "bull dykes" were like one of the dudes and he treated them as such. He also talked about how he was attracted to two feminine females engaging in romantic physical acts. The conversation with D was incredibly interesting. I wasn't uncomfortable, but it was eye opening to hear how he felt about having a teammate who was a sexual minority. I wonder if there are any student-athletes who identify as such and if they're comfortable around the football team. There's a sense of hyper masculinity within the game itself that's been well documented but despite having athletes come out in college, Michael Sam and the Kansas State, there may not be a safe environment. D was more accepting than I thought he would be. He was moreso concerned with having a male approach him romantically than anything else based on his first experience with a person from the LGBTQ community

Participant Name: Michael

Type of contact: In person

Contact Date: 2-20-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: "I think inclusion is like bringing people in, making people feel a part of something"

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Michael is a male football student-athlete who identifies as black and is a junior in the recreation and sport management program. He has a mother who identifies as bisexual and has been married to two different women in his lifetime. He discussed his relationship with his grandmother and how influential she was in his development as a child. He also talked about his time on the streets and the hardships of his hometown. He claimed how

lucky he was to have football and get out of the town because if not he could have been selling drugs, continuing to get in fights, or possibly dead. As a kid, some other children would make fun of him for his mom dating a woman but he would combat that with the fact that his mother's wife was making more money than the other child's father. When discussing religion and sexuality, he kept saying that no sin was greater than the other and how being a sexual minority is no worse than anything he or others have done in his lifetime. When asked about having a teammate come out, his response was very interesting: "you got followers and you got leaders. You know what I'm saying? And some of those leaders can sometimes be challenged, or some of those followers can be challenged. You get what I'm saying? If it was somebody to come out as I'm open, what'll happen, no matter how they felt, they know it wouldn't be cool to treat that person a different way. They know that... Yeah, they know that, because people who thinks they think is cool. You know what I'm saying? But somebody like me, I feel like my voice hold weight. So you trying to clown this dude out, and they understand that's not cool. I feel like people, my generation is more of like, oh, he gay, all right. I feel like, just don't try me, just understand me and you just friends. You know what I'm saying? And it's okay. You gotta live your life." Michael also talked about how feeling included is just better mentally and that it's human nature to feel wanted and to be around people. There are a lot of health benefits.

Participant Name: Chris

Type of contact: Phone

Contact Date: 2-20-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: "non-discriminatory"

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Chris is a female volleyball student-athlete who just finished up her junior year and is a recreation and sport management major. She identifies as Hispanic/Latino and white and has a brother who identifies as gay. She didn't have much time to chat, but when asked how the University felt about the sexual minority community, she responded that they are pretty accepting and that she's never seen anything negative. When asked about the athletic department itself, her response was "fairly" and continued onto say she doesn't think there's any discrimination. Within the volleyball team, having teammates date was not something that was expected so it was easy not to communicate about it at all. When asked if there should be resources in place within the athletic department for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, she responded "Absolutely. I think that it would be helpful to them. I think it would make them feel as if they're not being discriminated against. Because they'll have an opportunity to...for other people to know, and then how to handle it. Because, I would assume that it's different. So, I think having resources available to them would be a good thing."

Participant Name: Mandy

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 2-27-2018; 3-15-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: NA

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Mandy is a female strength and conditioning coach at University who was a former softball student-athlete before transferring to a second institution. She identifies as bisexual and is now engaged to a male. After the 1<sup>st</sup> interview with Mandy, she texted me and said she'd been journaling about her experience and wanted to meet a second time. The second interview lasted 90 minutes, totaling over two hours of conversation with Mandy. She is very passionate about her giving back to the student-athlete community and experience and wanted to make sure she'd written everything down she could possibly remember to help me understand her full experience at both institutions and how different they were. Mandy's experience was incredibly eye-opening and she really wanted to share. After our initial interview, she reached out later that day and told me she'd journaled about her experience and wanted to share more. She had two very different experiences at both of her institutions. She started at University and transferred out to another Division I, power 5 conference school. The coaching staff at University (which is no longer here) had a huge influence in her experience. A volunteer assistant coach was very religious and would have individual meetings with student-athletes she assumed was a sexual minority. The topic of conversation was always religion and sexuality, inviting the athlete to come to church with her, read bible verses about homosexuality, and Mandy claimed it felt as if she was trying to convert her (Mandy did not and does not consider herself religious). The individual she was dating also told many people about their relationship without Mandy's consent so she felt as though she was isolated, alone, and exposed without even having a say. In HS, Mandy's first relationship was with a girl from a religious family. Her parents found out about their relationship and confronted Mandy and her parents outside a facility with the rest of her team there. Her parents were very accepting and understanding of Mandy and her sexuality but didn't want her to have to experience that humiliation ever again. Mandy's relationship in college shared some similarities as far as the exposure without her consent. Her partner was openly gay and was telling her teammates and other student-athletes about their relationship. This caused Mandy to shut herself down when it came to building relationships with others. She felt isolated, alone, and like an outcast. Overall, her experience at University was not a positive one. She left after one year in the program and the next institution was much more accepting and open about her dating a female. The perseverance of Mandy to

tell her story. She wants people to know so that others do not have similar experiences as she did. That's why she wanted to work in college athletics, but she is on her way out. She doesn't buy into the culture of strictly performance-based evaluation and expectations. Mandy's purpose as a strength coach within the athletic department was to serve as a buffer between student-athletes and coaches. The specific teams that she worked with had some teammates dating each other and she even discussed the experiences she had with the coaches discussing the relationships. She thanked me for conducting this study and emphasized the importance of what I was doing. I think others may perceive Mandy as being dramatic and as putting herself into some of these situations, but at such an impressionable time as college, sometimes you don't exactly know who you are or what you want out of life. She was still trying to figure herself out...with no outside resources or visibility or support on campus, within the athletic department, and especially within her team. She had religious teammates that were not supportive of the same-sex relationships. Her partner was telling others about their relationship unbeknownst to Mandy. Her year at University was one of the most difficult years of her life. She experienced signs of depression and turmoil and I would consider many of the experiences as traumatic.

Participant Name: Jessica

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 3-1-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: NA

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information:

Jessica is a female swim student-athlete who identifies as heterosexual but is dating a female on her team. She is a criminal justice/sociology major and just completed her eligibility earlier this semester. Jessica is extremely intelligent and well-versed. She's done her research and seems to know herself really well. She talked about the extensive research she conducted when she first had feelings for her same-sex partner: religion, bible, sexuality, roots of words in Hebrew and Greek, social climate when bibles were translated into different languages, etc. She doesn't mess around. Her coaches did hear about her relationship with one of her teammates and pulled her (and her alone) into a meeting with all three of the coaches. The meeting was to proactively address the upcoming season and how she and her girlfriend were not to room together on away trips/meets. She said she didn't feel marginalized as a result of the conversation; the coaches made the analogy of a men's and women's team on the road; treating the relationship as if a male and a female were dating: no rooming together. I think Jessica has a great perspective, she is

someone who has never dated a female before, came from a religious background, and even considered herself to engage in behaviors that could be considered bigotry. Because of all the coaching changes, the team leaders actually dictated the climate of the program more so than the coaching staff. Though there is a designated captain, Jessica claimed there was a “panel of leaders.” The majority of the team was accepting of their within team relationship, though there were a couple that confronted Jessica about not having a relationship within the team, that it would involve other people on the team; blow up, be extremely dramatic if it went bad and would affect the program; but Jessica’s response was that they’re coming up with a hypothesized chain of events that haven’t happened and weren’t going to happen (and didn’t happen while she was competing now that she’s a graduating senior). A couple things I found surprising were: How much research she did about her attraction to a female and how much she knew about legal discrimination of same-sex partners and initiatives/alliances in place around the country. Interesting that the same exact coach has been identified in another interview in a less positive and professional light. This other individual works with the coach on a professional basis as a strength coach and has had the coach talk badly about the relationship with her in front of the entire swim team saying another student-athlete was uncomfortable with their relationship (which actually wasn’t the case at all it was taken out of context). This was probably the most intensive conversation about the experience of a student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority. I did forget to ask what inclusion means to her, but felt that the overall interview was comprehensive and shed light on a perspective I haven’t yet fully tapped into. I was surprised at the coaching staff’s response to the intrateam relationship-and honestly surprised that there was only a conversation with one of the student-athletes as opposed to both of them, either separately or together.

Participant Name: Beyoncé

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 3-28-2018

Today’s Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: “include everyone regardless of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, ability”

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information: Beyoncé is a senior cross country and track student-athlete who is majoring in criminal justice and sociology. She identifies as bisexual and white and is dating one of her former teammates. Both her and her girlfriend transferred from other institutions to come run at University. When asked if the coaches knew about her and her girlfriend dating, she responded with definitely but that it was never spoken of, that they don’t room together. That

being said, the first time the director of operations acknowledged the relationship between the two teammates was when there was a mix up with the rooms, with one room having a king size bed as opposed to two queens. She called Beyonce and asked if it was okay if her and girlfriend were comfortable rooming together on the road. Now, the director of operations asked about their relationship all the time. When asked about the athletic department's perceptions on student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, her response was interesting: "I think it's individual, based on who you are. They don't necessarily all have this one motto that they go by. You know? I feel like it's never even been talked about. I feel like that's another big thing, it's like, don't ask. Don't bring it up. Cause my coach absolutely knows that me and ... that's my girlfriend, but it's never been addressed. I think it's more of ... for me, from my personal experience, I think it's more an ignorance is their attitude. They just ignore it." He also referenced her girlfriend as her "little friend," "roommate," "teammate," and "training partner" so basically anything but "girlfriend." She wasn't sure about any resources on campus or within the athletic department but was sure there had to be something. When asked how a promotion of inclusion would be received by the surrounding area, she responded "Backlash. I don't know ... with anything socially ... I feel like Arkansas is falling behind. Okay, last year when the basketball players knelt, it was this huge uproar. And donors are like, you're gonna kneel on the game, I'm gonna kneel on donating, in it was this huge big mess. That, to me, was the surrounding area not supporting their student athletes. That's kind of scary, cause like shit, what if I were to do something like that because of my sexuality. How would the outside world ... or just the surrounding Arkansas area perceive that? I don't know." She talked about how she wished her experience would have been a little bit different "I think just in the ... because like I've said before, it's a lot of don't ask, don't bring it up. I see our coach or staff members ask other teammates, how's your boyfriend, things like that. That sucks, cause it's like, I know you're genuinely ... maybe you are curious, I don't care, but I know you're just not asking me those same question. You're not treating me the same. I think if I was treated differently, I think I would fight to stay here next year. I have all these opportunities to go pro, and all these different places are talking to me. For me, it's way more appealing to go to somewhere like Seattle or Portland where these running groups are like, come train with me, than to stay here with my coach and he's like, no I'll train you. That's definitely an option, he wants me, but I'm like, no. I don't want to stay here, just because of ... that's not the only reason, but sure that's a factor. Why would I stay with someone who doesn't even acknowledge a big part of my life is having a girlfriend." She has an incredibly supportive family who loves her girlfriend but has come into a little push back from a religious teammate. Going into the conversation, she knew that individual was going to have a conversation with her about religion and her relationship with her girlfriend but said they came out of it better friends. They sat and listened to what each other had to say, learned the perspective of the other and in the end had a greater appreciation of what the other stood for. Beyoncé felt as though her teammate was genuinely listening to what she had to say. Finally, when asked if the athletic department was inclusive, her response was "I don't wanna say no, but like no. If I had to pick yes or no I would say no... just due to my experience of not being treated the exact same as my straight peers."

Participant Name: Mark

Type of contact: In Person

Contact Date: 4-4-2018

Today's Date: 4-9-2018

Summary of Information:

Research Question 1: "The ability for everyone to co-exist and cooperate together"

Research Question 2 & 3:

Additional Information:

Mark is a male international student-athlete competing on the track team. He is a junior economics major and identifies as multiracial. Mark is a non traditional student in the sense that he's a few years older than his teammates who are the same year. He's been through a lot so far in his short life, his mother left at 2 years old and his father was verbally and physically abusive. His father also worked for an oil company and left for several months at a time, leaving Mark to fend for himself at the age of 12-13. At the time, one of his teammates and good friend's mother inquired about what was going on and invited him to come stay with their family. Now, he refers to his "adopted" family as his own parents and brother. He discussed the differences between Europe and America and the parent-child relationship: "Yeah, that isn't a thing over here. So you rely on your parents for a lot of things, which is just how the culture is which is, again, it's completely different to England. So, I feel like children want to make sure that they ... it's accepted in their parents eyes and you want to make your parents proud at the same time. It's just one of those things where individuals would rather live their parent's ideal dream for their children rather than them being what they want to be. They want to be happy. Why would they want to do ... so it's different. It is different." He talked about how hypocritical his religion father was, who attended church several times a week. His adopted family is "a portrayal of what life should be and being the nicest people you would ever meet. They treat the neighbors as their own." When talking about the track team, he claimed there was acceptance and they won't shame you but there's a lot of negativity involved. That some individuals were not willing to share rooms with a gay teammate and would talk about badly about individuals based on their sexual orientation. Mark went onto describe how some of his teammates were still learning about society and exposure to different cultures. Mark said he'd hate to be a part of the football team "because I just feel like there is too much testosterone in there and there is probably ... I know where most of them come from so they probably have that narrow mind, so I wouldn't say the track team was anywhere near like as bad as so and so, like some other teams I could think of. But, as much as they are accepting they are still afraid of change or difference." The difference between a male and female sexual minority may be completely different and females aren't really talked about badly but the relationship is normalized. He feels as though two lesbians together is more acceptable than two gay guys. He talked about how guys on his team use

personal or private information to roast other guys. “to make other people laugh. So shaming to bring hilarity...you could say bullying. You could say it was bullying but again it’s boys and that’s what boys do unfortunately.” When asked about his experience and if he’d want anything to be different he responded “I mean as a society in the South, I think the South still has a lot of work to do in terms of the whole ... they are not ... they are not the whole Chicago, they are not the whole San Francisco. It is one of those things where there are problems. I’ve seen like, I think they have Pride here sometimes and they have ... there are people who come in and say oh you’re going to hell. Like it is one of these things where my parents have always told me, if you have nothing nice to say just don’t say it. Unfortunately, again, we’re in the South. I keep pointing out. It’s going to take ... I feel like everyone is two steps in front of them. The South is just two steps behind. They need to kind of catch up with the rest of society. And I mean it. It takes time for change. But I feel like it’s going to take longer here. Like, do I need to change right now? I don’t want to force things on people who don’t believe in it, but I would like them to be able to see from a perspective of someone else and be able to understand what the other person sees.”

## APPENDIX E: Coding Memo Template

- Emerging Issues
  - What stands out?
  - What seems noteworthy?
  - How do you think about or describe what stands out?
  - How does the data relate to my guiding research questions?
  - Does this relate with what emerged with other participants? In what ways does it overlap or depart from that?
  - How do you think about the person's story in relation to other participants?
- Lingered questions
  - Were some of my questions leading? If so, in what ways? How might I account for that in the data?
  - What data, if any, do I still need to collect? What is missing?
  - What are the limitations of these data?
  - What other questions do I have after thoroughly reading through my data set?
- Reactivity
  - What assumptions do I bring to the data?
  - How am I, as the researcher, influencing the data?
  - Is there anything I can do to address this?
  - How do I see my presence/influence in the data?
  - How might I be misinterpreting the data?
- Ideas/thoughts about codes
  - What kinds of codes am I thinking about and why?
  - What prompted these codes?
  - What is shaping my sense of how to write about these data? How to represent the realities of the participants as they conveyed them?
  - Are they emic (insider perspective) or etic (outsider perspective)?
  - Are they inductive (more exploratory) or deductive (begin with theory)?
  - Are they related to theory? If so, in what way?
  - How does context mediate what I am seeing?
  - What assumptions continue to shape the research and analysis of data? What emerging stories am I discerning and why?
  - What patterns, if any, am I seeing and why?
- How do emerging learnings map onto and/or challenge my theoretical and/or conceptual framework
- What literature do I need to consult/reread?

## **APPENDIX F: Road Map of Findings**

RQ1:

### **Finding 1: Conceptualizing Inclusion**

Each participant was asked their own personal definition of inclusion. Some participants were unable to describe what inclusion meant to them.

RQ2:

### **Finding 2: Representation**

The athletic department documents and semi-structured interviews indicated the athletic department emphasized the student-athlete's responsibility to represent the university, the athletic department, their coaches, their team, their families, and themselves.

- Performance
- Brand/Responsibility

### **Finding 3: Silence**

Silence refers to not expressing in speech; prohibit from speaking; absence of words. An overarching theme of the interview data was a sense of don't ask, don't tell in regards to sexuality. A sense of silence when it came to the athletic department promoting or failing to promote inclusion of sexual minority student-athletes.

- Campus culture
- Athletic department culture
- Lack of inclusive language
- Pushback and backlash

### **Finding 4: Accessibility**

Accessibility is the quality of being easy to obtain or use; easily understood or appreciated. For the majority of the participants, they were unaware of any resources on campus or within the athletic department even though they had all been exposed to someone who identified as sexual minority.

- Exposure to sexual minority community
- Resources
- Other athletic departments and universities

RQ3:

### **Finding 5: Religion and Sexuality/Sexual Minorities**

The interview protocol did not include any questions regarding religious beliefs, views, or experiences. Nearly all participants discussed religion in some capacity.

- Participant relationship with religion
- Religious athletic organizations

#### Finding 6: Team Culture

When it comes to student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority, the culture within the sport team was one of the most influential aspects of their experience. The culture within the team included relationships with coaches and teammates.

- Coaches' influence
- Dating within the team
- Sport-specific
- Teammates' perspective

#### Finding 7: Acceptance

Acceptance is the process of being received as adequate or suitable. This theme may be misleading initially, but the readers will find that student-athletes who identify as sexual minority do not feel fully accepted within the athletic department. This theme describes the student-athlete who identifies as sexual minority experience, the perception of athletic department inclusion, the desire for certain inclusive resources, optimal/ideal inclusive behaviors and the perceived benefits associated with inclusive environments.

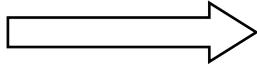
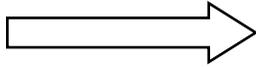
- Brittany
- Jessica
- Daniella
- Mandy
- Beyoncé
- Mark

#### Finding 8: Desire

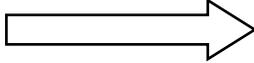
After inquiring about the resources on campus and within the athletic department, many of the participants discussed their desire for more: resources, policies, inclusive practices, etc. Some also discussed the ideal inclusive behaviors they'd imagine in such a supportive space and the perceived benefits associated with an inclusive athletic department.

- Visibility
- Education
- Safe space

**APPENDIX G: Analytic Category Development**

<b>Table 8. Analytic Category Development</b>			
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Finding Statement</b>	<b>Outcome/Consequence (Research Problem)</b>	<b>Analytic Category</b>
1. How is inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department conceptualized?	<b>Finding 1: Conceptualization of Inclusion</b>	<p>The participants individually defined what inclusion meant to them and ranged from acceptance to proactively and visibly supporting the student-athletes who identify as student-athletes. Acknowledging the gap between the emphasized values of the athletic department and the actuality of experiences of inclusion.</p> <p align="center"></p>	<b>Category 1:</b> Acknowledging individual conceptualization of inclusion, inclusive policies, practices, and behaviors.
2. How does an NCAA Division I athletic department address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority?	<b>Finding 2: Representation</b>	<p>After analyzing the documents and interviews, the overarching realization was that this particular athletic department did not address inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority in an overt way. Participants found a gap between the diversity and inclusion the athletic department promotes and the reality of the student-athlete experience. Support pertaining to student-athletes who identify as sexual minority is significantly lacking. This lack of addressing inclusion could be addressed by implementing education and training, programs, support groups, use of inclusive language, and increased visibility of sexual minority support within the athletic department</p> <p align="center"></p>	<b>Category 2:</b> Recognizing the gap between University athletic department’s emphasized values and actual practices and behaviors.
	<b>Finding 3: Silence</b>		
	<b>Finding 4: Accessibility</b>		

**Table 8. Analytic Category Development**

Research Question	Finding Statement	Outcome/Consequence (Research Problem)	Analytic Category
<p>3. How do student-athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion within an NCAA Division I athletic department?</p>	<p><b>Finding 5: Religion and Sexuality</b></p>	<p>For the majority of the student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, coaches and teammates had tremendous influence on their experiences competing for University. Individuals closest to student-athletes play a huge role in the experience of inclusion. Leveraging inclusive training for those working closest to student-athletes regularly to create inclusive environments for all student-athletes.</p> 	<p><b>Category 3:</b> Understanding experiences of and leveraging inclusive support for student-athletes who identify as sexual minority.</p>
	<p><b>Finding 6: Team Culture</b></p>		
	<p><b>Finding 7: “Acceptance”</b></p>		
	<p><b>Finding 8: Desire</b></p>		

## APPENDIX H: Findings through Recommendations

Table 9. Findings Through Recommendations			
Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
“If I find this...”	“Then I think this means...”	“Therefore I conclude that...”	“Thus I recommend that...”
Conceptualizing Inclusion	Participants each had different ways of describing what inclusion meant to them personally. Some utilized inclusion or inclusive while others referred to acting the same, feeling a part of something, having space carved out, being welcoming, and creating space that they can be themselves. Others discussed feeling safe and respected regardless of who they love and making sure the individuals wanted to be pulled into something. The most telling response was communication and expression of acceptance, not just tolerance; and how silence is an indicator that the environment is <b><i>not</i></b> inclusive.	These participants understood what I meant when I asked about inclusion and they were able to answer the interview questions accordingly.	I recommend that the athletic department listens to their views and reevaluates how inclusion is perceived within the athletic department itself from many different levels of employment: administration, support staff, coaches, and student-athletes.
Representation	From the first day they set foot on campus, student-athletes are constantly reminded that it is <b><i>their</i></b> responsibility to represent the university, AD, coaches, teams, families, and public in a positive light. Everyone I spoke	Student-athletes who identify as sexual minority may not feel as though they’re an adequate representation of the university and athletic department. As will come up in the next couple findings, when sexual orientation	Athletic department needs to do a better job of recognizing and honoring diversity of sexual orientation within the student-athlete population, as well as with AD employees. Merely mentioning

**Table 9 (cont.). Findings Through Recommendations**

Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
“If I find this...”	“Then I think this means...”	“Therefore I conclude that...”	“Thus I recommend that...”
	With understood this message and reiterated what they’d been told: representing everyone through actions and social media, that being a student-athlete is a privilege and that there is a university and personal brand at stake in everything they do.	diversity is not discussed in any way, shape or form, these student-athletes feel as though they should not be open about their relationship and wonder about the backlash and push back if they were to take their relationship or sexuality public.	sexuality is a start.
Religion and Sexuality	This is the most organic finding of all. I did have religion listed in any shape or form in the demographic questionnaire or the interview protocol. The vast majority of participants discussed religion and its influence on the beliefs and attitudes toward the sexual minority community or toward their own sexuality. Religion is often an indicator of less positive attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals and a source of turmoil for individuals who of non-heterosexual identities.	Religion within the athletic department has a huge impact on the experience of the student-athlete.	Having discussions about religion and sexuality. Or acknowledging sexuality in the same breath as religion and attempting to show others that there are indefinite perspectives on religion and sexuality and there can be agreeance or disagreements on beliefs. It is important that all know there will be no tolerance of discrimination or harassment based on religion and sexuality and all individuals within the athletic department are expected to aid in fostering of a diverse, inclusive, and accepting environment for all.

**Table 9 (cont.). Findings Through Recommendations**

Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
“If I find this...”	“Then I think this means...”	“Therefore I conclude that...”	“Thus I recommend that...”
Silence	The campus and athletic department were “don’t ask, don’t tell” environments in which sexuality was not acknowledged or addressed. The AD did not promote inclusion of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority.	With the absence of support groups, education/training for coaches, staff, and student-athletes, visible signs or markers of inclusion, and inclusive language, it is clear that embracing this community of student-athletes is not a high priority for this AD. There are programs and groups for other marginalized groups such as first generation, women, and international student-athletes.	My recommendation is visibility and awareness in the form of support groups, visible markers, education/training on inclusive language and behaviors, promoting inclusion publicly, and developing programs or initiatives that student-athletes who identify and allies are welcome to participate.
Team Culture	The team culture and environment was one of the most influential aspects of their experience: coach influence, teammates, dating within the team, and individual perspectives. Creating inclusive environments is most important at the team level-coaches’ and teammates’ perspectives are critical because those are the people who either have power over you or you’re around on a daily basis.	Promoting/emphasizing the importance of diversity within a team but actually embracing and engaging in practices that are congruent with “inclusion.” It is inevitable to have people from different religious, geographic, SES, education, etc. backgrounds but finding a way to recognize common ground and the importance of making others feel valued.	Training for coaches and student-athletes. Team rules having cultural expectations such as respect, integrity, acceptance, valuing others, importance of mental health and a sense of belonging.

**Table 9 (cont.). Findings Through Recommendations**

Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
“If I find this...”	“Then I think this means...”	“Therefore I conclude that...”	“Thus I recommend that...”
Accessibility	Though some resources are in place on campus for the general student population, only a few participants were familiar with on campus resources. The athletic department lacked visible/out faculty and staff and allies, support groups, and policies to protect student-athletes past the blanket nondiscrimination statement.	University athletic department is not overtly inclusive of student-athletes who identify as sexual minority due to lack of resources and visibility of the few resources available on campus	Athletic department personnel should develop resources specific to student-athletes that are not only accessible but promoted. As Mandy mentions, ensure that there are no negative consequences for utilizing resources by athletic department personnel, coaches, teammates, and other student-athletes.
“Acceptance”	Acceptance is defined as the process of being received as adequate or suitable. This theme may be misleading initially, but the readers will find that student-athletes who identify as sexual minority do not feel fully accepted within the athletic department. This theme describes the student-athlete experience in depth for each of the five student-athletes who identify as sexual minority, their perceptions on University athletic department’s inclusion, and overall takeaways for needs as student-athletes.	The participants described University athletic department as a definition-consistent tolerant environment as opposed to “accepting” or “inclusive.”	University athletic department personnel should become familiar with the differences between hostile, conditionally tolerant, and open and inclusive environments and implement policies, practices, and behaviors based on the criteria.

**Table 9. Findings Through Recommendations**

Findings Through Recommendations:			
Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions	Recommendations
“If I find this...”	“Then I think this means...”	“Therefore I conclude that...”	“Thus I recommend that...”
Desire	After inquiring about the resources on campus and within the athletic department, many of the participants discussed their desire for more: resources, policies, inclusive practices, etc. Some also discussed the ideal inclusive behaviors they’d imagine in such a supportive space and the perceived benefits associated with an inclusive athletic department	There is desire to create safe spaces within the athletic department but support staff in particular do not feel as though they are equipped with the appropriate tools, skills, and strategies to do so.	Give the people what they want! Training and education is the first step. Beyond that, the patience and attention to ensure inclusion over time through a change in culture within University athletic department.