"Don't Be Open or Tell Anyone": Inclusion of Sexual Minority College Athletes

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It is important not only for athletic departments to consider the promotion of inclusion but also the overall treatment and protection of college athletes. Numerous studies (e.g., Barber & Krane, 2007; Cunningham, 2015a, 2015b; Cunningham & Melton, 2011) have demonstrated the competitive advantage of inclusion. Informed by Ottenritter's (2012) framework for accepting and supporting LGBTQ individuals, the purpose of this case study is to understand and describe inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority within a NCAA Division I institution. Through convenience and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), this study employed multiple data collection methods including interviews and document review. The intent of this study is to positively contribute to the development and implementation of inclusive policies and practices regarding college athletes who identify as sexual minority.

Keywords: athletic departments, college athletes, inclusion, LGBT, sexual minority

Ⅰn comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, sexual minority college athletes are two times more likely to experience harassment (Rankin & Merson, 2012). Due to their sexual orientation this population often is ignored, excluded from team activities, and subjected to orientation-based derogatory remarks (Rankin & Merson, 2012). Sexual prejudicial behaviors (e.g., negative attitudes, homophobic language, physical harm, purposeful exclusionary acts) are commonly experienced by college athletes who identify as sexual minorities (Herek, 2009). Research repeatedly has demonstrated that athletes who identify outside the heterosexual narrative often are viewed negatively (Anderson, 2011, 2012; Anderson, Smith, & Stokowski, 2019; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2010; Griffin, 1998; Herek, 2009; Krane & Barber, 2003, 2005; Magrath, 2017; Pfeiffer & Mitsunori, 2018; Toomey, McGeorge, & Carlson, 2018). As such, adversity often is experienced by the estimated 8,500 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) college athletes whose sexual orientation falls outside the heterosexual narrative (Coutal, 2018; Gates, 2017).

Ottenritter (2012) developed "a framework for understanding and supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered [LGBT] students" (p. 531). This framework relies on organizational support from faculty as well as staff and is based on two key postulations:

> First, environments play a key role in supporting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors; therefore, attending to environmental influences is critical in institutional life and change. Second, people possess unique and diverse identities at the same time. Understanding the range of a student's identities, as well as the depth of them, is core to understanding students and their behavior (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 531).

The framework also acknowledges that the educational environment is crucial to student retention. Ottenritter (2012) recognizes that inclusion is difficult; however, the study expresses the importance of educational institutions surveying the current environment to assist in enhancing the climate for sexual minority students.

Sports are seen as social change agents (Cunningham, 2015a). Ottenritter's (2012) framework believes that "understanding and appreciating the importance of sexual identity is key in creating safe environments for LGBTQ students" (p. 533). Numerous studies have demonstrated the competitive advantage of inclusion, as non-inclusive climates negatively affect academic and athletic performance (e.g., Barber & Krane, 2007; Cunningham, 2015a, 2015b; Cunningham & Melton, 2011; Wolf-Wendel, Bajaj, & Spriggs, 2008). The purpose of this study is to understand and describe inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority within a NCAA Division I institution. The present study uses the term sexual minority when referring to an individual whose identity, orientation, or practices differ from the majority of surrounding society (Math & Seshadri, 2013).

Review of Literature

Inclusion Within Intercollegiate Athletics

Though research reports that the overall climate for LGBT athletes is improving (Anderson, 2011; Anderson, 2012; Carol, 2016; Coufal, 2018; Cunningham, 2012b; Griffin &

Caple, 2014; Magrath, 2017; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012; Southall, Nagel, Anderson, Polite, & Southall, 2008; Toomey et al., 2018), sexual minorities often are treated with less respect and value than other minority groups (Gill et al., 2010; Herek, 2009; Fink, Burton, Farrell & Parker, 2012; Magrath, 2017; O'Brien, Shovelton, & Latner, 2013; Pfeiffer & Mitsunori, 2018; Southall et al., 2009; Toomey et al., 2018). There is a culture of silence, specifically within the context of sport, for those that fall outside the heterosexual narrative. The fear of being negatively labeled may lead to stigmatization, negative recruiting, decreased playing time, being outed, lack of job opportunities, and job termination (Bennett, 2015; Cunningham, Satore, & McCullough, 2010; Greim, 2017; Rankin, Hesp, & Weber, 2013; Melton, 2013; Plymire & Forman, 2000; Satore & Cunningham, 2009). Numerous studies have documented the lack of support athletes received from athletic organizations due to their sexual orientation (Anderson et al., 2019; Barber and Krane, 2007; Bennett, 2015; Corbett, 2006; Cunningham, 2012; Krane, 1997; Shaw, 2013). Within non-inclusive environments, individuals and the collective both will suffer in their effectiveness and performances (Cunningham & Melton, 2011; Frankel, 2013). Beyond performance stressors, sexual minorities also have been shown to experience increased levels of anxiety, depression, hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness when compared to heterosexual college athletes (Kroshus & Davoren, 2016; Rankin & Merson, 2012).

Researchers have found inclusion within team and athletic department settings to be a competitive advantage for college athletes who identify as a sexual minority (Barber & Krane, 2007; Cunningham, 2015a, 2015b; Cunningham & Melton, 2011). Athletic departments that promote inclusive, nondiscriminatory environments find that LGBTQ individuals not only are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation, but also experience less discrimination (Walker & Melton, 2015). Past studies (e.g., Engign, Yiamouyiannis, White, & Ridpath, 2011; Magrath, 2017) also have found that those who know or associate with sexual minorities tend to have a more favorable outlook regarding this population. Furthermore, support groups and ally programming have been shown to create a more positive campus climate for those who identify as sexual minority (Anderson et al., 2019; Rankin & Merson, 2012; Rankin et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Though the NCAA (2015) provides guidelines and resources to promote LGTBQ inclusion, often the suggested practices are not formally adopted by membership institutions, further allowing the effects of sexual prejudice to persist (Coufal, 2018).

College coaches often are underprepared to work with LGBT college athletes (Dreamers, 2010). As such, they frequently remain silent on the topic of sexual minority inclusion and often fail to promote inclusion within the team setting (Coufal, 2018). In addition, athletic departments offer vague anti-bullying programs that only briefly mention sexual minorities (Coufal, 2018). As such, phenomenological studies have found college athletes who identify as sexual minorities calling for visible support from athletic departments (Pfeiffer & Misawa, 2018). Although recent studies (e.g. Anderson et al., 2019; Magrath, 2017, Pfeffer & Misawa, 2018; Walker & Melton, 2015; Toomey et al., 2018) have examined the experiences of LGBT athletes, to our knowledge, there has yet to be any case study conducted that looks at inclusiveness regarding this population at the NCAA Division I level.

Inclusive Environments

Inclusive environments are those in which individuals feel they are able to express their identities fluidly among context, time, and situation (Brewer, 1991, 1993, 2012; Cunningham, 2015a; Shore et al., 2011). Individuals may experience negative outcomes (e.g., mental health,

drug and alcohol abuse, decreased performance, increased frustration) when they are unable to express themselves genuinely (DeFoor, Stepleman, & Mann, 2018; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Meyer, 2003; Ragins, 2004). Work environments that promote inclusion help decrease or eliminate some of the aforementioned negative outcomes associated with concealing identities (Cunningham, 2015a). Inclusive environments are positively associated with individuals' feelings of uniqueness and belonging within a greater context (Shore et al., 2011). These environments foster a sense of appreciation and contribution (Wasserman, Gallegos, & Ferdman, 2008), increased satisfaction with work (Shore et al., 2011), and increased production (Katz & Miller, 1996).

Methodology

The authors utilized a qualitative approach grounded in constructivism to elicit the rich data necessary to address the inclusion phenomenon of college athletes who identify as sexual minority. Based on the purpose, conceptual framework, and overall purpose, 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). Furthermore, past studies that examined inclusion in collegiate athletic organizations (e.g., Cunningham, 2015s; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2010) used a phenomenological approach.

Case studies utilize multiple data sources to ensure triangulation of sources as well as perspectives, which is elaborated within the ethical considerations section. Our intent was not to develop new theory, but to understand and describe inclusion of college 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). In line with Ottenritter's (2012) framework, which speaks to the importance of the environment in supporting LGBTQ inclusion, the present research aims to understand the experiences and factors that contribute to inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority within an NCAA Division I athletic department. A better understanding has potential to initiate policy development and practice that ensures inclusion of this particular population within the athletic department.

University

The university selected (University) was a NCAA Division I membership institution within a Power 5 conference. The University scored on the low end of the Athletic Equality Index (AEI), indicating lack of overt inclusion. The AEI measures lesbian, gay, and LGBTQ inclusion policies and practices within the athletic space at individual institutions in Power 5 conferences (Athlete Ally, 2017). The University fails to adequately meet more than 60% of the AEI criteria, which includes non-discrimination policies, out or allied staff, accessible resources, collaboration with campus groups, LGBTQ college athlete groups or initiatives, pro-LGBTQ equality campaign/statements, LGBTQ inclusive fan code of conduct, and guidelines for transgender inclusion (Athlete Ally, 2017). This case was chosen after discussions with University personnel about their willingness to participate in a case study exploring phenomenon of inclusion of college athletes who identify as being a sexual minority.

Research Sample

This study utilized purposeful sampling procedures to select the sample for this study, common within qualitative research to include information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). 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. The present study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the researchers' affiliated institution. Referencing Ottenritter's (2012) framework in which faculty and staff impact the overall environment for LGBTQ students, the primary researcher consulted the athletic department staff directory, team rosters, and the diversity directory at University, creating a list of potential participants. Then, participants were contacted via email and asked to participate in the present study. The participant base was extended by using snowballing methods (Vogt, 1999). In total, 40 people were contacted, and 35 agreed to participate (yielding an 87.5% response rate). All who responded agreed to participate in an interview (see Table 1). The primary researcher conducted all interviews, which took place in person during a site visit to University or over the phone. Participants selected their own pseudonym for anonymity.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Ethnicity	Classification /Occupation
Beyoncé	23	Female	Bisexual	White	College Athlete
Biggie Smalls	21	Female	Heterosexual	White	College Athlete
Brittany	21	Female	Gay	Black	College Athlete
Chris	21	Female	Heterosexual	White/Latino	College Athlete
D	21	Male	Heterosexual	Black/Latino	College Athlete
Flo	22	Female	Heterosexual	White	College Athlete
Jessica	22	Female	Hetero (has gf)	White	College Athlete
Mark	23	Male	Bisexual	Multi-racial	College Athlete
Michael	20	Male	Heterosexual	Black	College Athlete
Sue	23	Female	Heterosexual	White	College Athlete
Sydney	20	Female	Heterosexual	White	College Athlete
John	23	Male	Heterosexual	White	Coach
Mandy	24	Female	Bisexual	White	Coach
Mia	35	Female	Gay	Black	Coach
Beth	23	Female	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Courtney	29	Female	Heterosexual	White	Support Staff
Daniella	24	Female	Pansexual	White	Support Staff
Jimmy	43	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Support Staff
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	Campus Personnel
Mallory	37	Male	Heterosexual	White	Campus Personnel
Millie	32	Female	Lesbian	White	Campus Personnel
Obadiah	36	Male	Gay	White	Campus Personnel
Blake	30	Male	Trans	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
Catherine	22	Female	Lesbian	White	LGBTQ+ Support Group
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	Expert
Margaret	33	Female	Lesbian	White	Expert

Data Collection Methods

The use of multiple methods and triangulation allowed for differing perspectives (Flick, 2014). A diverse sample of participants provides applicability of experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Utilizing semi-structured interviews, document review, and reflexive journals adds rigor and depth to this study and provides corroboration between the analyzed data (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Interviews. 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, and to uncover their lived world" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). Semi-structured interviews are a method commonly used when studying sexual minorities that participate in collegiate sport (Fynes, 2014; Krane & Barber, 2003; Anderson, 2011; Waldron, 2016; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001) as well as coaches and administrators in collegiate sports (Cunningham, 2015a, 2015b; Walker & Melton, 2015; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001; Krane & Barber, 2003). Ottenritter's (2012) framework also suggests that LGBTQ individuals benefit from reflecting upon their experiences. All interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately following the interview, and participants were addressed by a pseudonym of their choosing in an attempt to protect identity and promote anonymity. The institution was assigned the pseudonym "University," and any documentation from websites or document releases was paraphrased and not verbatim to protect its anonymity. Participant demographics can be seen in Table 1.

The interview protocol was developed based on literature review and Ottenritter's (2012) framework for LGBTQ best practices. There were two interview protocols. The first protocol consisted of open-ended questions for college athletes. "How would you say people feel about sexual minority college athletes at University" and "Describe some ways your institution has promoted (or failed to promote) inclusion," are examples of the types of questions asked. The second interview protocol consisted of questions for coaches, support staff members, support group members, and campus personnel. Examples of the questions posed to this population are "Tell me about LGBTQ programming" and "What inclusion efforts would you like to see from University and the athletic department?"

Document review. Athletic department documents have 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), and between mission statements and strategic plans of athletic departments (Ketterer, 2015). Cunningham (2015a) conducted a collective case study of two NCAA athletic departments that included individual interviews and review of athletic department documents to explore supportive cultures of LGBT employees in college athletics. As such, content analysis of University's archived data included any documents pertaining to coaching personnel, athletic academic personnel, and college athlete development (i.e., athletic handbooks, statements, policy and procedure manual, codes of conduct, Title IX statements, inclusion statements, athletic policies, team documents, media, website information, introductory paperwork, press releases, and annual reports).

Reflexive journal. The primary researcher continuously engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process to mitigate and embrace bias in the data. As in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and the data collection is the 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 the primary researcher's own personal experiences, biases, positionality, views, and ideologies in regard to the process of exploring the phenomenon of inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority. Engaging in reflexivity is not an attempt to control or remove researcher bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) but instead makes ideologies and potential biases visible throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008).

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data was collected and analyzed through inductive and narrative analysis (Creswell, 2007). Narrative analyses of participants' descriptions of their personal experiences allowed for the participants' voices to be heard within the data (Creswell, 2007). 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 (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2016). 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).

The research team of five individuals began clustering initial or preliminary meaning units throughout the transcriptions using Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis software. Each member of the research team separately created their own Quirkos map by coding interviews and documents, as well as reviewing reflexive journals. The research team met once a month to discuss the individual and group data analyses of the interviews, documents, and reflexive journals, condensing and compiling analyses into meaning units (300+), which were then condensed further into subgroups as the meetings progressed (48). The subgroups were then condensed and compiled again leading to the development of a final set of themes representative of the data (3). This final step of data analysis produced the final set of three themes through verbatim data as well as concepts from the literature.

Methodological triangulation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) was met through the form of semi-structured interviews, document review, and reflexive journals. Data and perspectival triangulation were achieved through the targeted sample of male and female participants, differing roles within athletic department (administrator, coaches, and college athletes), differing sport affiliation, and main campus perspective (personnel associated with LGBTQ/sexual minority initiatives). Interviewing individuals from such diverse experiences contributed to the authenticity of this study. Such a diverse sample brought about applicability of experiences in other contexts with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and served as triangulation of differing perspectives (Flick, 2014) of participants.

The reflexive journals, reviewed by the research team, aided in acknowledgement of potential researcher bias by the interviewer and also filtered potential leading questions in interviews, ensuring the narrative analysis' genuineness (Creswell, 2007). Reflexive journals were conducted following each day of interviews and were considered during individual coding

and research team discussion, contributing to the inductive analysis of the triangulated data (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability all aid in the establishment of trustworthiness within a qualitative researcher's rigorous practices (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility was established by clearly stating the procedures in which the study was conducted and how conclusions are drawn (Patton, 2002). Dialogic engagement through the integration of five 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.

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 interviews and documents separately coding all data collected. Utilizing multiple coders in qualitative analysis contributes to the inter-rater reliability of this project (Barbour, 2001; Campbell et al., 2013; Creswell, 2009).

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 aligned with research questions, identified possible bias role, and referred to field notes, post-interview memos, and pre-coding memos. The structured reflection process included thoughtful questions and interpretations throughout the study and included reflexivity of personal experiences, biases, positionality, views, and ideologies in regard to the process of exploring the phenomenon of inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority.

Thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study's context (i.e., 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. Thick descriptions and direct quotations provide confidence in the transferability of the research (Bryman, 2008).

Findings

The purpose of this case study was to understand and describe inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minority within a NCAA Division I institution. The results demonstrated that much of how college athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion is related to how the athletic department addressed or failed to address inclusion of LGBTQ athletes. Through inductive and narrative analysis (Creswell, 2007) of the semi-structured interviews, document review, and reflexive journals, three major themes emerged: representation, silence, and accessibility.

Representation

The first major theme revealed throughout the data was the theme of representation. This theme referred to the fact that college athletes felt they were expected to personify the university in a positive manner. Because the athletes were expected to represent University as well as the athletic department, they felt pressured to win on the playing field and also be successful in the classroom. Due to the pressure placed on athletes at University, those who fell outside the heterosexual norm felt a sense of alienation in that they were unable to be their true selves out of fear of tarnishing their personal reputations as well as the reputation of University. The representation finding emerged from athletic department documents developed for college athletes and from the interviews conducted with college athletes and support staff at University. Through the data, it appeared that the athletic department and coaches placed a significant amount of pressure on athletes to perform both on the field and in the classroom. The annual report in particular was comprised of academic and athletic achievements of men's and women's programs, championship tracking, financial reports of money raised and funded projects, and proposed or newly erected facilities, including the monetary contributions utilized to accomplish such arms race goals.

Regarding coaching, college athletes discussed the emphasis placed on the business-like nature of being a college athlete. Flo discussed that her coaches were "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 college athlete, Brittany quickly indicated that being a college athlete is a full-time job. Michael also talked about the business-like mentality of choosing a university to attend. However, once the college athletes arrived at University, the main emphasis of the coaching staff was performance, both athletically and academically.

In addition to the college 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 college athlete to represent the university in a manner that was in line with the brand identity of the institution, the athletic department, and the team as espoused by athletic administrators, coaches, and university policies. The college athlete handbook emphasized the representation of a positive image of the athletic department and made it clear that athletes were expected to engage in exemplary behavior during their time at the University. Near the end of the handbook is an excerpt on college athletes' behavior, highlighting the idea of college athletes potentially embarrassing themselves and those associated with them (e.g., family, teams, athletic department, University). Lastly, the handbook provided the college athletes with a friendly reminder that they always are in the public eye.

Furthermore, college athletes were expected not only to meet the expectations of their teammates, coaching staff, families, and University, but also the public. Phil, an academic advisor, described how both the athletic department and college athlete have a responsibility to represent that state and college. Beth, also an academic advisor and former college athlete at a different institution, stated that "being a college athlete, and being the pedestal of the school, you're kind of expected to be perfect, and do everything right." Brittany, a current female college athlete who identifies as gay, described how the athletic department and coaches make sure college athletes understand that representation is not for themselves, but for the University and their families. Also, when asked about her experience as a college athlete at the University, Brittany talked about how her role as a college athlete was extremely job-like and she did not 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." College athletes at University felt that if they were open about their sexual orientation it not only would fail to uphold the image of University but also could result in public condemnation. As Selena, a support staff member, stated, "I feel like we're open and we're welcoming but there's still like a barrier there." College athletes who identify as a sexual minority discussed how they felt being open about their sexual orientation potentially would result in reprehension with the team or athletic department.

Silence

Silence in the present study refers to not expressing in speech, to prohibit from speaking, or an absence in words. This particular theme emerged through campus documents (i.e., mission and value statements, college websites, diversity and inclusion documents and programming), athletic department documents (i.e., athlete handbook, team documents, administrative documents, website information), and interviews with participants, which seemed to suggest silence was indicative of both the athletic department and larger campus culture. An overarching theme of the interview data was a sense of "don't ask, don't tell" regarding sexuality, to keep quiet, and to not discuss or acknowledge sexuality entirely. There also was an overwhelming sense of silence when it came to the athletic department's promotion of inclusion of college athletes who identify as sexual minorities 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 the language used throughout.

Campus culture. An individual who identifies as sexual minority came to Mallory, a psychologist, with questions about their physical and psychological safety on campus. Mallory was not certain of their safety and as such did not feel comfortable confirming that University campus was a safe place for the LGBTQ community. Mallory 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." Like Mallory, other staff members (i.e., Courtney and Selena) strived to create a safe space on campus. However, there appeared to be a consensus among staff members and college athletes that University may not be a safe space for college athletes to express their sexuality.

The term "accepting" was thrown around often throughout participant interviews. Selena, an academic advisor, 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 worked on campus, established 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. During the interview, Obadiah touched on how administration at University (i.e., campus) approached his advocacy with extremely limited interaction. Obadiah explained that although administration did not tell him "no," there definitely was a lack of conversation on the matter. The idea of "don't ask, don't tell" appears to extend beyond the athletics department here, creating a culture of silence across campus.

    Athletic department culture. When asked about the culture of the athletic department itself, some participants responded vaguely while others provided significant details on the department's culture. Many participants claimed the surrounding area and athletic department were "accepting" or "progressive." Many individuals also were aware there was a "don't ask, don't tell" culture; however, they expressed there were people within the athletic department that wanted to make some changes. Mandy, a former college athlete who competed at two different institutions and currently is a strength coach, described her perception of the athletic department environment:

> People 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… 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.

    An interesting aspect of this case study was the incongruence of responses within and between participant interviews. Some heterosexual college athletes, support staff, and coaches stated they saw inclusive and accepting environments while others disagreed. Sydney, an international college athlete said positively, "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." Roberto stated, "I see them [athletic department] being…progressive towards it [sexuality], like don't talk about it necessarily, but they're not going to hold that against you…don't flaunt it…don't talk about it all the time or don't be extremely open about it." D, a heterosexual college 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 felt that sexual minorities should keep their sexuality to themselves. D did not believe the athletic department should promote inclusion of this particular population, stating, "You don't gotta announce nothing. You can still be mature about things…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…?"

    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 college athletes:

> 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… We want to be inclusive…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.

Flo talked about the disconnect between how the athletic department promotes itself as diverse and inclusive but at the same time isn't outwardly promoting inclusion of this population. Flo also believes that if it was brought to the attention of executive staff in the administration or college athlete development that something would be done, such as how international or women's programming was implemented in recent years. As such, although University is not necessarily discriminatory, the lack of basic acknowledgement of the sexual minority population further promoted silence.

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 pushback from somewhere in the athletic department, but said she didn't quite know 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.

Roberto, a heterosexual staff member, discussed the pushback he saw when college 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 college athletes. Then he went on to describe how he feels as though the response to promoting inclusion of sexual minority college 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 [college 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 [college athletes] shouldn't be on the [playing surface]." Then [coach] got a lot of heat too allowing them do that.

Beyoncé, a sexual minority college athlete, 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 college athletes experienced after taking a stance on a social issue within an athletic setting. Beyoncé explained:

> 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, and 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.

The "powers at be" at University did not want to recognize sexual minority college athletes. Furthermore, as Beyoncé described, when college athletes at University attempted to use their platform to raise awareness for issues related to social justice and equality, they were reprimanded by the community. Due the potential of "backlash," both college athletes and personnel were left almost powerless, unable to assist those who identify as sexual minority.

Accessibility

The third and final theme that emerged in the data was accessibility, or the notion related to whether campus inclusivity resources were made known to athletes and whether such resources were easily accessible. Although all of the participants had been exposed to someone who identified as sexual minority, most participants were unaware of any campus resources related to fostering inclusion. Regarding the theme of accessibility, two sub-themes emerged: exposure to the sexual minority community and accessibility of resources.

Exposure to the sexual minority community. Michael talked about growing up with a mother who was married to a female and how he was exposed to the sexual minority community at a young age. Michael, along with several of the participants, discussed the normalization of same-sex relationships within society and how it isn't a big deal to see same-sex couples on TV and social media today. Roberto works with someone in the athletic department who is openly gay. He recalled how some of his college athletes stated that "he can do what he wants on the weekends. I'm cool with him as long as he doesn't try anything with me."

D, a current athlete, spoke outwardly about sexual minorities in general, discussing an experience he had when he was a sophomore in high school. This experience was incredibly traumatic for D and definitely shaped his view of the community:

> I had an 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.

The event D described bolsters stereotypes of the predatory and oversexualized gay male as well as reinforces fears often expressed in sport regarding gay athletes in the locker room. Although D and Roberto discussed their experiences with the sexual minority athletes, due to lack of programming initiatives, such prejudices and preconceptions surrounding this population continued to flourish.

Access to resources. The only resources truly available for the LGBTQ population were located on campus. Obadiah and Mallory created the LGBTQ mentor program between out faculty and staff and students. There was a LGBTQ support group run through the counseling center on campus. University also has a Pride student organization, a Pride day during the spring semester, and Safe Zone training within the multicultural and diversity center. Although there were campus resources available, document review revealed a lack of effective communication regarding such resources. The University's Safe Zone ally training website provides little to no information on the training itself, instead directing individuals to the "It Gets Better Project" page for additional information. There also is no e-mail address provided, only a campus phone number to learn about the Safe Zone Allies program.

While there were LGBTQ resources on campus, there was a very different narrative within the athletic department. In the college athlete handbook, there was a blanket non-discrimination policy that included a statement on sexual orientation. After the non-discrimination policy there were three lines of text directing sexual minorities to an Athletic Trainer, Sport Administrator, or Director of Clinical and Sport Psychology.

When asked if resources were available in the athletic department for sexual minority college athletes, Selena responded, "That is a big strong heck no." Jimmy and Selena, both members of the athletic support staff, described the resources available for other specific groups of college athletes (e.g., first-generation, female, international) but explained the lack of resources for LGBTQ college athletes. Courtney confirmed there are no groups currently offered within the sport psychology department for sexual minorities.

There also was a lack of knowledge about resources available for the LGBTQ population. Mia, a coach, described the frustration of not being able to locate resources. Jessica, a sexual minority college athlete, said 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. Another sexual minority college athlete, Beyoncé, disclosed they were unaware of resources available for the LGBTQ community.

While LGBTQ resources did exist on campus, participants in this study were unaware of them. Within the athletic department, resources were available to first-generation, international, and female college athletes, but there were no resources for LGBTQ college athletes. Perhaps the most concerning finding lies in the fact that sexual minorities were directed to athletic trainers or a psychologist. This perhaps could infer that being a sexual minority is some sort of injury or condition rather than a personal characteristic that should be celebrated.

Discussion

Ottenritter's (2012) framework encourages an environmental "scan that can help individuals and groups reflect upon their college's environment" (p. 532). This phenomenological case study strived to do just that – understand and describe inclusion of

student-athletes who identify as sexual minority at a Division I Power 5 institution. The themes of representation, silence, and accessibility demonstrate the University athletic department does not fulfill the requirements of inclusion but instead creates an environment of toleration.

Representation

The athletic department did promote the importance of diversity and inclusion of employees and college athletes throughout athletic department documents. Specifically, within the athlete handbook, college athletes are tasked with the responsibility of representing the university, athletic department, team, themselves, and their families in a respectable and positive manner. Similar to Bernhard's (2016) study, there appeared to be congruence between the handbook and the statements made by the participants regarding what was expected of college athletes.

Beth stated that college athletes are expected to be "perfect" and that there is constant pressure on this population to perform well on the playing field as well as academically (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Greim, 2016; Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen & Kao, 2012; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). However, this image of perfection that athletes are expected to project could be a deterrent to self-expression, particularly within sport where sexual minorities often are viewed negatively (Anderson, 2011, 2012; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey & Schultz, 2010; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2003, 2005; Magrath, 2017; Pfeiffer & Mitsunori, 2018; Toomey, McGeorge, & Carlson, 2018). In this case, the pressure college athletes felt to achieve perfection in every facet of life came from their own athletic department.

Ottoenritter's (2012) framework was rooted in Cooley's (1902) concept of the looking-glass self. Cooley (1902) believed that self-concept is developed from the perceptions of others. Ottenritter's (2012) framework uses Cooley's (1902) looking glass-self to explain that "college environments that communicate negative messages about sexual minorities impact their LGBTQ students" (p. 532). Additionally, Ottenritter's (2012) framework is informed by Ottenritter's (1998) room of life model. Difference, one of Ottenritter's (1998) four stages of sexual identity formation, involves feelings of marginalization and appeared throughout the theme of representation. Athletic department policies, specifically the handbook, should promote the growth of college athletes instead of simply expressing to college athletes not to be an embarrassment to themselves or University (Ferdman, 2014). Although it can be inferred that promoting inclusion may aggravate the fan base, Mumcu and Lough (2017) reported that pride campaigns actually do not promote negative attitudes toward sports organizations. As such, perhaps intercollegiate athletic departments should confidently embrace pride campaigns and promote inclusion. Lastly, if winning is a priority at University, inclusion should be utilized, as according to Cunningham (2015a) embracing inclusion increases winning success.

Silence

In support of the silence theme, both the greater campus and athletic department failed to acknowledge sexual orientation diversity and inclusion on several levels. Cultural norms and institutionalized practices play into sexual prejudices experienced and felt by sexual minority college students and athletes. This theme of silence is in line with the literature in that sexual minorities often hold less value than other minority groups (Gill et al., 2006; Herek, 2009). Upon

surveying college athletes from the Division I Football Championship Subdivision, Greim (2016) found that those who perceived the main campus as an accepting environment for LGBT individuals also were more likely to perceive the athletic department as accepting. Participants discussed University's main campus as a "don't ask, don't tell" environment, with Mallory powerfully stating that "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 highlights a lack of acknowledgement of sexual diversity within the athletic department setting and is congruent with the AEI's assessment of Power 5 institutions' lack of inclusion of LGBT athletes within athletic spaces. University reported scores of zero in more than 60% of the AEI criteria. Additionally, University athletic department does not offer resources such as campus-wide nondiscrimination policies, support groups for college 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, or inclusive statements (Athlete Ally, 2017). Though the criteria hit on overt resources and practices, this study particularly explored the climate of University athletic department in addition to the AEI's assessment of those eight categories.

Research (e.g., Melton, 2013; Plymire & Forman, 2000) has demonstrated that institutionalized practices, such as the promotion of heterosexuality within sport and the geographical area, factor into the experiences of college athletes. When asked what the reaction would be to an LGBTQ inclusion initiative promoted by the athletic department, participants responded that there would be backlash or push-back from upper-level administration in the athletic department as well as from donors, sponsors, and fans within the geographical area. Not only did college athletes who identify as sexual minority recognize the unwillingness of the athletic department to provide access to resources, let alone promote inclusion of LGBTQ college athletes, their heterosexual counterparts did as well.

Ottenritter's (2012) framework stresses the importance of environment. According to Melton (2013), organizational factors such as organizational culture and leadership play a significant role in the experiences of those involved within an organization or team. Cunningham (2015s), who explored diversity and inclusion within sport organizations, found that when diversity is not valued, the preferences of those holding leadership positions tend to take precedence within an organization. Daniella claimed that upper level administrators within the University's athletic department are older white males unwilling to change their views or the culture itself. This leads to a lack of comfort in discussing all aspects of identity within the department (Melton, 2013), a negative effect on the overall experiences of athletes (Fink et al., 2012), and an expectation to present oneself heteronormatively (Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

While participants in this study did not report instances of physical harassment and acknowledged their experiences could have been much worse within [geographical region], they still wished their experiences had been different in regard 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 still were difficult conversations with teammates and coaches in which they did not feel fully understood. For the athletic department as a whole, there was no desire to support those who identified as sexual minority. The lack of interest in this sub-population of college athletes further promoted the theme of silence and potential psychological harm. Structural support in line with Ottenritter's (2012) framework can assist in enhancing the environment going forward.

Accessibility

University's athletic department referred to sexual orientation within the non-discrimination policy but failed to mention it again in any other documents or on the department's website. Athletic department spaces such as the academic success center, nutrition office, coaches' offices, locker rooms, fields, and courts did not display any visible signage or markers referencing the inclusion of sexual minorities. There also were support groups for international, first generation, and female college athletes provided among offered programs, however, no LGBTQ groups were offered for athletes.

Overall, participants recognized a lack of support from the athletic department, which is in line with past research (Bennett, 2015; Pfeiffer & Mitsunori, 2018; Shaw, 2013; Toomey et al., 2018). Similar to Bennett's (2015) study, there was a lack of dialogue or even acknowledgement of athletes that did not fit the heterosexual narrative. Barber and Krane (2007) referred to sports organizations not discussing sexuality as the "elephant in the locker room" (p.6). Coufal (2018) explained that often coaches choose not to discuss inclusion of sexual minorities. Furthermore, instead of investing in effective programming, athletic departments offered vague programs that fail to address issues related to sexual minorities (Coufal, 2018). Athletic departments that promote inclusive environments find that LGBTQ individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation, and the likelihood of sexual minorities experiencing discrimination there is reduced (Walker & Melton, 2015).

According to the NCAA's inclusion of LGBTQ college athletes and staff program guide, the NCAA designates individual athletic departments as responsible for providing and promoting inclusive environments (Griffin, Hudson, & Morrison, 2012). Research has demonstrated that those who know or associate with sexual minorities are more likely to view this population positively (Engign et al., 2011; Magrath, 2017). Furthermore, support groups and ally programming has been shown to improve the campus climate for those who identify as a sexual minority (Rankin & Merson, 2012; Rankin et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Ottenritter's (2012) framework also stresses the importance of student services, programming, and activities for LGBTQ students. As such, perhaps University should invest in LGBTQ support groups or ally programming to further develop inclusive practices.

Conclusion

In the present study, much of how college athletes who identify as sexual minority experience inclusion is related to how the athletic department addressed or failed to address inclusion. Ottenritter's (2012) framework serves as a "source of practical information for those wishing to craft a more inclusive environment" (p. 531). Institutions are encouraged to conduct an environmental scan, similar to the present study, to better understand how their environment influences behaviors and attitudes of LGBTQ students (Ottenritter, 2012). It also is recommended that faculty and staff attend diversity training. Lastly, Ottenritter (2012) believes that providing LGBTQ students with effective services, programming, and activities also will enhance the overall environment for this population. Ottenritter's (2012) framework along with the present study's results can assist athletic departments in further developing inclusion practices.

Implications for the University

Practically, there are several implications for University athletic department as well as other athletic departments looking to promote a shift in culture regarding the sexual orientation of college athletes. The first is revisiting the purpose and responsibility of the athletic department. Whose responsibility is it to promote inclusion of college athletes who identify as a sexual minority? Several participants from this study believe the upper- or executive-level administration and coaches are responsible for providing resources for this college athlete population.

In addition to upper-level administrators, support staff, and coaches, fellow college athletes also hold some of the responsibility for creating inclusive environments for *all.* Based on this case study, as well as the existing literature, inclusion is not a one-stop shop of recommendations that will ensure positive experiences for one particular group. If inclusion is not promoted across the board, the culture of University will not change. College athletes currently do not feel safe in every space within the athletic department, which potentially could adversely affect athletic and academic performance.

Although the NCAA (2010, 2015) provides LGBTQ resources (e.g., best practices, organizational resources, outreach) that promote inclusive practices, ultimately the athletic department is responsible for building a culture that promotes advocacy and support for diverse groups within college sport. An athletic department's core mission, values, and goals should include the practice of inclusion, not simply an acknowledgement of diverse populations. Once a diverse population is in place, what resources are available for those marginalized populations to ensure diversity within the department? Reinforcing the practice of *inclusion* at the administrative level through policies, practices, resources, and initiatives should be implemented without fear of losing sponsors and donors. The protection of marginalized college athletes and promotion of well-being for all college athletes can be attained in several different ways: awareness and visibility, access, policy development, and follow-through.

Awareness comes in the form of acknowledging the existence of sexual minorities within the athletic department. Refusing to acknowledge or speak about this population could be detrimental to the mental health of these college athletes. Athletic departments should provide diversity training and education for all employees, as well as for college athletes. Training focused on the diversity of sexual orientation and on 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 administrators often are reluctant to support the sexual minority population out of fear of being stigmatized by their colleagues (Avery, 2011; Cunningham & Satore, 2010). Courtney, a member of the athletic support staff, mentioned the responsibility of holding a privileged position/identity as a heterosexual ally. Individuals in a position of privilege must stand up for marginalized groups and assist in developing policies that

protect this population. Shaw (2013) recommended visibility through athletic departments taking a stance on social issues such as same-sex romantic relationships. As such, safe spaces are needed for this population. Safe spaces can be achieved through language (e.g., partner), signage (indicating inclusion), and ally programming.

University has some resources on campus for LGBTQ individuals, including a support group, a mentor program, and safe zone ally training. Unfortunately, many participants were unaware of these resources. Athletic departments would do well to provide access to college athlete-specific resources, such as sport-related sexual minority speakers, safe zone training for athletic department personnel, visible markers of inclusion, a college athlete-specific support group, visible allies, taking a stance on social issues, and implementing diversity and inclusion policies. Policy development alone will not create cultural changes, but they can aid in the athletic department's ability to protect college athletes who identify as sexual minorities. Policies also should create clear consequences for those who harass and/or discriminate against this historically marginalized community. The development and implementation of such policies also has the potential to positively impact University's culture. It is important to keep in mind that policy development may not have full effect for 10-20 years. Cultural change will take time as athletic departments begin to incorporate allied or safe zone training (Wara, 2012). The visibility and awareness for sexual minority college athletes only will occur by athletic departments taking purposeful steps over time.

According to Miller and Katz (2002), "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). Sport is a catalyst for change. Athletic departments have an obligation to advocate for their college athletes. Promoting inclusion will create a culture where, simply, everyone wins – on and off the field of play.

Limitations

Though this research established trustworthiness through the data collection and analysis processes mentioned within the methods section, there are several potential limitations. First, the college athletes who identify as sexual minority may not have been "out" to the athletic department, which may affect their 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 college athlete. NCAA Division I institutions are not all alike; the experiences of college athletes who identify as 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, because institution, athletic department, and team documents may not tell the full story of inclusion, 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 10 administrators, 10 coaches, 10 heterosexual college athletes, and 10 college 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 college athletes, support staff, or

coaches, but an increase in the number of participants for coaches and college athletes who identify as sexual minority would have helped reach full saturation.

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 college athletes' perceptions of sexual minority inclusion within a hyper-masculine sport. The coaches' perspective of intra-team dating also 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 conference should explore language, consequential literature, promotion of inclusive practices and behaviors, etc. within existing athletic department policy. As for resources specific to college 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 further be explored. 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 college athletes who identify as sexual minority within athletic departments.

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