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THAT'S SO GAY: LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVITY AND EDUCATION IN YOUTH SPORT
THROUGH WEB BASED CONTENT

Caitlin Shortridge

Master's Project Literature Review

Submitted to the School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

In

Sport Administration

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Abstract

LGBTQ+ youth, in sport and society, are more visible today than in years past. Athletes are coming out at earlier ages and need the support of those around them. Olympians, world champions, and elite athletes are acknowledging their identities and encouraging youth to be their authentic selves too. Though true, LGBTQ+ youth often do not feel safe in sport (Johnson et al., 2018). My goal of this project is to give youth athletes resources to better understand and include teammates who identify as LGBTQ+, making spaces safer and more inclusive for LGBTQ+ youth athletes. I created a website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) that houses a collection of resources and information specific to LGBTQ+ youth athletes. Among these resources are pages for sport statistics, news, LGBTQ+ language, athlete activities, a sport video library, and resources at the local and national level. Each page has interactive content, making it accessible and engaging for youth. On the language page, youth athletes can find flash cards with LGBTQ+ vocabulary. Hovering over each tile, they can learn vocabulary specific to the LGBTQ+ community. Within the sport statistics page, athletes can hover through a collection of statistics from youth athletes on their feelings of safety and sport avoidance behaviors. Both the news and video library pages connect youth to video and media content highlighting LGBTQ+ athletes. Under the athlete activities tab, athletes will find individual and group activities, educating them on LGBTQ+ experiences, that they can complete with their team. Finally, youth athletes can access resources, both local and national, through the resources tab. Resources include links to such organizations as the Trevor Project, GLSEN, Athlete Ally, and the It Gets Better Campaign. Through my website, youth athletes easily can find new and existing educational materials to better understand and support their LGBTQ+ teammates.

That's So Gay: LGBTQ+ Inclusivity and Education in Youth Sport Through Web Based Content

For many, sport is a safe haven and a place where anyone can belong. Sport is an opportunity to teach about teamwork, commitment, discipline, and time management in a fun and engaging atmosphere (MacCracken, 2011). For some of our youngest and most vulnerable participants, that is not the case. These vulnerable participants are youth athletes who identify as members of the lesbian, gay male, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community. Cisgender and heterosexual athletes historically face the least discriminatory barriers when participating in youth sport (Denison & Kitchen, 2015). Whether youth or Olympic level, sport brings together people with a wide variety of identities, be it religious, ethnic, racial, sexuality, or gender. Since the introduction of modern sport with the Olympics in Greece, sport has grown to include women, people of color, athletes of different abilities, and LGBTQ+ athletes among many other subgroups (Orlansky, 2007). Sexual orientation and gender identity are talked about now more than ever before and many youth teams have athletes who identify as LGBTQ+ (Krane et al., 2018). As youth athletes begin to self-identify their genders and sexualities at younger ages, we need to be certain they are in environments safe to do so. Sport should be safe and inclusive for these individuals and one way to foster this environment is through educating everyone involved (Hanna, 2017). Web based content is one way we can educate others on inclusive spaces for everyone, especially LGBTQ+ youth athletes.

Media platforms and use of web content for educational purposes is rapidly growing among youth today. Based on research conducted by the Pew Research Center, 95% of American teens ages 12-17 have access to and use the internet regularly (Zickuhr, 2014). Media platforms and web-based content are ways we can easily reach a large portion of American youth with

educational material on the LGBTQ+ community. Research shows that the internet has been known to foster both positive (e.g., self-esteem, relatedness, confidence) and negative (e.g., cyberbullying, harassment, declines in mental health) outcomes in users' lives (Abreu & Kenny, 2018). Discrimination and hate have no place in sport, or the world, and my project will be taking one step towards eliminating this.

The introduction of web-based content into school environments has drastically changed the ways in which students learn materials and behaviors (Holcomb et al., 2007). In current, traditional education settings, information on LGBTQ+ communities is lacking in the curriculum (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). The creation of my website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) will work to fill this gap and create an interactive space where youth athletes, and anyone else interested, can participate in interactive activities, read stories about out LGBTQ+ athletes, access resources for allies, and more. Several resources and media outlets exist for LGBTQ+ individuals, but they are not in one place and can be difficult to find if one is not certain where to look. Additionally, very few are targeted at youth populations, even fewer specifically for youth LGBTQ+ athletes and peers. Research into the life skill development of vulnerable youth suggests that more than nonvulnerable youth, it is important that sport be used to develop vulnerable athletes' emotional skills (Hermens et al., 2017). These vulnerable athletes specifically, without proper development of emotional and social skills, potentially face more mental health problems.

My project is a website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) where many of these resources and outlets are housed in one space. Among the resources available will be literature and news on the LGBTQ+ community, activities for athletes, video content on inclusion and current LGBTQ+ athletes in sport, and locations where LGBTQ+ individuals can seek help

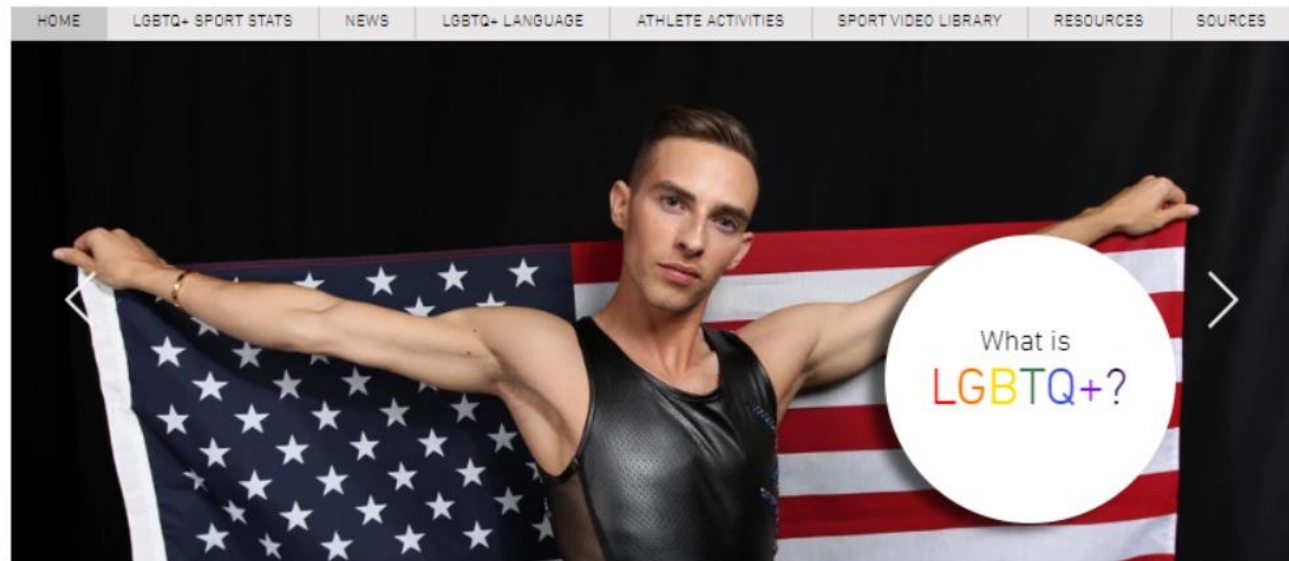
should they need it. Content also will be available for peers, mentors, coaches, and families of LGBTQ+ athletes who want to be more inclusive and supportive in creating a space for these athletes to engage in sport. The website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) will be an open platform available to all interested and accessible with any Wi-Fi or data connection, making it accessible at most schools, with 99% of schools having internet access according to Education Super Highway's most recent State of States report (2019). They also reported that in the United States there are 46.3 million students and 2.8 million teachers connected through fiber. With this access, 94% of schools report digital learning happening in their classrooms, with 96% of school leaders believing it to have a positive impact on instructor effectiveness and student outcomes. Education is a powerful tool. Media content presented through this website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) will create a common space that is age appropriate and accessible to those who wanted to be more inclusive and educated on the LGBTQ+ community. On the following pages are screenshots of the website.

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>

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LGBTQ+ Youth In Sport



L **G** **B** **T** **Q**

LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER QUEER

LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The plus shows that this acronym includes people who may not identify with these terms, but who do not consider themselves heterosexual (straight).

Creating inclusive spaces in sport for LGBTQ+ youth is important. Through this website, you will be able to learn vocabulary, practice activities, and hear experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes so that you can be a better ally in sport and aid in creating inclusive spaces.

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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-language-1>

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SPORT STATISTICS

Participating in sport is often a great highlight for many youth. However, for youth in the LGBTQ+ community it can be incredibly intimidating and scary based on their school and sport climate. Below are some statistics from the Human Rights Campaign Play To Win Report (2017) about experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in sport today. Hover over the graphics to see stats and facts on LGBTQ+ youth sport.

For a full copy of the Human Rights Campaign Play To Win Report, with these statistics and more, click [here](#).



<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-language>

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A number of popular and lesser know publications run news articles and stories specifically on LGBTQ+ individuals. Though they may not always be easy to find, their stories matter and I want you to have access to them. I have compiled a collection of our favorite LGBTQ+ newspapers, websites, and blogs so that you can find content that represents your experiences and identities.



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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/language>

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TALKING ABOUT LGBTQ+ SPORT

With LGBTQ+ teammates comes a unique set of terminology and slang. Below are just a few terms you may hear from an LGBTQ+ teammate or when discussing LGBTQ+ teammates (Killermann, 2020; Krane, 2019). It is important to know these terms so you can better and more respectfully address those in the LGBTQ+ community.

A more comprehensive list can be found [here](#).

TERMS



<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-inclusive-language>

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USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN SPORT

It is one thing to know LGBTQ+ inclusive language, but how do we use it in a sport context? Outlined below are just some suggestions and ways you can use your new vocabulary to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ teammates.

A complete guide from Rainbow Laces, a Stonewall campaign, is available [here](#).

#1. DON'T USE STEREOTYPICAL LANGUAGE

Stereotypes are often inaccurate and can be hurtful to those being stereotyped. Get to know fellow players before assuming things about them based on an identity.

#2. USE AN ATHLETE'S PREFERRED PRONOUNS

No one wants to be called something they're not. Respect if someone tells you their preferred pronouns and use them when talking with them.

#3. USE GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Instead of saying "you guys" or "hey ladies" when talking to your team, say "y'all" or "hey all". This language embraces those who may not identify as a male or female.

#4. AVOID MAKING LGBTQ+=BAD

If you say "that's so gay" when you dislike or think something is stupid, you are saying LGBTQ+ is equal to those feelings. Avoid these phrases.

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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/activities>

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Activities are a great way for you to learn about the LGBTQ+ community in a unique and fun way. In the drop down tab above, we have provided a number of activities for athletes to learn and feel more comfortable about the LGBTQ+ community. These activities aim to prepare athletes for creating spaces inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Feel free to print, handout, or share any materials with family, peers, or coaches. These can be generalized beyond sport and are great learning tools for all.

ATHLETES

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-athlete-activities>

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LGBTQ+ VOCAB CHECK



This worksheet will allow you to check your understanding of LGBTQ+ Vocab used in this website and the real world. Understanding this vocabulary will allow you to be a better teammate by giving you the right words to use in being inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. Click the soccer ball to the left to download the PDF file.

TRUE COLORS: AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS



This activity is for you and your teammates. As we've discussed elsewhere on this website, assumptions (stereotypes) of others can be very hurtful. This is certainly true for your LGBTQ+ teammates. Being able to identify how they see themselves is very important, this activity will help you understand that. Click the baseball to the left to download the PDF file.

GUESS WHO



This activity is for you and your teammates. Getting to know your teammates is a great way to create a safe space where everyone feels welcomed. This activity will allow you to learn some fun, potentially new facts about your teammates you would not otherwise know. Click the basketball to the left to download the PDF file.

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/video-library>

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VIDEO LIBRARY

Using the buttons below or drop down tabs above, you can navigate the selection of videos I've compiled featuring athletes who have come out as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Hear about their experiences and the ways they were supported by peers, coaches, and others.

[A Message From Gay Athletes](#)

[#ProudToPlay](#)

[The Out Field](#)

[Jake Bain on Ellen](#)

[Mason Darrow Princeton Football](#)

[Trans Track Stars](#)



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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/a-message-from-gay-athletes>

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Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXqFx0uk5bg>

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/proudtoplay>

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Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S14QJcl4KNs&t=10s>

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/the-out-field>

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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/jake-bain-on-ellen>

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<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/mason-darrow-princeton-football>

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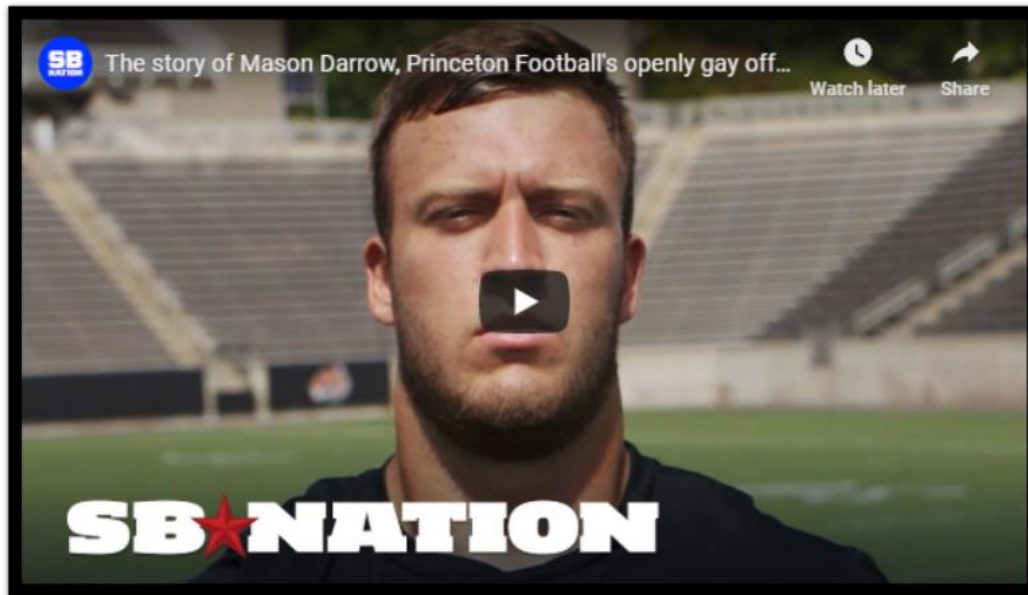
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Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYXrNX3xafi>

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-mason-darrow-princeton-foot>

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RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is in need or would like additional resources, there are buttons below to state and national LGBTQ+ friendly organizations.

OHIO

NATIONAL

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/ohio>

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OHIO RESOURCES

EQUITAS HEALTH

Telephone:

614-299-2437

Address:

4400 N. High Street #300, Columbus, OH 43214

KALEIDOSCOPE YOUTH CENTER

Telephone:

614-294-5437

Address:

1904 N. High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215

LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Telephone:

216-651-5428

Address:

6600 Detroit Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44102

LGBTQ+ RESOURCE CENTER, BGSU

Telephone:

419-372-2642

Address:

427 Bowen Thompson Student Union, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

RAINBOW AREA YOUTH (RAY)

Telephone:

419-255-7510

Address:

St. Mark's Episcopal Church 2272 Collingwood, Boulevard, Toledo, OH 43620

<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020/copy-of-ohio>

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NATIONAL RESOURCES

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[GLAAD SPORTS](#)

[HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN \(HRC\) SPORTS](#)

[INTERNATIONAL LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUEER AND INTERSEX YOUTH AND STUDENT ORGANIZATION \(IGLYO\)](#)

[IT GETS BETTER CAMPAIGN](#)

[LGBT SPORTSAFE](#)

[MATTHEW SHEPHERD FOUNDATION](#)

[NCLR SPORTS PROJECT](#)

[THE TREVOR PROJECT](#)

[YOU CAN PLAY PROJECT](#)

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Appendix

Review of Literature

This review of literature is an analysis of research about LGBTQ+ youth in sport and their experiences. The literature review serves to support the argument that youth athletes, specifically those with LGBTQ+ teammates, need more access to educational materials on the LGBTQ+ community and inclusive practices. The contents of this literature review, including data on school climates, social and emotional outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth, and ally practices, echo the need for this level of education.

School Climates for LGBTQ+ Youth

School climate is one of many factors influencing the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth participating in physical activity and sport, competitively or recreationally. How they navigate their time in the education system has been shown to have significant impact on their emotional well-being and feelings of safety while in school (Kosciw et al., 2018). In the 2017 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) report, a troubling percentage of LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling unsafe, hearing hostile language, and being harassed or assaulted while at school (Kosciw et al., 2018). In their findings, 59.5% of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation. Additionally, 44.6% and 35% reported feeling unsafe because of their gender expression and gender, respectively. These feelings of unsafety due to the hostile environments created in school settings for LGBTQ+ students have led many to simply skip school entirely. Participants in the GLSEN survey reported that in the previous month of their survey's completion, 34.8% of LGBTQ+ students had missed an entire school day (Kosciw et al., 2018). Of those reports, one tenth (10.5%) of surveyed participants had missed four or more days (Kosciw et al., 2018). Students' attempts to avoid these negative experiences

in school settings do not end at class absences though. Roughly three-fourths (75.4% and 70%) of LGBTQ+ students reported avoiding school functions (e.g., dances, concerts, trips, etc.) and extracurricular activities for fear of safety, with 18% having gone as far as to change schools for safety concerns.

The looming question is what behaviors are making LGBTQ+ students feel so unsafe in their schools? In Peter et al.'s (2016) research, students reported hearing derogatory language, specifically "that's so gay," up to 15 times in a single day. When discussing the frequency of hearing the phrase "that's so gay" a participant from Peter et al.'s (2016) research said the following:

Overall, people are becoming more and more negative towards people's sexual nature. Sometimes it is referred to as a joke, but anyone who is LGBTQ could be deeply offended by 'Joking.' (p. 203)

Among other behaviors reported, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, physical harassment, and assault were mentioned (Kosciw et al., 2018). One participant in Kosciw et al.'s (2018) report shared their experience of harassment:

I was barred from using the boys' bathroom and when forced to use the girls' I experienced frequent harassment and physical assault. I frequently went a whole day without using the bathrooms, and this has led to severe health complications. (p. 15)

Of those involved in the Kosciw et al. (2018) research, 70.1% of LGBTQ+ students reported they had been verbally harassed, being called slurs (e.g., fag, dyke, homo) or threatened (physically or verbally), in the past year. Another 48.7% of LGBTQ+ students were electronically bullied (cyberbullying) in the previous year, with an additional 57.3% being sexually harassed based on their sexual orientation. In a study of 20,000 Boston metropolitan

area students grades 9-12, the 1,200 LGBT participants reported cyberbullying at a rate two times that of their heterosexual peers (Wiederhold, 2014). LGBTQ+ students described self-harming due to anxiety from homonegative bullying (Orue et al., 2018). In a 2013 report from GLSEN, statistics showed that LGBT youth used the internet 45 minutes longer each day than their heterosexual peers, putting them at greater risk to be exposed to cyberbullying (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Within the school system it is not always easy for LGBTQ+ students to find supportive literature, resources, and information (Pierson, 2017). Religiously strict schools can be especially difficult to navigate, with bans on LGBTQ+ literature that could help to educate on these communities (Curwood et al., 2009). Hughes-Hassell et al. (2013) examined 125 schools for access to LGBTQ reading materials. Across the schools, there were a total of 4,284 books that were LGBTQ in theme. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2013) divided these titles into fiction, non-fiction, and biographical categories. Of the 4,284 books, over half (2,616) were fiction, 1,383 were nonfiction, and only 285 were biographical novels from members of the LGBTQ community. Of the schools involved, over half held fewer than 10 LGBTQ-themed nonfiction books, with 3 having none. With regards to biographical novels, 109 schools (87.2 percent) had less than 5 in their libraries. These findings paint a vivid picture of need for more LGBTQ resources in schools for LGBTQ+ youth and peers.

Research consistently supports that LGB youth experience suicidal ideation, attempts of self-harm, and suicide at greater rates than their heterosexual peers (Silenzio et al., 2007). Transgender youth also were found to be at greater odds for suicidal ideation compared to cisgender males and females of similar age (Ybarra et al., 2015). High school students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning were at high-risk for these

ideations and behaviors including consideration of suicide, planning the suicide, attempting suicide (Hatchel et. al., 2019).

It is important to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ students because similar trends carryover into sport climates as well. Homonegative language is heard in sport climates, physical safety is a concern, and many LGBTQ+ youth athletes do not feel they have adequate resources (Kosciw et al., 2018). Understanding these experiences builds the foundation for the need of resources among LGBTQ+ youth athletes, such as easily accessible content a website. Before we can address their impact in sport, we must understand how these behaviors are experienced and how they impact LGBTQ+ students on a regular basis at school. Some schools have worked to create positive climates by adding Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) and other resources but reports of discrimination and feelings of unsafety continue. Around 26% of LGBTQ+ students do not feel they have a trusted adult at school they can talk to about what they are experiencing (Seelman et al., 2015). Research has found that when these students do not have supportive climates at school, they are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes such as engaging in self-harm or committing suicide (Peter et al., 2016).

Outcomes of Homonegative Language

Homonegative language is common in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and playing fields (Orvue et al., 2018). The presence of this language in school settings puts LGBTQ+ youth at disproportionately higher rates for negative mental health outcomes compared to their heterosexual peers (Demissie et al., 2018). Identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning can have a lasting impact on the mental and behavioral health of youth (Tharinger, 2008). Among these negative mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth are anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and declines in academic performance (Painter et al., 2018). Based on a 21 year

longitudinal study, researchers determined that LGB (this study did not include transgender or queer identifying participants) youth were at a risk of 1.6 to 6.2 times that of their heterosexual peers to experience these mental health conditions (Fergusson et al., 1999). Some homonegative terms and phrases most frequently used and heard included “fag” and “that’s so gay” (Athanases & Comar, 2008). LGBTQ+ youth are already more stressed and inconvenienced than their heteronormative peers (Reisner et al., 2015). Frequently hearing terms such as “fag” and “that’s so gay” only add to the other stressors and inconveniences of LGBTQ+ youth.

To limit homonegative slurs, schools have tried to implement training to create more inclusive spaces; though, often they were perceived as punishment rather than proactive measures (Iida & McGivern, 2019). Despite training and interventions being implemented in school and sport settings, stories of homonegative language in sport are still reported in a wide variety of news articles, studies, and reports (Rugby Union, 2020; France 24, 2019). Changes have been happening to lessen homonegative language, but athletes and students still experience it. Research has supported that the climates for lesbian, gay, and bisexual athletes are changing, but transgender athletes still face a significant amount of transnegative language (Carroll et al., 2012). In a review of the experiences of transgender or transitioning softball players in lesbian softball leagues, researchers found that athletes who identified as transgender often faced verbal abuse from opponents (Travers & Deri, 2011). The current tactics for changing these behaviors are not working, because those engaging in the required workshops blame LGBTQ+ individuals for having to complete the courses instead of reflecting on their own personal actions and see the trainings as punishment (Power Forward, 2013).

For transgender and gender expansive youth, the use of preferred pronouns and names continues to be a barrier as well (Reisner et al., 2015). When not referred to by their chosen

name and pronouns, as Reisner et al. (2015) point out, these students are further exposed to potential bullying and teasing by classmates and others. Katie Reilly (2019), a Times reporter, heard from Aidyn, a 16-year-old female-to-male (FTM) transgender young man, that his experience with coming out in school was not supported by his faculty:

I spent an hour a day for 180 days with Mr. Kluge, watching as he avoided me and other transgender students. Mr. Kluge's behavior made me feel alienated, upset, and dehumanized . . . It made me dread going to orchestra class each day. (paragraph 11)

Aidyn's mother added:

When anybody denies your child their personhood, their identity, denies them that supportive environment, they're actively harming your child . . . He's going through the process of identifying who he is as a person. That's something that everybody goes through, but when somebody identifies as being transgender, that's much more difficult to go through, because that's something that not everybody understands. (paragraph 10)

Unlike the case of Aidyn, when LGBTQ+ individuals are addressed by their preferred pronouns and preferred or chosen names, they feel heard and supported (Brown et al., 2020). Imagine wanting to be called by your name and pronouns and being denied that right. It is demoralizing and suggests your feelings and identity do not matter. For trans youth specifically, having an ally or queer adult who acknowledges their names and pronouns is very important (Clarkson, 2019).

Homo- and transnegative language does not only affect students, but athletes as well. These trends of name calling, cyberbullying, and blatant disregard for LGBTQ+ identities (pronouns and chosen names) are seen in sport as well. Much of the literature that is currently available is reflective of high school or higher levels of sport, reinforcing the importance of this project and need for further work in youth athletics inclusion education. In research conducted

with collegiate level athletes, 79.7% reported having heard homonegative slurs and comments on their sport teams (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Recent studies on school and sport climates for LGBTQ+ athletes find that persistent homonegative language is maintaining these hostile environments. Over 75% of teachers and coaches say they want safe climates for their students and athletes, but 50% claimed they never confront homonegativism (including language) when faced with it (Gill et al., 2010). Sadowski (2017) notes that when teachers are prepared through enumeration, they are much more likely to act on these homonegative and bullying behaviors:

Enumeration provides teachers and school personnel with the tools they need to implement anti-bullying and harassment policies, making it easier for them to prevent bullying and intervene when incidents occur. Evidence shows that educators often do not recognize anti-LGBT bullying and harassment as unacceptable behavior. Sometimes they fail to respond to the problem due to prejudice or community pressure. When they can point to enumerated language that provides clear protection for LGBT students, they feel more comfortable enforcing the policy. Students in schools with enumerated policies reported that teachers intervene more than twice as often compared to students in schools with generic anti-bullying policies, and more than three times as often compared to students in schools with no policy at all. (p. 6)

Failure to address homonegative behaviors and language could stem from lack of knowledge and resources to educate coaches and teachers on how to do so tactfully. It is important to educate LGBTQ+ peers and coaches about these behaviors and language choices because they play a large part in these athletes' experiences. Access to web-based terminology, positive depictions, and activities will be an important resource for athletes, coaches, and parents.

Experiences of Coming Out as LGBTQ+

Depending on their support system, climate of the environment in which they participate, and peers surrounding them, coming out can be liberating or very dangerous for LGBTQ+ youth (Morris et al., 2014). Mark, a Division III student-athlete, is just one LGBTQ+ athlete to share their experiences of coming out in sport (Mullin et al., 2018). Mark is a male volleyball player who came out to his team during the preseason before his senior year. Mark's experiences as a gay male, college student-athlete were discerned through interviews with Mark, his coaches (former and present), parents, a teammate, and close friends, and his social media posts. After coming out, Mark's team was largely supportive. However, some of the younger team members, who were not as educated about the LGBTQ+ community, distanced themselves and made Mark feel as though he was not accepted (Mullin et al., 2018). Mark had the following to say about his experience coming out to his team:

I told my two closest friends Luis and Cameron, who I've roomed with all 4 years first. If I need to tell the team, I want to tell them before I tell the team. I wanted someone to know before I had to get there [back on campus] and tell them in person. And so I was like, 'How can I do this?' I don't want to call them on the phone, because I don't want to cry. I don't want to do it on Facebook so I thought an e-mail was much more serious and professional; don't ask me why this was my thought process. And I just kind of said, you know, 'I wanted you guys to know.' And I sent it and I left right away to go get my sister from dance. I remember I was at a stoplight and I got this long text . . . from Cameron and it was awesome . . . [Cameron] said, 'If anybody says anything, I got your back . . . This is so inspiring.' He was awesome. And Luis took like a couple of days to respond so I was like, 'Oh gosh! . . . This is not good.' I was so nervous because he didn't respond.

‘Am I going to get the first person who’s not okay with it?’ But at the same time I knew Cameron was okay with it, my best friend and I live with him, so I knew I was going to be okay [on campus]. That was the reassurance. He [Luis] responded. He was just like, ‘Um, thanks so much for telling me. I love you. This is not a problem for me . . . Can’t wait to see you.’ Like ‘Cool. Nothing’s changed.’ That was probably August, probably about a month before school. (p. 230)

With regards to his younger teammates, Mark said the following:

There was . . . the one [Joel] I told you about . . . I even kind of said, ‘I know that you aren’t, that you probably aren’t that comfortable with this,’ and he just said, ‘Well, um, it’s fine.’ I was definitely uncomfortable with that one just because he like wouldn’t be in the bathroom with me at all that year . . . Eventually I could put in perspective, ‘He’s an idiot.’ . . . I wouldn’t know if I would consider him more than a roommate and a teammate. (p. 231)

Mark’s experience of coming out is not uncommon to those of other athletes in the available research. Gough (2007) reports that many athletes share similar experiences when coming out, including feelings of invisibility, isolation, and new difficulties. Not all experiences of coming out are negative though, many are complex with varying emotions, reactions, and outcomes. Identities can be fluid and nuanced, adding layers of depth to the experience of being LGBTQ+ (Bosse & Chiodo, 2016). It is important to understand these layers so that youth athletes’ concerns and needs can be better addressed. Sherriff et al. (2011) highlighted these complexities. In the case of Alex, a trans man, who came out multiple times to themselves, family, and friends:

I've come out twice, maybe more. I really thought I was a straight girl. I tried hard to be. When I was 18, I tried to come out to friends saying, 'I think I'm bi-sexual,' and I got responses ranging from 'Don't be silly' to people not talking to me. With my family I wrote my father a letter because I was terrified of what he might think. My brother I never properly came out to. When I was 18 and doing my A levels, things got really difficult for me. I got depressed, I wasn't working hard. I can't really remember what happened just one night I got particularly down and I texted a friend saying, 'I feel rubbish, I want to kill myself'. After several months of going to awful gay bars and getting hideously drunk, that was my first start to coming out. For a while I was quite dyke, lesbian identified and I started doing drag king [a performance where an artist typically performs masculinity, by means of dress and mannerism, usually for public performance and entertainment] and I realized that I really enjoyed being a drag king. But then one day I realized, 'What's the difference between me as a drag king and me in real life?', and it's basically a fake beard. My partner got me a binder vest [clothing to flatten breast tissue] and I started wearing it thinking it would make me an even better drag king. So, I was like, 'Oh for goodness sake,' so I took off the fake moustache and started living my life as Alex. That's how I came out as Trans. (p. 947)

The time leading up to coming out can be difficult for athletes. In the case with Mark who came out prior to his championship season, he reported feelings of anxiety and physical distress leading up to coming out to his friends, family, and teammates. Coming out is a complex experience for many.

Complexities of Questioning Youth

Among athletes who may struggle most in unsupportive climates are questioning youth. Questioning youth are those who are in the process of exploring their identity and are figuring

out how they want to identify (Grisham, 2015). As children reach adolescence, they experience new levels of hormones and brain development (Horowitz & Itzkowitz, 2011). With these new changes to their physical bodies, youth are also experiencing their first feelings of attraction for others (Herdt & McClintock, 2000). Horowitz and Itzkowitz (2011) note that while exploring and questioning their sexual and gender identities, these youth can experience feelings of shame and guilt. Questioning youth reported more negative mental health challenges than their heterosexual and lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers (Espelage et al., 2008).

Facilities, Uniforms, and Programming for LGBTQ+ Youth Athletes

As the narratives and accounts of various LGBTQ+ athletes and non-athletes have shown, not all LGBTQ+ individuals fit neatly on the spectrum of female or male. Many LGBTQ+ youth athletes face climates in which instruction, uniforms, and facilities create barriers to their safe and/or comfortable participation. Gender segregated spaces are especially difficult to navigate for those LGBTQ+ individuals participating in sporting activities (Anderson et al., 2018). These gendered spaces are designed for people with binary sex and gender (e.g., masculine male or feminine female). Non-binary and transgender youth, in particular, may feel excluded or face barriers. Krane (2019) defines non-binary as “individuals with fluid, shifting, or flexible gender expression and/or people who do not identify as male or female. Also referred to as non-binary, gender fluid, or gender nonconforming” (p. 243). It is important to distinguish non-binary individuals from transgender individuals, who may or may not identify within a binary sex or gender. Krane (2019) defined transgender as:

A diverse range of people who find the sex labels assigned to them at birth are not consistent with their sense of self. Often used as an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their sex assigned at birth. Some

trans individuals perceive themselves transcending the boundaries of gender whereas others wish to be seen as the gender with which they identify. (p. 248)

When considering transgender or non-binary athletes, locker rooms and bathrooms can be one of the largest hurdles to overcome. During the most recent presidential administration, directives to rescind protections of transgender students' access to bathrooms have been put in place (Wernick et al., 2017). Wernick et al.'s (2017) research supports that the action of rescinding these protections promotes educational inequalities. For example, they note that limiting transgender students' access to restrooms works against affirming their gender identities and limits their expression of gender. In research from Johnson et al. (2018), LGBTQ youth expressed their feelings of unsafety in locker rooms more in depth. Their research found that among the LGBTQ student athletes surveyed, 11% reported never feeling safe in the locker room. Of those 11%, 41% were transgender boys, 34% were transgender girls, and 31% were non-binary youth. Transgender youth further reported having never used a locker room aligned with their gender identity (Johnson et al., 2018). Their research showed that of transgender youth in their study, 51% had never used a restroom aligned with their gender; 16% were currently playing a sport; and 32% used to play a sport but had stopped. Limiting access to spaces (be it restrooms or locker rooms) in which LGBTQ+ athletes feel comfortable fosters a climate in which it is perceived they are not welcome.

Once in the locker room, LGBTQ+ youth may worry about uniforms, too. When you think of a women's volleyball team, what uniform do you imagine? Spandex shorts and tight jerseys, right? Consider swimming next. You would not fathom a male diver going in with a shirt on, would you? Here in lies a large issue with LGBTQ+ athlete's ability to participate in sport, uniforms. Many programs do not have alternate uniforms or an option to compete in different

gear for LGBTQ+ athletes, allowing them to practice and compete comfortably. This can be especially difficult for transgender youth athletes, who may not have physically transitioned and still show markers of their sex assigned at birth while identifying with a different gender.

Among spaces that are challenging to be LGBTQ+ are physical education classes. As asserted by Fagrell et al. (2012), “there is no other school subject in which the body is as exposed as in physical education” (p. 101). Like most other educational settings, the performance and involvement in an activity can be largely impacted by the attitudes of those instructing. In the case of physical education classes, LGBTQ+ students and athletes reported participation was impacted by negative attitudes of physical education teachers (White et al., 2010). When considering gendered bodies, Velija and Kumar (2009) remark that physical education settings do little to breakdown hegemonic gender relations. For example, boys and girls are separated to participate in different activities during class, such as wrestling and yoga, respectively. This poses considerable difficulties for students with nonbinary identities. Researchers believe that anti-gay and anti-lesbian sentiments may be due to contextual influences (O’Brien et al., 2013). When youth are grouped into teams or partnered for activities in physical education classes, it is not uncommon for LGBTQ bullying behaviors to occur (Selekman & Vessey, 2004). Selekman and Vessey (2004) note further that youth have adapted so that these behaviors can be done under the radar of adults. One way to combat these homonegative beliefs and behaviors is through ally education.

Allies

The presence of allies is one of the largest determinants of LGBTQ+ people’s feelings about their experiences in school and sport (Poynter & Tubbs, 2008). An ally is defined as an individual who works to support the LGBTQ+ community through behaving in supportive

manners and educating themselves and others on the unique experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ individuals (Ryan et al., 2013). The development of ally programs across collegiate athletics is one attempt to create supportive environments for LGBTQ+ athletes (Toomey & McGeorge, 2018). Being an ally requires continual learning and development, even among those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community themselves, Andrew from Ryan et al.'s (2013) work, still found that they had room to learn and grow as an ally:

Here, I thought I knew, I thought I could teach them a few things they hadn't looked at before and they just completely turned the tables on me. But in an awesomely good way. As far as what it means to be in ALLIES, in my line of work I think it's really crucial. (p. 96)

Being an ally is a way for anyone to show youth athletes that they are in a safe space with someone who is invested in their well-being. Rainbow Laces (2018) outlined a collection of ally behaviors that people involved in sport could do to be more inclusive:

1. Get support and involve senior coaches and managers
2. Use gender neutral language and avoid stereotypes about what is masculine and feminine behaviour
3. Always challenge behaviour or language that's offensive to LGBT people, even if it's perceived that there aren't any LGBT people present or the language is presented as 'banter'. It's abuse!
4. Make sure it is as unacceptable as other types of discriminatory behaviour, such as racism
5. Be approachable and seek out other local organizations to support

6. Challenge positively to explain why and how someone's words and actions may have an impact
7. Work with members, fellow participants or whoever else is in your sporting community to develop a set of values that commit to respecting everyone
8. Make LGBT people more visible
9. Offer mixed teams and exercises where possible
10. Be confident and positive about making sport open to everyone – mistakes may be made along the way, but remember you're going in the right direction (p. 35)

The Importance and Need for Resources

As gender identity, sexuality, and gender expression become conversations more common in youth settings, more resources directed at this population are needed. Specifically, in sport environments, where not only emotional but physical changes are occurring, fostering climates where LGBTQ+ youth can prosper is vital. Resources exist to aid in the creation of these safe spaces, but they are limited and not easily accessible. Access to media outlets and internet is available to nearly all U.S. school systems. A web program for LGBTQ+ youth athlete inclusion would be a means of using this resource in a way that benefits all youth, putting to use materials and programming already available. My website (<https://cashort3.wixsite.com/masters2020>) puts access to LGBTQ+ inclusive materials a click away. Homeruns don't have to happen just on the field, they can happen at home on your laptop as well. Inclusion is for everyone and my project hits this theme out of the park.

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