

LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES IN COLLEGE ATHLETICS

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ABSTRACT

Background:

In contemporary United States' society, LGBTQ+ identities are widely becoming more accepted. However, LGBTQ+ athletes often experience discrimination at the college level, ranging from exclusion to hostility in sport (Attebury-Ash and Woodford, 2018; Griffin and Taylor, 2012). This project stemmed from previous experiences and research in LGBTQ+ rights for collegiate athletes, specifically at the varsity level. With limited knowledge about other types of sports' activities (ex. intramurals and club), the research was designed to understand how LGBTQ+ identities function within different levels of collegiate athletics. This research sought to see how LGBTQ+ identities experience college athletics.

Methods:

This research comes from a semester-long research course in the sociology major, Quantitative Methods. Students were tasked with coming up with research questions that they would then address using a survey and subsequent analyses of this data. The result was a self-designed survey instrument using Qualtrics software. Questions asked about a wide range of experiences within athletics, including experiences with teammates, coaches and other athletic staff, locker rooms, bathrooms, and team uniforms. Cisgender-heterosexual individuals were asked a slightly different set of questions than LGBTQ+-identifying individuals, recognizing that their experiences in sport may be different. The survey was distributed to the campus community in early October 2019, and remained open for a month. No identifying information was collected.

Results:

To measure LGBTQ+ athletes' experiences with perceptions of discrimination, a Support Score Index was calculated. This score measured comfort with a range of athletic experiences, such as locker rooms, bathrooms, and dress code policies. Support Scores ranged from 0 to 7, where higher numbers indicate a greater sense of support for LGBTQ+ individuals. Overall, student-athletes showed a moderate amount of support for LGBTQ+ athletes, with a mean Support Score of 5.36. However, mean Support Scores varied significantly based on team gender. Differences in means were statistically significant between male, female, and mixed gender teams (p -value < 0.01). These findings support the NCAA's hypotheses as discussed in their 2012 LGBTQ resource manual, *Champions of Respect* (Griffin and Taylor, 2012). As the NCAA highlights, LGBTQ+ issues can, and often do, look different within men's and women's

athletics. Therefore, it is not surprising that data indicates that there may be an association with gender of athletic team and support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Discussion and Conclusions:

The assumption that all LGBTQ+ athletes experience discrimination may not be entirely accurate. Results of the LGBTQ+ Support Score Index indicate that discrimination is more likely to occur on a male team, but LGBTQ+ athletes are likely to be shown support on a female or mixed-gender team, indicating that the discrimination might be more likely to occur on certain types of teams. Further research may also choose to address the differences in LGBTQ+ support among different types of sports.

It is important to address these potential differences in gendered athletics when it comes to LGBTQ+ support, because there are implications for the wellbeing of many student-athletes, including cisgender, heterosexual teammates. Current research tends to focus on statistics and anecdotal evidence that discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals *does* indeed exist in college athletics. However, to what effect? Future research should also focus on the impacts of such discrimination on athletic and academic performance.

Ultimately, the NCAA and other governing athletic bodies should prioritize developing and implementing policies and procedures that ensure equitable access to athletic programs, and safe spaces for all. This includes taking steps to increase programming and awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Specific action items might include examining the gender breakdown of sports, including the number of women's and mixed-gender sports offered, revisiting uniform and dress code standards, and addressing facility concerns (locker rooms, bathrooms, playing fields, etc.) to ensure equity of access and comfort of all student-athletes

Bibliography/Works Cited

- Atteberry-Ash, Brittanie, and Michael R. Woodford. 2018. "Support for Policy Protecting LGBT Student Athletes among Heterosexual Students Participating in Club and Intercollegiate Sports." *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 15(2):151-162. Retrieved 6 Feb 2020, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.ithaca.edu:2048/10.1007/s13178-017-0283-z>.
- Griffin, Pat and Hudson Taylor. 2012. "Champions of Respect: Inclusion of LGBTQ+ Student-Athletes and Staff in NCAA Programs." Edited by Karen Morrison, NCAA Director of Inclusion. Retrieved 7 Feb 2020, <https://bit.ly/3bkTIKJ>.

Supporting Graphs and Tables

Figure 1 - Table showing the breakdown of respondents' athletic participation level.

Participation Level	Percent
Intramural	7.2
Club	25.3
Varsity	53
None	14.5
Totals	100

Figure 2 - Table illustrating the breakdown of respondents' team gender.

Team Gender	Percent
Male	23.5
Female	55.9
Mixed-Gender	20.6
Totals	100

Figure 3 - A histogram showing the distribution of different LGBTQ+ Support Scores of all respondents.

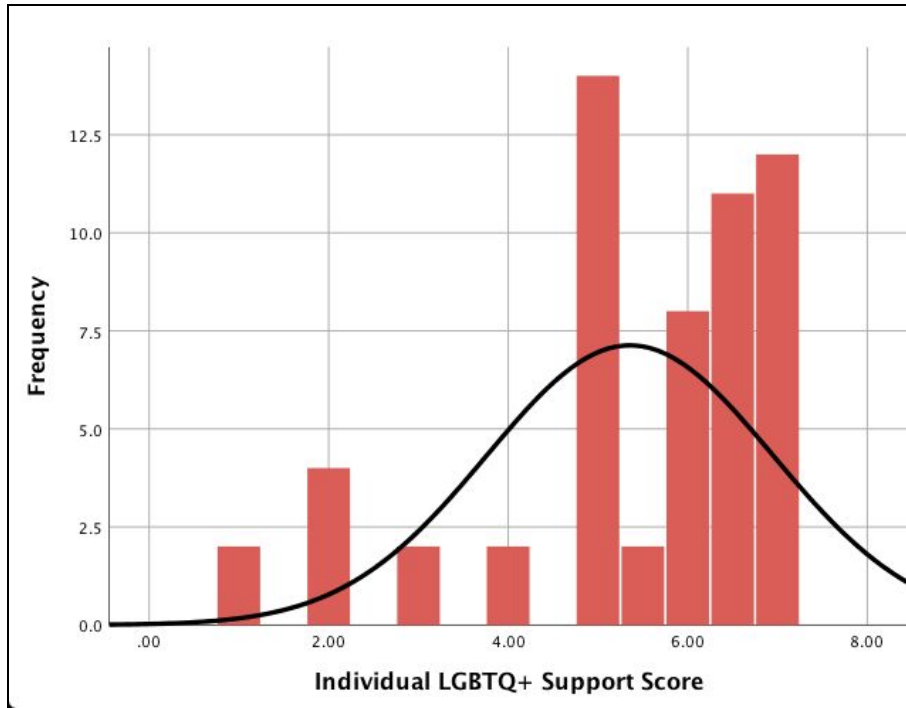


Figure 4 - A bar chart showing the mean LGBTQ+ Support Score based on gender of athletic team. Differences in means were statistically significant between male, female, and mixed gender teams ($p = 0.009$).

