PROFESSIONALLY “OUT” LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL COLLEGE COACHES:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUAL IDENTITY IN RELATION TO COACHING

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For Cindi.

Thank you for your constant support, motivation, belief, and reassurance (and Kleenex, for those particularly hard days). I love you! ***WE*** did it!

For Lou.

Thank you for giving me light and levity. My hope is this dissertation will be irrelevant and unnecessary when you're my age. I love you, kiddo!

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Jean Orr Merrill

PROFESSIONALLY "OUT" LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL COLLEGE COACHES:

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Within the historically heterosexist and homophobic context of sport, intercollegiate athletics coaches who professionally disclose their lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) identities often experience negative repercussions. However, growing research suggests that being open about one's sexual identity is integral to developing and maintaining psychological wellbeing, social cohesion, and individual efficacy. This qualitative study was guided by two research questions: 1. How do professionally "out" LGB head college coaches construct their professional identities? 2. How do the professional identities of LGB head college coaches influence their coaching roles? Six professionally disclosed, LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches participated in the study. Data analysis yielded several significant findings. First, the intersectionality of identity was a principal factor in how the participants constructed their LGB identities at work. They also construct their identities through visibility and a continuum of sexual identity management strategies. Secondly, participants regarded institutional culture and climate as the most influential social structure on their identities. Third, the participants felt their identities have the greatest influence on fostering team culture and safe spaces, and being a role model and mentor to student-athletes. Lastly, the participants regard their identities as more likely to hinder than help their career ambitions. The study asserted several consequential implications for LGB coaches, higher education and athletics department administrators, and researchers to advance the understanding and scholarship about an understudied phenomenon.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION 1
Statement of the Problem 1
Purpose of the Study 3
Guiding Research Questions 4
Significance of the Study 4
Definition of Terms 6
Overview of Dissertation 10

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 12
Heteronormativity, Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sexism in Sport/Intercollegiate Athletics 13
Men in Sport 14
Women in Sport 17
LGBTQ Acceptance in Sport 21
Intersectionality 22
Gaps in the Literature 23
General State of Higher Education for LGBTQ Individuals 24
Sexual Identity Management and Professional Disclosure 27
Sexual Identity Development 27
Sexual Identity Management and Disclosure 30
Professional Disclosure in Higher Education 35
Sexual Identity Management in Sport 37
Institutional Role 39
Chapter Summary 41

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY 43
Paradigm and Assumptions 43
Axiology 44
Ontology 45
Epistemology 45
Methodology 46
Methods 47
Sampling 48
Participants 50
Data Collection 50
Data Analysis 52
Ethical Considerations 55
Positionality 56
Trustworthiness and Authenticity 58
Credibility 58
Transferability 59
Dependability and Confirmability 60
Chapter Summary 60

CHAPTER FOUR PARTICIPANT PROFILES 61

Introduction 61
Table 1 61
Janet – Head Coach, Women's Basketball, Lake State University 62
Kay – Head Coach, Women's Golf, Northern University..64
Ruby – Head Coach, Softball, Airedale University 67
Es – Head Coach, Women's Tennis, Orange University 69
Max – Head Coach, Swimming, Life University 72
Jackie – Head Coach, Softball, Stanley University 76
Chapter Summary 77

CHAPTER FIVE FINDINGS 79
Introduction 79
Figure 1 80
Sexual Identity Management 80
Visibility 85
Sexual Identity Management Strategies at Work 94
Influential Social Structures 103
Social Norms and Expectations 104
Institutional Culture and Climate 107
Family/Friend Groups 118
Influences on Social Structures 120
Roles and Responsibilities 121
Fostering Team Culture and Safe Spaces 125
Role Model and Mentor 130
Recruitment of Prospects and Parents 134
"Face" of Team/Representative of Institution 136
Opportunities and Limitations 137
Chapter Summary 139

CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS 141
Introduction 141
Summary of the Research Study 141
Figure 1 146
Discussion and Interpretation of Findings 147
How Do Professionally "Out" LGB Head College Coaches Construct Their Identities?...148
How Do these Constructed Professional Identities of LGB Intercollegiate Athletics Head Coaches Influence Their Coaching Roles? 167
Opportunities and Limitations 170
Implications 172
Implications for LGB Coaches 172
Implications for Higher Education and Athletics Department Administrators 177
Implications for Researchers 179
Limitations 182
Conclusion 183
References 185
Appendix A Recruitment Script to Private Social Media Group 213
Appendix B Recruitment Script Directly to Prospective Participants 214
Appendix C Recruitment Script Directly to Prospective Participants Identified by Others ...215

Appendix D Indiana University Study Information Sheet for Research 216
Appendix E Interview No. 1 Protocol 219
Appendix F Interview No. 2 Protocol 224
Curriculum Vita

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Individuals who, to any degree, come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) are often stigmatized, outcast, bypassed, and discriminated against on many U.S. college campuses (Button, 2004; Cain, 1991; Griffin, 1991; Lambert, Ventura, Hall, & Cluse-Tolar, 2006; Rankin, 2004; Renn, 2010; Sedgwick, 1990). Discrimination and marginalization of LGBTQ individuals traverse all sectors of higher education, including intercollegiate athletics, wherein many athletics departments fail to adequately acknowledge, support, or protect LGBTQ student-athletes, coaches, and administrators with LGBTQ-inclusive cultures, resources, and policies (Baird, 2002; Cunningham, 2015; Griffin, 2012; Renn, 2010). Notwithstanding the concerns, there has been an increased visibility of LGBTQ individuals in intercollegiate athletics over the last 10 to 15 years, particularly student-athletes (Carroll, 2016). LGBTQ coaches, however, remain largely closeted.

Like most coaches, LGBTQ coaches shoulder tremendous pressures. They are responsible for their teams' athletic and academic successes, the support and development of student-athletes, the recruitment of prospective student-athletes, and the generation of institutional revenue and enrollment – among countless other *duties as assigned* (Frey, 2007). However, LGBTQ coaches often work in athletics departments that lack compassionate cultures, inclusive infrastructures, and protective policies, which can hamstring their full potential and that of their student-athletes.

Concerns about employment are constant and well founded for many LGBTQ coaches. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling that sexual orientation and gender identity

discrimination is prohibited under federal sex-based employment protections, the vast majority of LGBTQ coaches remain vulnerable to at-will employment law (*Bostock v. Clayton County*, 2020). At-will means "an employer can terminate an employee at any time for any reason, except an illegal one, or for no reason without incurring legal liability" (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2008, April 15, At-will employment – overview section, para. 3). Moreover, an employer may "alter wages, terminate benefits, or reduce paid time off" without notice or consequence (NCSL, 2008, April 15, At-will employment – overview section, para. 4).

Hypothetically, a university employer could terminate an LGBTQ coach or reduce their wages or benefits at will and without recourse, provided the rationale for such action was not *directly* based on the coach's sexual orientation or gender identity – a remarkably low bar when employment deference legally rests with the employer. Consequently, LGBTQ intercollegiate athletics coaches often find it safer and more prudent not to disclose their sexual orientations and/or gender identities at work. However, LGBTQ intercollegiate athletics coaches also report a heightened desire to incorporate personal lenses and experiences into their coaching, as well as to fully and authentically support their student-athletes (Anderson & Kanner, 2010; Cunningham & Melton, 2012; Griffin, 2012; Kauer, 2005; Krane & Barber, 2005; Orlov & Allen, 2014). Despite a growing body of literature about closeted intercollegiate athletics coaches, nominal research exists about professionally disclosed LGBTQ coaches, arguably a consequence of the limited size of this population of coaches (Griffin, 1992; Kauer, 2005; Keats, 2016; Krane & Barber, 2005). As more LGBTQ individuals across sport and higher education disclose their sexual and/or gender identities in the workplace, it is important to consider this small, but growing, population of coaches for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how professionally disclosed lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) intercollegiate athletics head coaches construct their professional identities. Moreover, this study aims to understand how these constructed professional identities of LGB head college coaches influence their overall coaching roles. Sexual identity disclosure does not operate on a static, colloquial binary of "closeted" and "out." Instead, sexual identity disclosure is individually constructed, uniquely fluid, and context dependent (Hunter, 2007; Keats, 2016; Orne, 2011). For example, a coach may openly identify as gay with friends and family, but may remain closeted in all professional settings, including with student-athletes, colleagues, and parents. Moreover, across the contexts of private and professional lives, the individual may have evolving and regressive degrees and conditions of disclosure under specific circumstances and among specific groups (Button, 2001, 2004; Cain, 1991; Fink, 2012; Hunter, 2007; Keats, 2016; Orne, 2011). Disclosure of sexual orientation is not a linear process, but rather a strategic management of identity (Keats, 2016; Orne, 2011). It should be noted that this research does not include transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse intercollegiate athletics head coaches because to date, I am not aware of anyone who has professionally disclosed at a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institution. However, it is vitally important to address this underrepresented and largely invisible population in future research.

Many self-identifying LGB head college coaches remain deeply closeted "out of fear that admitting their sexuality will mean the end of their careers" (Taylor, 2012, para. 1). This disenfranchised population of coaches often self-silences in an effort to protect themselves (and others), their careers, and their reputations from discriminatory employment practices, hostile work environments, and social isolation (Button, 2001, 2004; Woods, 1994). Increasingly,

however, there are a number of LGB head college coaches who, despite facing significant risk, denounce the culture of silence and secrecy in intercollegiate athletics, and professionally disclose their sexual identities.

Guiding Research Questions

Every day LGB head college coaches navigate uncertain circumstances by disclosing their sexual identities in professional settings. The manner of and reasons for disclosure are unique to each individual and their life circumstances, and cannot be generalized. The aim of this study is for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches to share their individual identities, subjectivities, worldviews, experiences, and stories within the context of the following guiding research questions:

- How do professionally “out” LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches construct their professional identities?
- How do these constructed professional identities of LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches influence their coaching roles?

Significance of the Study

Homophobic, heteronormative, heterosexist, and sexist norms and expectations are so deeply interwoven in the fabric of athletics most LGB coaches find relative sanctuary in the proverbial closet (Baird, 2002; Chauncey, 1994; Cunningham & Melton, 2012). In other words, most LGB coaches believe it is safer and more pragmatic to remain silent about their sexual identities than to professionally disclose (Baird, 2002). To underscore this point, it is important to know that the most recent data indicate 5.6 percent of American adults identify as LGBTQ (Gallup, 2021, February 24). Moreover, in a survey conducted by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation, 46% of LGBTQ respondents said they are closeted at work (2018a, p. 6).

That percentage seems to be even more magnified in college athletics. Of the 355 NCAA Division I men's basketball programs, and 353 women's basketball programs, there has never been a professionally disclosed LGB head coach on the men's side, and only a handful in the history of the women's side. Despite most LGB coaches regarding silence of sexual identity to be in their best interest, research suggests such secrecy may leave an individual feeling "inauthentic, disingenuous, [and] dishonest with student-athletes, and thus, ineffective as a coach" (Orlov & Allen, 2014, p. 2). As noted by former women's soccer coach Lisa Howe, who resigned in 2010 from Belmont University after coming out to her team as a lesbian:

> I knew there would be a risk in coming out…It's hard when you're hiding a part of yourself at work when you're trying to be a role model to 20-year olds…There are young people taking their lives. There are young people getting kicked out of their homes and families. I (was) on a daily basis sending this message: It's OK to be gay as long as you don't tell anyone or hide it. Or maybe I (was) sending the message it's not OK…It finally became such an internal struggle that it was affecting a lot of parts of my life. It affected how well I was coaching, my happiness, my relationships with friends and my partner. You get tired of lying. It wasn't outright lying, but I wasn't being honest. If you're a person of integrity, you want to be honest. (Ryan, 2017, paras. 25-27)

The culture of silence is further reinforced by many institutions' default modus operandi "Don't ask, don't tell," and an absence of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, statements, and codes of conduct (NCAA, 2018d). A presumption often exists that as long as an institution does not inquire about a coach's sexual identity, and as long as the coach does not disclose their sexual identity as anything other than straight, the institution, the athletics department, the team, the student-athletes, and the coach can all be successful. Many institutions

also impose a culture of silence by deliberately hiding LGB coaches' sexual identities and prohibiting or discouraging coaches from talking to their teams, recruits, donors, or the public about their sexual identities. This may occur explicitly, or the tacit silence may be inferred because of an institution's or a state's lack of anti-discrimination policies or laws. In other words, if a coach does not feel that their place of employment is safe for and supportive of LGBTQ individuals, the coach will have even more reason to not only remain closeted, but to remain silent as bystanders when confronted with homophobic slurs and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and behavior toward others, including their student-athletes. This study is timely and necessary to advance the scholarship of this underrepresented demographic of coaches.

Definition of Terms

Although my study is situated in the constructivist paradigm (as discussed in Chapter Three), I defined the following terms, which are frequently used in LGBTQ-related scholarship. This approach is intended to facilitate the reader's comprehension of the study, and is not a disregard of the study's constructivist approach.

- *Ally*: A term used to describe an individual who actively supports LGBTQ persons. An ally may be straight and cisgender. An ally may also be someone within the LGBTQ community (e.g., lesbian ally to transgender persons).
- *Asexual*: A term used to describe an individual who does not experience sexual attraction (Asexual Visibility & Education Network [AVEN], n.d.).
- *Bisexual*: A term used to describe an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to more than one sex or gender. The type and degree of attraction may vary. The term is often used interchangeably with the term pansexual (HRC, n.d.).

- *Cisgender*: A term used to describe an individual "whose gender identity is consistent with their sex assigned at birth" (NCAA, n.d.).
- *Closeted (also, "in the closet")*: A term used to describe an individual who does not disclose or express their sexual orientation or gender identity (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association [NLGJA], n.d.). Being closeted is context dependent and fluid (Hunter, 2007; Keats, 2016; Orne, 2011).
- *Coming out*: A term used to describe the process in which an individual "acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others" (HRC, n.d.).
- *Gay*: A general term used to describe an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to the same gender. The term is often used specifically to describe men whose sexual orientation is toward men. However, women and gender diverse individuals may also use the term (Griffin & Taylor, 2012).
- *Gender*: A term used to describe the fluid relationship between one's physical traits and behaviors and one's identity as man, woman, both, or neither. It is important to note that gender is a social construct, whereas sex is biological. Gender does not automatically align with one's sex assigned at birth (Griffin & Taylor, 2012).
- *Gender diversity*: An increasingly popular term used to describe "the extent to which a person's gender identity, role, or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for a particular sex." (American Psychological Association, 2015, p. 20)
- *Gender expression*: A phrase that "refers to the ways in which a person communicates their gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, haircut, voice, name, personal pronouns and other forms of self-presentation" (NCAA, n.d.).

- *Gender identity*: A phrase used to describe "one's inner concept of self as male, female, both, or neither. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the gender assigned at birth…All people have a gender identity" (Griffin & Taylor, 2012, p. 71).
- *Heteronormativity*: A term used to describe a cultural norm that heterosexuality is the only assumed, accepted, and normal sexual orientation (Griffin & Taylor, 2012).
- *Heterosexism*: A term used to describe a "social system of individual beliefs and actions, institutional rules and laws and cultural norms that privileges heterosexual relations and people and disadvantages same-sex relationships and lesbian, gay and bisexual people" (Griffin & Taylor, 2012, p. 72).
- *Homosexual*: A clinical term used to describe an individual who is sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex (Griffin & Taylor, 2012). Due to the term's clinical history, it is often regarded as an antiquated and offensive term that suggests gays and lesbians are diseased or psychologically disordered or dysfunctional (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, n.d.).
- *Homophobia*: A term used to describe a broad spectrum of negative feelings toward persons who love or are sexually attracted to persons of the same sex (HRC, n.d.). Biphobia and transphobia are related terms used to describe negative feelings toward bisexual, pansexual, transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals, respectively.
- *Lesbian*: A term used to describe a woman whose emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction is toward other women. Gender diverse individuals may also identify as lesbians (Griffin & Taylor, 2012; HRC, n.d.).

- *Negative recruiting*: A phrase used to describe a "practice denigrating rival coaches and programs during the recruitment of high school athletes…The goal is to use the negative cultural attitudes and stereotypes about [LGBTQ persons] to prey on parents' and athletes' fears and ultimately discourage them from attending rival universities" (Krane & Barber, 2005, pp. 71-72).
- *Nonbinary*: A term used to describe a person who "does not identify exclusively as a man or woman. Nonbinary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all nonbinary people do. Nonbinary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender-fluid" (HRC, n.d.).
- *Queer*: A comprehensive and re-appropriated term used to describe persons whose sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions fall outside the binary norms of straight man or straight woman (Renn, 2010). It should also be noted that the term is often criticized for its historically bigoted use, as well as its overly simplistic representation of many unique groups (Griffin & Taylor, 2012; Renn, 2010).
- *Pansexual*: A term used to describe an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any sex or gender. The type and degree of attraction may vary. The term is often used interchangeably with the term bisexual (HRC, n.d.).
- *Sexual orientation*: A term used to describe "an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people" (HRC, n.d.). The term may be used interchangeably with the term *sexual identity*.

- *Sexism:* A term used to describe "the systematic, institutional, pervasive, and routine mistreatment of women, feminine, and femme people. This mistreatment creates an imbalance of power in society that renders women, feminine, and femme people disadvantaged. The belief that maleness and masculinity are superior to femaleness and femininity" (University of Texas at Austin Gender and Sexuality Center, 2017).
- *Straight:* An informal term used to describe a heterosexual individual, whose sexual orientation is toward the *opposite* gender on the male/female gender binary (Griffin & Taylor, 2012).
- *Transgender:* A comprehensive term used to describe an individual whose identity and/or expression does not fall within gender norms. It is also a term used to describe an individual whose gender identity and/or gender expression do not align with the individual's assigned birth sex. It is important to note, a transgender individual may also identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or asexual (AVEN, n.d.; Griffin & Taylor, 2012).

In addition to the LGBTQ-related terms above, it was important to situate the terms *professionally disclosed* and *professionally out* for this study. Although each participant had the autonomy to self-conceptualize those terms, the common denominator for each participant was that their student-athletes and their coaching staffs were aware of their sexual identities. That was not a preordained selection criterion. However, it was useful to establish common contextualization for the terms across all the participants.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in six chapters: (a) introduction, (b) literature review, (c) methodology, (d) participant profiles, (e) findings, and (f) discussion and implications. In

Chapter One I provided an overview of the problems many LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches face if they professionally disclose their sexual identities. Additionally, I discussed the purpose and significance of the study, identified my guiding research questions, introduced several key LGBTQ terms, and provided a snapshot overview of the dissertation. Chapter Two offers an in-depth review of the literature as it relates to the three-pronged conceptual framework of this study: (a) cultural and systemic heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism in sport, (b) the general state of higher education for LGBTQ individuals, and (c) sexual identity management and professional disclosure. In Chapter Three I outline the paradigmatic orientation, research design, and methods for the study. Chapter Four profiles each participant within the context of sexuality, athletics, and salient intersecting identities. Chapter Five presents my findings using thick, rich description. Lastly, Chapter Six includes discussion about and implications of my research. Collectively, these chapters capture a complete, valid, and ethical consideration of how LGB head college coaches construct their professional identities and how their professional identities as LGB head college coaches influence their coaching roles.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is a scholarship composite that addresses the three concepts central to my research. First, I highlight the cultural and systemic heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia that exist in sport, including intercollegiate athletics, as it serves as the contextual crux of my study. Moreover, I illustrate how the heterosexist and sexist imbalance impacts men and women differently in sports. Secondly, I examine the general state of higher education for LGBTQ individuals. Intercollegiate athletics does not exist as an independent silo, but rather as part of a larger institution of social, cultural, political, and economic influence. Consequently, this portion of the literature review underscores the unique challenges LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches face navigating the dual yet interconnected worlds of sport and higher education. Lastly, I address sexual identity management and professional disclosure. This discussion point establishes a theoretical framework for how LGBTQ individuals manage their sexual identities, particularly in professional settings. Within this framework, I consider professional disclosure in intercollegiate athletics. However, due to the relative paucity of research in this area, as well as the comparable roles coaches and faculty maintain with students, I also explore professional disclosure in academia.

It should be noted that to maintain fidelity to the three central concepts mentioned above, and to focus a direct connection between the literature and my research, this literature does not cover the entire scope of sport, higher education, and identity management as it relates to LGBTQ individuals. Nor does the review identify an exhaustive list of gaps in the literature. Furthermore, sexual identity is a social, fluid, and impermanent construct, unique to every

individual (Katz, 1997). Therefore, any attempt to draw wholesale conclusions about these topics is impossible and irresponsible. These topics extend beyond the scope of this one literature review, but are intended to support the following questions guiding my qualitative study:

- How do professionally "out" LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches construct their professional identities?
- How do these constructed professional identities of LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches influence their coaching roles?

Heteronormativity, Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sexism in Sport/Intercollegiate Athletics

The institution of sport, including intercollegiate athletics, is historically heteronormative, heterosexist, homophobic, and sexist (Anderson, 2002; Cunningham, 2012; Griffin 2012; Rankin & Merson, 2012). That is to say nothing of the pervasive transphobia, and exclusion of transgender, nonbinary, gender diverse, and intersex individuals in sport (Anderson & Travers, 2017; Bianchi, 2017; Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019). Although the social norms and cultural stereotypes that uphold these ideological frameworks are different for men and women, and vary across race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, and ability, among other social classifications, the impact can be equally corrosive (Coakley, 2007; Griffin, 1998; Messner, 1996; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite, & Southall, 2011). As noted in the NCAA's Champions of Respect resource document, "When taken to extremes, these…gender and sexual orientation stereotypes for women and men lead to the assumption that all women athletes are lesbians and no male athletes are gay" (Griffin & Taylor, 2012, p. 7).

Hostility towards LGBTQ individuals in sport is not an anomaly reserved solely for intercollegiate athletics. Research shows a primordial presence of heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism in elementary and secondary school athletics (Griffin, 1993; Travers, 2018), as well as a stronghold in elite amateur athletics (e.g., Olympic and Paralympic Games) (Burbery, 2021; Symons, 2006; Symons & Storr, 2020), and professional athletics (Gregory, A., 2004; Sailors, 2020). Some scholars assert the gendered, dualistic, hierarchical structure of men's and women's sports contributes to ubiquitous hostility towards LGBTQ individuals at all levels (Fraser & Liakova, 2008; Travers, 2009). Specifically, Travers (2009) argued:

> The ideology of the two sex system itself is centrally implicated in gender hierarchy and supports sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. The sport nexus normalizes and reinforces the ideology of the two sex system to the detriment of women, gays, and lesbians, and the non-normatively gendered. (p. 80)

Therefore, it is crucial, for purposes of this study, to consider how heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism impact men and women differently.

Men in Sport

Sport continues to be regarded as one of the final bastions of systemically reproduced, celebrated, reinforced bigotry and patriarchal privilege that keeps women and LGBTQ individuals on the fringes with limited recourse (Anderson, 2002; Freedom for All Americans, 2021; Pronger, 1990; Women's Basketball Coaches Association, 2021). Historically, the white, able-bodied, masculine, heterosexual hegemony of sport was justified as a means to develop strong, patriotic, successful, and God-fearing men, and to ultimately build and maintain an independent, stalwart, Christian nation (Anderson, 2009). Any deviation from that model

masculine identity or physique was considered flawed, unethical, and a liability to the country and to Christianity (Anderson, 2009). Anderson (2009) noted:

> Modern sport was…born out of the turn of the 20th century notion that it could help prevent youth from possessing characteristics associated with femininity. It was designed to compel boys to reject all but a narrow definition of masculinity; one that created good industrial workers, soldiers, Christians, and consumers. The construction of sport as a masculine and homophobic enterprise was both deliberate and political, and, over a hundred years later, it remains so today. (p. 4)

Boys and men who participate in sports, particularly team-based, contact-heavy sports, continue to be presumed masculine and heterosexual, and are socialized to brandish those images in all facets of their lives (Anderson, 2002; Pronger, 1990). "Boys (in sport) learn early that to be gay, to be suspected of being gay, or even to be unable to prove one's heterosexual status is not acceptable" (Anderson, 2002, p. 860). Black male athletes and coaches in team sports are particularly vulnerable to overt masculinization and heterosexualization, thus demonstrating the deeply entrenched intersection of racism, homophobia, and sexism in sport (Majors & Billson, 1992; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite & Southall, 2011). As noted by Southall et al. (2011), "Historically, black male athletes have been perceived as hypersexual and hyper-masculinized, while simultaneously intellectually inferior" (p. 297). Conversely, gay men have been perceived as reservedly white and effeminate (Anderson, 2009). Consequently, Black men and gay men are often regarded as mutually exclusive – neither can Black men be gay, nor gay men be Black – particularly within the realm of sport (Froyum, 2007; Sankofa, Hurley, Allen, & Boykin, 2005; Southall et al., 2011).

Regardless of race, any male athlete, coach, or administrator who does not portray a subjectively appropriate amount of "manliness" or "straightness" may be discouraged or prohibited from participating in sports altogether, as it is often assumed that homosexuality and athleticism are incompatible (Baird, 2002). Heteronormative, heterosexist, homophobic, and sexist behaviors and attitudes are particularly prevalent in team-based sports (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Mowatt, 2013; Griffin, 1998; Magrath, 2016; Plummer, 2006; Roper & Halloran, 2007). A possible explanation is that team sports environments encourage "the melding of individual identities into the creation of an overarching team identity…that might be more likely to adhere to an established collection of ideas and attitudes, of which wide acceptance of heteronormative compliance may be included" (Anderson & Mowatt, 2013, p. 117). This type of heteronormative groupthink often manifests into homophobic bullying (Plummer, 2006). Teammates, coaches, opponents, fans, or the media may remark about actual or perceived gay or bisexual male athletes with homophobic or sexist slurs (Anderson, 2011a). Indignant terms, such as *faggot, homo, queer, sissy, pussy,* or *bitch*, may be used at times to intimidate or belittle boys and men in sports. Those terms are also just as likely to be used as motivation in practice or competition, or as juvenile locker room banter, and are not necessarily intended to stigmatize homosexuality (Anderson, 2011b; Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007; Magrath, 2016; Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016; Pascoe, 2005). This phenomenon is what Pascoe (2005) called *fag discourse* theory, in which fundamentally homophobic terms take on a variety of other meanings.

Despite assertions that homophobic, heterosexist, and sexist terms are innocuous, research shows that commonplace acceptance of such slurs creates and reinforces a culture in which gay and bisexual male athletes, coaches, and administrators are subordinate and

unwelcome (Anderson, 2009; 2011a; Plummer, 2006). There is also research that finds men to be generally more hostile to LGBTQ individuals than women (Cunningham, 2012; Cunningham, Sartore, & McCullough, 2010; Herek, 2002). As a result, many gay and bisexual male athletes, coaches, and administrators self-select out of sport entirely, or remain closeted, "fearing that coming out will thwart their athletics progress" (Anderson, 2009, p. 8; Plummer, 2006). Notwithstanding, for many gay and bisexual male athletes, coaches, and administrators who disclose their sexual identities to their teams, there is growing evidence that their teams' responses are "increasingly positive and supportive" (Cunningham, 2012, p. 70; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012). It is important to consider whether a similar culture exists for women in sport.

Women in Sport

Contrary to men, whose participation in sport is lauded as natural and virile, female athletes, coaches, and administrators are often criticized for betraying their feminized gender scripts, and are pejoratively labeled *masculine* and/or *lesbian* (Fink, 2012; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Twin, 1979). Although "most evidence suggests that sexually minoritized females are not disproportionately involved in sport," heteronormative social sentiment continues to inextricably link lesbians with athletics (Davis-Delano, 2014, p. 266; Griffin, 1998). After all, "one of the most effective means of controlling women in sport is to challenge the femininity and heterosexuality" of female athletes, coaches, and administrators (Griffin, 1998, p. 18). For women of color, particularly Black women, sport is even more complicated to navigate. Black women contend not only with the challenges of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality in sport, but also with how those gendered social standards intersect with race (Collins, 1991; 2000; Ferguson, 2015; hooks, 1981). Ferguson stated:

> The pure, non-physical, innocent, non-sexual, demure and submissive image of womanhood is associated with whiteness, class, and heterosexuality…This nonthreatening image is not applicable to all women and contradicts socially constructed images of Black women, which contain aggression and hypersexuality. (p. 6)

Unlike white women, Black women are often stereotypically portrayed as naturally physical, athletic, and aggressive (Carty, 2005; Wade, 2008). Consequently, Black women are generally cast as incapable of meeting the white hegemonic norms, ideals, and expectations of femininity and heterosexuality (Carty, 2005; Wade, 2008). As such, the presence and experiences of Black women are often rendered invisible and irrelevant in considerations of femininity and heterosexuality in sport (Bowleg, 2008; Carty, 2005; Wade, 2008).

After the passage of Title IX, the Educational Amendment Act of 1972, which prohibited sex discrimination by any institution receiving federal financial assistance, women could no longer be unequivocally denied participation opportunities in scholastic and collegiate athletics (Griffin, 1998). Although Title IX's impact on gender equity in education has been overwhelmingly positive (though less for girls and women of color), this groundbreaking federal law has also been the impetus for strategic social attacks on women in sport in an effort to "preserve the gender order" (NCAA, 2017a; Pickett, 2009; WideRights, 2012). As Griffin (1992) noted:

> The lesbian label is a political weapon that can be used against any woman who steps out of line. Any woman who defies traditional gender roles is called a lesbian…Any woman who speaks out against sexism is called a lesbian. As long as women are afraid to be called lesbians, this label is an effective tool to control all women and limit women's challenges to sexism (p. 259).

Consequently, the visibility of homophobia and heterosexism is arguably greater in women's athletics than in men's, and establishes lesbians as a liability to the overall advancement and legitimacy of women's sports (Griffin, 1992; Keats, 2016). Similar strategic efforts have been made over the last two years with the introduction of dozens of state legislative bills prohibiting transgender girls and women from participating in sport in an effort to "save women's sports" (Freedom for All Americans, 2021). Although sexual orientation and gender identity are assuredly unique, they are both regularly weaponized to uphold gender scripts through shame, bullying, and hate. Therefore, the acute and multi-faceted fear of being tagged masculine, lesbian, or transgender has not only caused many LGB women athletes, coaches, and administrators to remain closeted, but has concurrently resulted in a striking absence of straight women in sport who are public allies (Griffin, 2012; Keats, 2016; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012). Unlike men's intercollegiate and professional sports, which have witnessed a growing number of straight male allies who advocate on behalf of LGBTQ individuals, straight female athletes, coaches, and administrators tend to privately express their support for LGBTQ individuals, in an effort to preserve their own heterosexual reputations (Griffin, 2012; Keats, 2012; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012).

Women in sport, regardless of sexual identity, cope with these heterosexist burdens in a variety of ways. Some self-select out of sport altogether (Griffin, 1998; 2012; Krane & Barber, 2005; Townsend, 1997). Those who remain involved often pander to gender norms by trivializing their athleticism with demure, apologetic behaviors (Baird, 2002; Davis-Delano, 2014; Griffin, 1992; Stoelting, 2011). Conversely, many women ostentatiously display their femininity and heterosexuality by wearing ribbons, ponytails, make-up, and glitter (and skirts and heels for coaches and administrators), emphasizing their heterosexual relationships, and

engaging in media activity that platforms sexuality over athleticism – a postfeminist phenomenon Pat Griffin has facetiously called the "Freedom to be Feminine Movement" (Baird, 2002; Carty, 2005; Hargreaves, 2004; McDonald, 2000; Sartore-Baldwin, 2012, p. 145). As Griffin noted, "It's interesting to frame 'progress' in women's sports as the freedom to be feminine. It doesn't feel like progress, to me, however. It feels like buying into the same old thing" (Sartore-Baldwin, 2012, p. 145).

The practice of negative recruiting is another tactic regularly used in women's intercollegiate athletics to cope with heterosexism, despite its fundamental conflict with the NCAA's philosophy on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Krane & Barber, 2005; Griffin & Carroll, 2009; NCAA, 2017b). Negative recruiting, based on a real or perceived identity as LGBTQ, "refers to the practice of playing on stereotypes to deter recruits from attending rival athletic programs by alleging or implying that a rival coach or team members are [LGBTQ]" (Griffin & Carroll, 2009, p. 2). Since one of the common social narratives equates women's athletics with lesbians, negative recruiting has shown to be a particularly effective tool to capitalize on the fears of some female prospective student-athletes and their parents (Griffin & Carroll, 2009).

Negative recruiting is often paired with a positive promotion of *family culture* within a particular team, athletics department, or institution (Kamphoff, 2010). Examples include straight coaches' displaying photos of spouses or families on desks, bringing them to games, or mentioning them in biographies on university-sponsored athletics websites (Calhoun, LaVoi, & Johnson, 2011). Promotion of *family culture* privileges heterosexual ideology, subtly reinforces heteronormativity, and complements the practice of negative recruiting. Although many institutions anecdotally argue that the promotion of family culture is an affirmation of a positive,

supportive environment within intercollegiate athletics, it is also a value-laden, heteronormative declaration to prospective student-athletes and their parents, as well as other stakeholders, that any deviation from heterosexuality and femininity is unacceptable (Kamphoff, 2010).

LGBTQ Acceptance in Sport

Despite the bleak and unsettling presence of heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism in sport, burgeoning research has shown increasing acceptance of LGB individuals in sport and in society since the turn of the 20th century, particularly circa 2010 (Anderson, 2005; 2011a; Anderson, Magrath, & Bullingham, 2016; Griffin, 2012; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kozloski, 2010; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Southall et al., 2011). Inclusive masculinity theory, which is "grounded in a rejection of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, and femphobia," serves as the framework for much of this research (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2011a, p. 582; 2011b). This theory maintains that homophobia and homohysteria in sports are obsolete (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2011a). Likewise, hegemonic masculinity has been reconceptualized to include various constructions of masculinity (Adams, 2011). Consequently, as Anderson (2012) noted, "there is increasing evidence that as cultural homophobia continues to dissipate…team sport athletes are coming out in greater numbers, and that they are having a more affirming experience in sport" (p. 40).

Dr. Eric Anderson (2002; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2012) has been a major scholar on the shifting homophobic culture of men's sports over the last three decades. In 2002 Anderson published the first study of openly gay male athletes on primarily straight teams. Results showed that despite a reduction of outright homophobic discourse on the teams, the openly gay male athletes continued to exist within a heteronormative framework "by self-silencing their speech, and frequently [engaging] in heterosexual dialogue with their heterosexual

teammates" (Anderson, 2012, p. 38). In a comparative historical study, Anderson (2011b) found that the openly gay male student-athletes were not as trepidatious to disclose their sexual identities to their teammates as the 2002 participants, nor were they as concerned about "physical hostility, marginalization, or social exclusion" (2011b, p. 264).

For women's sports, research findings have not been as heartening, particularly for sports like basketball and rugby, which have historically been stereotyped as masculine, or softball, which has historically been associated with lesbians (Griffin, 2012; Hardin & Greer, 2009; Reimer, 1997; Travers, 2006). However, some studies have suggested that sex-segregated sports for women are "less apt to feature climates of heteronormativity, and…are more apt to facilitate appreciation of and comfort with women" (Davis-Delano, 2014, p. 279). Additionally, there are increasingly more advocacy organizations, such as the National Center for Lesbian Rights Sports Project, Athlete Ally, You Can Play Project, Equality Coaching Alliance, and Outsports that have partnered with several amateur, intercollegiate, and professional sports organizations to address issues and concerns of LGBTQ athletes, coaches, and administrators. These organizations are committed to raising awareness, driving policy, and eliminating homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, heteronormativity, heterosexism, and sexism in all sports (Griffin & Taylor, 2012).

Intersectionality

It is overly simplistic and flawed to bifurcate the experiences of individuals in sports solely along the gender binary of men and women. Although gender may serve as an anchor from which to ground a study, consideration of the intersectionality of multiple identities allows for a more robust understanding of how individuals uniquely experience a particular

phenomenon. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* in her research about the experiences of Black women. Specifically, Crenshaw explained,

> With Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis….I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender (1989, 139-140).

Within the scope of athletics, most research on intersectionality aligns with Crenshaw, focusing primarily on race and gender (Kalman-Lamb & Abdel-Shahid, 2017), including amongst college athletes (Simian, Arinze, & McGorry (2019), athletics administrators (Price, Dunlap, & Eller, 2017), and head college coaches (Rousseau, 2019). Although expanded considerations of intersectionality to other social dimensions, such as class, nationality, religion, or disability, are limited in sport scholarship, sexual orientation has increasingly emerged as an intersectional category of focus in sport, particularly as it relates to people of color (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Smith, Lucas, Tibbetts, & Carter, 2019) and women (Melton & Bryant, 2017).

Gaps in the Literature

There is an anecdotal, unsubstantiated belief in academia and in mainstream society that homophobia no longer exists in women's athletics – that attention, advocacy, and resources should thus be redirected towards men's athletics, particularly high-profile men's athletics (Griffin, 2012). This is an example of the deeply entrenched sexism that continues to flourish in sport (Griffin & Taylor, 2012). Additionally, most of the culture and climate research pertaining

to the decrease of homophobia and heterosexism in sport is limited to men's athletics, with few, if any, disclaimers that the culture and climate of women's athletics may yield different results (Adams, 2011; Adams & Anderson, 2012; Anderson, 2009; 2011a; 2011b; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Weeks, 2007). It is critical for scholars to acknowledge the hierarchical privilege of men's sports, as well as the unique, underrepresented experiences and perspectives of women in sport, by intentionally including more female athletes, coaches, and administrators in research about the culture and climate of sport, all while continuing to focus attention on the influence of intersectional identities.

General State of Higher Education for LGBTQ Individuals

Besides delving into the social, cultural, and political folds of sport, as it relates to professionally disclosed LGB coaches, it is critical to provide a fundamental summation of the state of higher education for LGBTQ individuals. Sexual minority and gender diverse students, faculty, and administrators have been historically underrepresented and disenfranchised within the context of higher education. Not only are these individuals at risk, and often victims of, conspicuous, personal, and even violent discrimination on college campuses, they are also regularly subjected to systemic, micro-aggressive, and opaque oppression, such as exclusion and isolation (Renn, 2010; Sears, 2010).

Specific to LGBTQ faculty, many institutions of higher education (or the states in which institutions are located) have not established inclusive, nondiscrimination policies or other protective measures to enable their LGBTQ faculties to be open about their sexual or gender identities. This can be particularly complicated at faith-based institutions, whose missions may fundamentally conflict with LGBTQ-inclusive policies (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Getz & Kirkley, 2006; Griffin & Taylor, 2012; Killelea McEntarfer, 2011; Love, 1998; NCAA, 2018a).

Thus, closeted LGBTQ faculty often do not have the opportunity to diversify the academic experience for the students they teach, to strengthen relationships with their colleagues, and/or enrich their own personal and professional experiences by disclosing their sexual and gender identities (LaSala, Jenkins, Wheeler, & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2008; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Sears, 2002)

Undoubtedly, the climate and culture of many campuses have improved for LGBTQ individuals over the last several years – though less so for transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals (Anderson & Travers, 2017; Bianchi, 2017; Blumenfeld, Weber, & Rankin, 2016; Coulter & Rankin, 2017; Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019; Knochel, Saltzburg, Rassi, & Natale, 2017; Rankin & Merson, 2012). Yet despite perceived and actual advances toward LGBTQ equality in U.S. higher education, research continues to show a significant presence of hostility, harassment, and violence on college campuses, coupled with an absence of support and security for LGBTQ individuals, particularly transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals and LGBTQ individuals of color (Anderson & Travers, 2017; Bianchi, 2017; Blumenfeld et al., 2016; Coulter & Rankin, 2017; Garvey et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019; Knochel et al., 2017; Rankin & Merson, 2012). Research shows that LGBTQ students, particularly transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse students, experience a higher rate of sexual assault and sexual harassment (Cantor, Fisher, Chibnall, Townsend, Lee, Bruce, & Thomas, 2015; Coulter & Rankin, 2017), depression and suicidal ideation (Intrabartola, 2017; Testa, Michaels, Bliss, Rogers, Balsam, and Joiner, 2017), homelessness and major financial concerns (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017; Tierney & Ward, 2017), and dropping out (Garvey et al., 2015; Peters, 2015) than their straight and/or cisgender peers. Although the methodology has been contested, the *2010*

State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People (the most comprehensive research study of its kind) shows that LGBTQ people on college campuses continue to be "the least accepted group when compared with other under-served populations and, consequently, more likely to indicate deleterious experiences and less than welcoming campus climates based on sexual identity" (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Noack, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010, pp. 8-9). Moreover, the report concluded that most LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty found "the environments in which they studied and worked to be personally challenging and perceived a lack of support from many of those around them" (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 1). The Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2020) reinforced those findings, noting LGBTQ individuals earn fewer bachelor's degrees and lower average incomes than their non-LGBTQ peers. Moreover, two-thirds of LGBTQ college students reported experiencing sexual harassment at least once, and 23 percent feared for their physical safety (PNPI, 2020). The findings were particularly acute for LGBTQ students of color (PNPI, 2020).

Dr. Sue Rankin, a leading scholar on LGBTQ issues in higher education, shared similar sentiments in a study titled, *Campus Climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People* (2004). Rankin (2004) initially argued that many of the participating institutions had "become aware of the challenges facing many queer members of their communities" and had "initiated structural changes" (p. 18). However, she also countered the aforementioned point as an anomaly. Based on the study, Rankin (2004) concluded that many LGBTQ students, faculty, and administrators at institutions across the United States continue to perceive and experience an inhospitable climate. Specifically, "within the last 12 months nearly 30 percent of the respondents…personally experienced harassment due to their sexual orientation or gender identity" (Rankin, 2004, pp. 18-19). Notwithstanding, another 60 percent of respondents

believed LGBTQ individuals would be victims of future targeted harassment (Rankin, 2004). Several other studies support these assertions of harassment and hostility towards LGBTQ individuals on college campuses (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Holley, Larson, Adelman, & Trevino, 2008; Morrison, Morrison, & Franklin, 2009).

Higher education seems uncertain and precarious for LGBTQ individuals. Over the last several years there has been a gradual social and cultural shift in the United States toward LGBTQ inclusion, albeit more so in certain parts of the country, and for certain LGBTQ communities, than others (HRC, 2021). Similar shifts are seen in higher education, wherein some institutions are adopting LGBTQ-inclusive policies. However, most institutions have yet to adopt LGBTQ-inclusive policies, and for those that have, many institutions do not have LGBTQ-inclusive cultures on their campuses (Campus Pride Index, 2021). Therefore, LGBTQ students, particularly LGBTQ students of color and transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse students of all races and ethnicities, face real and perceived threats of discrimination, marginalization, isolation, and violence. For these reasons, LGBTQ individuals must strategically manage their sexual and gender identities, including if, when, and how to disclose their identities to others, to ensure maximum self-protection.

Sexual Identity Management and Professional Disclosure

Sexual Identity Development

The acronym LGBTQ is recognizable shorthand for individuals, identities, behaviors, and attractions that fall outside the traditional paradigms of sex, gender, and sexuality (Renn, 2010). However, with more than an estimated 10 million LGB adults, as well as nearly 1.4 million transgender adults living in the United States, it is important to acknowledge the unique developmental processes of individual subgroups (Williams Institute, 2020).

With the exception of homosexual illness models, most sexual identity development theories emerged in the mid-to-late 20th century (Coleman, 1978; Fox, 1995; Gagnon & Simon, 1968; Hooker, 1956; Leznoff & Westley, 1956; Simon & Gagnon, 1967; Warren, 1974). Some of the earliest research focused exclusively on homosexual men, and hinged largely on behavioral and social components (Dank, 1971; Troiden, 1979). However, most of the fundamental models of sexual identity development did not sufficiently account for socio-cultural factors that impacted identity development (Langdridge & Moon, 2008).

Other models such as Cass's (1979) six-stage identity development model expanded to include lesbians, and considered cognition and effect, in addition to social and behavioral factors. Although Cass (1979) acknowledged the length of time in each stage was dependent on the individual, it was assumed every individual advanced through each stage sequentially – conceding, however, that some stages might be revisited. Emphasis was also placed on the concept of *public* and *private* realms of homosexual identity, thus serving as a foundation for sexual identity management theories.

The Fassinger model was considered one of the most inclusive models of sexual identity development due to its consideration of sociopolitical factors, as well as individual contexts (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Moreover, the model borrowed from racial/ethnic minority identity literature and gender identity literature, thus broadening its scope and applicability (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Originally, a model of lesbian identity development, it was later validated as apropos to gay male identity development (Fassinger & Miller, 1997). The model consisted of two parallel identity development processes: individual sexual identity development, and group membership identity development, and each process included sequential phases (rather than stages) to emphasize greater fluidity, continuity, and circularity (McCarn &

Fassinger, 1996). Unlike most sexual identity development models of the time, the Fassinger model did not "assume disclosure behaviors as evidence of developmental advancement…Disclosure is so profoundly affected by environmental oppression that to use it as an index of identity development directly forces an individual to take responsibility for her own victimization" (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, p. 522).

From these foundational models of sexual identity development, many other models and theories have emerged in the last 30 years, including the D'Augelli (1994) model, one of the first sexual identity development models to offer independent and interactive identity processes, and the first bisexual identity model (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). Many theories have centered on sexual identity development of youth and young adults (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Phinney, 1989; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006; Rosario et al., 2006). However, research on the sexual identity development during adulthood remains sparse (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Calzo, Antonucci, Mays, and Cochran, 2011; Kertzner, 2001; Mohr & Fassinger, 2003).

Some scholars have criticized sexual identity development theories, noting their limited, or altogether absent, considerations of intersectionality, particularly with race and ethnicity, or acknowledgements of racism in the Eurocentric LGBTQ community (Chun & Singh, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989; Grov, Bimbi, NaníN, & Parsons, 2006; Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004; Shapiro, Rios, & Stewart, 2010). LGBTQ individuals of color develop their sexual identities from a confluence of factors that cannot be articulated by the dominant racial narrative. As noted by Rosario et al. (2004), "Cultural factors including the importance of family, traditional gender roles, conservative religious values, and widespread homophobia may lead many ethnic/racial minority individuals to experience difficulties in the

formation and integration of an LGB sexual identity" (p. 216). This may be particularly challenging for lesbians and bisexual women of color. As noted by Parks et al. (2004), lesbians of color

> must simultaneously confront and learn to manage triple oppressions of sexism, heterosexism, and racism that exist both within the dominant culture and within their own racial/ethnic communities…Facing this challenge can be a daunting task, provoking anxiety, stress, and isolation. This may be particularly true for those who remain closeted in their families, at work, or in other important areas of their lives. (p. 252)

This is not to infer sexual identity is wholly constructed by racial and ethnic differences. In fact, some research has found nominal racial or ethnic variation in sexual orientation, behavior, identity, disclosure, or developmental milestones (Grov et al., 2006; Rosario et al., 2004). As noted by Rosario et al. (2004), "The available research provides mixed and even contradictory results," suggesting that "ethnic/racial differences are expected only in those aspects of the coming-out process that are vulnerable to external influences…but not in aspects that are driven by the self" (p. 218). However, for purposes of this study, it was of paramount importance to be cognizant of the dominant, privileged white, cisgender male, heterosexual framework in which sex, gender, and sexuality have historically been understood, and to challenge and dismantle normative social assumptions and constructions (Braun & Clarke, 2009; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002)

Sexual Identity Management and Disclosure

When dissecting any of the aforementioned sexual identity development models, *identity management* (or a comparable descriptor) is a steadfast component. Identity management falls on a continuum, in which disclosure or *coming out* holds different meaning to different

individuals in different contexts (Button, 2001, 2004; Cain, 1991; Fink, 2012). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals do not necessarily exhibit or express conspicuous, telltale features of sexuality. Therefore, they must evaluate the positive and negative implications of disclosing their sexual identities (Button, 2001, 2004; Cain, 1991; Goffman, 1963; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). According to Griffith and Hebl (2002),

> Disclosing one's sexual orientation is one of the toughest issues gay men and lesbians face because it involves considerable emotional turmoil and a fear of retaliation and rejection…At the same time, those who remain closeted report lower levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction…, increased health risks…, and extensive energy-draining activities focused on covering up their stigmatized identity" (p. 1191).

Within the context of identity management in the workplace, Woods (1994) identified three key management strategies: *counterfeiting, avoiding,* and *integrating. Counterfeiting* involves the construction or adoption of a false heterosexual identity (Woods, 1994). An LGB employee may surreptitiously swap pronouns when referring to a same-sex partner, falsify aspects of private life, or fabricate an entire heterosexual relationship (Button, 2001, 2004). Additionally, an LGB employee may participate in gender normative activities, or avoid stereotypical mannerisms in order to reinforce a heterosexual persona (Button, 2001, 2004).

Similarly, an LGB employee may use the *avoidance* strategy. However, instead of actively engaging in false representation of heterosexuality, as one would do with the *counterfeiting* strategy, an LGB employee shares nothing of their sexual identity, thus portraying asexuality (Button, 2001). "One of the most common approaches is to elude personal questions, talk in generalities, or change the focus of the conversation. Those who use this strategy may tend to avoid casual lunches, cocktail parties, and other social events" (Button, 2001, p. 323).

Lastly, the *integration* strategy is used by LGB employees to disclose their true non-heterosexual identities and attempt to "manage the consequences" (Button, 2001, p. 323). In most heteronormative work settings, LGB employees who integrate their true sexual identities must do so explicitly, otherwise heterosexuality is assumed. As noted by Button (2001),

> Some reveal themselves in an indirect or unobtrusive fashion, such as making telling remarks, receiving an increased number of calls from same-sex friends, or by allowing coworkers to find evidence (e.g., a photograph with one's partner). Others look for opportunities to tell coworkers whom they believe will be accepting. This may occur during a series of one-on-one lunches or by taking the opportunity to correct heterosexual assumptions when they occur (p. 324).

These identity management strategies may be used individually, or in various combinations. It is not uncommon for an LGB individual to employ all three strategies in the workplace, depending on what the individual determines is most appropriate for managing a sexual identity within multi-dimensional social and organizational contexts (Badgett, 1995; Button, 2001; Cain, 1991). Individuals who adopted *counterfeiting* or *avoiding* strategies experienced a number of negative consequences, including lying to colleagues (Button, 2001), using energy to maintain false heterosexual personas (McNaught, 1993), being regarded as antisocial (Woods, 1994), having difficulty forming and maintaining genuine, trusting work relationships, and not being as productive (Button, 2001). It is also important to emphasize that the use of one or more identity management strategies often depends on an LGB individual's particular phase of sexual identity development (Button, 2001; McCarthy, 1994; Pollack, 1991). Button's (2001, 2004) findings suggested that the more positive LGB individuals feel about their sexual identity and their workplace, the more they adopted an *integration* strategy at work. This

supports research that shows disclosing one's sexual identity is essential to the construction and maintenance of a positive lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity, and overall psychological wellbeing (Bredemeier, Carlton, Hills, & Oglesby, 1999; Cain, 1991; Cass, 1979; Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001; Coulombe & de la Sablonniere, 2015; Fox, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Moradi, 2009).

Nonetheless, consideration should also be given to the negative consequences of adopting an *integration* strategy at work. As noted by Button (2001),

> Waldo (1999) concludes overall stress may be the same for employees who are out versus closeted, due to the cumulative effects of indirect heterosexism experiences that act as chronic stressors. Thus gay and lesbian employees who are members of particular subgroups or who work in various contexts may conclude that the best, if not only strategy perceived to be an option is counterfeiting/avoidance, regardless of the psychological costs they must pay (pp. 334-335).

In general there is an omnibus of cautionary research demonstrating the potential consequences of disclosing a socially unwonted sexual identity (Button, 2001; Cain, 1991; Goffman, 1963). Disclosure can prove challenging for LGB employees – arguably more so than individuals who belong to other invisible, stigmatized groups, such as those with undisclosed disabilities, or those belonging to underrepresented religions (Ragins et al., 2007). As noted by Button (2001), "Revealing one's sexual identity can have serious negative consequences…such as increased stress due to minority status (Waldo, 1999), discrimination of being fired, loss of credibility and respect (Croteau, 1996), and lower pay (Badgett, 1995; Ellis & Riggle, 1996" (p. 322). Therefore, many LGB individuals consider concealment a "necessary and adaptive decision in an unsupportive or hostile environment…thus underscoring the importance of social

context" (Ragins et al., 2007, p. 1114). Even for LGB individuals who do not disclose their sexual identities, stigma theory suggests that the mere concern of what *may* happen can also cause significant psychological duress and compromised job performance and productivity (Button, 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al, 2001; Ragins et al., 2007; Stoelting, 2011). As noted by Button (2004), LGB individuals who use identity management strategies to keep their sexual identities private "may represent a significant cost to the organization in terms of lowered productivity, reduced team effectiveness, and increased turnover" (p. 491).

It is important to note that identity management and disclosure are not one-time, isolated actions. Instead they require regular deliberation, and for many LGB individuals, can be the source of lifelong anxiety and unease (Ragins et al., 2007). Each new encounter requires an LGB individual to decide how, and to what degree, to manage their sexual identity, including whether to disclose (Ragins et al., 2007). For example, as noted by Ragins et al. (2007), "Those who fully disclose at work still need to disclose to new coworkers, managers, clients, vendors, and thus these employees continually face the risk of negative reaction to disclosure" (p. 1115).

Research has shown that women may fare more positively from sexual disclosure than men (Pachankis & Mays, 2015). Specifically, disclosed lesbian or bisexual women were found to have lower risks of depression or anxiety than closeted lesbian or bisexual women (Pachankis & Mays, 2015). Conversely, results showed that men who came out as gay or bisexual were at higher risk for major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder than closeted gay or bisexual men (Pachankis & Mays, 2015). Overall, the "results suggest that the closet is associated with mental health advantages for men but disadvantages for women" (Pachankis & Mays, 2015, p. 897). It was important to be cognizant of these results when considering gender differences among the participants in my study.

Professional Disclosure in Higher Education

Literature regarding professional disclosure of LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches is meager. Most of the research and discourse within intercollegiate athletics is limited to LGBTQ student-athletes (Anderson et al., 2016; Morales & White, 2019; Stoelting, 2011). Consequently, it is necessary to draw from other areas within higher education. As a result of coaching's fundamental and deeply rooted link to teaching, parallels can be drawn between identity disclosure in athletics and academia (Jones, 2006). After all, "many of the dilemmas and complexities inherent with coaching closely mirror those in teaching" (Jones, 2006, p. xiv).

Identity disclosure in academia has been the subject of research since the late 1970s (Braun & Clarke, 2009). Referred to as "engaged pedagogy", bell hooks described the phenomenon as a "way of teaching that bridges the personal and the academic, humanizes the teacher and personalizes the teaching process" (Braun & Clarke, 2009, p. 175; Cress, 2009; hooks, 1984). The expanse of literature has included a myriad of stigmatized or underrepresented social identities across race, sexuality, gender, age, ability, class, and religion. Research suggests that an educator's willingness to avow a vulnerable identity to students causes "significantly positive relationships between 'teacher immediacy' and students' cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning" (Cress, 2009, p. 14). Moreover, students "learn to examine the privileges, opportunities, and oppressions that accompany their race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability, and gain understanding and respect for others with diverse experiences" (Allen, 1995, p. 136). That said, the institutional and/or departmental climate is often a pivotal determinant in whether a faculty member discloses their sexual identity. Faculty must gauge the political, legal, and cultural milieu of an institution and/or department, and assess potential threats, such as censure, demotion, or termination (LaSala et al., 2008).

The reasons vary regarding why LGB faculty disclose their sexual identities to their students. For some, the desire to disclose cascades from broader institutional missions "to develop in students diverse intellectual and personal qualities that promote greater good and advance the academy's role in sustaining a free and democratic society" (Orlov & Allen, 2014, p. 4). For other faculty there is an altruistic interest in supporting LGBTQ students in their own journeys of self-concept and understanding (Orlov & Allen, 2014). Notwithstanding, the advocacy for academic freedom also galvanizes many faculty to lay bare their identities to their students (Cress, 2009; Orlov & Allen, 2014).

On the contrary, the professor/student power differential may discourage some faculty from disclosing their sexual identities. As Cress (2009) contended, the "contexts of [professors'] lives are too intimately intertwined as instructors with grades, evaluations, and graduation to serve as objective texts for student learning" (p. 16). The professor is effectively a figure of omnipotent authority, and as such, is not "equally vulnerable" to their students (Gregory, 2004, p. 54). Moreover, other faculty regard the classroom as a space of authentic, candid, and balanced inquiry, which ultimately could be upended if students perceive a professor's disclosure to reflect bias (Cress, 2009). Therefore, it is a delicate balance between LGB professors' "moral and pedagogical needs to be out in the classroom and [their] students' needs for moral and intellectual autonomy" (Gregory, 2004, p. 54).

There is also considerable consternation, particularly among non-tenured faculty, that disclosing their sexual identities could lead to "promotion denial, termination, or pigeon-holing" or "being labeled inappropriate and unprofessional educators" (LaSala et al., 2008; Orlov & Allen, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, in an era of assessment and accountability, professors who disclose their sexual identities are prone to unfavorable, biased evaluations by their students

(Ewing, Stukas, & Sheehan, 2003). This supports previous research showing college students are often prejudiced towards marginalized faculty, including women, faculty of color, and LGBTQ faculty (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002).

Additionally, concerns of tokenism may deter some faculty from disclosing if their institutions or departments do not value systemic inclusion of LGBTQ faculty, students, or curricula (Fradella, Owen, & Burke, 2009; LaSala et al., 2008). Tokenism often casts a spotlight on LGBTQ faculty, thus drawing disproportionate attention and criticism to their work (LaSala et al., 2008). As noted by LaSala et al. (2008), "This could lead to significant psychological pressure on 'token' LGBT people to succeed and believe they cannot make *any* mistakes" (p. 258).

Ultimately, however, faculty disclosure of sexual identity to students is highly dependent on social context – specifically, whether "the classroom community dynamics would value from or be distracted by the information" (Cress, 2009, p. 15). Mutual rapport and trust can only be built if faculty *and* students feel safe, valued, and welcomed to engage, free of judgment or restriction. Due to the correlation between academia and athletics, the same rationale may be extended to professional disclosure of LGB college coaches.

Sexual Identity Management in Sport

Stoelting (2011) has argued "the most powerful and effective strategy to eliminate homonegativism in the sport world is to come out or disclose one's sexual identity to others" (p. 1188). That is also the crux of intergroup contact theory, which posits, "intergroup interaction is an essential part of any remedy for reducing prejudice and conflict between groups" (Pettigrew &Tropp, 2011, p. 272). Most literature regarding sexual identity disclosure within intercollegiate athletics centers on LGBTQ student-athletes, who cite desires of honesty, self-acceptance, and

normality as motivating factors (Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012; Pariera, Brody, & Scott, 2021; Stoelting, 2011). Conjointly, there remains a dearth of literature on the small, yet increasing number of LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches who professionally disclose in a culture of hostile indifference (Fink et al., 2012; Griffin, 1998; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005).

The social identity perspective is a theoretical framework used by some scholars to explain sexual identity management (Kauer, 2009; Krane & Barber, 2005). For example, Krane & Barber (2005) used this lens to better understand the identity management strategies of lesbian intercollegiate athletics coaches, who all but one concealed their sexual identities to varying degrees. This framework runs counter to many of the previously discussed identity development theories, which focused more on "characteristics of individuals, rather than on social influences" (Cain, 1991, p. 72). However, researchers now tend to agree that sexual identity management is influenced by a hybrid of individual characteristics and social contexts (Button, 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001).

When individuals develop social identities, they self-categorize "within a group with whom they feel similar…The process of self-categorization includes learning the stereotypic norms and values of a social group" (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 68). For example, fear, silence, and self-protection are all deeply established norms and values within the lesbian coaching community (and arguably among the entire LGBTQ coaching community) because they are inextricably linked to potential employment termination, negative recruiting, and an inability to rise in the coaching ranks (Krane & Barber, 2005). Many of the lesbian coaches who participated in the Krane and Barber (2005) study felt an often-exhausting need to self protect by completely compartmentalizing their professional coaching identities and private sexual

identities. Furthermore, there was a compelling preoccupation to be "better than other coaches so that they would seem irreplaceable" (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 73). However, the participants regretted that their modified disclosures had compromised trust and transparency with their student-athletes (Krane & Barber, 2005). As one coach lamented, "With coaching, it's like your kids play for you [and] you're *not* being honest with them…I just think the more honest you are with them the better off you are" (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 75). These factors have resulted in many LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches leaving the profession altogether (Kamphoff, 2010).

Institutional Role

Research suggests that organizational structure and climate are imperative to LGB individuals' sense of safety, support, and empowerment when professionally disclosing (Fink et al., 2012; Ragins et al., 2007). Although some higher education institutions have made strides toward a more LGBTQ-inclusive culture, most have not (Campus Pride Index, 2021). Moreover, although a 2020 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, several institutions reside in states without public or private anti-discrimination employment laws. Specifically, only 22 states fully prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, leaving many LGBTQ coaches with limited legal recourse (HRC, 2021).

Additionally, research shows athletics departments continue to trail behind their institutions in terms of establishing LGBTQ-inclusive cultures and policies (Kauer, 2009; Southall et al., 2011). For example, in a study by Fink et al. (2012), participants "felt athletic departments were generally uninterested in creating a supportive environment for athletes who are LGBT. In fact, in many cases, the participants indicated the athletic department wanted to avoid any mention of counter sexualities" (Fink et al., 2012, p. 97). In 2017 the NCAA

conducted a survey across NCAA Division III member institutions and conferences, and found among respondents that only 66 percent of institutions and 38 percent of athletics departments have LGBTQ-inclusive policies and procedures (NCAA, 2018d). Among NCAA Division I institutions, 70 percent of athletics departments make available LGBTQ resources and only 2.8 percent of NCAA Division I student-athletes "compete in departments that fully protect and support their LGBTQ identities" (Athlete Ally, 2021, p. 1).

Athletics departments often use the phenomenon of moral panic to justify discriminatory employment practices against LGB coaches (Baird, 2013; Fejes, 2008). For example, athletics departments frequently "use the fact that high school athletes and their parents are afraid of the presence of [LGB coaches] in their athletics programs as a tool to discriminate in their hiring, firing, and promoting decisions" (Baird, 2013; Kamphoff, 2010). After all, there are inveterate perceptions that homosexual adults are predators of children, or that homosexuality is socially contagious, and must be kept at a distance (Kamphoff, 2010; Plummer, 2006). As a consequence of moral panic, "adult supervision is often compromised in the vicinity of boys' change rooms, largely because of homophobia – after all, no male teachers can afford to appear too interested in young males dressing" (Plummer, 2006, pp. 129-130). The same sentiment applies to women coaches. In the previously discussed study by Krane and Barber (2005), lesbian coaches underscored the importance of drawing distinct boundaries with student-athletes. For example, one coach noted that "she never entered a locker room while her athletes were changing…Avoiding even the hint of impropriety was an important form of protection to some of the coaches" (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 73).

Despite the moral and economic trepidation by many athletics departments to adapt their policies, procedures, rhetoric, behaviors, and attitudes to be more inclusive of LGBTQ

individuals, research has shown significant benefits to athletics departments that were more systematically inclusive of LGBTQ student-athletes, coaches, and administrators (LaSala et al., 2008, p. 257). For example, Cunningham and Melton conducted a study in 2011, concluding, "Sexual orientation diversity results in a number of workplace advances, including improved decision making, greater marketplace understanding, and enhanced goodwill among consumers" (Cunningham & Melton, 2012, p. 72). In a subsequent study, they found similar results.

> We examined the relationships among sexual orientation diversity, and inclusive environment, and objective measures of performance among [NCAA] Division I athletic departments…The results provided robust support for the benefits of diversity and inclusion. Those departments that coupled sexual orientation diversity with an inclusive strategy far out-performed their peers, sometimes, by as much as sevenfold" (Cunningham & Melton, 2012, p. 72).

Chapter Summary

Intercollegiate athletics coaches are often regarded as some of the most influential adult figures in the lives of student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Griffin & Taylor, 2012). Further, student-athletes often spend more time with their teammates that with any other peer group (Shoenfelt, 2011). Consequently, it is important for institutions of higher education to acknowledge and appreciate that a coach's ability to be open with their team about their sexual identity may significantly impact the overall student-athlete experience and team performance. Coaches are educators and mentors, who transcend the wins and losses of competition, by teaching, supporting, and motivating their student-athletes (Jones, 2006).

> Coaches are mentors who can have an impact beyond winning championships. When coaches take the opportunity to lead by the example of their own behavior, what they say

> and what they do, they have the opportunity to help student-athletes redefine what it means to be a champion in ways that embody respect and inclusion as integral to that definition (Griffin & Taylor, 2012, p. 4).

Currently there exists scant research about coaches, particularly intercollegiate athletics coaches, who professionally identify as LGB (Kauer, 2009). Further, most of the research is based on relatively small sample sizes (Button, 2004; Coulombe & de la Sablonniere, 2015; Rosario et al., 2004). Therefore, there was a need to study how professionally disclosed intercollegiate athletics coaches construct their sexual identities in a professional setting, as well as how their sexual identities influence their coaching roles. This literature review and my subsequent research are timely and necessary to advance the scholarship of this underrepresented demographic, and to challenge the heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism thriving in sport generally, and intercollegiate athletics specifically.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences, perspectives, influences, motivations, and concerns that shape the identities of professionally disclosed LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches. It also aimed to explore how the identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence their overall coaching responsibilities. Due to the subjective, hermeneutic nature of this study, I used a qualitative, phenomenological research methodology. This chapter details the paradigmatic, epistemological, and methodological framework of the study, precise methods used for recruiting and securing a participant sample, and procedures for data collection and data analysis. The conclusion of the chapter discusses ethical considerations of the study, my positionality as a researcher, as well as tactics used to ensure the study's trustworthiness and authenticity.

Paradigm and Assumptions

Based on the research questions, this qualitative study was situated in the constructivist paradigm. Crotty (1998) noted, "In the constructivist view…meaning is not discovered but constructed" (p. 42). For purposes of this study's research questions, *truth* and *reality* were co-constructed meanings belonging to those involved in specific experiences and social relations. For example, the truth and reality of one participant was inevitably unique to the truths and realities of the other participants because the experiences, intersectional identities, social relations, interpretations, and meanings were singularly distinct. Similarly, it was important to note that my role as a qualitative researcher also contributed to the co-construction of each participant's truth and reality in this study. Specifically, as a researcher who worked in intercollegiate athletics, and who identified as a professionally disclosed lesbian, I was value-

laden as I shaped, categorized, and interpreted the descriptions of individual experiences to make sense of a larger phenomenon, despite my best efforts to establish an epoché of self (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). My values were inextricable and inevitable in the production of knowledge, and in the construction of truth and reality (Crotty, 1998; Frow & Morris, 2000).

Although not equivalently situated in the transformative paradigm, wherein all levels of social and political oppression are confronted, marginalized groups are prioritized, and advocacy is central, it was important to note the inherent considerations of social justice in this study's guiding research questions (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015). For example, as will be detailed in subsequent chapters, the social, political, legal, and cultural marginalization of LGB individuals in society broadly, and sports specifically, has, in part, shaped the participants' constructed sexual identities, and contributed to how their identities influenced their coaching roles. Consequently, a transformative lens informed, in part, my data collection and data analysis process, as it did my review of the literature.

Beyond broadly situating this study within the constructivist paradigm, and, to a degree, the transformative paradigm, it was essential to consider the various assumptions, or basic beliefs, that underlay the research planning and implementation process. Listed below are the assumptions associated with constructivism that ensured a fidelity and confluence to the overarching philosophy that reality is socially constructed.

Axiology

The axiological stance, or basic ethical principles, for this study was practical/communicative (Crotty, 1998). Practical/communicative interests imply the purpose of the research was to understand the social world, social codes, and social norms of behavior, among other social considerations, in order to get along in the world. In this study, there were

axiological elements of critical reflection and transformation, as influenced by queer theory (Spargo, 1999). However, the fundamental purpose was more aligned with learning about and understanding the unique experiences and worldviews of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Moreover, the axiological criteria accounted for this study's trustworthiness and authenticity, including my own value-laden, biased positionality as the researcher.

Ontology

Relativism was the ontological stance, or framework of reality, for this study (Crotty, 1998). In other words, *reality* is a social, local, and specific construction that is neither objective nor monolithic (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2015). Within the context of this study, the *truth* and *reality* of a participant was specific to their individual experiences, intersecting identities, context, and stakeholders. Every participant's experience (i.e., constructed *truth* and *reality*) was shaped by countless variables, including, history, intersecting identities, and life circumstances.

Epistemology

As a researcher operating within the constructivist paradigm for this study, I acknowledged the mutual influence I had on the participants and they had on me. Therefore, my epistemological assumption was constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism holds that *truth* and *reality* are not *out there* waiting to be discovered. Instead, as previously mentioned, specific experiences, intersectional identities, social relations, interpretations, and meanings construct *truth* and *reality*. Constructionism upsets the notion that a researcher can maintain objectivity and neutrality in a study, void of influencing, or being influenced by, others in the knowledge-gathering process (Mertens, 2015). As previously articulated, my role as a researcher was situated in an interactive, reciprocally influential, relational context with the participants in this study. By disclaiming objectivity in exchange of knowledge, my values and positionality

were noted, thus validating my methods for data collection and data analysis (Mertens, 2015). Moreover, constructionism asserts that if, for example, a participant had described experiencing negative recruiting by a rival institution, that participant's *truth* and *reality* would be constructed by a very different set of factors than participants who had not been the subject of negative recruiting.

Methodology

Understanding how LGB head college coaches constructed their professional identities, and how those identities influenced their coaching roles could not be accomplished through experimental, causality research. Rather it was through inductive and exploratory processes that the constructed *truths* and *realities* of individual participants ultimately emerged into common, universal concepts (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As part of the constructivist paradigm and its associated axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions, the methodology for this study was qualitative, inductive, and emergent, largely influenced by my researcher role of shaping, categorizing, and interpreting qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). Mertens (2015) wrote,

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (p. 236)

By applying the qualitative research method of interviews (which I detail later in this chapter), I was able to inquire about and interpret the constructed identities of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, as well as how those constructed identities influence overall coaching roles. The specific qualitative design applied was phenomenological, which Creswell (2013) describes as simply "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 76). Moreover, phenomenology calls upon the researcher to suspend theories, explanations, hypotheses, and conceptualizations to be able to understand the phenomenon 'as it exists prior to and independent of scientific knowledge'" (Mertens, 2015, p. 247). Using a phenomenological research design was paramount for this study, as I was wholly committed to understanding the shared "universal essence" of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach (Cresswell, 2013, p.76). In turn, my informed description of the phenomenon of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach in an historically heteronormative, heterosexist, homophobic, and sexist profession was meant to inform stakeholders at higher education institutions and within intercollegiate athletics departments, including LGB college coaches themselves, of the commonalities of this unique and relatively small demographic of people and ways to support them.

Methods

This section offers a detailed description of the specific research methods used, including the participant selection and sampling process, site selection, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. The research design for this study was largely situated in queer theory (Butler, 1993; de Lauretis, 1991; Foucault, 1978; Gamson, 2000; Sedgwick, 1990). Queer theory, a descendent of feminist theory (de Beauvoir, 1949; Friedan, 1963; Lorde, 1984), challenges heteronormative and patriarchal discourse by

disrupting and destabilizing not only the socially constructed sexual binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality, but also the gender binary of man and woman (Kimmel & Plante, 2004). Moreover, queer theory challenges the inherent and static correlation of sex, gender, and sexuality, and the assigned label of *deviant* to anyone whose sexual or gender identities or behaviors fall outside normative categories. Whereas this study's participants identified as LGB coaches, and whereas heteronormative and patriarchal discourse are so deeply embedded in the ideology, culture, structure, and operation of intercollegiate athletics, queer theory had an ever-present and unabating influence on the methodological approach.

Sampling

The only sample selection criterion for this study was that a participant had to self-identify as a professionally disclosed lesbian, gay, or bisexual head coach at an NCAA member institution. There were no additional criteria, such as intersectional identities, the sports they coached, or their institutions' divisional membership within the NCAA (i.e., Division I, II, or III) or institution-type (i.e., public, private secular, or private faith-based). To maintain allegiance to the constructivist paradigm, there also was no qualifying criterion to determine *professional disclosure*, as disclosing sexual identity in a professional setting is fluid, varying, and unique to every individual. For example, one individual might regard professional disclosure as informing their human resources office of their sexual identity to secure health insurance for a same-sex partner. Another individual might disclose their sexual identity to the student-athletes and coaches on their teams. Yet another individual might come out to prospective student-athletes and their parents during the recruiting process. Due to the relative anomaly of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, and the nascent research on this topic, it was critical to cast a wide net.

I identified participants using purposeful sampling in order to access “information-rich cases” that would allow me to study the phenomenon in-depth (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Mertens, 2015, p. 331; Patton, 2002). My specific sampling strategy was snowball sampling, wherein I contacted “key informants who are viewed as knowledgeable about” LGBTQ issues in intercollegiate athletics (Mertens, 2015, p. 333; Patton, 2002). At the time of identifying participants, I was employed in the office of inclusion at the NCAA national office, and regularly presented at or facilitated NCAA-sponsored conferences and seminars, including LGBTQ-specific programming. In that capacity, I collaborated with thought leaders and scholars on LGBTQ issues in intercollegiate athletics, partnered with LGBTQ advocates, and supported LGBTQ student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and allies across the NCAA. Moreover, as a lesbian working in intercollegiate athletics, I had the privilege of belonging to a private social media group for LGBTQ intercollegiate athletics coaches and administrators (at all phases of disclosure). Through my formal work on LGBTQ-inclusive programming and my network with LGBTQ coaches, administrators, scholars, and advocates across the United States, I became increasingly aware of and personally introduced to professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches who would qualify as participants. I solicited participation for the study three ways: (a) by posting a request for prospective participants through the private social media group for LGBTQ intercollegiate athletics coaches and administrators, (b) by directly emailing professional points of contact who may have been interested in participating in the study, but who were not part of the aforementioned private social media group, and (c) by directly emailing prospective participants who were referred to me by other professional points of contact. Ultimately, nine coaches responded to my solicitations to participate. Specifically, three coaches replied to my solicitation on the private social media group page. Of those three coaches, two

never returned subsequent communications, and one did not qualify because the individual was no longer a head coach. I directly emailed each of the six head coaches referred to me by professional points of contact that were LGBTQ intercollegiate athletics administrators, faculty, and advocates. All six head coaches agreed to participate in the study.

Participants

I interviewed six current (at the time of interviews) NCAA intercollegiate athletics head coaches, who self-identified as professionally disclosed lesbian, gay, or bisexual. It was a sample size that fell within Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation of 5 to 25 individuals. Chapter Four details the profiles of each participant, including a participant chart with relevant demographic information. Limiting the participants to head coaches (as opposed to assistant coaches, volunteer coaches, or graduate coaches) underscored the heightened stakes, profile, and responsibilities of leading a sports team, establishing the team's culture and expectations, interfacing with administrators, fundraising and securing donors, recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents, and serving as the overall *face* of their program. Assistant, volunteer, and graduate coaches simply do not manage that level of responsibility or pressure. Moreover, by exclusively interviewing head coaches, the study drew more closely the parallel of coaching to teaching, on which much of the literature review for this study rests (Jones, 2006).

Data Collection

As I designed this phenomenological study, it was important to acknowledge throughout the process that I, as the researcher, was "the instrument for collecting data" (Mertens, 2015, p. 261). I controlled the method and structure for data collection, and ultimately determined what data to prioritize, what to discard, and what themes to advance. Therefore, I was ever mindful of my privilege and power as a researcher collecting data about LGB individuals – whose

experiences, voices, and truths have historically been exploited, marginalized, or altogether excluded (Dodd, 2009).

I intended to conduct two individual, semi-structured, in-person interviews with each participant. Individual interviews foster relationship building and trust with the participants by placing "emphasis on reflexivity [and] on the consideration of power within research relationships" (Mertens, 2015; p. 256; Sampson, Bloor, & Fincham, 2008). Moreover, semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used interview technique in social science research because they incorporate a moderate structure to the interviews, but allow conversational leeway, mutually determined by the researcher and the participant (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Mertens, 2015). What's more, in-person interviews allow greater opportunity to develop rapport and trust with participants, and enable "interpersonal contact, context sensitivity, and conversational flexibility to the fullest extent" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 578). Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated all interviews be conducted via videoconference. Notwithstanding, the videoconference platform still allowed for the development of trusting relationships with the participants, in which I could seek rich, thick, meaningful qualitative data in a confidential setting (Mertens, 2015).

Between September 2020 and February 2021, a total of 10 individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, a videoconferencing software application. Each of the six participants participated in at least one interview. Four participants obliged a second interview. Two participants never returned communication following their first interview. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews ranged from 25 to 76 minutes in length, and averaged 54 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Two interview protocols were used, one for the first and second rounds of interviews, respectively (See Appendices E and F). The literature review informed the content and organization of the first interview protocol. The second interview protocols were informed by universal themes, shared experiences, and anomalies that emerged from the first set of interviews. The protocols were meant to simultaneously ensure a consistent framework for each interview, allow flexibility to establish a rapport with the participants, and focus on specific elements of individual conversations deemed meaningful by either the participant or me (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). After all, as Mertens (2015) states, "This reliance on interaction between participants is designed to elicit more of the participants' points of view than would be evidenced in more researcher-dominated interviewing" (p. 382).

Data Analysis

Unlike quantitative data analysis, which occurs primarily at the conclusion of a study, qualitative data analysis is ongoing, recursive, and generative throughout the research (Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). It is within the scope of emergent data that I discuss the specific analytical strategies used for this study. First, as mentioned previously, I audio-recorded all interviews, having first obtained verbal consent from each of the participants. Audio recording allowed me to be more present and attentive during my data collection, and subsequently enabled me to review and reflect on the actual words and tone spoken by participants, rather than relying on my second-hand field notes. Although I intended to personally transcribe all audio-recordings to fully immerse myself in the data and enhance the study's trustworthiness and validity (Biber, Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006), I ultimately determined it was a more prudent use of time to outsource the responsibility to a professional transcription and caption service. To compensate for not having personally transcribed the interviews, I engaged in four rounds of listening to the

audio recordings of each interview. During the first two rounds of listening to the audio recordings, I concurrently reviewed each transcript and when necessary, made edits to ensure accuracy. Edited transcripts were sent to participants for review and feedback. During the last two rounds of listening, I memoed with a focused intent to identify emergent themes, interpretations, and relationships, researcher bias, and any needed changes to the study's structure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 429; Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). Memoing included writing questions, inklings, and suppositions about the data, noting relevant quotations, and reflecting on previously noted non-verbal data not captured in audio recordings, such as gestures, facial cues, emotions, and pauses. In effect, memoing allowed me to intimately and critically connect to, explore, and interrogate the data, the study, and my role as researcher in an informal and casual manner.

Another central element of my qualitative data analysis was the reduction and categorization of the data, known as *coding* (Mertens, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). Specifically, I initiated three phases of grounded theory coding. Grounded theory coding is an inductive approach to textual analysis that "shapes an analytic frame from which to build the analysis" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 45).

During the initial phase of grounded theory coding, "the goal is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the readings of the data" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 46). Consequently, I remained close to the data during the initial phase of coding, by generating parsimonious descriptive codes, including in vivo codes, to each line of data. I used gerunds in the initial coding, thus assigning action to each code. Doing so curbed my "tendency to make conceptual leaps and to adopt extant theories *before* [I had] done the necessary analytic work" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 48). I also used member checks and dependability and confirmability audits

between the first and second interviews, in which I invited each participant to review my initial coding and emergent themes, provide feedback, and suggest revisions as necessary. Similar member checks and audits were conducted prior to submitting the final dissertation manuscript. This approach encouraged the use of the constant comparative analysis in order to ultimately identify phenomenological themes later in the analytical process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Mertens, 2015).

The second phase of grounded theory coding, called focused coding, allowed more "directed, selective, and conceptual" coding than what was accomplished during the initial phase of coding (Charmaz, 2009, p. 57). Focused coding "involves testing the initial codes against the more extensive body of data to determine how resilient the codes are in the bigger picture that emerges from the analysis" (Mertens, 2015, p. 440). During this phase of coding, I moved across the data in a constant comparative approach to further condense the data, and ultimately focused the codes into more specific themes. Focused coding, also referred to as pattern coding, serves four important functions:

1. It reduces large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units.
2. It gets the researcher into analysis during data collection, so that later fieldwork can be more focused.
3. It helps the researcher elaborate a cognitive map, an evolving, more integrated schema for understanding local incidents and interactions.
4. For multi-case studies, it lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69)

It was through this process of coding that themes, theories, and trends of the phenomenon emerged from the data.

Lastly, I conducted a third phase of coding called axial coding. Unlike initial coding and focused coding, which fractures the data into manageable segments and categories, axial coding is intended to "sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 60). In other words, axial coding links "relationships between categories…on a conceptual level rather than a descriptive level" (Charmaz, 2009, p. 61). The reconstructed concepts are presented in Chapter Five. Throughout the coding process, I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, to ensure the data was easily saved, organized, and accessible. However, the use of NVivo served only as supplementary assistance to my individual coding analysis – it did not replace it. It was critically important to maintain an intimate knowledge of the data, and not become reliant on the software to offer output.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations and the protection of participants were linchpins throughout the study's planning process and remained so through the study's conclusion. Prior to recruiting participants and conducting interviews, I obtained approval to conduct research on human subjects from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Indiana University. Although the IRB's primary purpose is arguably to protect the institution rather than the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Christians, 2000), receiving its approval to conduct research was central to any discussion about ethical considerations for this study.

Before every interview I provided the participant with a study information sheet (SIS), which was approved by the IRB, detailing the goals of the study, ensuring confidentiality, and outlining potential risks and benefits of participation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Mertens, 2015). For purposes of confidentiality, every participant chose pseudonyms for themselves and for their institutions (Mertens, 2015). All data collected and analyzed, including audio recordings,

transcribed interviews, memos, as well as administrative paperwork, such as interview schedules and member checking were securely stored on my personal computer. All hard copy documents were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Once the final dissertation manuscript has been accepted, all electronic and hard copy materials will be destroyed.

Positionality

It was important to consider abstractly what I would bring to this study, including my personal lens, worldview, intersecting identities, ethical and social influences, and countless individual characteristics (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015). My positionality in this research was largely situated by my complicated identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian intercollegiate athletics administrator, who was also a deeply closeted collegiate student-athlete. Between 2008 and 2021 I worked at the NCAA national office and openly identified as a lesbian. My wife is currently an employee at the NCAA national office, and our marriage and the birth of our child, have been recognized and supported by an overwhelming majority of colleagues. Throughout my tenure, the NCAA national office became increasingly more respectful and welcoming toward its LGBTQ employees, by instituting several LGBTQ-inclusive policies, procedures, and best practices, employing openly-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual AND transgender individuals, establishing an LGBTQ employee enhancement group, and annually participating in the Circle City Pride Parade.

But my positive personal experience as a professionally disclosed lesbian working in college athletics is tempered (even occasionally eclipsed) by my diametrically negative experience as a closeted student-athlete. As a collegiate softball student-athlete in the late-1990s/early-2000s, I was hypersensitive to the lesbian stereotypes of the sport (Myer, 2015), stereotypes that were embraced and perpetuated by my teammates – and me. I had never met an

openly gay person, and those perceived to be gay were kept beyond arm's length and made a mockery behind their backs. I actively used homophobic language and engaged in heteronormative behaviors as a matter of self-protection, denial, and overwhelming shame. Having no LGBTQ role models, resources, or support at my college or at home only amplified in my mind the isolation, stigma, and danger that would befall me if I ever disclosed my true self, thus reinforcing the need to remain deeply closeted.

As previously illustrated in the literature review, research suggests that the experience of many LGBTQ individuals in intercollegiate athletics is one of exclusion, apathy, fear, censorship, and malice. As a researcher of, and a practitioner in, intercollegiate athletics, I recognized that my privilege as a disclosed lesbian in an LGBTQ-inclusive workplace was not a privilege that necessarily extended to any participants in this study. This recognition was further buoyed by my dissenting experience as a student-athlete. Those dueling influences shaped my own sexual identity in the context of intercollegiate athletics, and served as the lens through which I approached my research. However, to further interrogate my positionality and to account for intersectionality, I had to look beyond my sexual identity. My identities as a white, upper middle-class, educated, cisgender woman, who worked in intercollegiate athletics administration at a national level instead of a campus level, situated my positionality as a researcher in a unique way, and shaped my personal paradigm that offered advantages and blind spots to the inquiry. Quite simply, as a researcher who worked in intercollegiate athletics on a national level, and who openly identifies as a lesbian, and has had the experiences mentioned above, I had to constantly bridle my values, biases, and power, and remain cognizant of and deferential to the voices of the participants and their personal constructions of meaning and truth (Mertens, 2015; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The rigor of this study should be evaluated on its trustworthiness and authenticity (Mertens, 2015). It was imperative to demonstrate that this qualitative study satisfied standards of evidence and quality by carefully documenting "how the research was conducted and associated data analysis and interpretation processes, as well as [my] thinking processes" (Mertens, 2015, p. 267). Guba and Lincoln (1985) described their criteria to evaluate trustworthiness in qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. I used each criterion to optimize trustworthiness throughout the study.

Credibility

There are multiple techniques to establish credibility in a study, most notably prolonged and persistent engagement, peer debriefing and member-checking, triangulation, negative case analysis, and progressive subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mertens, 2015). In this study, I engaged prolongedly and persistently, primarily by eclipsing my own preexisting constructs and conceptions about the topic throughout the process. As I moved through each phase of the study, I participated in peer debriefs with colleagues and peers within intercollegiate athletics and within higher education. Moreover, I sought verification from the participants themselves. Doing so enabled me to explore "aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within [my] mind" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 308).

Credibility was also sought through triangulation. Specifically, I cross-referenced interview transcripts with notes and observations articulated in personal memos. I also compared objective information (e.g., the age when a coach professionally disclosed) collected during the two rounds of interview of a particular participant. However, I did not triangulate data across participants. Doing so would have suggested it is possible and preferred to identify objective,

categorical consistencies across participants, and would undermine the constructivist paradigm guiding this study (Mertens, 2015).

Negative case analysis also contributed to the credibility of this study. As I identified phenomenological themes and trends across the data, it was critical to search for elements that ran counter to those themes and trends, thus requiring me to modify emerging explanations (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Patton, 2002). For example, if all participants but one felt their experience as a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach was overwhelmingly positive, I delved more deeply into understanding the outlier. Lastly, as noted previously, I used a memo to journal my observations, interpretations, impression, and plans throughout the study. Through this process of progressive subjectivity, I documented changes and evolutions of the study, from beginning to end (Mertens, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability, a parallel concept to external validity in post-positivist research, "enables readers of the research to make judgments based on similarities and differences when comparing the research situation to their own" (Mertens, 2015, p. 217). I sought transferability in this study by using thick description and multiple participants. In other words, by describing emergent phenomenological themes in rich, thick detail, the reader may determine if the findings are transferable to other individuals and contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mertens, 2015). It is important to underscore that transferability does not equate to generalizability. Specifically, as the researcher, I did not attempt or claim to generalize findings to, in turn, be applied to populations beyond the sample of six participants. It is entirely up to the reader to generalize and apply findings to external populations, as deemed appropriate. In sum, transferability may be

used to evaluate a qualitative study. However, generalizability and external validity may not (Mertens, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are the qualitative analogues to reliability and objectivity, respectively (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mertens, 2015). In other words, the dependability and confirmability of a qualitative study is the degree to which a study's findings, interpretations, and conclusions are accurate and supported by the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mertens, 2015). External audits of researcher memos and interview transcripts (i.e., audit trails) are commonly used to determine a study's dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Mertens, 2015). Moreover, the evaluation of audit trails is often paired with triangulation. Throughout the ongoing process data analysis, I incorporated audit trails into peer debriefs, member-checks, and the triangulation process, by sharing interview transcripts and memos of emergent themes.

Chapter Summary

Using a qualitative, phenomenological research methodology, I explored how professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches construct their identities, as well as how those professionally disclosed LGB identities influence their overall coaching responsibilities. This chapter details the paradigmatic and epistemological framework, theoretical considerations, and pragmatic methods used to plan and execute the study, including procedures for data collection and analysis. The conclusion of the chapter discusses ethical considerations, researcher positionality, as well as demonstrations of trustworthiness and authenticity. Chapter Four presents demographic and experiential profiles of each participant within the context of sexuality, athletics, and intersectional identities.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

This chapter briefly introduces the six participants. By providing rudimentary, yet consequential, demographic and experiential information about each participant, I unfurl a more coherent, seamless analysis of emergent themes in Chapter Five. Moreover, in the spirit of constructivism, it is important to dedicate intentional and sovereign space to each participant's individual identities, narratives, and experiences. For each participant, I summarize their self-described identities and experiences within the context of sexuality, athletics, and salient intersectionality.

Table 1

Participant Profile Chart

Coach	Age	Sexual Orientation	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Nationality	Religion	Sport	Institution-type	NCAA Division
Janet	41	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	Black	American	Christian	Women's basketball	Private, secular	I
Kay	42	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	White	Canadian	None	Women's golf	Public	I
Ruby	55	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	White	American	Spiritual	Softball	Public	III
Es	33	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	Hispanic, Latina	Brazilian	Flexible	Women's tennis	Public	I
Max	47	Gay, bay	Cisgender man	White	American	Evolving	Swimming	Private, secular	III
Jackie	40	Lesbian	Cisgender woman	White	American	Catholic	Softball	Private, Catholic	III

Janet – Head Coach, Women's Basketball, Lake State University

Janet identifies as a lesbian. She also uses the term gay interchangeably and synonymously with the term lesbian. Having suppressed her lesbian identity until she was 26 years old, Janet self-describes as a "late-bloomer." Janet is a 41-year old, Black, Christian, cisgender woman, born in the United States. She is married to a white woman who is her assistant coach at Lake State University.

Embodying supposedly discordant identities of Black, Christian, and lesbian, Janet describes herself as an "oxymoron." She also refers to herself as "Triple Threat" or "Three Strikes" because of the racism, homophobia, and sexism that often accompany her intersecting identities as a Black, lesbian woman. Ultimately, she prefers to use the nickname "Triple Threat" because of its arc toward self-empowerment, rather than "Three Strikes," which suggests self-deficiency.

Janet's Christian faith is integral to her sense of self, despite its engendered tension and conflict with her lesbian identity. Religion and sexual orientation were "probably the most difficult to try to merge," Janet declared. She acknowledged that to be a Black lesbian is particularly challenging because African-American communities, whose cultures are deeply rooted in Christianity, often have stigmas around homosexuality and LGBTQ identity. "It's definitely shunned upon…things that people don't want to talk about and necessarily address," she said regretfully.

Before Janet accepted her lesbian identity, she used religion to repudiate it. She recalled how "super religious" she was and how she would figuratively "throw the Bible" in her closest friends' faces, quoting scriptures that mentioned homosexuality as a sin. Janet also explained how she weaponized her faith and sacrificed her own physical health to exorcise what she

regarded to be a sinful sexual identity. "I spent a lot of time trying to *literally* pray the gay away," she said. "I fasted at one time for four days, trying to just be different."

Janet continues to identify as a Christian, but has reframed her faith perspective in a way that honors her lesbian identity. "There's a lot of hypocrisy in the Bible," she admitted. "To look back on it, I was so judgmental." She explained that her renewed relationship with God is less condemnatory and more compassionate.

> If it's Sunday, I want to play my gospel music and have praise and worship. I think being able to be in a position to make the relationship with God between me and God. What my relationship is, the next person doesn't have to…You don't have to worship like I worship. You don't have to do what I do. I say this phrase to myself often, "At the end of the day, if I'm going to hell for loving somebody, then God wasn't who I thought He was."

Janet began playing basketball, volleyball, track and field, and tumbling in seventh grade, where she had opportunities to compete on the middle school teams at no cost. In high school, Janet continued to play basketball, volleyball, softball, and track and field. She earned an athletics scholarship to play basketball at a community college before transferring to an NCAA Division I institution on a full athletics scholarship, where she eventually graduated. Janet had a very positive student-athlete experience, noting, "I loved being a student-athlete [at] both places."

Janet is the head women's basketball coach at Lake State University, a private, secular, NCAA Division I institution located in a major metropolitan area in the western United States. She has been coaching for 20 years, but this is her first time as a head coach. At the time of the interviews, Janet had been coaching at Lake State for less than one year and had not yet

completed a full season of competition. Prior to Lake State, she spent 10 years as an assistant coach at another private, secular NCAA Division I institution. That is where she met her wife, with whom she coached. As a coach, Janet prioritizes holistic student-athlete development, emphasizing, "Basketball is not everything, as much as coaches want to try to make it seem."

Janet considered coaching her first year in high school, whimsically recalling, "I had a couple of great coaches that really invested in me as a person, both on and off the court. And I always thought if I could get into coaching and make another player feel the way they made me feel…" Janet's interest in coaching was further fueled by a couple of "inspirational" college coaches, leading to her first college coaching opportunities.

Despite Janet's ambition to become a coach, it presented obstacles to her lesbian identity development and management. "I remember when I first did come out…I was working with someone who was basically like...'You were supposed to be…my young Christian recruiter, but now you're gay?'". That set the expectation for Janet early in her coaching career that she "had to hide everything." She continued, "And if the question was ever asked, you found creative ways to get around it or simply not answer." Even as a head college coach, Janet continues to do "a lot of double-Dutching" with her intersecting identities, noting the incessant challenge to "show up and then mentally check these boxes, to make sure you can continue to be in that space, to continue to have a seat at the table."

Kay – Head Coach, Women's Golf, Northern University

Kay identifies as a lesbian. She became self-aware of her lesbian identity when she was 19 years old and in college. Kay is a 42 year-old, white, cisgender woman, born in Canada. She does not identify with a religion or faith perspective. Kay is married to an American woman

who is an associate strength and conditioning coach at Northern University. They have two children, whom Kay's wife birthed and Kay adopted.

Kay's identity as a Canadian immigrant living in the United States has been central to her personal and professional experiences.

> I think a big part of my story does have to do with being Canadian and living in the U.S. My green card struggles and visa status were a close-to-a-decade battle. So very defining in my professional career, and even with my daughters, to make sure it wouldn't bar me from being able to adopt.
>
> That was the most legal status I had going for me. I couldn't be married. I didn't have a permit work visa. My visa status was really shaky. So adopting her was the one thing that I had and obviously I absolutely treasured that and valued that I was able to at least be a mother to my daughter.

Her nationality has also intangibly intersected with her sexual identity. Kay proudly highlighted that she and her wife were one of the first same-sex couples in their Midwest state to apply for a spousal green card. She reminisced, "It was really cool to feel like you're a trailblazer." Kay's identities as a Canadian and a lesbian also serve as constant reminders that she is different than most people in her quotidian American life.

> I don't run into many LGBTQ people at the end of the day. I just don't run into many resident aliens on a daily basis. So I carry that with me all the time. I know that I'm different than most people, for better or for worse.

Kay's athletic background did not begin with golf. She was first introduced to ice hockey as a child. "I played with the boys starting at seven years old," Kay recollected, "and played hockey very competitively all the way through the end of high school." Besides ice hockey, she

played basketball and soccer. It was not until the age of 12 that Kay became involved in golf, soon recognizing that her talent in golf presented the greatest opportunity for her to earn an athletics scholarship to attend an American university. Ultimately, Kay received a golf scholarship to an NCAA Division I institution where she competed for two years before transferring to, and graduating from, another NCAA Division I institution. Despite having had a very good student-athlete experience at both institutions, Kay admitted, for reasons unexplained, she did not have a positive relationship with the head coach at her second institution. Kay stated, "That was a tough situation there with [the head coach], so I wanted to get away from college athletics." But that was not to be.

Kay is the head women's golf coach at Northern University, a public NCAA Division I institution located in a Midwestern city of approximately 70,000 people. She has been the head coach at Northern for 16 years, despite a rather laissez faire start to her coaching career. "I really didn't have much of a solid plan at all," Kay admitted. "College athletics was not on the radar." Yet at the age of 23 and recently graduated, she was hired to be an assistant coach at an NCAA Division I institution while she completed her master's degree. The head coach, who was a friend and former golf opponent, had a formative impact on Kay. Nearly 20 years later, Kay continued to marvel at the young head coach's proficiency. "I think she was just phenomenal what she was able to accomplish at her young age. I certainly learned a lot from her," Kay stated. Kay also reflected on how much her student-athlete experience prepared her to be a college coach.

> I realized that in all my upbringing like being around sports and being very competitive and athletic and taking on leadership roles on any given team, that I realized even though I didn't really think about this as a career path, I looked back and thought, "Well, so

> much of what I've done has led to this and has prepared me for this." When I started coaching I realized, "Wow, I've been networking!". I didn't realize I was networking.

During the interviews Kay repeatedly expressed frustrations about the sexism she experiences as a coach, underscoring that she regards it more challenging to be a woman in sport than to be a lesbian. Kay shared the following anecdote:

> I think about being a female in athletics more than being a lesbian in athletics because I'm often in meetings where there are a dozen people and I'm the only female. Like yesterday, we were at the golf course. I'm with my team and there is an outing going on. We probably saw 100 males playing in this golf outing and working the outing. No other females. I'm used to it. I'm very aware of male privilege…I do look around and think, "Because of your male privilege, that in some ways you have no idea what it's like to be female in athletics." I separate that from my lesbian identity.

Although Kay attributes more challenges with being a woman in sport, she mused about the complicated emotions tethered to her lesbian identity, and about her tendency to be "different" as a Canadian, lesbian head college coach at an American university. "I enjoy some of that [being different] because that's all I've known," Kay acknowledged. "But I also wonder what it would be like to feel like I would fit in differently or be more like others – not that I want to be like others."

Ruby – Head Coach, Softball, Airedale University

Ruby identifies as a lesbian. She also self-describes as *gay.* Ruby has known she is a lesbian almost her entire life, most vividly around fifth grade when she discerned her identity was "not normal." She is a 55 year-old, white, cisgender woman, born in the United States. Although vague in detail or definition, she considers herself to be "spiritual." Ruby has been in a

15-year domestic partnership with a woman who has a child from a previous relationship. The child, who Ruby regards as her "daughter," is now an adult.

Ruby does not believe her sexual identity dictates her life. She underscored the sentiment rather defiantly in the following statement:

> I think in some ways I don't feel like my sexuality leads my life. It's part of who I am. It's not about my defining characteristic or whatever. I've always been all right if you don't like me because of whatever. It doesn't matter, my curly hair, whatever it is, it really doesn't matter. Then that's on you, it's not really on me.

Moreover, Ruby is dubious that her lesbian identity affected her student-athlete experience in any meaningful way. "I don't know that my identity [impacted] it. I was just an athlete, so that why I played sports," she said forthrightly.

Ruby grew up on a college campus where her mother coached softball and volleyball. In high school she played softball, volleyball, soccer, and basketball. Basketball was Ruby's unequivocal "love" despite being the daughter of a softball and volleyball coach. As a college student, Ruby attended the same NCAA Division III institution where she had grown up, competing on her mother's softball and volleyball teams. She also played basketball. After two years, Ruby discontinued basketball, and transferred to another NCAA Division III institution, a private liberal arts institution lampooned for its large enrollment of lesbian students – where "the men are men and so are the women." Ruby remarked that it was an affirming collegiate space and a "great experience to not have to worry about anything – so you are what you are."

Ruby is the head softball coach at Airedale University, a pubic NCAA Division III institution located in a small town near a major East Coast metropolitan area. She has been the head coach at Airedale for 25 years. Prior to Airedale, Ruby was an assistant coach at two

NCAA Division III institutions, one public and one private. Coaching was always an assumed profession for Ruby, noting, "I didn't think there was anything else that you could do. I thought [my mom] would retire and I would take her job." But the plan to be her mother's successor never eventuated. Instead, Ruby's coaching career began at a high school, which she alleged operated within the "good ol' boys system," a colloquial term for structural sexism wherein social and professional connections among men are prioritized and advantaged. The high school hired Ruby as a junior varsity girls' basketball coach. She had applied to be the high school's head varsity softball coach, but was denied. Shortly thereafter, Ruby was hired as an assistant softball coach at an NCAA Division III institution. Ruby recalled the sense of poetic justice, leapfrogging from a denied high school promotion to a college coaching position. "When I got the college job, it was just kind of funny like, 'You wouldn't let me be your softball coach, but I could go and get a college job.' So it was just kind of funny, the good old boy system in effect."

Ruby's frustration and fatigue with sexist practices in sport was routinely expressed throughout the interviews, remarking that being a female coach is more impactful and challenging than being a gay coach. "Male umpires don't respect female coaches as much. We can't go as far as the men can go," Ruby opined anecdotally. "That has nothing to do with gay or straight." She conceded Title IX has made the inclusion of women better, but equity for women coaches is stagnant and, in many instances, wanes. "Other [men] coaches aren't held accountable. They just make excuses for them."

Es – Head Coach, Women's Tennis, Orange University

Es identifies as a lesbian. She has been aware of her lesbian identity since she was 19 years old and in college. Es is a 33 year-old Hispanic/Latina, cisgender woman, born in Brazil. She uses the terms *Hispanic* and *Latina* interchangeably to describe her race and ethnicity.

Raised Catholic in a predominantly Catholic country, Es describes her current faith perspective as "flexible" without elaboration. Es is in a long-distance relationship with a woman who lives in Poland.

Ethnicity plays a central role in Es's sense of self, noting her nationality is often misidentified. She contends that in the United States, pan-ethnic terms like *Hispanic* and *Latina* are often exclusively used to describe those who originate from or descend from Spanish-speaking countries. However, as a Brazilian, Es's native language is Portuguese. Therefore, she is in a regular state of misclassification and misunderstanding.

Es is often saddled with the assumption that her Hispanic/Latina identity and her lesbian identity are "two separate things" and cannot coexist in one person. For many, particularly men, it is simply unfathomable and insufferable that Es embodies both identities. Es suggests that the strong Catholic presence in Hispanic and Latino cultures further complicates her intersecting identities around race and sexuality. Es summarized the sentiment, "The notion of a Latina and a lesbian and a Catholic don't really go together…it's just something that is taboo."

Es was always involved in sports as a child, primarily soccer and volleyball. Her mother and father were soccer referees in Brazil. Around the age of 12, Es was introduced to the sport of tennis, at which point she discontinued participating in other sports. Es described feeling developmentally delayed compared to her peers who had begun playing tennis much earlier in life. Despite a relatively late introduction to tennis, Es displayed glints of prodigious talent. At 17 years old, she began competing professionally throughout South America and Mexico in low prize-money tournaments, and believed her future was that of a professional tennis athlete. College athletics was always a distant and improbable "Plan B" – until her corporate sponsorship ended two years later, effectively derailing her professional athletic ambitions. Ultimately, Es

enrolled at an NCAA Division I institution on a full athletics scholarship where she graduated in four years. She expressed having had a positive student-athlete experience, largely because many of her teammates were also international student-athletes.

Es is the head women's tennis coach at Orange University, a public NCAA Division I institution located near a Midwestern city of less than 300,000 residents. She has been the head coach at Orange University for five years. After completing her master's degree from Orange University, she was hired as an assistant women's tennis coach for one year before her promotion to head coach. Never fully intending to pursue a career as a head college coach, Es unassumingly characterized her qualifications as simply "at the right place and at the right time." Es described the student-athlete experience under the previous head coach as "a little bit rocky," and ultimately accepted the position "to give back to the players, [and] to make sure that they had a better experience."

> I felt like I could change the program around. There are things that have not been done yet and I felt like I had the potential to do it. I knew that I was going to learn a lot with everything, being my first head-coaching job. But I also had a very good relationship with the players and I knew that if we were all on the same page, that we could maybe accomplish some things that had not been accomplished yet. So I think for me it was, like I said, a good opportunity at the right time to be here and to kind of make a difference for them.

Es regards her international identity as instrumental to her effectiveness, success, and joy coaching in the United States. As one of few international coaches in the NCAA, she feels uniquely situated to recruit, coach, and support international student-athletes, whose experiences, skillsets, interests, and needs may vary drastically from domestic student-athletes. She also

acknowledged that she is "just more comfortable with the international players." However, despite the contented niche she has established as an international coach, Es remarked that the personal challenges and vulnerabilities as a nonimmigrant worker are constant.

> I'm a little bit unique just because I'm still on an H-1B [visa]. Everybody else has their citizenship already. So I don't have that comfort that the others do have. And so therefore, maybe that is why I still feel a little bit uncertain about some things, to discuss or to not discuss or where to push and not push. So that's the probably the biggest challenge.

Max – Head Coach, Swimming, Life University

Max primarily identifies as gay, but also uses the self-constructed term *bay* in more limited ways.

> I created this word because bisexual didn't fit…I feel like I want to honor my relationships that I've had with women in my life. But I think for me to claim gay would feel like I'm closing off an opportunity that potentially would present itself to me. And I don't want to do that. But I also recognize that right now, all my…substantial relationships have been with men. But I also, sometimes find myself still finding…women attractive. And I get kind of curious.

Max also frequently self-describes as *queer*. Max is a 47 year-old, white cisgender man, born in the United States. He does not identify with a religion or faith perspective and remarked that he has never had a "direct negative experience with religion" concerning his sexual identity. Max is in a partnership with a man who is in an open marriage with a woman.

Max regards his sexual identity as having a tremendous impact on his life. His first introduction to a non-straight sexual identity was in high school when his older brother revealed

he was gay. Shortly after his brother came out, Max had his first intimate experience with a man, thus affirming his own attraction for men and women. "You've got to be solid in your identity," Max stated contemplatively.

> Sometimes I think it's the most magical, beautiful thing to not be sort of in the cultural dominant norm of hetero. Like, I wouldn't change it for the world. And then there's times when I'm like, "Wow, it's hard." You know? It's hard.

Although Max is proud of his queer identity, he acknowledged that his internalized homophobia often shapes and influences how he moves through the world. Perhaps more than anything, Max attributes his internalized homophobia to his feelings of not being "enough", and to a consequential tendency to overcompensate and outperform – a phenomenon he believes is common among LGBTQ persons.

> I think that sometimes there's this idea with people that are not straight, they have to…kind of excel at, at a different rate or a different level…And that can be exhausting…I think that you can't only link it to that. But I think that there is something there around just kind of feeling like your whole self isn't enough.

Describing the intersectionality of identities, Max stated, "We're all such complex individuals that there's so much to our identities and how they play out with professionalism, or being professional, or being in a career, or having it be your sexual orientation or your race, or your gender." As the only male-identified participant, Max acknowledged his privilege as a white, cisgender man in sport. He is pointedly aware of that privilege within the context of coaching at an historic women's college.

> I have the honor and privilege of my white male identity – cisgender, white male identity – that's probably made my experience of being out professionally easier…I guess it's

something that I'm continually learning about and I'm pretty conscious of. I'd like to think I'm fairly conscious of it and there's always more to learn about, but I think it definitely probably made it easier.

Max elaborated on how those privileged identities occupy space at his institution.

Being at Life University, historical women's college has really opened my eyes to this concept of space, and how there have been many times where I might be the only [cisgender] man in the room, or even male-identified person in the room, and I'm very conscious of…just being here is going to change the space.

Max described himself as a very active child, introduced to gymnastics and swimming to "expend energy." He also played soccer, baseball, and basketball. Max began swimming competitively when he was in fourth grade, demonstrating aptitude and talent. Max's brother, who is seven years older, was a major influence on Max, including as a swimmer. When Max was a freshman in high school, he did not try out for the high school team, fearing he "wasn't good enough." He tried out for and made the team his sophomore year, and by his junior year in high school, Max qualified for the state championship finals and a regional USA Swimming championship.

Max was not actively recruited by any NCAA Division I institutions he was considering. Ultimately, Max enrolled at an NCAA Division I institution as a non-recruited walk-on, and recalled the head coach telling him, "I don't let swimmers with your time on the team…You're not of the caliber." However, the coach extended a consolation, "Here are our preseason practice times if you want to show up." Max was "scared shitless" to practice with faster, stronger, recruited student-athletes on athletics scholarships. However, Max eventually realized that "[his teammates and coaches] didn't care how fast [he] was. At some point, [he] realized they wanted

[him] to get better. They wanted [him] to be happy. They wanted [him] to thrive." By his junior and senior years of college, Max was enough of a formidable competitor to earn a partial athletic scholarship.

Max attributed his interest in becoming a coach to the support and affirmation of his college teammates and coaches, stating, "There's no way I'd be doing what I'm doing now if that hadn't happened." Max's coaching career began with young children, and advanced to club coaching and high school coaching. Ultimately, Max resolved that college coaching was going to be the most financially secure option if he wanted to coach as a profession. His first college coaching opportunity was as a graduate assistant at an NCAA Division I institution. Despite having a positive experience as a graduate assistant, Max realized NCAA Division I was not the division where he ultimately wanted to coach.

> The general [NCAA Division I] vibe just didn't vibe with me. There was tension in the office all the time. I felt like everyone was worried they were going to lose their job, and you were always positioning yourself somehow academically, financially, or athletically to have a reason not to lose your job. And it just didn't feel like sport to me.

Max is the head swimming coach at Life University, a private, secular, historic women's college and a member of NCAA Division III, located in a major metropolitan area on the West Coast. Max has been the head coach at Life for 19 years, but is pursuing coaching and/or administrative opportunities at other NCAA institutions. He became the head coach after one year of Division I coaching as a graduate assistant. Max sometimes laments not being at more of an athletically competitive and successful institution, admitting, "Coaching is a huge part of my identity. Almost too much so I think sometimes…sometimes I wish the athletic identity as a whole of my group is a little bit more unified and in line." However, he was quick to reframe his

perspective that the role of college athletics extends beyond traditional markers of success, such as winning and championships. "It really made me check in with my core gut value system of what I think athletics is for," Max said. "And it's really the individual journey and personal growth and having a community and supportive space, and challenging space to explore yourself and learn about yourself, and having meaningful support around that and again, challenge too." Almost rhetorically, Max philosophized, "Sports shouldn't be the most important thing in your life. But they teach you how to handle the most important things in your life."

Jackie – Head Coach, Softball, Stanley University

Jackie identifies as a lesbian. She has been self-aware of her lesbian identity since she was 19 years old and in college. Jackie is a 40 year-old, white, cisgender woman, born in the United States. She identifies as Catholic and espouses its tenets, acknowledging that Catholicism does not "totally accept" homosexuality. She does not regard herself as a practicing Catholic and does not meet the requisite precepts. Jackie is married to a woman with whom she has two children.

Jackie played several sports growing up, including basketball, softball, and tennis. She had the most success in softball. Throughout high school, Jackie played tennis in the fall, basketball in the winter, and softball in the spring. Although she was recruited to play tennis, basketball, and softball in college, she chose to play softball exclusively. As Jackie recalled, "Someone had once told me, 'Play the sport that you like to practice the most, because you're going to practice more than you play and travel.' So that's why I chose softball."

At the time of the interview, Jackie was the head softball coach at Stanley University, a private, Catholic, NCAA Division III institution located in an upper-Midwest city with a population of almost 30,000. Jackie was the head coach for 13 years. However, shortly after the

interview, Jackie was no longer listed on Stanley's athletics staff directory webpage, instead listing an interim head coach. In April 2021, Stanley University issued a press release, announcing a new head coach.

Stanley University, her alma mater, immediately hired Jackie following her graduation. She was eventually promoted to head coach. Jackie had a close connection between her experience as a college student-athlete and becoming a coach. As an undergraduate student at Stanley, Jackie intended to become a teacher. However, shortly before graduating, Stanley offered her the opportunity to be an assistant softball coach. Jackie was an assistant coach at Stanley for four years before a 13-year career as head coach. Asked why she wanted to be the head coach at her alma mater, Jackie reflected,

> Being that I had attended the university, it was I just knew the go-round, wanted to still stay in the program, loved working with the program in my four years as the assistant. Just wanted to continue what I'd already helped create in four years as an assistant, wanted to continue that as the head coach. And loved the university, loved the location, everything about it.

Chapter Summary

In summary, six participants between the ages of 33 and 55 participated in my study. Five participants identify as lesbian women. One participant identifies as a gay and bay man. All are former collegiate student-athletes, and their head coaching careers at their current institutions range from less than one year to 25 years. In Chapter Five, I describe the emergent themes from the interviews within the context of sexual identity management, influential social structures, head coach roles and responsibilities, and opportunities and limitations as

professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Guided by the two research questions, the emergent themes offer additional insight into this phenomenon in intercollegiate athletics.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the findings of my research and to answer the guiding research questions:

- How do professionally "out" LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches construct their professional identities?
- How do these constructed professional identities of LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches influence their coaching roles?

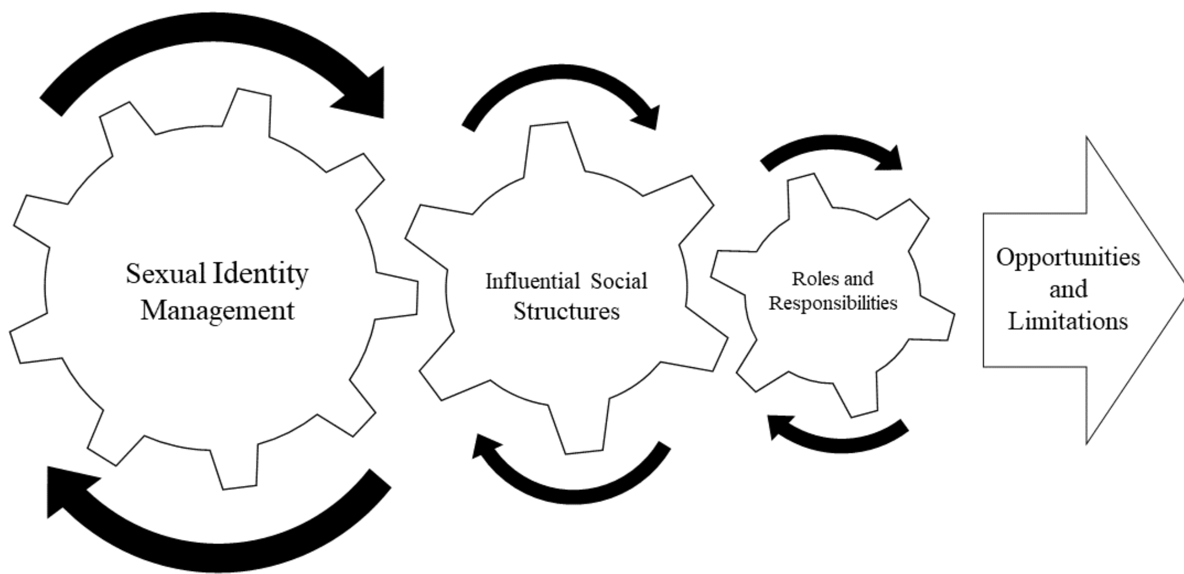
In this chapter, I describe six participants' experiences with the phenomenon of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. As stated previously, each participant's experience is unique to their individual history, intersecting identities, situational conditions, and relational dynamics. Throughout the data analysis process, it was important to maintain fidelity to personal experiences, perspectives, and values through individual, semi-structured interviews described in Chapter Three (see also Appendices E and F). However, to operate within the phenomenological framework of the study, it was critical to understand how multiple participants experience a common phenomenon. Consequently, I present the four major themes from my study: (a) sexual identity management, (b) influential social structures, (c) roles and responsibilities, and (d) opportunities and limitations.

This chapter is structured to address the first research question with the first two themes, by describing participants' sexual identity management strategies and the social structures that influence how they construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college

coaches. The latter two themes focus on the second research question, describing how the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence, and are influenced by, their roles and responsibilities, including professional opportunities and limitations. This organizational approach aligns with the study's phenomenological methodology and constructivist paradigm. The following graphic is a visual representation of the findings. The three gears represent the themes that shape how the participants construct their identities and influence their coaching roles. These gears are relational, interdependent, and do not operate in isolation. Sexual identity management is the largest gear because of it seemed to have the most significant impact on the participants' constructed identities. Collectively, the gears generate an output of professional opportunities and limitations.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Findings



Sexual Identity Management

Sexual identity management is a constantly evolving, fluid, multi-directional and convergent, context-dependent phenomenon that the participants frequently discussed during their interviews. Despite the relative clarity and fixedness of the participants' sexual identities, the manner in which the participants managed their identities varied considerably when factoring institutional structures, social norms, groups, and individuals. As a reminder, all six of the participants self-identified as professionally disclosed lesbian, gay, or bisexual head coaches at NCAA member institutions. Max, the head swimming coach at Life University, identifies professionally as gay and personally as bay. The other participants identify as lesbians, but often use the term *gay* interchangeably. In this section, I discuss how the participants construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches through visibility and the following sexual identity management strategies: avoidance, authenticity, and normalization.

Max described the "tricky" nature of his sexual identity management, stating, "I think I use *gay* for most people…I feel comfortable with it because it's easy to grasp." When he initially began disclosing his sexual identity to others, Max did not self-identify as gay *or* bay. Instead he euphemistically pronounced he was "attracted to men." Over time, Max has felt increasingly confident disclosing his gay identity to others, as it is a familiar, if not altogether accepted, concept to most. But his bay identity remains a source of unease and complexity that Max infrequently shares with others in professional contexts.

The participants recounted how others reacted when they disclosed their sexual identities. Some, like Janet, the head women's basketball coach at Lake State University, and Kay, the head women's golf coach at Northern University, focused on the varying degrees of reception by their respective families. Kay remarked that despite support and acceptance from her family, she felt

hostility from her wife's family, thus reinforcing the importance of a reserved and cautious management of her sexual identity.

> I had stayed away from [my wife's] family gatherings and wasn't really welcome…So the fact that a lot of people didn't know was reinforced by the fact that we weren't even accepted within our own family units…we've been through a lot. Even [my wife's] mom was not accepting of me at first. [My wife] wasn't allowed to talk to her sisters. Those were some pretty terrible and dark times for us early on. It just reinforced, yeah, we've got to keep this quiet and keep this on the down low.

On the contrary, Janet recalled an overwhelmingly positive coming out experience with family and friends. "It was really good. I had my mom…then my brother and sister, in terms of close family…And once they were good with it, and my close friends, I didn't have any horror stories or lose anybody." Janet acknowledged that some individuals regarded her sexual identity as "just a phase." Nonetheless, she considers herself to have "been super fortunate" coming out to her family and friends.

Ruby, the head college softball coach at Airedale University, reflected largely on her coming out experience as a coach at her previous institution. "It was a good place to be," Ruby reminisced. "I never really felt like I had to be in the closet." When Jackie, the former head softball coach at Stanley University, was asked what her personal experience had been as a lesbian, she hastily stated, "In general, positive." Max suggested he had a positive personal experience by inversely describing what he had *not* experienced. "I haven't been the recipient of direct homophobic actions or words…I've never felt completely unsafe, and/or never been the sort of object of direct homophobia because of my situation."

Several participants discussed some of their first coming out experiences. It is not clear if those experiences were the first times they had disclosed their sexual identities to other people, or rather the most impactful. Janet described the internal struggle she had coming out for the first time. “I fought it for a while and I tried to suppress it in various ways,” she said. Ultimately, at the age of 26, Janet conceded, “It is what it is, you are who you are. Take it or leave it.” Kay also recounted how she is more comfortable now disclosing her lesbian identity to others than she once was.

> I remember telling one of my classes once, I was introducing myself, and it was a fitness class. I was like, “I'm married. To a woman.” I'm like, “Oh my gosh. Can I be any more awkward?”. I'm looking at the students who don't know me and I'm thinking, “Wow. I have to do a little better.”…Yeah, it would just be a fluid sentence today, right, coming out. I'm looking for responses. No one's going to gasp or anything.

Jackie remarked on her personal evolution, acknowledging her experiences with sexual identity had changed since she first became aware she was a lesbian at the age of 19.

> I'd probably say before I was married [I] was not as open about it. People knew, but I wasn't as open about it. Then obviously after I got married I was a little bit more, or was more known, I guess. I'd say the definition for me probably wouldn't change…if you had asked me before what the definition would be to now, I think the definition would be the same. I would say my experience with it changed from the start.

Due to the fluidity of contexts, circumstances, and people that impacts sexual identity management, particularly in intercollegiate athletics, which is a turnstile for student-athletes and coaches, I asked the participants to describe what it means to be a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach and how they manage that identity. Janet remarked broadly on the tendency

of LGBTQ coaches to self-impose limitations for fear of judgment by others. “It restricts some of us from probably going after things,” she deplored. “Whether it’s a bigger job or a bigger role…in the athletics department or on campus, because we’re not sure how it’s going to be perceived.” Janet elaborated,

> It’s the uneasiness of not knowing your supervisor or how your community’s going to react to you just living…not knowing if you can bring your full self…I think…it’s intentionally not bringing that part up that I have a wife or that I am a lesbian, because you don’t want to be judged for that and that only. And I think sometimes we’re, as head coaches, trying to figure out, and lesbian, gay, you’re just trying to figure out, “Can I be my full self here?”.

Ultimately, Janet summed up her concept of being professionally out in the following way:

> I live very out…And now being in a role as a head coach, when they say bring your spouse, this is my spouse…I think being out is one where you feel like you can live your full self in every room that you walk in, and we have the opportunity to do that.

Es, the head women’s tennis coach at Orange University, explained that she was not certain how to manage her sexual identity early in her head-coaching career, pondering whether it was a lack of confidence in her fundamental coaching capabilities or simply inexperience as a head coach. “[The uncertainty] kind of made me doubt myself sometimes or just not being comfortable there. So I think as I went year by year there, it’s definitely changed in a more positive way.” Asked what the concept of being professionally disclosed as a head college coach meant to her, Es replied, “I think professionally out is being surrounded by others, by people that identify differently than you and still being okay with it. Just in a social setting, in a work environment. Things like that.”

Max responded to the same question, explaining why he almost exclusively identifies as gay, rather than bay, in professional settings – “Because it’s just easier.” Jackie replied to the question with an element of uncertainty and equivocation.

> I would say that you, if asked, would be able to talk about it. I don’t think being out you need to broadcast it, because straight people don’t need to broadcast it. I would say just allowing people to know that, well before I was married I had two kids. Just knowing that I had a partner. So I’d say just not having to hide it if asked. So willing to talk about it maybe.

Jackie later noted that part of her own concept of being professionally disclosed includes others’ knowing she has a wife and children.

Several participants talked about how managing their sexual identities as head college coaches is exhausting and incessant. Janet articulated the sentiment with precision, expressing, “It can get exhausting, sometimes, to think about all of these different spaces and ways that you have to manage your feelings and emotions.” Max buttressed her remarks, arguing that coming out “can happen so many ways, and it’s a never-ending journey. I mean, it just doesn’t stop…it’s kind of exhausting sometimes.”

Visibility

Visibility was a major factor in how several participants constructed and managed their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Some aspects of visibility were within the control of the participants, while others were imposed on them. The primary aspects of visibility that emerged from the interviews were public presence, visibility of family, and physical expression.

Being publicly out as LGB was an element of professional disclosure that some participants explicitly discussed, particularly Janet, Max, and Kay. Janet described a media article published in December 2020 (between her first and second interviews for this study), which publicly detailed for the first time her experience as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She did not regard it as a "coming out article" per se because she and her wife already considered themselves to be professionally and personally disclosed as lesbians. However, Janet acknowledged some benefit and utility to having a public presence regarding her lesbian identity.

> That [article] really became a great conversation piece, not just with our current student-athletes, but even recruits as well. I felt like we got ahead of it…It's allowed the conversation to flow easy. You don't feel like you're tiptoeing around.

It is important to note Janet's opinion about public presence has evolved since her first interview for this study, during which she remarked, "We just live. I don't understand why you have to [do an interview]." In hindsight, Janet seems to have discovered a pragmatic appreciation for public acknowledgments, such as the article, to assuage some of the exhaustion of constantly coming out to others.

Max has a tepid relationship with the notion of being publicly out. For 19 years Max has, without fanfare, identified as a professionally disclosed gay head college coach. However, his sexual identity never held much of a public presence, such as through press conferences, media articles, or public declarations on social media. Max admitted, "I don't have social media personally…Like I don't have this public way of telling the world all the time what I am, I guess." Not only is Max's personality somewhat averse to the attention, but also Life University is a small, relatively low profile institution that does not draw broad public interest. "Life isn't

exactly the athletic powerhouse where we get the type of publicity that Kirk Walker (LGBTQ advocate and former NCAA Division I head softball coach) gets around stuff. So, I'm not doing interviews," Max acknowledged.

Of the six participants, Kay is the only one who has publicly disclosed her sexual identity in her online athletics biography, explicitly mentioning her wife and two children. She characterized her decision to include them in her online biography as a "big step." A few years ago, Kay participated in a study to determine how many NCAA Division I head coaches mentioned same-sex partners in their online athletics biographies. Kay recalled, "There's something like 17 head coaches in the U.S. whose bio includes a same-sex relationship partner…It blows me away."

Similar to Janet's pragmatic regard for her media article, Kay has found mentioning her wife and children in her online athletic biography to be of considerable utility. Specifically, it has reduced the need for and stress of repeatedly coming out to a carousel of stakeholders, particularly prospective student-athletes and their parents. Kay stated,

> If people can just know, and I don't have to come out, then that's much easier for me, much less stress for me. In the recruiting world, if you're coming to my campus, I'm assuming you've done your work and you've read my bio because you're coming over for dinner with your parents. I've never had an issue with it. They come into our house and they play with our dog and hang out with the kids and meet [my wife]. It's taken a lot of 'pressure and stress' off me just to have it in the bio. So being out is taken care of.

Janet feels it is a "personal preference" for a coach to publicly refer to their sexual identity or same-sex partner in an online athletics biography. She appreciates that some coaches are exceptionally eager and proud to reflect their sexual identities in their biographies. However,

for Janet, who does not mention her wife in her online athletics biography, "it wasn't a big deal." She explained, "I feel like we just live so visibly already, that that piece wasn't important to us." But she quickly followed with, "We're definitely going to update it…I'm not embarrassed about it. I don't know why it's not in there." To date, Janet's online athletics biography does not reference her wife.

Ruby indicated that she had never really thought about whether to include her family in her online biography. However, she unwittingly aligned with both Kay and Janet's rationales, noting, "I think it's whatever people are comfortable with. It's one way of…if parents are reading bios…you don't have to have the conversation."

Max fully supports and celebrates coaches who disclose their sexual identities and same-sex partners in their online biographies, but also defends those who choose not to come out on a public platform. His utmost concern is whether it is fundamentally necessary or appropriate to include personal information in an online athletics biography.

> I think sometimes I struggle with why are we even talking about this in a bio anyway…Even in the heterosexual normative world I'm like, "Is this really important?"…Especially in the realm of recruiting, you're wanting other parents or someone to know that you've got this family, a nuclear family, and for some reason that makes you okay and safe.

Max stated that although he does not mention his partner in his online biography, he still thinks he is partially disclosing his sexual identity by mentioning his involvement in LGBTQ initiatives. He concludes, "So in a way, that's a way to come out, even without saying I'm out."

The conspicuous presence of family was another aspect of visibility that impacts how several participants construct and manage their sexual identities in a professional context. It was

first important to understand how the participants described their immediate families, including significant partners and children. Janet, Kay, and Jackie are married to women. Janet does not have children, and Kay and Jackie each have two young children. Ruby is in a domestic partnership with a woman who has one adult daughter from a previous relationship. Ruby met her partner's daughter when she was 12 years old. Es has a girlfriend who lives in Poland. Max has a male partner who is married to a woman. His partner and wife have children and grandchildren.

Janet and Kay are uniquely situated in this study because their wives are also employees in their respective athletics departments. When Lake State hired Janet as the head coach, they clarified, "We support whoever [sic] you want to hire to be successful. That includes your wife." Consequently, Janet hired her wife as an assistant coach, with whom she had worked on the same coaching staff at her previous institution. Kay's wife is a strength and conditioning coach at Northern. Although they are not on the same coaching staff like Janet and her wife, Kay and her wife have a relatively high visibility among student-athletes, colleagues, and the surrounding community. Kay commented, "I find myself saying 'hi' to all these athletes like I know who they are, but I really don't…They work with [my wife] and they like her, so they know my name even before I know theirs." For Kay, the most pressing concern was not about her sexual identity, but rather perceptions of nepotism and "not wanting to blend too much personal and professional."

For several coaches, the visibility of their families meant they were automatically "outed," independent of their own disclosure process or timeline. Kay stated,

> My "coming out card" was telling people that we were having a baby. Because I knew they knew we were together but it had never been disclosed or nothing ever official.

> Back 15 years ago lesbian couples weren't getting engaged and weren't posting it on proposals and engagements, and certainly weren't having weddings.

Ruby also spoke about how the visibility of family influences the management of her lesbian identity in a professional setting. For example, Ruby's innocuous references to her "partner" often result in an inevitable disclosure of her sexual identity. Like Kay, Ruby discussed her daughter (her partner's daughter from a previous relationship) with alacrity. Ruby stated, "When you have a child, you're outed immediately, all the time. So there is no 'in the closet.'" She emphasized, "You can't put your children in the closet with you." Ruby acknowledged that for LGB head college coaches without children, the visibility of family might be easier to manage, and dependent largely on the degree to which a coach is amenable to integrating their personal life with their professional life. She acknowledged, "I can understand where it comes from and I've seen it where people aren't comfortable having their significant other around." However, Ruby regards the visibility of her own family as a positive aspect of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. "I think it's an important part of it, personally, that we are able to have our kids around."

Jackie also discussed how the family visibility influences her identity management as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She stated, "Like me bringing the kids around, seeing that it's no different than a straight relationship…I think that has helped team-wise."

Es and Max's partners do not draw as much visibility in the workplace as the other participants' spouses, partners, and children. Es's girlfriend lives in Poland. Max is in a relationship with a man who is concurrently married to a woman, and remarked that part of him "wants to lift up" the visibility of his partner, the dynamics of their relationship, including

concepts of polyamory, and to "normalize [his] experience." However, Max is hesitant to do so without engaging in full, earnest, and individual conversations about the relationship, with discerning context. Given the rapid pace of intercollegiate athletics, Max often cannot dedicate time or emotional capital to such complicated and deeply personal discussions. "That's why I kind of lean towards the *gay* versus the *bay* and talk about my partner instead of expanding," Max admitted. "There's a little bit of shame in it too, just because it's so different."

When asked if he thought children might impact the identity of a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, Max wholly agreed, "The kid part would be huge." He elaborated, "I think by having kids, I could totally see that adding a whole other layer of not really giving the chance to *not* recognize an identity." Like Ruby, Max contended that without children, the "partner part allows for you to be more stealth about it if you wanted it to be." However, also like Ruby, Max attested that his partner's presence and support have had an entirely positive effect on his professional identity as a gay head coach. He described his partner's involvement in his professional life in the following way:

> Always supportive, always recognizing and validating the involvement in the [LGBTQ] working group and/or doing these [LGBTQ] talks, or just giving a sense of pride around it…he recognizes it and validates it as a really critical piece to what I'm doing for work and how I am existing as a human, and where I'm putting my values and priorities. So just having that around is really amazing.

Physical gender expression was an aspect of visibility that some participants described as impacting their identity management and concept as a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. The participants described ways they physically present their genders, a tactic commonly used by LGBTQ people to manage their sexual identities. Because gender is frequently and

acutely associated with sexual identity, LGBTQ people often amplify or subdue their *gender* identities as a way to exalt or disguise their *sexual* identities. Janet and Jackie described themselves as presenting across the gender spectrum, embracing elements of masculinity and femininity. Janet described her gender expression as “femme” or “tomboy”, but noted she and her wife are both “feminine,” allowing them to “pass” or to be presumed straight. She acknowledged that to pass, or to have a more heteronormative gender presentation, likely makes easier some elements of her experience as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. Specifically, Janet stated, “It’s probably easier for me because I identify as female. People always say, ‘You don’t look gay.’ I’m like, ‘Well, what does gay look like? What does gay look like? Gay girls can’t wear a dress? Lesbians don’t wear dresses?’.” Meanwhile, she stated that there are professionally disclosed lesbian college coaches who are “closer to the stud level,” who modify their masculine presentation when speaking to various groups or attending team meetings. She acknowledged,

> They kind of go through that checklist too, of just consciously what you have to wear, not just how you’re going to talk or show up, but then appearance-wise, to show up in that space. It’s definitely a check box that a lot of us go through mentally.

Es suggested that appearance and gender expression play a manifest role in sexual identity management as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She stated,

> That’s the first thing people see is your image and the way that you’re dressed and how is your hair and things like that. And I think…there is definitely a difference there from the gay, lesbian, or bisexual and straight coaches.

Like Janet, Max also has the ability to "pass" or to be assumed straight. He recalled an anecdote when he disclosed his gay identity to another coach at Life University, and it "kind of blew her away." Max stated,

> I think because I can pass as straight…I think I blow people's minds sometimes…I try to make it as much of a non-issue…And I try to talk about it like, "Oh, yeah, I went to the movie with my partner…and we had a great time."

Visibility was a complex, instrumental, and multifunctional component of sexual identity management for the participants, most notably through pubic presence, visibility of family, and physical gender expression. Some participants described public presence as a way to intentionally bring broad awareness about their sexual identities, principally through media publications, online athletics biographies, and social media. Although most of the participants claimed not to have much of a public presence, the benefits of the participants who did primarily rested with not having to repeatedly disclose their sexual identity at each new encounter, which they cited as a source of anxiety and exhaustion. The participants generally described visibility of family, particularly children, more as a resigned reality beyond their control than a deliberate identity management strategy. They acknowledged some discretionary latitude for those without children, allowing the participant to have more ownership in dictating their terms of professional disclosure. But the participants with children conceded a near-absolute lack of control over their sexual identity management, noting their children are the inherent connective tissue between their personal and professional lives. Lastly, several participants described how physical gender expression is a way to deliberately control visibility as a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach because of the seemingly inherent association of gender and sexual identity. Most of the participants who discussed physical gender expression described their tendency to align

more with heteronormative gender norms as a way to navigate their professional worlds with more ease, and acknowledged those whose do not often face additional challenges.

Sexual Identity Management Strategies at Work

Throughout the interviews, the participants described the sexual identity management strategies they most commonly employ in the workplace. Although fluid and lacking first dividing lines, the strategies typically fell into the following three categories: (a) avoidance, (b), authenticity, and (c) normalization. Avoidance – or evading specific opportunities to disclose or acknowledge one's LGB identity – was a tactic several participants mentioned. Janet explained that she occasionally avoids disclosing her sexual identity to others because it is simply too taxing to constantly come out, particularly as a Black woman. She stated,

> Sometimes when I'm in certain situations, I'm like, "I don't want to mention that I'm gay. I don't want being Black to be an issue. I don't want them to be distracted that I'm a female." I think being able to comfortably bring all those intersections to the same space that I'm in, I think society, especially right now, is exhausting.

Similarly, Max noted he occasionally avoids disclosing his gay and bay identities because of fatigue. "Sometimes I don't come out when I could because I just am like exhausted talking about it," he said. Max is also uniquely situated in that he considers himself to be a professionally disclosed *gay* head college coach, but he typically avoids disclosing his *bay* identity in professional contexts.

For other participants like Es, avoidance is a tactic rooted in self-protection. When assessing whether to bring her girlfriend to athletics department gatherings, Es invariably wonders, "How is this going to play out with people around?". Es continued, "Even though I know most of them really wouldn't care, but I think some of them would still be judgmental

about it." Es qualified that despite not *actively* disclosing her lesbian identity to others, she also does not conceal it, and noted the following about how she manages her sexual identity.

> I'm very honest and very open, obviously with my circle of people that are closer to me. So that includes my supervisor, my team, my supporting staff. Those are directly in my circle. But for everybody else, I really don't necessarily talk about those things too much, unless there is a conversation and unless they ask. So I would say I am out professionally, but I'm also not the person that is necessarily going to be advocating for that. Just because I feel like the label sometimes says more than what people try to know really for themselves. I mean I support it and everything. I think it's great. But just as a personal preference, I wouldn't necessarily put myself out there in that situation, just because I don't feel the need to.

Ruby expressed a similar sentiment of self-protection, stating, "I don't share with everybody because…if I don't feel somebody's respectful, I don't need to get into it with them." Jackie associated her avoidance tactics less with self-protection, and more with expectations set by her private Catholic institution. "You don't really talk about it [at Stanley University]," she declared.

Authenticity was another sexual identity management strategy the participants frequently discussed. With the exception of Jackie, all the participants use authenticity as part of their constructed identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Janet offered the most insight on authenticity.

Janet centered her intersecting identities as a Black woman when she explained authenticity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. As someone who holds several marginalized identities, Janet feels a moral responsibility to elevate and prioritize all of

those identities in the workplace. "Not a lot of people are in a position to really want to address some of these social issues," she said. "If I am going to be the only one at the table, I am going to take full advantage of that and represent all that I am, the gay part of me, the Black part of me, the female part of me, in those spaces."

Janet elaborated on the importance of holistic authenticity "to be who you are," rather than on authenticity of individual identities. "I'm not just going to talk about being gay, not just going to talk about being Black, not just going to talk about being a female," she said. As someone who works with her spouse, the need to embrace authenticity as a primary sexual identity management strategy is further reinforced, if not altogether required, due to the blurred lines between her personal and professional realms. However, as is evident in Janet's anecdote below, authenticity is not an automatic or inherent tactic. Rather, it is active and intentional. Janet recalled when she applied to be the head women's basketball coach at Lake State University, determining whether her sexual identity management should be authenticity or avoidance.

> When they started the interview process, it was the middle of June, so it's Pride Month…I'm super active on Twitter. So I had a Pride post and my wife posted one, I retweeted it. So my friend texted me and said, "Hey, just so you know, they're doing their social media checks this week." And I was like, "Okay." So I was going through it and I'm like, "Do I delete any of this?". And I'm like, "No, this is me. This is me. This is me." So I left it, and then when they called for the initial phone call, I was thinking, "Okay, did you see my Twitter? Because I know y'all looking and it's Pride." And then they just kept calling, I'm like, "Oh, so everybody must be good with it." And it was just

> literally a non-issue, because it was nice to be able to talk about me as a coach and my career, not like that had to be the only identity that we needed to talk about.

Janet clarified that to be authentic with her sexual identity does not equate to ubiquitously centering it in all contexts, regardless of relevance.

> I think being out here is kind of the same of just being visible and comfortable talking about my family *when necessary*. And I add the "when necessary" part because I do think, sometimes, those of us who identify as gay, lesbian, or somewhere on the spectrum feel like it has to be all places, all times. Yeah, you can be gay right now, but it's not important in this context, so no one's trying to suppress your gayness, it's just it wasn't relevant right now. And I think sometimes, we get too worked up about having to interject all of us, in all situations, at all times.

On the whole, Janet remarked how appreciative she is to live authentically as a professionally out lesbian head college coach, suggesting the opportunity is inaccessible to many. She marveled, "I almost feel like sometimes I'm in this surreal gay world. My friends didn't believe me that I can just be this out and this open." Janet also discussed the importance of being authentic about her sexual identity with student-athletes. "They love the authenticity of just what you see is what you get," she said. I think that part is so important, especially now as a head coach.

Kay shares many of Janet's perspectives about authenticity. Like Janet, Kay understands the nuanced balance of living authentically without necessarily shoehorning her sexual identity as the foremost topic of every setting. She remarked what a "non-issue" it is to be authentic as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach, summarizing her experience in the following way:

> I think it's just…so organic now and authentic. It's such a non-issue whether I go to work or sit in staff meetings. It doesn't come up. It's a part of who I am, yes, but we're talking about maximizing your budget or how to overcome a certain issue or whatever, we're all colleagues trying to accomplish the same things and give our athletes the best opportunities. I'm always very aware and appreciative of that. Yeah, we all know a little bit about each other's personal lives, but it really is a non-issue.

Kay also echoed Janet's sentiments about authenticity with her student-athletes. "I'm trying to be real and authentic with my athletes," she said. Similarly, Kay expressed gratitude to live with authenticity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach, recognizing many others do not have that same opportunity. Kay reflected,

> I feel like we're so fortunate because of where we are now, my wife and I…I have colleagues who when I first started coaching, everyone was closeted. It was never talked about and there were no partner benefits. Of course, I knew…who was dating who or whatever, and I'm so thankful that we're not there because it makes me really sad to think about those couples who, had the world been a little friendlier, a little different, they'd have children. Their lives would look so much different. So I definitely feel like we're the lucky ones.

Kay acknowledged the tactic of authenticity did not always feel as innate as she described it during the interviews. In the excerpt below, Kay described how her sexual identity management strategies evolved from avoidance to authenticity – an evolution she regards as positive.

> For the first few years I found it hard to say "wife." And there were certain people who I would avoid saying that to. I feel uncomfortable so I think well maybe they'll feel

> uncomfortable, so I'm just going to skip over that. I'm really pleased to be where I am now. I find myself saying it like it's no big deal because it's not to me. I'm always aware of how others would perceive it. Just saying the word, or use the identity like, "Well, my wife and I have two daughters," the response has been wonderful. The ease at which I'm able to say it feels really good, lot of progress.

Unlike Janet and Kay, who described authenticity as a purposeful tactic, Ruby suggested authenticity is a fundamentally existential characteristic that requires no contemplative, conscious action. "It wasn't a decision – I just was. I was with somebody in a relationship and that was like, this is my partner." She continued,

> I never really thought about it any other way…I've never lived my life any other way so I am who I am. This is what I am. If you don't like it, then we don't have to be friends or whatever it is. But I think to not be open would do them a disservice because at some point, they're going to find out.

Ruby explained that she speaks openly in her athletics department about her family and her partner. "I don't have a filter on that. It's not something I'm hiding," she said. "I get to live my life and I talk freely…about my family…just as any other coach in the department does, whether they're straight or gay." Although Ruby regards authenticity more as a characteristic than a tactic, she feels it has made being a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach much easier, inviting a greater respect from colleagues, student-athletes, and other stakeholders.

Es embraced a similar existential perspective about authenticity as Ruby. "I don't think about those things anymore, I just show up," she said. However, in many of her remarks throughout the interview, she inferred deliberation and intentionality. Es stated that the most important factor for her, as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach, is to be secure

with herself. She reiterated that she does not intentionally conceal her sexual identity, pointing to her social media and campus engagement on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues as examples of authenticity. However, Es acknowledged, “I think there’s levels of it and I think there are some other gays and lesbians that are just way more out there than I am.” She elaborated on this point.

> I’ll do what I can in my own kind of circle and try to influence positively people that are close to me. But I also don’t know that I would go too far beyond, if that would make me uncomfortable. So I think for me, it’s just more being comfortable with who you are and really having those discussions.

Max regards authenticity as a tactic toward self-empowerment and self-determination. As he considers new professional endeavors, Max described how authenticity, as a sexual identity management strategy, factors into his considerations. He stated rather assuredly,

> If someone doesn’t want to hire me or if I feel like I’m…not able to be my authentic self throughout the hiring process…then maybe that’s a really good indication that that’s not the right place for me, which is amazing and beautiful…I think I’m in a place in my life where I don’t want to not be able to…show up in that way.

Most participants referred to normalization as another strategy used to manage their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches. Several of the participants described normalizing their sexual identities as assimilating to the pervasive heteronormativity in intercollegiate athletics. Jackie illustrated normalization as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach when she stated, “I wasn’t like, screaming it from the mountains, but I wasn’t hiding it, per se.” Janet described the considerable efforts to normalize her sexual identity and to make her relationships appear exemplary. Moreover, as a Black, lesbian woman, she regularly

gauged how much of each of her marginalized identities might be regarded as "too much" by others.

> I think the other negative sometimes, when you are out, both professionally and personally, especially when you're in a relationship, is almost going overboard to make sure it's seen as healthy, non-drama centered…I do these check boxes as a Black female, so I'm not too angry, I'm not too this. And it's kind of the same when you identify as a lesbian because you don't want to be too strong, you don't want to be too masculine, it's all these check boxes.
>
> I catch myself doing that in meetings…trying to figure out how much of each [identity] do I need, because all three are going to show up, all of these, my age, add that in there, if necessary, religion, all of them are going to show up, but how much of each of them. So it's this constant balancing act to give just enough, but also being conscious of not trying to be overbearing or too gay or too this.

Janet also reiterated that situating her lesbian identity as a constant focal priority "gets exhausting." She also clarified that normalizing her lesbian identity is neither rooted in shame nor is she trying to be someone she is not. On the contrary, Janet emphasized that normalization is a tactic she uses to upset identity-based stereotypes and assumptions. Janet also noted that normalization is a tactic that serves others who share her minoritized identities.

> Whether you're the only female, the only gay, the only person of color, you recognize the responsibility that comes with it," she said. "Unfortunately, it often means however you show up in that space could affect someone else's opportunity, if they get to or not.

Ruby also avails herself to normalization strategies as part of her sexual identity management, remarking it helps remove stigma and being "othered." Her rationale aligns with Janet's notion of heteronormative assimilation in intercollegiate athletics. Ruby stated,

> I think as long as I live my life and I'm not worried about my pronouns and those sorts of things, I think in that way, it does normalize it. Then it just is. It's not the secret among the team.

Like Jackie, Ruby does not aim "to be the poster child" for LGBTQ issues. She commented that her personality is not oriented to seek attention. "I have never been a flag-waving, going-to-the-parade kind of person, but that's just who I am as a person. It doesn't mean I'm not proud of who I am," Ruby said. Instead she anchors her identity in heteronormative comparisons. "I live my life just as a heterosexual person would and they don't have to advertise who they are. I just live who I am…rather than I have to have it on my forehead or whatever." Ruby also correlated normalization with concepts of "being good," stating, "I think by being a good person, I think that leads to people having a good feeling about how people can live their lives. And that's really not that different. We all have the same issues." It is not clear if Ruby has an inverse association with non-heteronormativity and concepts of being bad.

Max tends to equate normalization with accessibility. In other words, normalization is a way for more people to understand his identity. Max commented,

> My gay identity feels so much more accessible to everybody…I don't have to elaborate and explain to everyone my past or my history…I think in more of that public realm, in the coaching realm professionally, again the gay identity is so much more…People can relate to it more and from all sides I think, hetero sides and the LGBTQ community side.

Inferences to heteronormativity are common in how Max described normalization. Max stated, "I don't want it to be anything other than what straight people [have]…I don't want any special privileges." The sentiment extends to his relationship, which Max described as comparable to a "typical hetero-relationship."

Like Ruby, Max's personality precludes him from seeking attention. "There's a part of me that wishes…I was more on the rooftop screaming and talking about it," he lamented. "That's just really not a personality of mine, I guess." However, Max disrupts stereotypes in ways that are compatible with his personality and that use the normalization tactic. Max stated,

> I don't like sitting and being like, "I have something to tell you." I try to really make it…just like how everyone else talks about their world. And I think it's beautiful because I can see how…it's like a surprise. And I know I value when my stereotypes get rocked of people. I have a stereotype of someone, and someone makes me check that stereotype. And I think that's a valuable experience.

Max theoretically pondered whether normalization is a stigma-removing, empowering tactic, rooted in LGBTQ pride or an assimilative tactic, rooted in shame and doubt. He reflectively stated, "I think there is a potential of normalizing because…of that internalized homophobia, and we're not wanting it to rock too many people too big or whatever, and so to try to make it seem as normal as possible." Max speculated that determining the emotive roots of normalization is likely a constant "struggle for a lot of people in the queer community."

Influential Social Structures

There are numerous social structures that influence how, when, and to what degree the participants construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. The following section focuses on the most frequently discussed social structures: (a) social norms and

expectations, (b) institutional culture and climate, and (c) family and friend groups. Lastly and conversely, I briefly detail how some of the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, have influenced social structures.

Social Norms and Expectations

Social norms and expectations were regularly mentioned as influential factors in how the participants construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Max asserted there is an unparalleled concentration and emphasis on oppressive social norms in sport. "These things are institutionalized," he stated. "And the sporting world, unfortunately, I think is like a hyper-representation of dominant, patriarchal, white, straight norms."

Although some participants remarked on the social progress of LGBTQ issues in recent years, most participants felt that homophobia and negative attitudes toward LGBTQ people play a more salient role in how they construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches than any advances in equity. Kay stated enthusiastically, "That's cool to see how far society has come in just five years." However, she was quick to temper her zeal, acknowledging the social perils LGBTQ people continue to endure in the United States. "I know what's out there in this country…It's amazing that it hasn't come my way," she stated soberly. Max described the caustic stereotypes of gay men and sexual deviancy, which he asserted make it difficult for some gay men to professionally disclose in sport. "That's the social sexual predator side of what most of us have been the recipient of in the gay community," he said. "And it's powerful…and it's unfortunate." Max explained that because many LGB people experience internalized homophobia, stereotypes about gay men and sexual deviancy invasively manifest and thrive within the gay male community. He described the gay male community as a "microcosm" of society writ large. "I think the internalized homophobia around being a predator

and/or having to navigate your sexual life in a deviant way because it's not okay otherwise, it just perpetuates it." Max continued, "In the gay community, I feel like [hypersexuality] is a common response when I say that I'm a swimming coach, and it does sort of rub me the wrong way. I mean it's perpetuating the stereotype."

Max suspects that coaching at an historic women's college likely spared him from consequential inferences or accusations of sexual deviancy. However, the potential of having to bear such innuendo and allegation has influenced his identity as a professionally disclosed gay head college coach. Max recalled when he was a high school coach in Montana, his former girlfriend, who had just learned of his sexual identity, said to him with trepidation, "It scares me to death what parents would do if they found out. I think you'd lose your job."

Max also discussed how bisexuality is often viewed with prejudice and suspicion, not just by those who are straight, but by the gay community as well, revealing another reason for his reluctance to disclose his bay identity. He has been told by gay friends and acquaintances, "Oh, you're just not fully okay with this [gay] identity," "Oh, you'll come around eventually," or "Oh, everyone's like that in the beginning." Max remarked crestfallen, "It is ironic because it doesn't seem like you would get that feedback from the community that has experienced the same thing. But it just does show where the rampant internalized homophobia is in all of us."

Because of that internalized homophobia, Max shared what it feels like to be a gay/bay man in intercollegiate athletics.

> It feels a bit heavier…because of all the…internalized sexism and internalized homophobia that we're accustomed to receiving through messages all our life. It just potentially doesn't make the space all that okay for this, and ultimately, it does come down to this sort of masculine/feminine difference as opposed to even sexual orientation.

Several participants discussed how particular sports that are assigned sexuality stereotypes can impact how professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches in those sports construct their identities. Ruby and Jackie explained that softball is often stereotyped as a sport dominated by lesbians. To emphasize the point, Ruby shared an anecdote about a student-athlete who once said, "The interesting part about softball is I'm heterosexual, but everybody assumes I'm a lesbian because I play softball." Although regarded as baseless, Ruby seemed to somewhat facetiously embrace elements of the stereotype as accurate, stating, "I'll be stereotypical. We're better when we have more [lesbians]…they're better athletes." Ruby also suggested that women's basketball, for reasons not detailed, is another often-stereotyped sport for lesbians. However, she distinguished that women's basketball coaches are more likely to be closeted, at least professionally, than softball coaches, theorizing, "I guess when the money's higher, that it's a little bit different."

Max wondered if there are more professionally disclosed gay male coaches "in certain sports that are perceived to be less masculine," thus returning to the suggestion that sexism might play a greater role in sport than sexual identity. "I think it's not a sexuality issue, I think it's a masculine/feminine issue, really," Max stated. Kay shared a similar perspective, "I think there's more to be said for being female in this industry regardless, with sexual identity being not part of that conversation, but just being female in college athletics, which is very much male dominated."

Ruby posited that because women's gender norms often run contrary to the masculine norms of sport, women in sport are often presumed to be masculine and/or lesbian.

> I think females are more normalized than males are. Professionally out males in athletics have, I think, a little harder time. You expect it. The norms, we expect the athletes to be

lesbians or whatnot, whereas the guys, you're not tops because you're a gay man…The stereotypes that go along with, out and open, I would say with guys is more difficult. It's not as normalized as the females are.

When discussing sexist and homophobic social norms and expectations that have been the most influential on her as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach, Janet deviated from the structures of sport and pivoted toward religion. "I think society is so caught up in religion," she stated indignantly. "I think that's what religion does to you…just how religion is set up in our society. It puts this false pecking order" that allows individuals to judge and castigate others based on their faith doctrines."

Institutional Culture and Climate

All the participants described in depth how institutional culture and climate have impacted their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. For purposes of this section, the term *institution* is generally regarded as a catchall reference for a participant's university *and* athletics department, unless otherwise clarified.

Janet described Lake State University as valuing and espousing diversity, equity, and inclusion, even though it is not a racially diverse campus. "There's not a lot of Black people here, I can tell you that. At all." Despite the lack of racial diversity, Janet emphasized what a positive experience it has been "just being in a place that has a diverse mindset." She described Lake State University, including its athletics department, as an institution where she is "supported and encouraged to talk about [her] family, though it's considered a non-traditional family." She acknowledged the buoyancy she feels "to be able to show up as [her] full self. So feeling like [she] can be a gay, Black female in all [her] interactions is support to [her], personally."

Janet also credited much of Lake State's inclusive culture and climate to its being situated in a large, socially progressive, metropolitan area. She reported feeling fortunate to be living and working in a very liberal city, acknowledging the institutional geography may heavily influence if and how an LGB coach constructs a professionally disclosed identity. "If you're speaking to another coach living in…Alabama. Their thoughts might be different," Janet surmised. She described how Lake State's culture and climate has positively influenced her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach.

> Being out here, I almost feel like they embrace it…Being a coach for so long and then finally being named a head coach for who I am and all of who I am was probably the most surreal and refreshing part about the process. Being like, "Oh, you're too out. You're too gay. You're too outspoken. You're too Black," all of these things, and it was literally embraced here. So it's been a seamless transition, honestly, to be an out lesbian, I think it's one that they…celebrate…I don't feel like a token hire by any means, but I think they're proud of all that as their head coach.
>
> I don't know about the policies, per se, but I do feel like the culture is very welcoming. Where, when people walk into the office or spaces like the athletic department, I think there are people who, honestly, either have ally stickers up or have rainbow stickers, and just knowing that everybody's welcomed here. So I say it's a very welcoming, I don't know if there's necessarily pen to paper for actual policies, but the environment, well, it appears to be very non-judgmental.

Kay acknowledged that her athletics department does not have any policies regarding LGBTQ inclusion, but nevertheless she feels supported by her institution regarding her lesbian identity. Her greatest grievance is male privilege, ascribing that aspect of the institutional culture

as having the most significant impact (albeit negative) on her as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. Kay stated, "If me or [my wife] feels not supported, it's something else at work. It's not about our relationship or our [sexual] identity. Have I mentioned male privilege?"

Es described a remarkably inclusive culture and climate at Orange University, crediting "many things going on as far as not only LGBTQ groups or anti-racist groups." She directly associates her campus's inclusive culture and sense of community with her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach.

> There definitely are more people I can talk to about those things," she explained. "It's a very close community. So I can see people everywhere in town and I know exactly who that person kind of identifies with, way more now than I did when I was a player or when I was starting my career.

She continued, "It's definitely made me feel a lot more comfortable being who I am." At the same time, Es was quick to distinguish the culture and climate of the campus with that of the athletics department. "As a university, I think it is very diverse and very open here…Athletics, I think it's really more of each coach and each program to make its way."

Max described Life University as "profoundly inclusive."

> [Life University is] a place where mostly non-straight, mostly lesbian-identified students and gender nonconforming trans students can come to…There's definitely still issues and a lot of obstacles and hurdles for people. But I think it's been an amazing place for a lot of people.

Much of the athletics department staff also identifies as LGBTQ. "At one point…100% of our [athletics] staff I think was queer," Max declared. Even amongst historic women's colleges across the United States, Life University stands out. According to Max,

> People say that [Life University] is very different from even the women's colleges on the East Coast because of the amount of students of color, and the amount of LGBTQ-identified people, and they cross ages, and…I mean, it's a beautifully complex spot.

Max attributed Life University's positive, affirming culture and climate to its membership in NCAA Division III and being a private, historic women's college.

> I would imagine that public schools depending on the state that they're in would have maybe even more protections in place, explicitly. So that's a different vibe feeling, like you have the right to be who you are is different than actually having a space that affirms who you are. I mean both are critical, but just because a state school you have certain protections, doesn't mean that it's a place that you enjoy being and feel like you can really bring yourself.

Max pondered what his "identity journey" would have been if he had spent his coaching career at another institution, or if his institution had been a different institution-type. "I wonder if I was at a coed institution if I would have come out as soon," he mused.

> Have I stayed [at Life University] too long? Did I miss being able to be out and go somewhere else, and have more of an athletic identity…like more of an environment of athletic identity and sort of competition in the traditional way that I'm a little more used to, and kind of like?

Ultimately, Max expressed appreciation, stating,

> I do feel super-grateful because [Life University has] allowed me to settle into myself a little bit more…It allowed me to be both [gay/bay and a head college coach], which was just amazing. And I didn't know if I thought that'd be possible.

Ruby maintained that Airedale University is "trying" but "not as far ahead" with LGBTQ inclusion as it could be. She acknowledged, "We have more protections" because Airedale is located in a not at-will state for employment termination. However, "[the] state is behind in a lot of ways, not only in education, but also in inclusivity." Ruby continued, "And so being at a state school, I think we're still a little further behind than I would have expected." Like Max, Ruby attributed some of the institutional culture and climate to Airedale's membership in NCAA Division III, which she suggested allows for "a lot more leeway" to be a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, when compared to NCAA Division I.

Among the participants, Jackie's institution seems to be the most socially conservative, with a culture and climate that encourages, if not requires, avoidance as the sexual identity management strategy for LGBTQ individuals. She stated that LGBTQ issues and identities are "just not really talked about" at Stanley University. "It's never really brought up," she continued. "But it's not like I'm shunned or criticized, per se, by anyone. That I know of at least." Jackie described a *don't ask, don't tell* culture at Stanley, wherein no one is encouraged to inquire about or disclose LGBTQ identity. Jackie shared an anecdote to illustrate how infrequently LGBTQ identity is discussed at her institution:

> This summer we had [an athletic] department meeting and we were obviously talking about the racial unrest and different things people had experienced in their life. So I think in that meeting a couple [of LGBTQ coaches] talked about being out and

> difficulties we may have had in the past…I think maybe the department got a little bit broader view of how, not only racially but sexually, people are discriminated against.

Ultimately, Jackie surmised that being at a private, faith-based institution, "We can't do many things where I feel like right now I'd be able to help out more." As expected, Jackie confirmed that her institution does not have any LGBTQ-inclusive policies, other than applicable federal and state laws.

Many participants bored further into the culture and climate of their institutions, specifically describing how their campus and athletics administrations influence their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Janet stated, "The support of your administration, I think that plays such a huge role." She asserted, "Even…if you were in the South, or if you're in a place that doesn't necessarily recognize [LGBTQ rights], if you feel supported by your supervisor or the people that you work with, everything else will essentially be irrelevant." Janet equated working at Lake State University to living in a "utopia" because of the Lake State administration's unconditional embrace and support of Janet and her wife.

> I felt when I got the position that I was able to come in fully as myself because that's how they hired me. They hired me as this basically gay, Black female that they wanted…to take care of the student-athletes and change the culture of the program. I think the support of the administration is a huge factor in being able to be yourself.

Janet remarked that the campus and athletic administrations set the tone for the entire institution, and she has not "faced any type of negativity or questions" about being a professionally out lesbian head college coach since her arrival. She explained,

> The administration plays a key role…They set the tone of what's going to be allowed. I think even just opening the door to allow me to hire my wife and just to be out, that everybody else is almost following their lead.

Janet credited the athletics administration with fostering personal and professional growth opportunities for her. "It's definitely helped me grow, even in this short time, to have such a supportive administration that just wants to see you grow, as a coach, but want to make sure that you're growing as a person too," she stated.

Kay focused most of her remarks on the influence of the athletic administration at Northern University. Despite Northern's athletics director being a lesbian woman, Kay expressed frustration with what she regards as male privilege and entitlement in the athletics department. She stated, "I look around and I feel like, 'Wow, we could use some sensitivity, diversity-type training.'…It's pretty aggravating and stressful to think that there are some individuals who are just clueless."

Ruby described her athletics administration, particularly under the previous athletics director, as "not very supportive" of her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She speculated whether the void of support stemmed, in part, from some athletics administrators themselves being LGBTQ and closeted, and begrudging her openness at work. "We had a female athletic director and she was not very accepting", Ruby said. "[My partner and I] went through [In Vitro Fertilization], but my partner was carrying my embryos…My athletic director, who was female, was not supportive…We ended up losing the pregnancy."

When asked about how his campus and athletics administrations influence his concept as a professionally out gay head college coach, Max responded, "Probably one of the most ultimate influencing factors is who your leader is, from president to AD because both of those can really

set different tones." Max recalled his interview for the head-coaching position at Life University. During the interview the athletics director posed the following scenario, "How would you handle this situation? You're on a road trip, and Sally comes up to and tells you that they don't want to room with Alex, because Alex is a lesbian. How would you navigate the situation?" Max recalled being positively surprised by the question because it demonstrated the value Life University places on LGBTQ inclusion.

Jackie's campus and athletics administrations appear to have had a negative influence on her concept of being a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She does not regard either administration as a proponent or supporter of LGBTQ inclusion.

> Stanley is not open to doing any formal programming on it. I have created proposals and stuff and sent them up the chain…Was sent up the chain and heard nothing back…At Stanley right now there's not much movement on anything. Which is sad.

To emphasize her perspective, Jackie described an incident involving the parents of a student-athlete, who alleged Jackie did not play their daughter who was straight, preferring instead to play a lesbian student-athlete. As the incident unfurled over the course of a softball season, Jackie never felt supported by her campus or athletics administrations, claiming they failed to follow up with her, or explain if and how the incident was resolved. "It was swept under the rug and ignored," Jackie stated matter-of-factly. "They didn't support me, but they didn't *not* support me. They just kind of stood back and let it ride."

Several participants delved more deeply into the influence of institutional culture and climate by specifically acknowledging the influence that individual athletics colleagues have on their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches. Ruby described her experience with colleagues, including male coaches, as overwhelmingly positive. "I think the other male

coaches are great and 90% of them are fantastic," she remarked. Ruby illustrated ways she and her family feel supported by colleagues.

> We'll go out after a game and [colleagues'] families will come and a couple of football coaches or my administrators and we call them friends and if we win a championship, we all go out to eat and hang out after games and that sort of thing with their spouses.

However, Ruby juxtaposed those reflections of camaraderie with frustrations with two particular colleagues who identify as LGBTQ. Ruby stated, "They say they're open and out, but they're really not." She hypothesized the two colleagues may be in a romantic relationship, thus, for reasons unexplained, complicating their own sexual identity management strategies. Consequently, "people make fun of it" and it "makes stuff weird" for Ruby and for many of her colleagues.

Es also remarked on the importance of her colleagues, acknowledging,

> Being in a college town [as a professional] is a little bit different than what it was for me as a player. And I think those relationships; you can really dedicate yourself and develop with a little bit of time. So I think that part is really cool about here.

However, Es conceded it has not been an entirely positive experience with her colleagues, particularly her male colleagues. "I've probably felt some judgment for the most part," she admitted. "I have worked with male coaches…for some of them it may be harder…to not only accept, but there's always some type of joke going on." But Es emphasized staunchly, "This is going to sound hard, but not that I really care about what people think."

Jackie commented that she often feels excluded by colleagues because of her lesbian identity, particularly her male colleagues. "[My wife and I are] never really invited to big social gatherings, outside of my close friend group in the department." Jackie continued, "Not to bash

guys, but it was more if the males had stuff going on, inviting their other buddies and their wives, we wouldn't be invited." Like Es, Jackie emphasized that she does not really care about not being invited to gatherings, but she still recognizes that the disparate treatment from colleagues is due to her sexual identity.

Remaining within the context of institutional culture and climate, most participants described their teams and student-athletes as having the most affirming influence on them as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Janet discussed how impactful her team's wholehearted acceptance of her and her wife has been. Ruby touted student-athletes as "a little more educated" on LGBTQ issues than other stakeholders, suggesting it has made her experience easier. Kay shared a story about when she was hired as the head coach at Northern University and was dating her now-wife. "We kept it quiet and we didn't talk about it and my athletes didn't even know." After several years of avoidance, a student-athlete finally asked a question about Kay's sexual identity. Kay recalled,

> It was like 2008 after four years of us being together. [The student-athlete] just came out and asked, "Are you…together?"…I've since seen her and thanked her. I said, "You have no idea how much that did, that one question, did for me." So, so thankful for her. It's crazy to think of where we were then and where we are now.

Kay's story was an example of how student-athletes have deeply and positively influenced her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. Not only have they demonstrated support for Kay and her family, they have also demonstrated what it means to live authentically and unapologetically. Kay continued,

> My athletes today, they openly go back and forth about who they're dating. One of them is dating a girl, one is dating a guy…They go back and forth like it's nothing and it's

> amazing. It's so heartwarming. Even though some of them still have issues with their parents and that stuff still certainly exists.

Es stated the relationship with her team is the most important one she has as a head coach, and expressed gratitude to coach a team with such an open, nonjudgmental mindset. She noted that her team comprises mostly international student-athletes, which she believes has made the team culture "a lot more open than when it was…all Americans." Regarding American student-athletes, Es asserted, "You definitely get a little bit more judgment there." Though she ruminated whether she is "just more comfortable with international players."

Max suggested that his team and student-athletes reflect the broader campus and departmental values around diversity, equity, and inclusion. He credited student-athletes with teaching him about LGBTQ issues and gender identity.

> The discussions that they have around gender in general are profoundly enlightening to me, and I'm always learning from them because I think they're at the forefront of…those changes. And the same thing with sexual orientation…They keep the ball rolling.

Max also acknowledged the inspiration that many of his student-athletes bring to the team and to his life. "Some people show up and they end up being some of the most inspirational people on our team, you know. And so the student athletes are definitely what bring me joy."

Jackie was not clear "if the team really values" LGBTQ inclusion, and immediately tethered that uncertainty with the institutional approach to LGBTQ issues and identity - "something we know is there, but we don't talk about it." Nevertheless, she declared, "If there's any motivation or reason to continue to live as I have, as I am, is really for student-athletes. I think it's important."

Parents of student-athletes were another component of institutional culture and climate that some participants identified as influential to their concept of being a professionally out LGB head college coach. Ruby's experience with parents has been positive. She whimsically reflected, "The parents have always been supportive…you can't say 100%, but they'll hang out with my partner…She has a better relationship sometimes than I do with them. She doesn't have to deal with playing."

Contrary to Ruby, Jackie stated sweepingly that parents are the only aspect of being a head coach that she does not like. Then she clarified with more precision, "Some parents." Her experience with the disgruntled parents of one particular student-athlete described previously has colored her perspective on parents writ large. When describing her overarching frustrations and disfavor with parents, Jackie immediately returned to the story of the parents who alleged Jackie was starting a lesbian student-athlete instead of their daughter because Jackie is a lesbian. She recounted the student-athlete's father posted belligerent comments on social media, which escalated to more threatening behavior.

> He started coming to games and started harassing me at games…her dad would come to every game that we had and harass me from the sidelines. At which point I had to have campus safety at games. I had to be escorted by umpires to and from [the dugout].

Family/Friend Groups

The participants often mentioned family (e.g., blood relatives and in-laws) and friend groups as examples of social structures that influence their concept of being a professionally out LGB head college coach. Janet commented on the importance of having social outlets with friends and acknowledged how "super fortunate" she and her wife have been not to have received "any pushback from family or friends."

Kay remarked that her family, which she identified as her mother, father, three brothers, and their respective families, has always accepted her lesbian identity. However, being in Canada, Kay infrequently sees them. As someone who is married with children, it is important for Kay and her wife to be able to visit both families. Kay stated,

> That's a big reason why we're still here. Her family's…30 minutes away. My family being in [Canada], there aren't very many places in the U.S. I could be and be able to drive home in a day…it's worked out really well.

Es has a mother, father, and one sister. However, she relies on her friends to support her lesbian identity, particularly those in her "own personal direct circle." She stated,

> My friends are very supportive…I have a few friends that are also gay, lesbian, and are out. Some others, not so much…the ones that are not so much are the ones that are back home. Just as a cultural background…maybe religion plays a role in it, maybe they don't have that exposure.

Es stated that the "biggest part is…to have those [LGBTQ] people with the same experience and being able to share that with them."

Ruby hinted that her parents may not fully understand her lesbian identity, but are nevertheless "extremely supportive." She bolstered the description by stating,

> [My parents] love my partner and my daughter and I've always taken whoever I was with to family gatherings…It never was, "Oh, you can't bring that person," or anything like that. I don't think anything has changed or impacted it.

Max indicated that his family, which he described as his mother, father, and brother, has had a major impact on his concept of being a professionally out gay head college coach – particularly his brother. He stated, "My brother had come out to me as a senior in high school,

so it's not like it was totally foreign…you know being gay wasn't totally foreign. And I embraced him when he did that."

Jackie stated succinctly, "Family has been awesome. My friends have been great, supportive. So I think socially everyone's been good." No more information was shared about Jackie's family.

Influences on Social Structures

Besides detailing how the various social structures have influenced the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, some participants discussed the inverse impact their identities have had on various social structures. Ruby suggested that because most LGBTQ coaches are closeted, it serves to reason that her being a professionally out lesbian will have a more consequential impact on social structures. "If we get more people who are out that will help and that's the problem," she stated.

Janet acknowledged that her intersecting "Triple Threat" identities as a Black lesbian woman have positioned her to positively impact colleagues and student-athletes.

She stated,

> I think having those three identities and being already in these marginalized areas, to be visible. I can think of times where it's been a positive impact, whether it's on either colleagues or players that I'm coaching, just being able to be in a position where I'm not what, sometimes, people expect.

Recognizing the gravity of that influence, Janet continued,

> What keeps me going is just…knowing, for some people, I might be the only interaction they have with a gay female, a Black female, a Black person, or a gay person…I'm really conscious of trying to make sure I show up as my full self, in all the spaces I'm allowed.

Roles and Responsibilities

This theme addresses the second guiding research question, "How do the constructed identities of professionally 'out' LGB head college coaches influence their overall coaching roles?". In this section I describe how the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence, and are influenced by, their roles and responsibilities. Although most participants do not consider their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches to have a major influence on their day-to-day responsibilities, there were four roles and responsibilities that many participants mentioned as influencing, and being influenced by, their identities: (a) fostering team culture and safe spaces, (b) serving as a role model and mentor, (c) recruiting prospective student-athletes and parents, and (d) being the "face" of their team and institution.

The participants discussed several head coach roles and responsibilities that have little, if anything, to do with their sexual identities. To emphasize the point, Janet recalled an instance when a fellow NCAA Division I women's basketball coach asked if Janet's lesbian identity had impacted her experience as a head coach. Janet responded unequivocally, "It's not even an issue. You're coaching your team, I'm coaching my team." In fact, Janet noted her Black identity seems to have more of an influence on some of her roles and responsibilities than her lesbian identity, namely her involvement with racial justice initiatives and anti-racist conversations within the athletics department, across campus, and with the local community.

Kay was challenged to think of ways her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian has influenced her head coaching responsibilities. "It's hard to separate what's been because I'm professionally out and what's been because I'm just trying to be the best coach I can be." Ruby similarly remarked, "Within the day-to-day head coaching stuff, but I don't think [my lesbian

identity] has anything to do with it." The perspective was further reinforced by Jackie, who stated, "I think whether I was out or not, I think I'd still be on the same path."

All participants maintained that every day as a head college coach is different. Ruby described, "Putting out fires a lot of times…Something comes up and all right, I'll put this down and have to start on something else. You never really start something and go to completion…at one setting." Max characterized being a head college coach as "physically, spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally a release and supportive and challenging, but just super dynamic. It's never boring, and sometimes it's really stressful, but it's never boring. Sometimes I wish it was more boring." Kay stated there "are no two years or no two scenarios the same" as a head college coach.

All of the participants noted the ebb-and-flow of the intercollegiate athletic calendar, distinguishing between in-season and out-of-season responsibilities. Janet stated,

> During the season, it's kind of tricky, because we're traveling and preparing for games, and all those same responsibilities will still exist out of season - it's probably a little easier to manage, and it'll give me an opportunity to spend a little bit more time with the players.

Kay also noted the intense travel schedule while in season.

> Usually we're in the middle of traveling to five different tournaments throughout this fall. So qualifying and figuring out our lineup and our roster, and booking hotels and vans and budgeting for all the expenses associated with those trips.

Max summarized his roles and responsibilities in the following statement, lamenting his inability to give any single responsibility his full attention or capacity.

> So, I am the travel manager, the equipment manager, the academic support person, the psychological support person, the life parent, the entertainment director, oh and the coach, and the strength and conditioning. Oh, and the recruiter, right?

Max is also an assistant athletics director at Life University, meaning he has more administrative responsibilities than most coaches. As the assistant athletics director, Max serves as the liaison with the admissions office, the academic support services, and the counseling and psychological services. Despite the frustrations with having so many responsibilities, he expressed affection and appreciation for them all.

Like Max, Jackie holds formal administrative roles at Stanley University. Besides being the head softball coach, Jackie is also the associate athletic director, the compliance director, the director of athletic facilities, and the senior woman administrator (i.e., the highest-ranking female administrator in her institution's athletics department). Like the other participants, she also identified responsibilities related to practice and competition, including travel, field maintenance, schedule modification, ordering equipment, and scouting opponents.

Es shared many of the same responsibilities of being a head college coach, including scheduling a competition season and managing travel logistics. Similarly, Janet discussed competition and practice, committee service, staff meetings, and "most importantly," making time for her student-athletes.

Most of the participants also commented on the administrative paperwork as a responsibility that consumes a large amount of time. Kay stated, "All the compliance forms like student travel, authorizations, itineraries, and all those that have to go through. So it's a lot of busy work." Ruby stated, "There's always paperwork it feels like." Of Max's myriad responsibilities, the only one he would gleefully forego is the administrative paperwork.

Several participants indicated that preparing for practice and competition were central responsibilities as a head college coach. To underscore the point, Kay noted that had it not been for the COVID-19 pandemic, she would have been hosting a tournament with 100 golfers from 17 institutions instead of participating in this study. “Work leading up to hosting such a big event is crazy,” she said. “Just running around, from buying cases of water to spraying tee boxes to setting up the driving range with the signs in the parking lot and getting tee gifts and gift bags in order.”

Jackie explained that she spends a lot of time on softball field maintenance, particularly when hosting home contests. “We at Stanley have to truck our own fields and do all of our own field maintenance”, she said. “So we're doing all field work, everything related to that.”

Ruby clarified that despite having a bit more flexibility when softball is out of season, practice and competition still consume a considerable amount of time. There is also a greater amount of time spent in the office completing administrative tasks, attending staff meetings, and serving on committees. During the softball season, time is primarily spent on practice and competition, scouting opponents, watching video, networking with other coaches, and planning banquets.

All the participants emphasized that the development of relationships with prospective student-athletes and current student-athletes is the most important head coach responsibility. Es discussed that international recruiting is a major focus for her. Before the pandemic, she traveled internationally to recruit prospective student-athletes. However, her international recruitment is now conducted exclusively via videoconference. She lamented that this is the new, if not permanent, post-pandemic recruiting reality.

> You know someone through the video but you don't really know them until you spend a little bit of time with them and actually know their parents. For me that's very important. It's very family oriented here and I need to make sure that they understand those things and that they're mature enough to be on the same page.

For Jackie, the recruiting responsibilities were what she enjoyed most when she began coaching, stating, "Once I was assistant coach I just fell in love with the recruiting and the getting to know players and working with them."

For Janet, Kay, and Ruby, developing relationships extends to their coaching staffs as well. Kay stated, "I have a GA, a graduate assistant, who every two years it's a new position. Always training and mentoring somebody new." Besides Janet, none of the participants have large coaching staffs. They have graduate assistants or one or two assistant coaches, some of whom are part-time or volunteer. Consequently, the seemingly endless roles and responsibilities of being a head coach are exacerbated by their lack of robust coaching staffs. As Es acknowledged, "It's just a lot of the times I kind of [run] the whole program myself."

None of the participants mentioned fundraising as a role and responsibility. However, I specifically asked if any of them were required or encouraged to fundraise to better understand whether their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches influence, or are influenced by, donors. Most participants indicated they do some team-centered fundraising like operating sport camps (Ruby) and conducting letter-writing campaigns (Jackie), rather than direct appeals to prominent donors.

Fostering Team Culture and Safe Spaces

The participants unanimously declared that it is a head coach's responsibility to foster a team culture that affirms, supports, welcomes, includes, and protects student-athletes.

“Ultimately we’re responsible,” Janet stated, arguing that an inclusive and safe team culture is mutually beneficial to student-athletes and to the coaching staff. She recalled introducing her wife during the first team videoconference. The student-athletes “all clapped” in unified support. “Everybody was super-excited,” she reflected fondly.

Janet shared three instances to illustrate how being a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach has fostered an inclusive team culture and safe space for her student- athletes, individually and collectively. Janet recalled the first occasion, which involved a student-athlete on her team who was in the process of coming out as LGBTQ to her family.

> [The student-athlete] comes from a very supportive Trump family…It was a good time, around election obviously, anxiety and tension was high, for her to kind of share that and open up about just trying to balance that out. So to be able to be there for her, just as a sounding board, and help her navigate obviously this time in her life, figuring out who she is, and then her family, as well.

Janet’s second occasion happened on National Coming Out Day, an annual awareness day to support and recognize LGBTQ people who disclose their sexual and gender identities.

> That's when I shared a couple poems that I wrote. There's a couple players that aren't the most talkative, but the one [player] screenshots and she texts me. It's like, “Thank you for sharing this.” That's actually how she came out to me. We were talking about the poem. Then one was already out before, and so we were able to kind of talk about that. Then we shared, just writing back and forth.

The third occasion highlighted the team’s affirming, supportive culture for LGBTQ teammates and coaches.

> I had a player come out…She told me, when I got the position here, that it was just refreshing for her to be able to share that part of herself with her coaches, because she couldn't have done it with her previous staff. And I know there's another player that identifies as lesbian, as well. And the best comment that she said to me is just the hardest conversation for her to have was with her team, but how they embraced her and celebrated her, that gave her the courage to come out to her parents. And so, I think the team that I have is just very open-minded and I think they genuinely want everybody to be the best version of themselves…And I was like, "You inspire me. I was literally 26. In college, I was totally opposite, I was trying to be with every football player because there's no way I'm gay." And so, it was really just a cool moment for her to feel confident enough to say it, but then also realize, too, that she has instant mentors for that part of her. But I think that doesn't happen if she doesn't have the type of teammates that help celebrate her and literally bought her a cake for congratulations. Yeah, they are super cute.

Kay places a premium responsibility on ensuring her student-athletes are "cared for and they're comfortable." However, she was not willing to directly attribute that responsibility to her sexual identity, positing,

> As a head coach, you always have to be aware of the messages you're sending and make sure athletes know that they're in a safe space around you. I think regardless of my identity, I would feel that way.

Like Janet, Kay praised the student-athletes for creating a welcoming team culture and expressed gratitude for the reciprocal impact she and the team have had on one another.

> We're just thankful for the perspective that I'm able to bring, know that because I provide an environment where they can show up and be themselves, and where we can appreciate each other and appreciate where we are, that that's going to lead to improvement.

She continued proudly,

> They're so open. We have the athlete with the long-term boyfriend who is giving advice to the newly out lesbian on…who to say yes and no to on her little profiles on the Internet…It's incredible the way they can be allies for each other and it's no big deal.

Es reinforced the sentiments expressed by Janet and Kay. "As a coach, you have those discussions everyday to make sure that your athletes are…feeling like they belong. And knowing that the space, the environment is open." Es explained two of her strategies to foster an inclusive, safe team culture are to encourage conversations about "taboo" topics and to hold her team and herself to the same standards of inclusive behavior. "Whatever [the student-athletes] expect from me is what I expect from them," she stated matter-of-factly.

"For the most part" Es feels like she has fostered a positive team culture and a safe space for LGBTQ student-athletes.

> I think we've had a couple in the past, athletes that were out. I think for the most part they…just were themselves. And I think that's definitely a culture that we try to be welcome with, because if I am the head of the program and I would have a problem with that or they would have a problem with that, then I think I would be doing something wrong.

However, Es expressed some concern that inclusive team cultures may inadvertently cause some student-athletes to feel "too comfortable" with their coaches, potentially leading to inappropriate fraternization.

> I think it's something that happens. And…some coaches do act on it. And I think that's probably one of the things that you really just have to be very careful with…I think when you are in a situation where you are the head coach, you are the one responsible also for not letting it get to that point.

Max acknowledged the responsibility he bears to foster an inclusive team culture and to provide an empowering space for student-athletes at Life University, who "are really finding their voice and having a transformative experience." Of his many coaching and administrative roles, Max declared, "The most critical one is providing a really trusted and safe environment for my team." Max clarified that it is "not just holding a title or a role" that allows Max to cultivate the team culture. Instead it is the inclusion-driven, day-to-day actions that he models as the head coach, as well as his sincere commitment to understanding complex social issues that allow him to have the greatest impact on student-athletes. "How I set up asking for pronouns and how I set up the norm of people, if they change their pronouns throughout the year…Those things are all simple role modeling as opposed to…a formal process set up." Max opined, "I just think there's many ways to be that 'role model' without being in this sort of formal standing... It's just like how do you navigate every day, can you create inclusive space every day intentionally?". Max proudly stated,

> [The team is] bringing everyone's amazing, authentic, intersectional identified selves to our practice and we talk about it, and we value that. And then we use them and do something as a unit that's sort of in addition to all those identities where we're working together towards a goal.

Jackie briefly described her team's culture in the following terms, "I think team-wise, we're doing pretty good. I think that…just me being out has helped…Like me bringing the kids

around." When asked if she ever counseled the lesbian student-athlete, who was at the center of the controversy discussed earlier, to ensure her overall well being, Jackie responded in a manner consistent with the avoidance strategy.

> I would assume she was aware of it. But basically the only thing I said to her was, as I tell everybody, "I'm playing the best person. So you're the best person at the position, so that's why I'm playing you." Other than that, there wasn't too much discussion with that player.

Ruby remarked that her "team is very accepting and it doesn't matter" if someone is LGBTQ. She qualified that she has never had a transgender student-athlete on her team, which she regards as "the next iteration" of inclusion. She assumes her team would be accepting of a transgender teammate, but admitted, "We haven't had to cross that bridge at this point that we know of." Ruby also acknowledged, "We haven't had that many couples on my team…so we haven't had much to deal with" regarding LGBTQ issues.

Role Model and Mentor

Although somewhat similar to fostering inclusive team cultures and safe spaces, all the participants discussed how their individual identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches have influenced their being role models and mentors to others.

Janet sees no greater responsibility as a head coach than modeling all of her intersecting identities with authenticity. Her primary "motivation for becoming a head coach is just seeing the type of influence" she can have on student-athletes. Janet has regarded herself as a mentor throughout her coaching career. However, she now recognizes that being a mentor and role model as a head coach holds "a different weight…, a different type of responsibility" than that of

an assistant coach. She enjoys witnessing student-athletes and colleagues "grow and mature," and values "helping them navigate their own goals."

Janet emphasized that "it's the last step before adulthood" for college student-athletes. Therefore, she deeply appreciates "just being in a position to be visible to them and to be accessible to them when they're navigating their own questions." Part of how Janet serves as a role model is being authentic as a lesbian. Janet stated, "I think it's important that we be consistent, that we're authentic." She also remarked how important it is that she and her wife model a "healthy relationship" for her student-athletes, stating, "I think it's important for us to help them kind of navigate that space, especially if we are comfortable with who we are…I don't care who they date, as long as they're in a healthy relationship."

Janet also serves as a role model to her coaching staff. She recognizes that many intercollegiate athletics coaches are "entry level," not far removed from being student-athletes themselves. Everyone on Janet's current coaching staff identifies as gay, including a 26-year old male-identified assistant coach. Janet recalled the day after her "coming out" media article was published, her male assistant coach expressed how meaningful it was to see Janet publicly and authentically embracing her lesbian identity, and credited that authenticity to "his own growth."

Kay explained the importance of being a role model as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She stated, "One of the coolest things about being a head coach is I've had several athletes have that [sexual identity] conversation with me in my office." She recognizes the significance of a head coach modeling authenticity, particularly for student-athletes who may also identify as LGBTQ. Kay stated,

> I think it's important…for our kids that are struggling with their identity. I think it's important for them to see that you can live a life, you can have a family, you can have a career, you can be successful and you don't have to live a lie or you can experiment.

Like Janet, Kay understands that as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach, she might be a role model to those beyond her student-athletes. She shared a story of a neighbor whose lesbian daughter was getting married and planned to have children with her wife. The neighbor confided in Kay, “You might not know this, but you’re a role model…Because of what they’ve seen you guys do.” Kay said contentedly, “I take pride in that…yeah, those would be some of the highlight moments.”

Ruby also places a high priority on being a professionally out lesbian role model for her student-athletes. She theorized, “The more people that are out and open, the easier it is for them to understand if they identify that way, that you can be successful.” Ruby continued on the theme of LGBTQ role modeling, reflecting on her own collegiate student-athlete experience.

> I am so thankful for the coaches and professors at the school that I went to, that they were good role models and you could see, even though they were closeted a little bit, but you could see there was an opportunity and they had partners and they were living the best lives…So I want to do the same thing.

Ruby understands that LGBTQ student-athletes may not have many LGBTQ role models, and that her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach “helps them, especially if they don’t have support from their family.” Ruby continued,

> Just that they can see people functioning within a career and being able to be who they are and not having to hide and being successful. The more people that are open and out, the easier it becomes for the next generation.

For Max, who identifies as a white, cisgender man, coaching several student-athletes of color at an historic women's institution, he admits that he has not been a ubiquitous role model across all racial and gender identities. However, regarding "queer identity," he strives to be a role model for, and a constant source of support to, his student-athletes. Max's strategy as a professionally disclosed gay head college coach is to model with authenticity.

> [The student-athletes] like to know more about you, and to be able to share a little bit of a life experience…That is one of the things that I can share with some of my student-athletes a little bit more, aside from being an athlete…This is sort of a shared journey that I can have with them. And it's helped foster good relationships, more trusting relationships in that way. Meaningful relationships.

Like Janet and Kay, Max's meaningful relationships reflect reciprocity of support, in which the student-athletes support him as much as he supports the student-athletes. Max regards being a gay role model and mentor as "just having someone in a position that holds identities that maybe someone is figuring out or grappling with or solidly knows. I think that can be hugely impactful." He continued, emphasizing his use of the normalization strategy, "Being able to talk about it in a normal way, in a sort of typical, straight way can be huge."

As a coach, Jackie values being a role model and cares deeply for her student-athletes. She views being a role model as "working with [student-athletes] throughout the year and seeing year to year how they're going to develop and how they come from just being in high school to growing into an adult." However, within the context of being a professionally disclosed lesbian head coach, she did not offer much insight, acknowledging simply, "I think it's helped some of my players, I believe, so that's maybe positive. Knowing that they can come talk to me. So that has helped."

Recruitment of Prospects and Parents

All the participants described how their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches have influenced the recruitment of prospective student-athletes and their parents. Conversely, they discussed how recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents has influenced their concepts of being professionally disclosed.

Janet explained that she is always mindful of her lesbian identity when recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents, even though her identity is not necessarily regarded negatively. As she explained, "There's…schools…that there's no explanation necessary…it's just a traditional family and there's not a lot of questions there. So I think just trying to navigate that part in terms of recruiting."

Kay has never perceived her lesbian identity to affect recruiting, nor recruiting to affect her identity. To illustrate the perspective, she recalled an instance when a media reporter contacted her, inquiring how her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach impacted her ability to recruit prospective student-athletes. She responded to the reporter, "No, it hasn't. There hasn't been one time where I've known that somebody has disliked me or chosen not to come to [Northern University] because of my identity."

Ruby's recruiting experiences align with Kay's, explaining that when she speaks with a prospective student-athlete or a parent, she refers to her partner and her daughter without concern or hesitation. "Honestly, I just am who I am," Ruby stated unabashedly. Max does not consider his identity as a professionally out gay head college coach to have much influence on his recruiting responsibilities. However, he conceded, "Being gay at a historical women's college might make some people feel even better about their student coming to that school." Es considers her identity as a professionally out lesbian head college coach to have actually helped

with recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents. "They know what they get," she said forthrightly. When recruiting, Es prefers to be "straight forward" about her lesbian identity, as "kind of a test" to determine if prospective student-athletes and their parents might be uncomfortable with a professionally out lesbian head coach.

> You like it, you like it. You don't, that's okay. And I think that's also played an important role there, with is that recruit going to be comfortable with it or is that going to be a problem? Or are the parents going to be a problem?

Es noted that it is typically the parents who "have the most difficult time understanding or maybe are puzzled…Because the kids themselves are just very open-minded. They don't really necessarily care." Ultimately, Es attributes her recruiting transparency with personal and professional confidence that has only emerged over the last couple of years. Previously, she never would have regarded her lesbian identity as a beneficial recruiting tool.

Jackie identified several ways that recruiting has influenced her concept of being a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. She stated, "When I'm recruiting student-athletes, I don't talk about it. Or when they come on campus, I don't. We don't really talk about, which you probably shouldn't. You shouldn't have to." She continued, "I'm recruiting them as student-athletes. Not necessarily what my background is. I'm recruiting them to play softball. My sexual orientation shouldn't have any weighing on whether they choose to come to Stanley or not." When asked if her lesbian identity has ever been brought up during recruiting, and how she has navigated that, Jackie stated, "I would just say I'm married with two kids…But not whether it's a male or female." Jackie's response suggests that recruiting has had a significant impact on her concept of being a professionally out lesbian head college coach and

that she uses the avoidance strategy when recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents.

"Face" of Team/Representative of Institution

Some of the participants mentioned that their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches have influenced their role as the "face" of their team or a representative of their institution. Janet acknowledged the heightened visibility she now has as the head coach of her team.

> Head coaches are definitely the faces of athletic departments and universities. And I think the other influence is just being on different committees within the athletics department or across campus…I think it's important to be comfortable being that face.

Janet continued, "I'm in this role and I recognize…that visibility is important." She emphasized

> just how much weight and responsibility that a head coach has, of just how they show up. Whether it's practice, whether it's…being on a couple different committees, how they show up. Then realizing that often I might be the only Black person at the table, I might be the only female. In my case here, I'm the only Black female in the entire athletic department.

Part of the reason Janet wanted to be a head college coach was "to be the face and be the leader of the [women's basketball] program…[to] help in a lot of different ways, not just our players, but across campus."

Max also commented on the influence his identity as a professionally disclosed gay head college coach has had on being the face of the program. He stated, "I do feel like, especially being a coach, I think there's a lot of projection on to you…you know the eyes are on you a little

bit more." But Max also acknowledged that being a professionally out disclosed head college coach has

> provided the opportunity to be a representative of the [LGBTQ] community and try to advocate for safer spaces…When I reflect on it, I feel like I've done a lot. And being able to be out allowed me to do that.

Opportunities and Limitations

When asked about opportunities and limitations that might exist for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, most participants focused on limitations or reductions of opportunities.

Janet believes that limitations are primarily levied by external factors, but are also self-imposed by professionally disclosed LGB head coaches as a form of self-protection. "You don't want to have to deal with the hurt, the rejection of knowing, especially when you're qualified for something," she stated. Janet described how many LGBTQ coaches weigh the potential consequences of coming out professionally. "Am I going to lose my job if I do this article, if I take my wife here, if I go there?" she rhetorically asked. "That's why people most of the time are in the closet, because you don't want to lose your job, or you don't want to do this."

Kay did not identify any personal limitations or "negative impacts" from being a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach. However, she acknowledged that when she has previously considered other professional pursuits outside of coaching, she has gravitated toward "those companies, groups, organizations that bring awareness to women in sports or the LGBTQ community." She simply stated, "I think that those would be opportunities."

Ruby also did not feel like she has been "treated differently" as a result of being professionally disclosed. She reinforced her perspective, "I've never really felt that my sexuality dictated very much in my life. I'm just who I am."

Although Jackie did not think her identity as a professionally disclosed lesbian head college coach has influenced professional opportunities or limitations, she shared some broader perspective and experiences. Jackie stated, "For me at Stanley, it hasn't affected me at all. I've worked up to where I am. [However], I would think if I would ever want to be an athletic director, that might play into it."

Es asserted it is very easy for administrators to generically say, "We're done, we're not compatible," particularly now that federal law prohibits blatant termination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. "I think there's some jobs that are definitely not looking for a professionally out lesbian," she remarked. "In some places…the fact that you are professionally out is already a minus when you're going against another person for a job." Es recalled that it happened when she was a club tennis coach. Not only did she feel that her lesbian identity limited professional opportunities for her, but she felt the reasons were based on the baseless stereotype that LGBTQ people are sexually deviant.

Max's self-regard as "not enough" also qualifies as a professional limitation. As he noted,

> Being not a part of the majority identity around sexual orientation already holds this unspoken layer of being different, or other, or not enough, and then I think there's pressure to perform because I put on myself an expectation. I think a lot of people probably experience this based on just existing in the world, because I do trust and feel like most people are doing the best they can almost all the time. But it is funny that I

> myself am projecting on that I'm not doing the best I can or that I need to do more, or that I need to have a bigger team or do a better job with recruiting.

Max's comment suggests self-perception, projection, and fear may contribute to professional limitations, by convincing oneself of a perceived and/or actual lack of qualification.

As Max considers his next coaching or athletics administration opportunities, he is more cognizant of how his identity as a professionally disclosed gay head college coach may impact his employment prospects.

> I have been thinking a little bit more around the professional out identity in terms of if I were to continue coaching,..how that would impact things. It's a balance of questioning and then also saying, "Well, who cares?". I mean if someone has an issue with it, then I guess I don't want to be there anyway, because ultimately, I'd want to be somewhere that feels really welcoming at the most.

The stereotype of sexual deviancy has also crept into Max's consciousness as he considers his professional future. "I've been also branching into the admin side...still being in athletics potentially, but doing administration…that feels like maybe even a safer space to be able to be out." He suggested that the relationships with student-athletes feel "less intimate" with athletics administration than with coaching, stating, "There's such a powerful connection with the coach/student-athlete relationship…I think in administration it gets to be different."

Chapter Summary

Having interpreted the data by distilling the multiple interviews of the participants into coded themes, I have a greater understanding of the two central research questions:

1. How do professionally "out" LGB head college coaches construct their identities?

2. How do the constructed identities of professionally "out" LGB head college coaches influence their overall coaching roles?

Based on the thematic analysis, it appears the participants manage their sexual identities with aspects of visibility, as well as avoidance, authenticity, and normalization strategies. The participants also construct their identities based on several influential social structures, particularly social norms and expectations, institutional culture and climate, and family and friend groups.

The participants described how their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence, and are influenced by, their overall coaching roles and responsibilities, most notably, fostering inclusive team cultures and safe spaces, being a positive, affirming role model and mentor, recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents, and serving as the "face" of the team and a representative of the institution. As part of the discussion about overall coaching roles and responsibilities, the participants described the professional opportunities or limitations that exist because of, or in spite of, their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. In Chapter Six I discuss and interpret the findings of my study, by drawing correlation with or distinction from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Additionally, I put forth practical implications for stakeholders in intercollegiate athletics and higher education, and limitations of the study so as to advance the scholarship.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

There are few professionally disclosed LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches, particularly head coaches. For reasons ranging from termination, demotion or loss of benefits, to limited ability to fulfill coaching responsibilities, to feelings of isolation and being "othered," most LGB head college coaches feel it is in their best interest – and the interest of those about whom they care – to remain professionally closeted. However, there is a small, yet increasing number of head college coaches who professionally identify as LGB. This research study is one of the first to explore the experiences of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches.

In this chapter, I briefly summarize the study's problem, purpose, guiding questions, and significance, as well as the literature on which my study is based. I also concisely describe the research design and methods used to operationalize the study. This chapter includes an overview, discussion, and interpretation of the findings. The interpretations serve as a through line between the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the data collected for this study, drawing parallels, associations, and divergences.

Chapter Six is not only a recapitulation of chapters heretofore presented, but also forward-focused, discussing the implications of this study, as well as its limitations. This chapter is an abbreviated summary of the full dissertation, ranging from inquiry, existing research, execution, discussion of findings, and implications for others. It is with hope and expectation that this study advances the scholarship and understanding of professionally disclosed LGBTQ head college coaches.

Summary of the Research Study

There is a paucity of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches - and consequently, a dearth of research exists about their experiences. However, a small but increasing number of LGB head college coaches are deciding to come out in their professional contexts. The imperative of this qualitative, six-chapter study was to better understand the identities, experiences, expectations, contexts, cultures, roles, responsibilities, opportunities and limitations, strategies, and perspectives of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Specifically, the guiding research questions were:

- How do professionally "out" LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches construct their professional identities?
- How do these constructed professional identities of LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches influence their coaching roles?

In Chapter One, I provided an overview of the problems many LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches face if and when they professionally disclose their sexual identities. Specifically, intercollegiate athletics, and sport writ large, are a safe haven for homophobic, heteronormative, heterosexist, and sexist norms, cultures, structures, and behaviors, causing most LGBTQ coaches to remain closeted for fear of negative consequences – it is simply more prudent and pragmatic to remain silent about their sexual identities than to professionally disclose. However, research suggests that a coach's decision not to disclose their sexual identity may render its own negative consequences, such as feelings of inauthenticity, insincerity, and dishonesty with student-athletes, thus feeling ineffective as a coach overall (Orlov & Allen, 2014). Many higher education institutions and athletics departments breed and reinforce cultures that range from outright hostility and prohibition to silence and indifference, made strikingly apparent by the absence of LGBTQ-inclusive nondiscrimination policies, statements, and codes of conduct

(NCAA, 2018d). Chapter One also introduced several key terms and concepts, and provided a snapshot overview of the dissertation.

Chapter Two comprised a review of the literature on which my study is based, addressing three central concepts. The first concept was heteronormativity, heterosexism, sexism, and homophobia in sport/intercollegiate athletics. As part of this concept, I explored how oppressive norms around sex, gender, and sexuality impact men and women differently in sports, including intersections around race. The second concept of import was the general state of higher education for LGBTQ individuals. Sexual and gender minority students, faculty, and administrators have been historically underrepresented and disenfranchised within the context of higher education. Coaches are uniquely situated in athletics departments, which are concurrently part of a broader university structure, culture, and operation. The third and final concept central to the literature review was sexual identity management and professional disclosure. This concept was a way to develop a theoretical framework for how LGBTQ individuals develop, manage, and disclose their sexual identities, particularly in professional settings. Literature regarding professional disclosure of LGB intercollegiate athletics coaches is meager. Most literature regarding sexual identity disclosure within intercollegiate athletics centers on LGBTQ student-athletes (Fink et al., 2012, Stoelting, 2011). Consequently, it was necessary to draw from other areas of higher education, particularly academia, due to coaching's fundamental and deeply rooted link to teaching (Jones, 2006). With the overlap of all three concepts, I developed a theoretical framework to consider professional disclosure in intercollegiate athletics.

In Chapter Three I detailed the research design and specific methods used for the dissertation. Situated largely in queer theory, the dissertation, in part, challenged heteronormative and patriarchal discourse, founded on the socially constructed sexual binary of

heterosexuality and homosexuality and the gender binary of man and woman, as well as theorized haranguing regarding those labeled “deviant” if straying beyond categorical norms (Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1978; Gamson, 2000; Kimmel & Plante, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990). I interviewed six current (at the time of the interviews) NCAA intercollegiate athletics head coaches, who self-identify as professionally disclosed as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Limiting the participants to head coaches underscored the heightened stakes, profile, and responsibilities of leading a sports team, and allowed the study to draw more closely the parallel of coaching to teaching, on which much of the literature for this research rests (Jones, 2006). Maintaining allegiance to the constructivist paradigm, there was no qualifying criterion to determine “professional disclosure.” Nor was there an initial criterion restriction for participants due to the relative anomaly of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. In short, it was important to cast a wide net. I identified participants using snowball sampling, using strategic solicitation strategies (Mertens, 2015; Patton, 2002). Ultimately, nine coaches expressed interest in participating in the study. One did not qualify because the individual was no longer a head college coach. Two individuals who initially expressed interest did not return subsequent communications. The six remaining coaches were accepted as participants. I conducted at least one semi-structured, individual interview with each of the six participants. Four participants obliged in a second semi-structured, individual interview. Two participants never returned communication following their first interview.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all 10 interviews were conducted via videoconference between September 2020 and February 2021. For the study, I used interview protocols (see Appendices E and F) to ensure a consistent framework for each interview, while concurrently allowing flexibility to establish a rapport with the participants or to abruptly pivot the focus to an

unexpected topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes. The shortest interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, the longest lasted approximately 75 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I engaged in extensive memoing to better understand the data and to recognize emergent themes, interpretations, relationships, researcher bias, and any necessary changes to the study's structure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Mertens, 2015). I also conducted member-checks in between the first and second interview of each participant, and prior to the dissertation defense.

Another central element of my qualitative data analysis was the reduction and categorization of the data, known as coding (Mertens, 2015). Specifically, I initiated three phases of grounded theory coding: (a) in vivo coding, (b) focused coding, and (c) axial coding. To facilitate the coding processes, I used NVivo software to analyze the qualitative data I had collected, including both structural and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016). Chapter Three also addressed ethical considerations, including the protection of participants through the IRB process, my positionality as a researcher, and the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study.

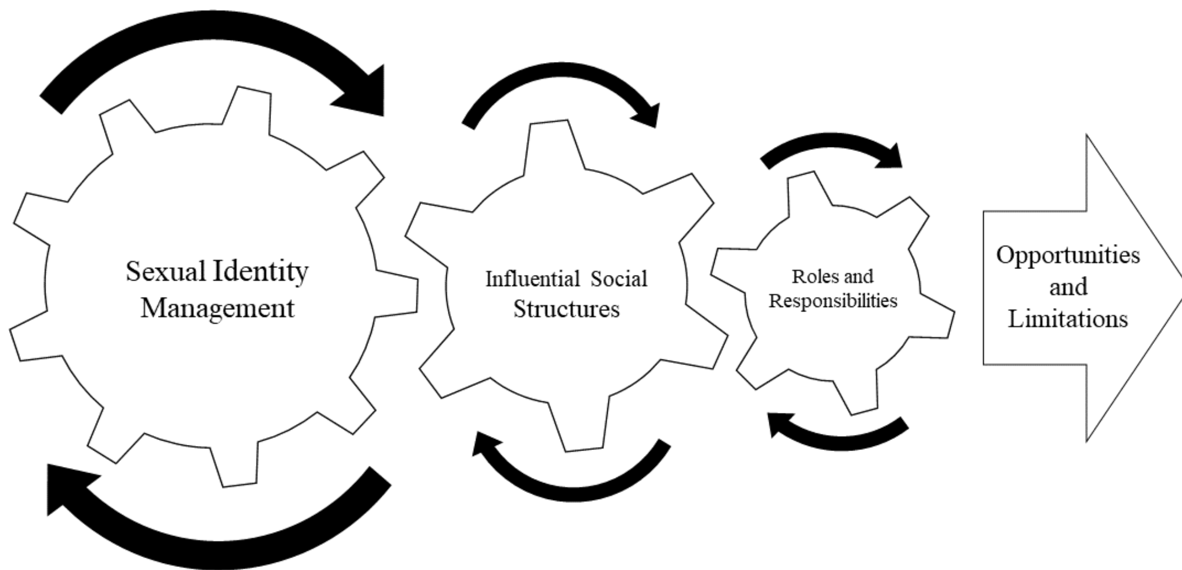
In Chapter Four I briefly introduced the reader to each participant. By providing rudimentary, but consequential, context about the identities and experiences of each participant regarding sexual orientation and sport, I hoped to introduce a more cogent and coherent analysis of the data in Chapter Five. Moreover, each participant's individual identities, narratives, and experiences required dedicated and sovereign space to remain steadfast to the constructivist paradigm.

In Chapter Five, I presented the findings of my research, framed around the two guiding research questions. The chapter was organized with the following four themes: (a) sexual identity management, (b) influential social structures, (c) roles and responsibilities, and (d)

opportunities and limitations. The first two themes addressed the first research question, by describing participants' sexual identity management strategies and the social structures that inform how they construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. The final two themes focused on the second research question, describing how the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence, and are influenced by, their roles and responsibilities, including professional opportunities and limitations.

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Findings



The first theme, sexual identity management, captured how the participants construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches through sexual identity management strategies, particularly avoidance, authenticity, and normalization. Visibility was a major factor in how several participants constructed and managed their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches, primarily through public presence, family visibility, and physical expression.

The second theme, influential social structures, highlighted the numerous social structures that influence how, when, and to what degree the participants construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Specifically, the section focused on the most frequently discussed social structures: (a) social norms and expectations, (b) institutional culture and climate, and (c) family and friend groups. Lastly, and conversely, I briefly detailed how some of the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches have influenced social structures.

The third theme, roles and responsibilities, focused on how the identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence, and are influenced by, their coaching roles and responsibilities. Although most participants do not consider their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches to have a major influence on their day-to-day coaching responsibilities, there were four roles and responsibilities that several participants mentioned as impacting, and being impacted by, their identities: (a) fostering team culture and safe spaces, (b) serving as a role model and mentor, (c) recruiting prospects and parents, and (d) being the "face" of the team and institution.

The fourth and final theme, opportunities and limitations, addressed how the participants felt their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches created professional opportunities or hindrances for them. Some participants felt that their professional disclosure presented more risk, limitations, and reductions of professional opportunities. Other participants were opaque or waffled with their sentiments, not regarding it as having much impact, and leveling their success as meritorious. There was nominal sentiment that their identities enhanced or emboldened professional opportunities.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this dissertation was not to draw wholesale conclusions about being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. Instead it was to explore the phenomenon based on the stand-alone experiences of six individual participants. This is a largely understudied population of coaches that necessitates additional focus, research, and deliberation. To further bolster the necessity of this research, it was important to draw correlation and distinction between the research findings and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Such is the intent of Chapter Six. Chapter Two laid the foundation on which to ground my research questions, design my research, select my methods, and frame my paradigmatic and epistemological inquiry. It is important to return to that foundation to uncover newfound information, fill in gaps, assert implications, and remain forthright where limitations still exist.

How Do Professionally "Out" LGB Head College Coaches Construct Their Identities?

This study successfully addressed how six professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches construct their identities. This is largely uncharted scholarship, informed by previous literature about sexual identity management and professional disclosure, the general state of higher education for LGBTQ individuals, particularly in academia, and cultural and systemic heteronormativity, heterosexism, sexism, and homophobia in sport.

It brought to light concepts of intersectionality, which were considered in the literature review, but limited largely by gender and race (Anderson, 2002; Baird, 2002; Bowleg, 2008; Carty, 2005; Coakley, 2007; Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Davis-Delano, 2014; Ferguson, 2015; Fink, 2012; Froyum, 2007; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Griffin, 1998; Griffin & Taylor, 2012; hooks, 1981; Krane & Barber, 2005; Majors & Billson, 1992; Plummer, 2006; Pronger, 1990; Sankoka et al., 2005; Southall et al., 2011; Twin, 1979; Wade, 2008). In this study I found that the intersectionality of sexual identity and gender, race, nationality and/or faith perspective were

principal factors in how the participants constructed their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Several female participants regarded sexism as the greatest threat to their success as head college coaches. That is, they felt that being women in sport, rather than lesbians, presented the greatest challenges. The literature supports this finding. Languishing and even dwindling numbers of female college coaches continue to plague intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2017a; Pickett, 2009; WideRights, 2012). For women who manage to defy the odds of being college coaches, the literature argues they must often endure considerable criticism, both macro- and microaggressive, for daring to occupy space in the masculinized institution of sport (Davis-Delano, 2014; Fink, 2012; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Griffin, 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005; Twin, 1979). Although none of the participants explicitly associated a betrayal of feminized gender scripts with the alleged sexism in sport, there were recurrent inferences that they, as women, do not belong in sport, particularly in prominent leadership roles.

The study also drew a confounding correlation between gender and sexual identity. For example, data suggest there is no disproportionate presence of LGB women in sport (Davis-Delano, 2014). However, the overwhelming majority of participants in this study identified as LGB women (5) compared to gay or bisexual men (1). How then might the literature explain the inordinate representation of LGB women in this study? Griffin (1992) and Keats (2016) argued that homophobia and heterosexism are more pronounced and intentional in women's athletics than in men's. Specifically, they suggested that stereotyping women who participate in sport as lesbians is meant to deter women broadly from encroaching on what has historically been an impervious masculine institution. Moreover, they maintained that popular women's sports, like softball and basketball, have been stereotyped as "lesbian sports" as a way to uphold the gendered social order (Griffin, 2012; Hardin & Gree, 2009; Reimer, 1997; Travers, 2006). This

notion was captured by Ruby and Jackie, who described the sport of softball as a stereotypically "lesbian sport," despite their respective teams having fewer than two disclosed LGBTQ student-athletes on them. As a result of these suggested efforts to pit sexual orientation and gender against one another in women's sports, a cultural assumption may exist that women in sport are more likely to be lesbians. This, in turn, may invite LGB women to be more willing to disclose their sexual identities in sport than LGB men. This speculative explanation suggests that female student-athletes and coaches may experience a compounded hostility at the intersection of their gender identity and sexual orientation, which may likewise make it relatively easier for LGB women in sport to disclose their sexual identities more than men. Without persuasion or suggestion, the participants overwhelmingly acknowledged LGB female head college coaches may find it comparably more seamless to disclose professionally than gay or bisexual men perhaps because of the fabricated cultural association – even expectation – of lesbians in sport. That said, the participant sample is simply too small, and there are too many unknown factors, including the whims of chance, to confidently rest on this hypothetical analysis.

Unlike several of the female participants, Max does not seem to experience sexism in a way that subverts an assumption of heterosexuality, a theory detailed by Griffin and Taylor (2012). Max agreed that it might be harder for men, particularly men of color, to disclose as gay or bisexual in sport because of the inherent and seemingly fixed hyper-masculinization and heteronormativity of sport (Anderson, 2002). However, Max wonders if he has had an anomalously easier experience than most gay or bisexual men in sport because of his employment at an historic women's college and because he coaches a sport that is not team-based or contact-heavy, two characteristics of sport commonly associated with heterosexuality and hyper-masculinity (Anderson, 2002; Pronger, 1990).

Race was a prominent point of focus, particularly for Jackie and Es, who identify as Black and Hispanic/Latina, respectively. Their experiences support scholarship that asserts sport is markedly more complicated for women of color, particularly Black women, to navigate. Women of color, especially Black women, confront the intersecting realities of sexism, heterosexism, and race, which have often caricatured them as aggressive, hyper-sexualized, or altogether invisible (Collins, 1991, 2000; Ferguson, 2015; hooks, 1981). Janet described herself multiple times as a "triple threat" or "three strikes" because of her intersecting identities as a Black lesbian woman. Es described her intersectional experience as an Hispanic/Latina, Brazilian, lesbian woman. Specifically, she explained that many people in her home country of Brazil, particularly men, cannot conceive that she embodies all those identities. Janet and Es's testimonials support Parks et al.'s (2004) assertion that lesbians of color "must simultaneously confront and learn to manage the triple oppressions of sexism, heterosexism, and racism that exist both within the dominant culture and within their own racial/ethnic communities (p.252). Their experiences also support Rosario et al. (2014), who argued that LGB individuals of color, particularly women, may feel hamstrung in their sexual identity development and management because of cultural factors, including heteronormative family structures, conservative gender roles and values, and pervasive homophobia. Although some literature found nominal racial or ethnic variation in sexual orientation, behavior, identity, disclosure, or developmental milestones, the experiences of Janet and Es suggest race and ethnicity have significantly contributed to their identities as professionally disclosed lesbian head college coaches (Grov et al., 2006; Rosario et al., 2004; Whitam, Daskalos, Soblewski, & Padilla, 1998). The intersectional impact of race and ethnicity and sexual orientation warrant further consideration.

Two intersecting identities emerged in this study that were not explicitly explored in the literature review: religion and nationality. Janet, Es, and Jackie, described their Christian identities as deeply impactful to their constructed identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Each recounted a lifetime of insufferable guilt and denial imposed by religions that commanded a zero-sum rejection of their lesbian identities for the sake of salvation. Eventually, Janet and Es recalibrated their faith perspectives to harmoniously coexist with their lesbian identities. Janet now places greater priority on the personal relationship with her Christian god, rather on the imposed doctrine of her Christian denomination. Es's faith has evolved from dogmatic Catholicism to a more fluid, agnostic spirituality. The intersection of faith and sexual identity has proven more complicated for Jackie, who at the time of her interview was working at a Catholic institution, which she believed regarded homosexuality as objectively immoral. Therefore, the intersection of Jackie's faith and sexual identity was particularly fraught with uncertainty, trepidation, and discontent. Due to the number of faith-based institutions of higher education in the United States, this is warrants further exploration within the context of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches.

For Kay and Es, their respective identities as a Canadian nonpermanent resident and a Brazilian nonpermanent worker in the United States have had a tremendous impact on their constructed identities as professionally disclosed lesbian head college coaches. Their experiences have been distinct, with variance across race, ethnicity, religion, language, and other cultural categories. Kay's Canadian identity has substantively intersected with her sexual identity in a way that largely elicits pride. She and her American wife became one of the first same-sex couples in their Midwest state to apply for a spousal green card. They have since had

two children and have embraced a multinational family unit. Kay does not seek American citizenship, nor is she frightened to be without it.

Contrarily, Es's Brazilian identity intersects with her sexual identity in a way that evokes steadfast caution. Her Brazilian upbringing, framed by Catholicism, has shaped Es's lifelong wariness. Like Kay, Es is not a United States citizen. However, it is not of her own proclivity. Moreover, Es lacks several of Kay's legal safeguards. Thus, the uncertainty of being a nonpermanent worker in the United States is constant, and impacts the degree to which Es is willing to professionally disclose her lesbian identity or advocate for LGBTQ inclusion. Nationality was not accounted for in the literature review and warrants further inquiry, particularly the intersecting factors and identities that shape the experiences of international LGBTQ coaches in the United States.

In addition to the intersectional identities within the heteronormative, heterosexist, homophobic, and sexist context of intercollegiate athletics, the participants' identities as LGB head college coaches were shaped largely by sexual identity management strategies. As the literature and the findings of this study both suggest, sexual identity management falls on a continuum, wherein disclosure is situationally defined, and dependent on context, occasion, stakeholders, risk/benefit assessment, and anticipated personal toll (Button, 2001, 2004; Cain, 1991; Fink, 2012; Goffman, 1963; Ragins et al., 2007). Similar to the findings by Ragins et al. (2007), several participants described the management of their LGB identity as a fatiguing, incessant burden, which resides front of mind with each new encounter. Disclosure of sexual identity is not a one-time instance, but often is a constant, deliberative, and anxiety-provoking consideration that lasts a lifetime for LGB individuals. Several participants emphasized supplemental complications when accounting for the intersectionality of gender, race and

ethnicity, religion, and nationality. As suggested by the literature, the participants described potential negative consequences they consider when professionally disclosing their sexual identities, including enhanced stress, alienation and isolation, termination of employment, loss of professional credibility, and lower pay (Badgett, 1995; Button, 2001; Croteau, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Waldo, 1999). Reading the contextual cues and topography of their particular circumstances, and managing their sexual identities accordingly, is an essential skillset the participants have refined, personally and professionally, for decades.

In this study, participants' sexual identity management strategies in the workplace generally fell into one of three categories: avoidance, authenticity, and normalization. These categories shared some striking commonalities with Woods' (1994) workplace sexual identity management model. For example, the model by Woods (1994) included *avoiding* as one of the three key management strategies. However, unlike Woods' (1994) *avoiding* strategy, the participants in this study who used the avoidance strategy did not falsely represent or claim heterosexuality. Instead, they leveraged the preexisting heteronormative culture to their advantage, disclosing nothing of their LGB identity, and allowing a default presumption of heterosexuality or asexuality to seep into the consciousness of those with whom they interacted – a strategy also described by Button (2001). Jackie was the participant who most commonly used the avoidance strategy, particularly when recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents.

The participants also used a strategy I interpreted as authenticity. This strategy is tantamount to the *integration* strategy described by Woods (1994), wherein LGB employees explicitly disclose their sexual identities to others. As mentioned previously, a presumptive heteronormative culture exists in college athletics. Therefore, the authenticity strategy necessitated the participants disclose their sexual identities intentionally and unambiguously,

such as coming out as LGB to student-athletes, bringing a same-sex spouse or partner to work functions, or mentioning a same-sex family in an online athletics bio. Authenticity, as explained by the participants and Woods (1994), is ineffective when reliant on innuendo, insinuation, and deductive inference.

I interpreted the participants' third strategy to manage their workplace sexual identities as normalization. This strategy deviated entirely from the Woods (1994), whose third identity management strategy was *counterfeiting*, wherein an individual constructs or adopts a false heterosexual identity. None of the participants described using a comparable *counterfeiting* strategy, likely because they fundamentally consider themselves to be professionally disclosed as LGB. Therefore, outright denial of LGB identity would be seemingly contradictory and incompatible.

Normalization was a more of a sub-strategy the participants used to complement and buttress either the avoidance strategy or the authenticity strategy, depending on the intent of its use. Some participants described normalizing as a tactic to subdue their LGB identities and assimilate to the heteronormative culture of sport. Essentially, the more "normal" they looked, behaved, and thought, the more palatable they would be to others. The participants often compared their identities, characteristics, even their same-sex relationships with heteronormative ideals. The more they could approximate heterosexuality - short of *counterfeiting* a straight identity, the easier it would be for people to accept them. Some of the literature supports this finding of normalization, coupled with avoidance, particularly for women. Several scholars found that regardless of sexual identity, women in sport often pander to feminine norms so as not to be labeled a lesbian (Baird, 2002; Davis-Delano, 2014; Griffin, 1992; Stoelting, 2011). For the women in sport who are LGB, this is a way not to be "too gay," according to Janet.

As the lone male participant, Max raised a pragmatic explanation for normalizing LGB identity. Specifically, he noted that the more heteronormative his gay and bay identities are, the easier it is for others to understand and embrace him as a gay and bay person. This perspective supports Anderson's (2002) research on openly gay male athletes on predominantly straight teams, who were found to normalize their identities by censoring LGBTQ discussion and engaging in discussions about heterosexuality with their teammates. However, Max's explanation deviates from Anderson's (2012) more contemporaneous research, which found that openly gay male student-athletes were more willing to disclose their sexual identities to their teammates than the 2002 participants because of reduced concerns about safety, marginalization, or social isolation.

Some participants also described normalization, when paired with authenticity, as a strategy to dismantle LGB stereotypes and assumptions. This framing of normalization is not rooted in shame, nor does it complement the avoidance strategy. Instead it allows participants to disclose their LGB identities in ways that erode the commonly envisaged caricature of LGB people as bizarre, unorthodox, counter-cultural, deviant, and dangerous, reserved only for the frays of society. Normalization, when tethered to authenticity, was not a strategy participants utilized as a way to assimilate to the heteronormative culture and to diminish their LGB identity. Instead it was described as a way to emphasize that all sexual identities, not just heterosexuality, are normal and fundamental to humanity and should be regarded as such. Effectively, their LGB identities and same-sex relationships and family structures are, in and of themselves, normal.

Similar to the literature, the participants used sexual identity management strategies individually and in various combinations, dependent on multi-dimensional social and organizational contexts and their particular stage of sexual identity development (Badgett, 1995;

Button, 2001; Cain, 1991; MacCarthy, 1994; Pollack, 1991; Ragins et al., 2007). Although age was not a predominant factor in the participants' management, the evolution of their sexual identities was a topic raised by most participants, particularly Kay, Jackie, and Es. This is consistent with the literature (Cass, 1979; Dank, 1971; D'Augelli, 1994; Fox, 1995; Gagnon & Simon, 1968; Hooker, 1956; Leznoff & Wesley, 1956; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Simon & Gagnon, 1967; Rosario et al., 2004; Troiden, 1979; Warren, 1974; Weinberg et al., 1994). Because this study exclusively addressed head college coaches, thus suggesting a relatively advanced age, it suggests it may be easier for a head college coach who has had time to evolve and understand their sexual identity as they get older. Interestingly, all the participants except Janet knew they were LGB when they were undergraduate students or younger. However, as the findings of this study show, most of their journeys toward professional disclosure were lengthy and complicated – and continue.

Generally, the participants who most frequently utilized an authenticity strategy had more positive feelings about their LGB identities at work, similar to Button's findings (2001, 2004). However, in this study I found a more nuanced association between disclosure and overall psychological well being than other scholars (Bredemeier et al., 1999; Cain, 1991; Cass, 1979; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Coulombe & de la Sablonniere, 2015; Fox, 1995; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; McNaught, 1993; Moradi, 2009; Woods, 1994). Specifically, the results of this study suggest that the overall stress may be comparable, regardless of sexual identity development or management, because of the omnipresent threat of stigma in a heterosexist culture. This is comparable to the findings of other scholars (Button, 2001; Cain, 1991; Charbot-Mason, et al., 2001; Goffman, 1963; Ragins et al., 2007; Stoelting, 2011; and Waldo, 1999). In other words, for participants like Jackie, who most frequently described using the avoidance

strategy, there were apparent stressors associated with the wrong people finding out her sexual identity. However, even for a participant like Janet, who described using the authenticity strategy most frequently, she also acknowledged stressors with being a professionally disclosed lesbian head coach, particularly as a Black woman. Generally, there was a sense that those who were professionally disclosed in multiple ways, and with various stakeholders, the more content they seemed to be with their circumstances.

A major theme of the study was how the participants used visibility to construct their identities as LGB head college coaches. This is an emergent finding because of the nominal scholarship focused on the experiences of professionally disclosed LGB coaches. Three aspects of visibility emerged in this study: public presence, visibility of family, and physical expression.

Janet and Kay were the only participants who described any kind of publicity about their sexual identities. Each has been the subject of separate media articles about their experiences as lesbian head college coaches. Kay was the only participant to mention her wife and children in her online athletics biography. I found mixed sentiments about the necessity and appropriateness of including one's sexual identity in an online athletics biography. Rather than making sweeping moral declarations in support of or in opposition to disclosing sexual identity in an online athletics biography, most participants deferred to individual preference, comfort, and circumstance. Some participants like Kay, Janet, and Ruby, noted the pragmatic utility of self-disclosing in an online athletics biography instead of constant, direct disclosure, particularly with prospective student-athletes and their parents. Kay regarded the inclusion of her family in the online biography as a "big step" and a source of pride. It was a way for her to normalize her family in a manner commonplace to straight married coaches. For Jackie, there was a fundamental, philosophical curiosity of its relevance to coaching, wondering what sexual identity

had to do with coaching. Max recognized the costs and benefits, but ultimately expressed concern that to disclose an LGB identity in an online athletics biography is to capitulate to the heteronormative narrative that shapes what a family culture in college athletics narrowly means. Instead of mentioning his same-sex partner in his online athletics biography, Max mentions his involvement in LGBTQ issues as a way to bring visibility to LGBTQ identity broadly.

The visibility of family, particularly young children, seems to contribute significantly to the constructed identities of professional disclosed LGB head college coaches. Several participants described how their spouses and partners shape their LGB identity in the workplace. However, children were cited as having the greatest impact on the professional disclosure of the participants who are parents. As Kay and Ruby shared, the presence of their young children in professional settings equates to automatic professional disclosure of their lesbian identity. However, each of the participants who are parents emphasized the importance of their children being integrated in their professional lives, even if it draws more visibility to their sexual identities in the workplace. They all regard it as beneficial to their families, to their teams, and to themselves to integrate their children into their professional lives.

Of the six participants, Max and Es's partners were the least visible in their professional lives. They were also the only participants not in a legally recognized relationship. The findings did not suggest whether relationship-type was a factor in how Max or Es constructed their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Unfortunately, the literature regarding professional disclosure in academia does not address the visibility, presence, or influence of family, particularly children, in how faculty construct their identities in the workplace. Nor does it address whether relationship-type is a factor in constructing a professionally disclosed LGB identity in academia. Consequently, this is rife for future research.

Physical gender expression was another type of visibility that several participants use to construct their identities as professionally out LGB head college coaches. Because of the inherent and inextricable association between gender and sexual orientation, many coaches can often control how, when, and to what degree, they professionally present as LGB (Griffin & Taylor, 2012). Some like Janet and Max, present in more traditional gender roles, which can serve to normalize and avoid their sexual identities. For example, presenting in more traditional gender roles can help them *pass* as straight. It may also serve as a way to allow for a first impression without being pigeon-holed or eliminated based on their LGB identity, particularly when recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents, or perhaps applying for new coaching positions. The type of physical gender presentation may serve as a reprieve from the constant coming out process, as asserted by Ragins (2007). Conversely, Max noted that presenting in traditional gender roles is a method he also uses to shock deep-seated and long-held stereotypes about gay or bay men when he does come out. This is particularly poignant since men in sport are generally presumed to be straight (Anderson, 2002; Froyum, 2007; Pronger, 1990; Sankofa et al., 2005; Southal et al., 2011).

The influential social structures, within which the participants work, seemed to shape how they construct their identities as LGB head college coaches. This aligns with the literature suggesting sexual identity development management is not only driven intrinsically, but also influenced by one's surroundings (Badgett, 1995; Button, 2001; Cain, 1991; Cass, 1979; Fink, 2012; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Parks et al., 2004; Ragins et al., 2007; Rosario et al., 2004; Waldo, 1999). The participants described varying degrees of influence, from the widely, near-universal social norms and expectations that transcend time and place, to more specific institutional cultures and climates, to the personal influences of family and friend groups on their

professional identities. This is yet another example of the thin membrane between the participants' personal and professional lives and identities.

Consistent with the literature (Anderson, 2002; Cunningham, 2021; Griffin, 2012; and Rankin & Merson, 2012), the participants underscored that contemporaneous social norms and expectations of intercollegiate athletics continue to assert and espouse heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism, serving as the foundation from which their constructed identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches emerged. Despite the unsettling presence of these oppressive and discriminatory social norms and expectations in sport, most of the participants acknowledged their circumstances, as LGB individuals, are better now than they once were. This aligns with the research, which found increasing support and acceptance of LGB individuals in sport since the turn of the 20th century (Anderson, 2011a, Anderson, 2005; Griffin, 2012; Kian & Anderson, 2009; Kozloski, 2010; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Southall et al., 2011). However, the findings of this study did not go as far as the assertion by Adams (2011) or Anderson (2011a) that homophobia and homohysteria in sport are effectively bygone concerns. Despite the recognition of overall social progress in LGBTQ inclusion, the participants conceded the progress can easily be stymied, depending on intersectional identities, such as sex, race, religion, or nationality, as well as institution-type, institutional location, and state law. Moreover, the acceptance of the participants' LGB identities seemed to wane most with those who were not students, particularly colleagues, administrators, and parents.

For some like Max, social norms and expectations around sexual identity have manifested into an internalized homophobia and self-shame, thus blurring the lines between the influence of social norms and expectations and intrinsic determinants on constructed sexual identity. Max's

assertions of internalized homophobia support the psychological toll on LGBTQ individuals, as discussed by LaSala et al. (2008) and Krane and Barber (2005).

Max, in particular, and to a lesser degree Es, discussed stereotypes of sexual deviancy that saddle the LGBTQ community, particularly gay men. These stereotypes trace back to the early sexual identity development theories based on homosexual illness models of the early 20th century (Coleman, 1978; Hooker, 1956). For Es, these notions of sexual deviancy were concerns she expressed dealing with those outside the LGBTQ community and in relation to fostering relationships with student-athletes. For Max, the stereotype of sexual deviancy emerged from within the gay male community, perhaps as a manifestation of community-wide internalized homophobia. During the review of literature, there was not considerable focus given to sexual deviancy and LGBTQ individuals. However, considering it was discussed by two of the six participants, it merits additional inquiry. As the only participant who identifies with elements of bisexuality, Max also acknowledged the social norms and expectations, including biphobia, that exist in the gay community. This is another element of the study that warrants further consideration.

With the exception of Jackie, all of the participants described their institutions' culture and climate regarding LGBTQ inclusion as overwhelmingly positive. This supports the literature that over the last several years the climate and culture on many college campuses have improved – though less so for transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals (Anderson & Travers, 2017; Bianchi, 2017; Blumenfeld et al., 2016; Coulter & Rankin, 2017; Garvey et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019; Knochel et al., 2017; Rankin & Merson, 2012). Jackie's strained experience with her institution supports the literature that found that to be LGBTQ at a faith-based institution can be particularly complicated because the

mission may fundamentally conflict with LGBTQ-inclusive policies and beliefs (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Getz & Kirkley, 2006; Griffin & Taylor, 2012; Killelea McEntarfer, 2011; Love, 1998; NCAA, 2018a).

Data published by Athlete Ally (2021) asserted only 19% of NCAA Division I athletics departments have an accessible LGBTQ nondiscrimination statement. Moreover, research by Kauer (2009) and Southall et al. (2011) showed athletics departments continue to trail behind their institutions in terms of establishing LGBTQ-inclusive cultures and policies. Data show NCAA Division III institutions do not fare much better. Specifically, a 2017 NCAA Division III survey (2018d) found only 38 percent of their athletics departments had a written LGBTQ nondiscrimination policy. This is consistent with the findings of this study, wherein most participants asserted their athletics departments either do not have LGBTQ-inclusive policies or they are not aware of them. Ultimately, based on the variance of experiences of all the participants, it also suggests that the institutional culture and climate around LGBTQ inclusion has little to do with NCAA divisional membership.

In the study, most of the participants were largely unaware of LGBTQ-inclusive policies at their respective institutions. However, the more aligned an institutions' and an athletics departments' cultures were regarding LGBTQ inclusion, the more the participants felt supported. For example, Janet and Max are at institutions where the values of LGBTQ inclusion cascade across their campuses, including their athletics departments. As professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, Janet and Max feel validated and valued by their institutions. Kay and Es, however, are at institutions where the culture and climate around LGBTQ inclusion is more affirming across their campuses than it is in their athletics departments. Consequently, Kay and Es are less content with their respective institutional culture and climate and seem to construct

their identity as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches more on self-determination rather than the external support from their institutions. Jackie was the least content with her institutional culture and climate, which she did not believe affirmed LGBTQ inclusion or her identity as a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. Although no literature ties directly back to intercollegiate athletics, the findings of this study support the literature that suggests organizational structure and climate are imperative to LGB individuals' sense of safety, support, and empowerment when professionally disclosing (Fink et al., 2012; Ragins et al., 2007). It is also consistent with the literature regarding professional disclosure in academia, wherein institutional and/or departmental climate is often a pivotal determinant in whether a faculty member discloses their sexual identity (LaSala et al., 2008). Moreover, it supports the literature, which suggests that sexual identity management is influenced by a hybrid of individual characteristics and social contexts rather than one or the other (Button, 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001). The findings also suggest that more than policies and procedures, an institution's culture and climate bear the greatest impact on the constructed identity of a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach.

Several participants discussed the critical role an institution's and an athletics department's administration plays in how they construct their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. For Janet and Max, their institutional and athletics department administrations have welcomed, supported, and empowered them, even when broader systems, laws, and social norms have not. Indifferent or contrarian administrations, such as those described by Kay, Ruby, Es, and most notably, Jackie, have caused those participants to be more self-reliant on their own fortitude rather on decision-making leaders, whose inclusion and support may ebb and flow – or may be altogether absent. Colleagues, who were described as

fellow coaches and athletics administrators, were also frequently mentioned as critical elements to institutional culture and climate. The participants noted their colleagues are central to the type and extent of departmental camaraderie and community that may shape their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Kay, Es, and Jackie, acknowledged that some of their male colleagues have been less supportive of them, suggesting a potential intersection with sexism and heterosexism. Ruby also suggested that closeted LGBTQ colleagues might keep their distance from her as a way to safeguard their own sexual identities in the workplace.

Overwhelmingly, the participants cited the relationships with their teams and individual student-athletes as the most influential aspect of institutional culture and climate to their constructed identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. This aligns with the literature that draws parallels between coaching and teaching (Jones, 2006). There seems to be reciprocity of support and authenticity between most of the participants and their student-athletes. The participants present themselves authentically to their student-athletes and, in turn, the student-athletes are authentic around the participants, thus reinforcing and supporting a culture of mutual inclusion, trustworthiness, and support. This supports hooks' (1984) phenomenon of "engaged pedagogy," wherein the teacher personalizes and humanizes the educational process by associating the personal aspects of their personhood with the professional. Even for Jackie, who does not specifically discuss her sexual identity with her team, her primary motivation to be a professionally out lesbian head college coach is for the student-athletes (Braun & Clarke, 2009; Cress, 2009; hooks, 1984). This supports research by Cress (2009) and Allen (1995) who suggest that an educator's willingness to avow a vulnerable identity to students causes "significantly positive relationships between 'teacher immediacy' and

students' cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning" (Cress, 2009, p.14). Moreover, students "learn to examine the privileges, opportunities, and oppressions that accompany their race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability and gain understanding and respect for others with diverse experiences" (Allen, 1995, p.136). Repeatedly, most of the participants offered examples of student-athletes displaying empathy to the participants and to one another regarding LGBTQ issues, and generally developing a positive, affirming team culture in which each team member is valued and integral. Most importantly, the experiences of the participants in this study served as a foil to the experiences of the participants in Krane and Barber's (2005) research, who expressed regret for having modified their disclosures to their student-athletes, and compromising trust and transparency.

As much as the student-athletes impart strength and support to the participants, findings showed the support from the parents of those student-athletes was less certain. Some participants, like Ruby, reported feeling supported and having positive relationships with the parents of student-athletes. Whereas others, particularly Jackie, reported that parents of student-athletes were the solitary negative aspect of being a head coach. However, she conceded that it was primarily the parents of one student-athlete who shaped her broader sentiment. Unfortunately, the literature on professional disclosure in academia did not address the influence of students' parents. Because intercollegiate athletics often invites, elicits, and welcomes parental involvement, and coaches are often culturally portrayed in loco parentis, and it warrants further inquiry.

The role of friend groups and families beyond immediate spouses, partners, and children, demonstrated the inextricable link between the participants' personal and professional lives. Several participants described how their family and friend groups influenced their concept of

being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. This seems to suggest that the support of those closest to the participants facilitates their sexual identity construction and helps them feel supported in the professional setting, where the support is less certain. Several of the participants included their parents and siblings in this category. However, friends groups, including LGBTQ friend groups, also offered an element of personal support that influenced their professional identities. This is also revelatory that previous literature on professional disclosure in academia did not explore. It suggests that despite the obvious parallels between teaching and coaching, the contexts and structures are unique and there is a limit to the parallels that may be drawn. Further inquiry is justified.

How Do these Constructed Professional Identities of LGB Intercollegiate Athletics Head Coaches Influence Their Coaching Roles?

In this study I successfully explored how the constructed identities of six LGB intercollegiate athletics head coaches influence their coaching roles. Incidentally and conversely, I found the participants' coaching roles influence their identities. The participants described lengthy lists of ever-changing responsibilities they have as head college coaches. Overwhelmingly, the participants noted that many of their coaching roles and responsibilities have little, if anything, to do with their sexual identities, such as preparing practice and competition, completing administrative paperwork, and scouting opponents. However, the participants identified four roles and responsibilities that impacted, and were impacted by, their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches: (a) fostering team culture and safe spaces, (b) being a role model and mentor, (c) recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents, and (d) being the "face" of the team or a representative of the institution. The roles of fostering team culture and safe spaces and being a role model and mentor aligned with some of the literature regarding

professional disclosure in academia. Specifically, Orlov and Allen (2014) found LGB faculty disclosed in the classroom because they felt a responsibility to create safe, inclusive spaces in their classrooms, and to support and mentor LGBTQ students in their own journeys of self-determination. However, responsibilities comparable to recruiting prospective student or being a representative of the institution were not found in the literature.

The participants unanimously agreed that the imperative responsibility of any head college coach is to create a safe and affirming culture for student-athletes. As professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, some participants have had student-athletes self-identify as LGBTQ and to seek support and guidance from the participants. Several participants described a reciprocal responsibility of coaches and student-athletes to foster affirming team cultures and safe spaces. In other words, the student-athletes have influenced the participants by imparting LGBTQ-inclusive expectations and behaviors that were simply described by some as generational differences. The findings suggest that the participants understand that despite the generally favorable trajectory toward LGBTQ equality in U.S. higher education, students still need safe harbor from the presence of anti-LGBTQ hostility, harassment, and violence on college campuses. The findings also support Cress (2009), who maintains that faculty disclosure of sexual identity to students is successfully achieved when faculty *and* students feel safe, valued, and welcomed to engage, free of judgment or restriction.

The participants also placed the utmost priority on being positive role models and mentors to student-athletes and their coaching staffs. Several participants remarked that considering how few LGBTQ role models there are in sport, it is particularly important for them to be that role model for their student-athletes and coaching staff members, particularly those who are LGBTQ. This finding supports Stoelting's (2011) assertion that "the most powerful and effective strategy

to eliminate homonegativism in the sport world is to come out or disclose one's sexual identity to others" (p.1188). As a Black, lesbian, female head college coach, Janet emphasized the importance of holistically and authentically modeling all of her identities, and mentoring her student-athletes to do the same. Many participants described role modeling and mentoring in ways that normalized their LGB identity. Normalization was framed to align with authenticity, rather than avoidance. However, some participants used heteronormative comparisons, particularly when role modeling a relationship, family unit, or mentoring others about being in healthy relationships.

The responsibility of recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents yielded little parallel with the literature. The findings of this study show how the recruitment of prospective student-athletes and parents have mutually influenced, and been influenced by, the participants' identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Unlike the literature, which suggested the practice of negative recruiting is a tactic regularly used in women's intercollegiate athletics, the participants did not specifically discuss negative recruiting (Griffin & Carroll, 2009; Krane & Barber, 2005;). In fact, few participants felt their LGB identities had ever negatively affected their ability to recruit. Jackie is influenced by her sexual identity when recruiting because she avoids talking about her sexual identity, utilizing the avoidance strategy, defending that approach because her sexual identity should not have anything to do with recruiting someone to play softball.

Notwithstanding, the participants had a honed consciousness of their LGB identity in the recruiting domain. For example, Janet lamented the unjust reality that straight coaches at rival institutions do not have to be cognizant of their sexual identity when recruiting prospective student-athletes. Kay acknowledged that disclosing her lesbian identity in an online athletics

biography liberates her from incessant and perhaps uncomfortable discussions about her sexuality on the recruiting trail. Max conceded that his gay identity might be more palatable for prospective student-athletes and parents who are considering an historic women's college. Max also acknowledged that the commonplace recruiting tactic of promoting the family culture presents challenges for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. As Calhoun et al. (2011) and Kamphoff (2010) asserted, the family culture most athletics departments portray privileges heteronormative values, and subtly communicates to prospective student-athletes and their parent, that deviating from those heteronormative values of family culture is unacceptable.

Unlike the literature on disclosure in academia, several participants discussed how their identity as LGB head college coaches influence their role as the "face" of their team or a representative of their institution. Janet described the heightened visibility she has as a head coach, across campus, in the community, and with various stakeholders. She feels the gravity to represent her team and her institution at all times. But as a head coach who holds multiple identities that are historically underrepresented in sport, she feels responsible for representing each of those communities. Max shared a similar sentiment that being a professionally disclosed gay head college coach does not just impact his being the "face" of his team or a representative of his institution. It also means he can be more of a face for the LGBTQ community, advocating for safer, more inclusive spaces.

Opportunities and Limitations

The participants regarded opportunities and limitations for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches through a defensive lens of risk assessment. What risks exist by disclosing their sexual identities in a professional context? When constructing their professional identities, there was virtually exclusive focus on the limitations of professionally disclosing rather than on

the opportunities. This suggests that the participants professionally disclosed their LGB identities despite limitations, not because of the opportunities.

Several participants perceived a potential termination, demotion, or a reduction of professional development opportunities because of their sexual identities. This finding aligned with LaSala et al. (2008) and Orlov & Allen (2014), who that found LGB faculty, particularly non-tenured LGB faculty, were fearful that disclosing could lead to denied tenure, pigeon-holing, or termination. Es and Max suggested that some of the limitations they face as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches might be based on the stereotype that LGBTQ people are sexually deviant. As Max considers his next professional move, he regards athletics administration as a more optimal shield against that stereotype because of its relational distance from student-athletes. This finding was also consistent with LaSala et al. (2008) and Orlov & Allen (2014), whose research revealed that non-tenured LGB faculty were concerned about being labeled "inappropriate and unprofessional educators" (p.3). Max also suggested that a lack of self-confidence and a sentiment of not being enough can be a professional hindrance. LaSala et al. (2008) similarly found, in part, that some LGB faculty felt an intrinsically-driven pressure to uphold the highest standard of professional quality and productivity, void of mistakes or missteps.

These findings suggest that the participants exercise caution and vigilance as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. They identify more potential pitfalls because of their sexual identities rather than avenues for success. However, none of the participants cited specific policies or laws that actualize their perceived limitations or negative outcomes. Certainly, those policies and laws exist, but the participants' fear stemmed more from broad assumptions of negative consequences rather than actual negative consequences of their specific

circumstances. This suggests that even for individuals who regard being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach as positive, hypothetical negative consequences of working in an historically – and contemporaneously - heterosexist, heteronormative, sexist, and homophobic industry reside firmly in their consciousness.

Implications

The findings from this study lead to several practical implications for those working in intercollegiate athletics and higher education. Although more expansive implications may be gleaned from previous sections, the two-fold purpose of this section is to present those implications that are the most consequential, and to direct them to three primary stakeholder groups: (a) LGB coaches, (b) higher education and athletics department administrators, and (c) researchers. Armed with new information regarding an understudied phenomenon, these stakeholder groups may advance their own understanding of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, and cull pragmatic, actionable ideas to improve the experience of a population of intercollegiate professionals that continues to expand.

Implications for LGB Coaches

Professionally disclosed LGB coaches – not just head coaches - are a grossly understudied phenomenon. As a consequence, LGB coaches have little frame of scholarly reference to navigate their experiences. The implications of this study may better inform LGB coaches' understanding of professional disclosure, including sexual identity management strategies and influential factors, as well as how professional disclosure may influence coaching responsibilities and opportunities and limitations. Regardless of an LGB coach's rank (e.g., head coach, assistant coach) or where they fall on the continuum of sexual identity management, the implications of this study may impart a sense of shared, kindred experiences that facilitates their

own decision-making processes regarding professional disclosure. LGB coaches may find the following three implications particularly beneficial: (a) professional disclosure is individually constructed and context dependent, (b) institutional culture and climate is a major influence on the experience of a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, and (c) coaching responsibilities anchored in student-athlete well-being and development may be most impacted by a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach's identity.

LGB identity disclosure is often situated as an absolute, unequivocal binary wherein an individual is either in the closet or out. There is infrequent recognition of the nuanced complexities of disclosure. The findings from this study suggest professional disclosure is not a static, narrowly-defined-yet-universally-applied concept. Instead professional disclosure is a fluid, individually constructed phenomenon based on a confluence of intrinsic, extrinsic, and circumstantial factors, both professional and personal.

Through this study I show the intersectionality of one's identity is a particularly instrumental factor. Professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, like everyone, embody a myriad of intersecting identities that shape how they understand, and function in, the world. The intersectionality of gender identity and/or racial identity reverberated most for the participants in this study, particularly for those who identify as women of color. This suggests that those who hold multiple underrepresented, minoritized identities, may experience compounded erasure, oppression, or discrimination that impacts their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. This may be particularly salient for Black LGB female head college coaches, who often contend with a magnified barrage of inequities, indignities, and obstructions based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. The findings also suggests faith perspective may be an intersecting identity that presents a notable challenge to some

professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. The challenge may arise if one's faith perspective and LGBTQ identity are discordant and irreconcilable. That is not to suggest that those identities are never without conflict, particularly if one's faith affirms LGBTQ identity. But it demonstrates that an individual's faith perspective – or absence of one - may play a pivotal role in how a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach constructs their identity.

The findings of this study suggest that the sexual identity management of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches generally falls into three categories: avoidance, authenticity, and normalization. These categories establish a relational continuum based on the degree to which an individual seeks distance from (avoidance) or to embrace (authenticity) their LGB identity. Depending on its purpose, normalization is a multifunctional strategy that may be used to further avoid or authenticate their LGB identity. The strategies may be used singularly or in conjunction with one another, ebbing and flowing based on the context. Findings from the study suggest authenticity may render more positive feelings for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches than other sexual identity management strategies. However, stress and fear still exist, regardless of one's disclosure strategies. Therefore, professional disclosure should be an individual decision, shaped and dictated by individual factors and considerations.

Visibility of sexual identity, particularly by means of public presence, visibility of family, and physical gender expression, may be instrumental in how a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach constructs their identity. Despite a prevalent belief that *professionally out* and *publically out* are synonymous, the findings suggest it is not necessary, and perhaps not common, for a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach to publicize their sexual identity. They also suggest that an LGB head college coach with a same-sex family, particularly with young children, may have an increased the visibility of sexual identity because of their

family's integration and involvement in their professional life. A professionally disclosed LGB head college coach's gender expression may also draw or subdue attention to their sexual identity, due to the inextricable, socially constructed association between gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, an LGB coach who presents more normative gender roles may *pass* as straight or be regarded as more tolerable to social conventions.

The findings show that professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches are influenced by a variety of concentric and interrelated social structures, ranging from near-universal social norms and expectations, to personal family and friend groups. Institutional culture and climate may be the most influential social structure of all. This study demonstrates a correlation between an institution's culture and climate and whether, how, and to what degree an LGB head college coach professionally discloses. Correlation seems to be consistent across public and private institutions, secular and faith-based, regardless of NCAA divisional membership. Within the structure of institutional culture and climate, the administrations of an institution and an athletics department play critical roles in how a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach constructs their identity. The more aligned the administrations of an institution and an athletics department are, the more likely a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach will feel welcomed, supported, and empowered. Colleagues, such as fellow coaches and athletics administrators, are also central to the constructed identity of a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, particularly in terms of creating community and camaraderie. The relationships with teams and individual student-athletes may be the most influential aspect of institutional culture and climate on a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach, suggesting a parallel between coaching, teaching, and student development.

Regarding head coaching roles and responsibilities, the findings from this study suggest that the constructed identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches have the greatest influence on cultivating student-athlete development and wellbeing. Specifically, the participants placed the utmost priority on fostering inclusive cultures and safe spaces, and being role models and mentors to student-athletes - particularly those who identify as LGBTQ. The findings suggest that the participants understand that despite the generally favorable trajectory toward LGBTQ inclusion in U.S. higher education, students still need safe harbor from the presence of anti-LGBTQ stigma, hostility, harassment, and abuse on college campuses and in intercollegiate athletics. There is also an acknowledgment that their identities as professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches might partially fill the gaping void of LGBTQ roles models for their LGBTQ student-athletes and coaching staff members. Many participants described role modeling and mentoring in ways that normalized their LGB identity. Normalization was generally framed to align with the authenticity, rather than avoidance. However, some participants used heteronormative comparisons, particularly when role modeling a relationship, family unit, or mentoring others about being in healthy relationships.

Ancillary to student-athlete development and wellbeing is this study's implication on recruiting prospective student-athletes and their parents. Principally, the participants did not feel that their LGB identities have, to date, negatively affected their ability to recruit. Nevertheless, there is an acute awareness that their LGB identities could, at any moment, be a detriment in the recruiting domain. This illustrates that professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches may find themselves in shifting sands, wherein the influence of their sexual identities on recruitment is altogether unpredictable and nerve-racking.

I found that participants' consideration of professional opportunities and limitations was comparable to a risk assessment. This suggests than an LGB head college coach may consider worst-case scenarios, such as termination, demotion, or reduction of benefits, when considering whether and how to disclose. Even for those who self-identify as professionally disclosed with authenticity, self-doubt and fear of negative consequences persist, and may shape and sway professional ambitions. This suggests that even for individuals who regard being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach as compellingly positive, doomsday hypotheticals may still leave them in a protective crouch.

Implications for Higher Education and Athletics Department Administrators

The results of this study point to important implications for higher education and athletics department administrators, who are committed to shaping supportive, affirming, and empowering institutional cultures and climates for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Chief among the implications, organizational structure and climate are imperative to LGB individuals' sense of safety, support, and belonging in the workplace. According to the findings, an institution's culture and climate may be the utmost determining factor in whether, how, and to what degree an LGB head college coach discloses their sexual identity. I found that the more LGBTQ inclusive an institution's culture and climate are, the more likely a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach may be to manage their sexual identity with authenticity and to have a meaningful impact on student-athletes, particularly LGBTQ student-athletes. Moreover, the more consistent, integrated, explicit, and intentional an institution and an athletics department are with LGBTQ-inclusive cultures, policies, operations, and communication strategies, the more positively a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach may regard their experience and identity.

The experiences and job performances of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches may be less optimal at institutions whose LGBTQ inclusion efforts in their athletics departments are inconsistent, decentralized, lagging, non-existent, or in opposition to the efforts occurring across their broader campuses. As the findings illustrate, most of the participants were not aware if their athletics department had LGBTQ-inclusive policies and procedures. Moreover, the participants whose athletics departments lagged behind their institutions regarding LGBTQ inclusion felt less positively about being professionally disclosed than those participants whose campus-wide efforts cascaded into their athletics departments. Specifically, the waxing and waning of LGBTQ inclusion in an athletics department may elicit concerns about job loss, demotion, or loss of benefits, thus distracting coaches from their actual job responsibilities. Therefore, it may be mutually beneficial for higher education administrators and athletics department administrators to consider collaboratively establishing, reviewing, and updating LGBTQ-inclusive cultural expectations, enforceable policies, procedures, nondiscrimination statements, and codes of conduct, and consistent, accessible communication plans. It may also be worthwhile for higher education administrators and athletics department administrators to conduct concurrent and concentric climate surveys regarding LGBTQ inclusion.

For higher education and athletics department administrators at faith-based institutions, it may be particularly important – albeit challenging – to establish integrated LGBTQ-inclusive initiatives across campus and within an athletics department to engender a positive experience for professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. As the findings suggest, the relationship between faith perspective and sexual identity can be fraught. It has caused many LGBTQ persons to renounce religion as condemnatory, many persons of faith to castigate LGBTQ identity as abominable, and many LGBTQ people of faith to flounder in inner-turmoil. Faith-

based institutions may ameliorate or exacerbate that tenuous relationship. Although many faith-based institutions are inclusive of LGBTQ persons in covenant and deed, many are not. Therefore, it is important for higher education and athletics department administrators at faith-based institution to be explicit and unified in their commitment to LGBTQ inclusion. Even then, it may be challenging to recruit, hire, promote, and retain professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches.

Higher education and athletics administrators should also be mindful that the culture created by institutions and athletics departments is consequential to developmental and learning outcomes for student-athletes. The findings suggest that coaching closely compares to that of teaching. Professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, especially those who manage their sexual identities with authenticity, teach, support, and mentor their student-athletes in ways that often yield greater self-authorship. It is important to create LGBTQ-inclusive cultures at an institution and within an athletics departments so professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches can maximize the positive impact on their student-athletes, particularly those who are navigating LGBTQ identity, and improve team performance.

Implications for Researchers

The findings of this study yield several notable implications for researchers of higher education, sport, and LGBTQ issues to build on the existing literature of this understudied phenomenon. Researchers have a virtual carte blanche to follow their whimsy and wonder and meaningfully contribute to the scholarship. Although research on higher education, sport, and LGBTQ issues has primarily centered on the experiences of white men, some scholarship has begun to fracture the homogeneity with more deliberate considerations of intersectionality. However, much more nuanced research is needed. The findings suggest that the intersectionality

of identities, particularly sex and race, are pivotal to the constructed identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches. Moreover, other identities, such as faith perspective and nationality, may be equally imperative. Ultimately, the more researchers deconstruct the monolithic approach to studying higher education, sport, and LGBTQ issues with intentional considerations of intersectionality, the richer, more relevant and applicable the research will be.

Another implication of this study for researchers is that the parallels between coaching and teaching are finite. Beyond the similarities around student development and wellbeing, the experiences of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches and professors seem to deviate. For example, unlike the literature about disclosure in academia, I found that visibility of sexual identity is deeply influential in the constructed identity of a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. Perhaps that is because athletics, colloquially regarded as the "front porch" of an institution, generally draws more attention than academia (McCollum, 2009). There also seems to be notable difference between the personal/professional worlds of disclosed LGB head college coaches and those of professors. Because of the recreational and social bent of sport, a coach's personal and professional worlds may be more likely to meld than those of a professor, particularly if a coach has a family. However, the literature regarding professional disclosure in academia does suggest there is a significant integration of the personal and professional lives of faculty, beyond cursory acknowledgments of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Consequently, further exploration of the fusion of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches' personal and professional worlds and identities is rife with potential.

The findings also suggest that the parents of student-athletes influence the constructed identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, whereas, the literature on professional disclosure in academia does not assert that professionally disclosed LGB faculty are

influenced by the parents of their students. Because intercollegiate athletics often promotes and promulgates a family atmosphere, acting in loco parentis, it warrants further inquiry. Coaches are also critical in the recruiting process for enrollment-driven institutions. Because of the weight placed on coaches to drive enrollment numbers, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches within the context of recruiting.

It would also be worthwhile to explore the phenomenon of a student-athlete being coached by a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. From the participants' perspectives, they seem to be most influenced by their relationship with their student-athletes. Moreover, their sexual identities most influence coaching responsibilities centered on creating a safe, inclusive culture and being a role model and mentor to student-athletes. Exploring this relational phenomenon from the perspective of student-athletes would also advance understanding of scholarship around student-athlete development and student-athlete wellbeing and inform practical initiatives.

It may also be interesting to conduct a similar study based on the experiences of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches exclusively at faith-based institutions. Religion can be both an individual and an institutional identity that is exceptionally influential, and often in conflict with LGBTQ identity. Considering an institution's culture and climate, including that of the athletics department, impact how a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach perceives their own identity, it would be interesting to center religion and faith perspective in a comparable study.

In the not-so-distant future, there is potential that a critical mass of professionally disclosed transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse head coaches will work in intercollegiate

athletics. At the time of this study, I was not aware of any professionally disclosed transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse head college coaches – and certainly not enough to conduct an ethical study that ensured anonymity. Although minoritized sexual orientations and gender identities are often conglomerated as LGBTQ, the experiences of LGB individuals and transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse individuals is markedly unique. Despite the current legislative effort to prohibit and erase transgender women from sport and to push them further to the fringes of society, there is growing support for trans-inclusion. It is my hope that the increasing number of transgender, nonbinary, and gender diverse student-athletes will pursue coaching careers and advance this scholarship in a very unique way.

Limitations

At the peril of stating the obvious, this study has its limitations. Like any research, this study cannot capture the full scope, interest, and impact of a particular phenomenon. Therefore, it is imperative to highlight some of those limitations, alongside the implications, as a way to metaphorically pass the baton for continued research. A fundamental limitation was the lack of scholastic grounding specifically on the topic of professionally disclosed LGBTQ coaches. Certainly, the parallels with disclosure in academia were important, justified, and critical to conduct this study. However, there were considerable limits to the parallels - a consequence of researching a nascent topic.

Additionally, despite the fact that the majority of LGBTQ scholarship centers on the experiences of men, I would have preferred a more balanced sample of men and women in this study, particularly men of color. As stated in the implications for researchers, the more diverse and representative the scholarship on this phenomenon can be regarding the broad tapestry of identity and experience, the richer, more meaningful, and more useful it will be.

Another hindsight limitation of this study was the insufficient attention paid to the opportunities and limitations of being a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach. As I developed this study, my primary focus was on the how professionally disclosed LGB coaches construct their identities. Other than a conciliatory question about opportunities and limitations, I did not structure enough time and space for participants to address this topic with much depth. However, I feel that if I had been more intentional with the consideration of opportunities and limitations, more insight would have been shed. This is a consequential consideration and one that also is a factor in how a professionally disclosed LGB head college coach constructs their identity.

Lastly, I believe my positionality as a professionally disclosed lesbian who worked in intercollegiate athletics, specifically in LGBTQ inclusion, overwhelmingly served me well. I believe it allowed me to reach and relate to the coaches in ways I might not otherwise be able. However, I found at times it placed me too close to the research, drawing conclusions based on my own worldview. Occasionally, I would find myself inserting my own presumptions, judgments, and experiences into the analysis of the data, although I attempted to counter my positionality with regular memoing and member-checking throughout the process.

Conclusion

This dissertation adds one more practical and scholarly brick to the field of higher education, particularly intercollegiate athletics, by exploring how professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches construct their identities. There is also greater insight into how the constructed identities of professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches influence their overall coaching roles. Although the findings of this study are not generalizable to all professionally disclosed LGB head college coaches, they do offer additional insight to a

currently scant body of scholarship. With the exceptional generosity of the participants' time and introspection, we can advance our understanding of this understudied phenomenon, and better support a small, but growing population of coaches.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Script to Private Social Media Group

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Needed - Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Head College Coaches Who are "Out" at Work.

Body of Message:

I am looking for volunteers to participate in a study examining how **professionally "out" lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) head college coaches** construct their sexual identities at work, and how their sexual identities at work influence their overall coaching roles.

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed twice about your lived experience as a professionally "out" lesbian, gay, or bisexual head college coach. During each individual, one-on-one interview, I will ask questions about your sexual identity, your experience in sports, intercollegiate athletics, and higher education, your personal definition of being professionally "out", and how being professionally "out" has influenced your roles as a coach. Interviews will take place via videoconference. Your participation will be **entirely voluntary and confidential** and will take approximately two hours of your time.

Please contact Jean Orr Merrill (orrj@iu.edu) if you are interested in participating.

By participating in this study, you will contribute to a scholarly understanding of, and calls to action for, a largely underrepresented population of coaches in college athletics. Results from this study will be used intentionally to support LGBTQ college coaches who are professionally "out". This study is part of a dissertation project within the School of Education at Indiana University. The Institutional Review Board has approved this study (2002215365). Attached is a study information sheet with additional information about the benefits and potential risks of participating.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Jean Orr Merrill
Primary Contact
orrj@indiana.edu

Dr. Megan Palmer
Dissertation Chair
mmpalmer@iu.edu

Appendix B

Recruitment Script Directly to Prospective Participants

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Needed - Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Head College Coaches Who are "Out" at Work.

Body of Message: Dear **[name of potential participant]**,

My name is Jean Orr Merrill and I am conducting a study examining how **professionally "out" lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) head college coaches** construct their sexual identities at work, and how their sexual identities at work influence their overall coaching roles.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study titled, *"Professionally 'Out' Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Coaches: The Construction of Sexual Identity in Relation to Coaching"*.

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed twice about your lived experience as a professionally "out" lesbian, gay, or bisexual head college coach. During each individual, one-on-one interview, I will ask questions about your sexual identity, your experience in sports, intercollegiate athletics, and higher education, your personal definition of being professionally "out", and how being professionally "out" has influenced your roles as a coach. Interviews will take place via videoconference. Your participation will be **entirely voluntary and confidential** and will take approximately two hours of your time.

Please contact Jean Orr Merrill (orrj@iu.edu) if you are interested in participating.

By participating in this study, you will contribute to a scholarly understanding of, and calls to action for, a largely underrepresented population of coaches in college athletics. Results from this study will be used intentionally to support LGBTQ college coaches who are professionally "out". This study is part of a dissertation project within the School of Education at Indiana University. The Institutional Review Board has approved this study (2002215365). Attached is a study information sheet with additional information about the benefits and potential risks of participating.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.
Jean Orr Merrill
Primary Contact
orrj@indiana.edu

Dr. Megan Palmer
Dissertation Chair
mmpalmer@iu.edu

Appendix C

Recruitment Script Directly to Prospective Participants Identified by Others

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Needed - Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Head College Coaches Who are "Out" at Work.

Body of Message: Dear **[name of potential participant]**,

My name is Jean Orr Merrill and I am conducting a study examining how **professionally "out" lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) head college coaches** construct their sexual identities at work, and how their sexual identities at work influence their overall coaching roles. I recently **[communicated with/interviewed] [name of referring participant]** for my study, and **[he/she/they]** said that you may also be interested in participating in my study.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study titled, *"Professionally 'Out' Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Coaches: The Construction of Sexual Identity in Relation to Coaching".*

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed twice about your lived experience as a professionally "out" lesbian, gay, or bisexual head college coach. During each individual, one-on-one interview, I will ask questions about your sexual identity, your experience in sports, intercollegiate athletics, and higher education, your personal definition of being professionally "out", and how being professionally "out" has influenced your roles as a coach. Interviews will take place via videoconference. Your participation will be **entirely voluntary and confidential** and will take approximately two hours of your time.

Please contact Jean Orr Merrill (orrj@iu.edu) if you are interested in participating.

By participating in this study, you will contribute to a scholarly understanding of, and calls to action for, a largely underrepresented population of coaches in college athletics. Results from this study will be used intentionally to support LGBTQ college coaches who are professionally "out". This study is part of a dissertation project within the School of Education at Indiana University. The Institutional Review Board has approved this study (2002215365). Attached is a study information sheet with additional information about the benefits and potential risks of participating.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.
Jean Orr Merrill
Primary Contact
orrj@indiana.edu

Dr. Megan Palmer
Dissertation Chair
mmpalmer@iu.edu

Appendix D

Indiana University Study Information Sheet for Research

Professionally "Out" Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Coaches:
The Construction of Sexual Identity in Relation to Coaching
Jean Orr Merrill, Dr. Megan Palmer; 2002215365

About This Research
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Scientists do research to answer important questions which might help change or improve the way we do things in the future.

This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

Taking Part in this Study is Voluntary
You may choose not to take part in the study or may choose to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate, or deciding to leave the study later, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled and will not affect your relationship with Indiana University or the Office of Graduate Studies.

Why is this Study Being Done?
The purpose of this study is to better understand how professionally disclosed lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) intercollegiate athletics coaches construct their professional identities. Moreover, this study aims to understand how these constructed professional identities of LGB college coaches influence their overall coaching roles.

You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified as an NCAA intercollegiate athletics head coach, who is professionally disclosed as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

The study is being conducted by Jean Orr Merrill and Dr. Megan Palmer, both with the IU School of Education.

How Many People Will Take Part?
If you agree to participate, you will be one of 6-8 participants at NCAA member institutions taking part in this study.

What Will Happen During the Study?

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:
Participate in two individual, one-on-one interviews about your experience. You will be asked questions about your identity as a professionally "out" LGB college coach and how that identity influences your coaching roles. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes, with flexibility to shorten or extend the interview based on your needs and interests. Each interview will be audio-or video-recorded and transcribed. You will have an opportunity to review copies of the transcripts from your interviews.

Both interviews will be conducted via a secure, invitation-only videoconference software.

Participation in the interviews is voluntary, and you may stop or withdraw from the study at any time.

What are the Risks of Taking Part in this Study?
While participating in the study, the risks, side effects, and/or discomforts include:

- Being uncomfortable answering questions. During either interview, you may tell the researcher that you feel uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer a particular question. You may also stop or withdraw from the study at any time.

- A possible loss of confidentiality. While we will not identify who you are to others, we may use your responses as part of a dissertation report.

What are the Potential Benefits of Taking Part in the Study?
The benefits to participation in the study that are reasonable to expect are that you will have an opportunity to share your experiences as a professionally "out" LGB college coach and how that has impacted your coaching roles. Limited research exists about professionally out LGBTQ coaches. Therefore, your participation in this study may advance the scholarship of this underrepresented demographic in higher education.

How Will My Information be Protected?
Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. No information which could identify you will be shared in publications about this study. All data collected and analyzed, including audio/video-recordings, transcribed interviews, memos, as well as administrative paperwork, such as interview schedules and consent forms will be stored securely on the co-principal investigator student's personal computer. All hard copy documents will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet at the co-principal investigator student's home office. Within one year of the conclusion of the study, all electronic and hard copy materials will be destroyed.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, the Indiana University School of Education, and state or federal agencies who may need to access the research records (as allowed by law).

Will I Be Paid for Participation?

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Will it Cost Me Anything to Participate?

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study.

Who Should I Call with Questions or Problems?

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Dr. Megan Palmer, principal investigator, at (317) 274-5231. After business hours, please call Jean Orr Merrill, co-principal investigator student at 812-320-9537.

In the event of an emergency, you may contact Jean Orr Merrill at 812-320-9537.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Subjects Office at 800-696-2949 or at irb@iu.edu.

Can I Withdraw from the Study?

If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future. The study team will help you withdraw from the study safely. If you decide to withdraw, please inform Jean Orr Merrill (812-320-9537; orrj@indiana.edu), and you will be immediately removed from the study.

Your participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to your consent in the following circumstances: unforeseen circumstances and/or at the request of other investigators.

Appendix E

Interview No. 1 Protocol

Study: Professionally "Out" Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Coaches: The Construction of Sexual Identity in Relation to Coaching

Interviewer: Jean Orr Merrill

I. Pre-Interview Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. My name is Jean Orr Merrill and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Indiana University. Although I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral program, I also want to disclose that I am director of inclusion at the NCAA national office, and that I identify as a professionally "out" lesbian. The purpose of this study is to better understand how professionally "out" lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college coaches construct their professional identities. Further, this study aims to understand how the constructed professional identities of LGB colleges coaches influence their overall coaching roles.

Before we start the first of two interviews for this study, there are some important factors to review with you:

- The conversation will be kept confidential. Please select a pseudonym for yourself, your institution and any other fictional identifiers to keep your identity confidential. What would you like your pseudonym to be? And a pseudonym for your institution?
- We have planned this interview to last approximately one hour, with flexibility to shorten or extend the interview based on your interests and needs.
- I will audio-record the interview and take notes for data analysis purposes only. The transcripts and electronic files will not be shared with anyone other than my doctoral dissertation committee and will be destroyed once the study is complete.
- You will receive a copy of the transcript of this interview to edit or add to points discussed in the interview process.
- I may ask follow-up questions to elaborate on responses when needed.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to fully express yourself and share your honest opinions.
- Please feel free to ask me questions or tell me your concerns. We can stop the interview at any time.
- Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
- May I begin the interview?

II. Interview

This study is about professionally "out" lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) head college coaches. Examples of being professionally "out" may include, disclosing one's sexual orientation to student-athletes, to prospective student-athletes and their parents, to the

media, to colleagues, or to donors. However, these are just a few examples of being a professionally “out” college coach. It is important to recognize that your concept of being a professionally “out” LGB head college coach is individually constructed, uniquely fluid, and context dependent.
It is important to the success of the interview that you share your experience of being a professionally “out” lesbian, gay, or bisexual head college coach in your own words. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers.

1. ***Participant’s identity and involvement in sports.***

   a. How do you define your:
      - Sexual orientation.
      - Gender.
      - Gender expression.
      - Race.
      - Ethnicity.
      - Religion/faith perspective.
      - Socio-economic status.
      - Age.
      - Significant family relationships.
      - Is there anything else you would like to share about your identity or personal experiences that is important to you?

   b. Please tell me about your involvement in sports.
      Probe:
      - *Participation in sports before going to college.*
      - *Were you a college student-athlete? If so, what was your student-athlete experience like?*
      - *Describe your career path in sports, particularly intercollegiate athletics?*
      - *Why did you decide to pursue a career as head college coach?*

2. ***Participant’s experience as current head coach.***

   a. I understand you are the head coach of the (insert sport) team at (insert school name).
      - How long have you been head coach at this school?
      - Why did you want to be the head coach at this school?
      - What do you like most about being the head coach at this school?
      - Is there anything you dislike about being the head coach at this school? Please explain.

   b. Walk me through your roles and responsibilities as the head coach.
      Probe: What does a typical in-season week look like for you? What about a typical out-of-season week?

   c. Tell me about your reporting lines.

3. Participant's notion of sexual orientation and disclosure.

a. What does the term (*insert participant's sexual orientation*) mean to you? How do you define it?

b. How long have you been aware that you are (*insert participant's sexual orientation*)?

c. What has been your personal experience as (*insert participant's sexual orientation*)?

d. Has your (*read listed identities below*) impacted your personal experience as (*insert participant's sexual orientation*)? Please explain.
   - *Gender.*
   - *Gender expression.*
   - *Race.*
   - *Ethnicity.*
   - *Religion/faith perspective.*
   - *Socio-economic status.*
   - *Age.*
   - *Significant family relationships.*
   - *Anything else you would like to share about your identity or personal experiences that is important to you.*

e. How has your sexual orientation impacted your involvement in sports?

f. Has the intersection of (*read listed identities below)* with your identity as (*insert participant's sexual orientation)* impacted your involvement in sports? Please explain.
   - *Gender.*
   - *Gender expression.*
   - *Race.*
   - *Ethnicity.*
   - *Religion/faith perspective.*
   - *Socio-economic status.*
   - *Age.*
   - *Significant family relationships.*
   - *Anything else you would like to share about your identity or personal experiences that is important to you.*

g. In your opinion, what does it mean to be "out"? How do you define it?

h. Can you share examples of you being "out"? Please explain.

i. In your opinion, what does it mean to be professionally "out"? How do you define it?

j. Within the context of your current heading coach position, how do you define being professionally "out"?

k. Has that definition changed since you began your career in college athletics? Please explain.

4. ***Participant's experience as a professionally "out" head coach.***

a. What has been your experience as a professionally "out" head coach?

b. What benefits or positive consequences have resulted from being professionally "out"? Can you give me specific examples?

c. What challenges or negative consequences have you faced from being professionally "out"? Can you give me specific examples?

d. In what instances has the intersection of (*read listed identities below)* and (*insert participant's sexual orientation)* impacted your experience as a professionally "out" head coach? Please explain.

- *Gender.*
- *Gender expression.*
- *Race.*
- *Ethnicity.*
- *Religion/faith perspective.*
- *Socio-economic status.*
- *Age.*
- *Significant family relationships.*
- *Anything else you would like to share about your identity or personal experiences that is important to you.*

e. How has being professionally "out" influenced your roles and responsibilities as head coach? Please explain.

f. What career opportunities or limitations do you perceive to exist from being professionally "out"?

5. ***Role of participant's institution.***

a. How would you describe your school's efforts and your athletics department's efforts to establish an LGBTQ-inclusive culture and policies? Please explain.

b. How would you describe your team's culture around LGBTQ inclusion? Please explain.

c. In what instances have you felt supported by your immediate social structures (e.g., school, athletics department, team, local community, family) to be professionally "out"?

d. In what instances have you not felt supported by your immediate social structures to be professionally "out"?

6. ***Additional comments/closing remarks***

a. Is there anything else you would like to add or to talk about that you have not yet discussed?

Thank you for the interview! I look forward to analyzing the data. If you have any questions about your participation in this study, about any of the content we covered in this interview, or about my study in general, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview! I will now stop the audio-recording of this interview.

III. **Post-Interview Conclusion**. Thank you again for your participation in this study. As a reminder, you will receive a copy of the transcript of this interview in the coming weeks to edit or add to points discussed in the interview process. At that time, I will also invite you to schedule a second interview. If you have questions at any time, you may contact me at orrj@indiana.edu or my dissertation chair Dr. Megan Palmer at mmpalmer@iu.edu.

Appendix F

Interview No. 2 Protocol

(Example of Interview Protocol with Janet)

Study: Professionally "Out" Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Coaches: The Construction of Sexual Identity in Relation to Coaching

Interviewer: Jean Orr Merrill

I. Pre-Interview Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. My name is Jean Orr Merrill and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Indiana University. Although I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral program, I also want to disclose that I am director of inclusion at the NCAA national office, and that I identify as a professionally "out" lesbian. The purpose of this study is to better understand how professionally "out" lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college coaches construct their professional identities. Further, this study aims to understand how the constructed professional identities of LGB colleges coaches influence their overall coaching roles.

Before we start the second of two interviews for this study, there are some important factors to review with you:

- The conversation will be kept confidential.
- We have planned this interview to last approximately one hour, with flexibility to shorten or extend the interview based on your interests and needs.
- I will audio-record the interview and take notes for data analysis purposes only. The transcripts and electronic files will not be shared with anyone other than my doctoral dissertation committee and will be destroyed once the study is complete.
- You will receive a copy of the transcript of this interview to edit or add to points discussed in the interview process.
- I may ask follow-up questions to elaborate on responses when needed.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to fully express yourself and share your honest opinions.
- Please feel free to ask me questions or tell me your concerns. We can stop the interview at any time.
- Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?
- May I begin the interview?

II. Interview

This study is about professionally "out" lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) head college coaches. Examples of being professionally "out" may include, disclosing one's sexual orientation to student-athletes, to prospective student-athletes and their parents, to the media, to colleagues, or to donors. However, these are just a few examples of being a professionally "out" college coach. It is important to recognize that your concept of

being a professionally “out” LGB head college coach is individually constructed, uniquely fluid, and context dependent.

It is important to the success of the interview that you share your experience of being a professionally “out” lesbian, gay, or bisexual head college coach in your own words. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Questions/Topics for Interview No. 2:

1. ***Opening Questions***
    - Since we last spoke, what, if anything, have you been thinking about regarding your professional identity as a lesbian college coach or how that identity has influenced your overall coaching roles?

    - Have you had any additional experiences as a head coach related to your identity as gay, lesbian or bisexual since we last spoke?

2. ***Questions Derived from Interview No. 1***
    - Last time we spoke, you mentioned the “triple threat” of sexism, racism and homophobia.
        - What does that concept mean to you?
        - How has that “triple threat” impacted your identity as a professionally out lesbian college coach?
        - How has that “triple threat” influenced your overall coaching roles?

    - Last time we spoke, you expressed tension between your Christian identity and your lesbian identity.
        - In what ways do you manage those identities?
        - How has the tension of your Christian identity and your lesbian identity impacted your identity as a professionally out lesbian college coach?
        - How has the tension of your Christian identity and your lesbian identity influenced your overall coaching roles?

    - Several coaches participating in this study noted in their first interview that by having partners/spouses and/or children, they, by default, are professionally out.
        - Do you agree with that perspective? Please explain.
        - Last time we spoke, you mentioned that your wife is also your assistant coach.
            - How has the personal and professional partnership impacted your identity as a professionally out lesbian college coach?

            - How has the personal and professional partnership with your wife influenced your coaching roles?

- Several coaches participating in this study, including you, remarked on their efforts to "normalize" their sexual identities and/or not overtly pronouncing their sexual identities. For example, we when last spoke, you stated:

    - *"I think being out here is kind of the same as just being visible and comfortable talking about my family* ***when necessary****. And I add the 'when necessary' part, because I do think, sometimes, those of us who identify as gay, lesbian, or somewhere on the spectrum feels like it has to be all places all times. Yeah, you can be gay right now, but it's not important in this context, so no one's trying to suppress your gayness, it's just it wasn't relevant right now. And I think sometimes, we get too worked up about having to interject all of us, in all situations, at all times."*

    - *"I think the other negative sometimes, when you are out, both professionally and personally, especially when you're in a relationship, is almost going overboard to make sure it's seen as a healthy, non-drama centered, all of these check boxes. I do these check boxes as a black female, so I'm not too angry, I'm not too this, and it's kind of the same when you identify as a lesbian, because you don't want to be too strong, you don't want to be too masculine, it's all these check boxes, so then the same with relationships."*

        - Can you expound on this notion?
        - How has this notion impacted your identity as a professionally out lesbian college coach?
        - How has this notion influenced your overall coaching roles?

- When we last spoke, you noted that your lesbian identity has "allowed [you] to be more of a role model, honestly, and a resource for [your] players."

    - Please expound on this concept of being a role model for student-athletes.

- When we last spoke, you noted that your institution has an inclusive culture where you can bring your authentic self to work; however, you are not aware of LGBTQ-inclusive policies.
    - In your opinion, what was the most important institutional factor in determining whether you could be a professionally out coach at your current institution and whether you could fulfill your coaching roles?

3. Additional comments/closing remarks

- Is there anything else you would like to add or to talk about that you have not yet discussed?

Thank you for the interview! I look forward to analyzing the data. If you have any questions about your participation in this study, about any of the content we covered in this interview, or about my study in general, please do not hesitate to contact me. Again,

thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview! I will now stop the audio-recording of this interview.

b. **Post-Interview Conclusion**. Thank you again for your participation in this study. As a reminder, you will receive a copy of the transcript of this interview in the coming weeks to edit or add to points discussed in the interview process. If you have questions at any time, you may contact me at orrj@indiana.edu or my dissertation chair Dr. Megan Palmer at mmpalmer@iu.edu.

Jean Orr Merrill
orrj@indiana.edu

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An accomplished athletics administrator with almost 13 years of NCAA national office experience. Extensive experience with NCAA diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, legislation and policy, committee oversight, and project team management. Ability to collaborate with and support stakeholders, including student-athletes, coaches, university faculty and administrators, conference commissioners, external organizations, the public, and the media. Excellent written and verbal communication skills with significant presentation and public speaking experience. Proficient ability to advance DEI initiatives within the context of a national athletics organization.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education, Higher Education and Student Affairs **August 2021**
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

Master of Science in Education, Higher Education and Student Affairs **May 2008**
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

Bachelor of Arts, Spanish **May 2002**
Hanover College, Hanover, IN

RELEVENT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Indianapolis, Indiana
Director of Inclusion *January 2019 – April 2021*
Assistant Director of Inclusion *January 2018 – January 2019*
Assistant Director of Academic and Membership Affairs *March 2010 – December 2017*
Coordinator of Academic and Membership Affairs *February 2009 – March 2010*
NCAA Postgraduate Intern *June 2008 – February 2009*

NCAA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Experience

- Served as primary liaison to the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA). Major responsibilities included, managing the NCAA Woman of the Year program, NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program, and other CWA-directed initiatives to prioritize gender equity.
- Guided and educated the following national governing bodies through the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program: National Collegiate Acrobatics and Tumbling Association; National Collegiate Equestrian Association; US Equestrian Federation; National Intercollegiate Rugby Association; USA Rugby; USA Triathlon; and USA Wrestling.
- Served as primary liaison to the inaugural NCAA Division III LGBTQ Working Group. Responsibilities included developing resources and programs, specifically the NCAA Division III LGBTQ nondiscrimination policy guide, NCAA Division III LGBTQ-inclusive logo and branding materials, the NCAA Division III LGBTQ One Team facilitator-training program, and the Division III LGBTQ OneTeam Awards program.

- Served as secondary liaison to the following DEI governance bodies: NCAA Board of Governors Committee to Promote Cultural Diversity and Equity; NCAA Gender Equity Task Force; NCAA International Student Records Committee; and NCAA Division Initial Eligibility Committee's Subcommittee on Education-Impacting Disabilities. Responsibilities included, developing agendas, facilitating discussion, writing reports, and executing directives.
- Produced the NCAA Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee's (SAAC's) "You Can Play" and "It's on Us" video campaigns.
- Served as executive mentor in the Global Sports Mentoring Program, an initiative of the U.S. Department of State.
- Served as member of the Common Ground Leadership Team, whose mission is to provide LGBTQ individuals and individuals at NCAA member institutions and faith-based organizations an opportunity to learn how to work more cohesively within athletics.
- Managed the inaugural NCAA Title IX at 50 National Office Advisory Group, which was tasked with planning the 50th anniversary of Title IX across the Association.
- Hosted international sport delegations that visited the NCAA national office.
- Partnered with the NCAA Eligibility Center to educate international student-athletes about the NCAA collegiate experience.
- Processed education-impacting disability waivers.
- Collaborated in the planning and facilitation of the annual NCAA Inclusion Forum.
- Managed and presented annual NCAA convention programming for the office of inclusion.
- Served on a national office team supporting the NCAA Board of Governors Policy on Campus Sexual Violence.
- Collaborated in developing the NCAA's plan to advance racial equity at the national office and across the membership.
- Reviewed and edited the NCAA national office's staff handbook for inclusive language.
- Advocated for equitable facilities access at the NCAA national office for individuals with disabilities, who are nursing, or who identify as transgender or nonbinary.
- Actively participated in the following Employee Engagement Groups (EEGs): Disability EEG; LGBTQ EEG; People of Color EEG; and Women's EEG.
- Served as co-chair of the NCAA People of Color EEG's) Ally-Building Subcommittee.
- Organized and managed the NCAA national office's Pride Month activities.

NCAA Governance Experience

- Served as liaison to the following committees: NCAA Division II Academic Requirements Committee's Subcommittee on Initial-Eligibility Waivers; NCAA Division III Advisory Group; NCAA Division III Management Council Convention Planning Subcommittee; NCAA Division III Membership Committee; and NCAA Division III SAAC.

NCAA Legislative/Compliance Experience

- Served as primary legislative contact for 11 NCAA Division III conference commissioners and eight NCAA Division III sport committees.
- Oversaw NCAA Division III programming and strategic planning for NCAA Regional Rules Seminars, and annually presented continuing education to the membership.

- Analyzed, processed, and presented legislative relief waivers, initial-eligibility waivers, progress-toward-degree waivers, prospective student-athlete reviews, Academic Performance Plan penalty waivers, Academic Progress Rate adjustment requests, membership requirements waivers, and interpretations requests.
- Managed the Division III rules test and developed educational resources for various Division III constituents.
- Liaised between the NCAA Academic Outreach Team and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A).

Other NCAA Experience

- Supervised the assistant director of inclusion, the coordinator of inclusion, and three NCAA postgraduate interns, and managed performance against job accountabilities, department goals, and national office values.
- Served as member of the Women Leaders in College Sports Legislative and Governance Committee.
- Served on editorial board for book series "Explorations in Small College Athletics" (2015).

OTHER RELATED EXPERIENCE

Team Leader and Corps Member
AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC*),*
Denver, CO *January 2003 – November 2004*

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

2018 Indiana University LGBTQ+ Distinguished Alumni Award