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# THE SPORTS CULTURE AND CLIMATE FOR LGBT+ ATHLETES AND MEMBERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER'S NCAA ATHLETIC PROGRAM

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*“For both men and women, the first step in getting power is to become visible to others, and then to put on an impressive show...As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we’ll all be better for it” (Sandra Day O’Connor: Ruth Bader Ginsburg My Own Words).*

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, as the two legendary path makers they were, remind us that the power of visibility can change the world. That is the power of people being seen doing what they were told they could not do or being somewhere they were told they did not belong alters the minds and hearts of societies. You do not have to go far to understand that in many cultures across the globe, LGBT+ people have been historically underrepresented and excluded in sports, and thus invisible in the sports world. But that is changing. Across the nation and globe more LGBT+ people are coming out, living authentically, and being embraced for who they are. Sport has achieved an almost supernatural pedestal in our world. It is this pedestal that also allows the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in this world, and a potent accelerator for change in many aspects of LGBT+ rights.

This analysis focuses on LGBT+ college student athletes. What is the culture within which LGBT+ student athletes are operating today? Spurred by decades of legal and social change, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides an inclusive policy

framework and recommendations for LGBT+ athletes. Advocacy groups are paying attention as well, monitoring the adoption of these policies. Athlete Ally is one such organization created to measure how Power Five Schools are doing when it comes to the implementation of these policy recommendations. (Power Five Schools are those that compete in the five most competitive college football conferences.) There has also been an explosion of social activist campaigns in recent years which aim to further the rights and visibility of LGBT+ athletes. However, there remains a significant gap in case-by-case and in-depth understanding of the culture surrounding athletics for LGBT+ people at specific NCAA member institutions.

It remains that policy is not the same thing as culture or even implementation. My study aims to understand the culture of University of Colorado (CU) Boulder Athletics for LGBT+ members in comparison to CU's Policy. CU Boulder scores 95/100 on the "Athletic Equality Index" as measured by Athlete Ally and is among the top of Pac 12 schools for their inclusive policies for LGBT+ athletes. To what extent is this policy being observed on the ground and among the various members of the CU athletic community – student athletes, coaches, and administrators? The specific question being asked in this study: What is the culture and climate like for members of the LGBT+ community in CU Boulder athletics?

Chapter Two reviews the literature informing the analysis, including research focused on law and policy adopted to address LGBT+ rights in sports; the LGBT+ experience of discrimination; and research on attitudes and climate in sports from the LGBT+ rights in sports advocacy community. Chapter Three draws on the literature to frame the hypotheses and the research design. Chapter Four presents the results from the survey distributed to the CU Boulder

athletic community (NCAA athletes, coaches, and athletic department administrators) designed to elicit information on the sports climate for LGBT+ athletes and other members of the athletic community at CU Boulder. Chapter Five, provides discussion and analysis of the survey results, adding in interview findings to probe the question of sports climate more deeply. The conclusions are found in Chapter Six.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The NCAA provides an inclusive policy framework and recommendations for LGBT+ athletes. Athlete Ally is an organization created to measure how Power Five Schools are doing when it comes to the implementation of these policy recommendations. The University of Colorado Boulder scores 95/100 on the "Equality Index" and is among the top of Pac 12 schools for their inclusive policies for LGBT+ Athletes. It remains that policy is not the same thing as culture or even implementation. My study aims to understand the culture of CU Athletics for LGBT+ members in comparison to CU's Policy. This chapter reviews several sets of literature to help lay the foundation for analysis of sports culture and attitudes related to LGBT+ members of athletic communities. This review considers law and policy on LGBT+ rights in sports. It then addresses the complex topic of discrimination against LGBT+ people in sports from a perspective in neuroscience and through an assessment of the conversation NCAA member institutions have begun to have around LGBT+ inclusion in sports. Finally, this chapter addresses the social activism projects that have sparked national and even international conversation about the culture and climate of sports for LGBT+ members.

There are many other research avenues that could be probed. For example, psychological studies might be useful in terms of examining how policy content and application might affect psychological and neurological responses of athletes. While interesting and important, that is a question outside the scope of this study. Instead, the literature outlined here will provide the platform necessary for understanding the laws and policies in place addressing LGBT+ rights,

and what is known about attitudes and culture related to LGBT+ rights within the sports community.

## **A. Research Focused on Law and Policy Focused on LGBT+ Rights in Sports.**

Legal scholarship forms one of the most important, extensive, and relevant bodies of literature when it comes to LGBT+ rights in society and specifically in sports. This includes the legal discussion of LGBT+ rights, legal precedents that have arisen to address athletics, and then the intersection of LGBT+ rights and sports.

### **1. The law and LGBT+ rights**

Some of the most significant US Supreme Court cases that have furthered the visibility and rights of LGBT+ individuals are 1) *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644, legalizing same sex marriage across all 50 states, and holding that the right to marry is fundamental and protected by the Due Process and Equal Protection clauses of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment; and 2) *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U. S. \_\_\_\_ (2020), banning the hiring and firing of employees based in part on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Further, the protections of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act “prohibit employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin” (Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act). This case made it clear that one cannot discriminate against a person based on their sexual orientation or gender identity without also discriminating against their sex.

Bostock holds specific relevance when it comes to a discussion about furthering diversity and inclusive excellence in LGBT+ NCAA sports. That is because the same legal logic should hold true for Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments--which impact NCAA funding for college sports. Title IX says, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments). Each sport and program at all Division I and Division II universities are allowed a certain number of scholarships for student athletes. Currently, there are exceptions for race related diversity scholarships. However, diversity exceptions are not at the moment recognized for LGBT+ athletes. Indirectly, *Bostock v. Clayton County* shows that this may be an interesting Constitutional conversation. Although there is no direct rule allowing funding opportunities for LGBT+ student athletes, thanks to *Bostock*, the language in the Title IX Civil Rights Act protecting sex-based funding discrimination may help the non-existence of a diversity exception for scholarships for LGBT+ student athletes.

## **2. The law and NCAA sports**

When it comes to assessing the culture of a university athletic institution understanding the law on NCAA climate at large is important. *Alston v. National Collegiate Athletic Association* (No. 19-15566, 9th Cir. 2020) enjoined the "National Collegiate Athletic Association from enforcing rules that restrict the education-related benefits that its member institutions may offer students who play Football Bowl Subdivision football and Division I basketball" (No. 19-15566, 9th Cir. 2020). This means that scholarship caps and quotas in



football and men's basketball are no longer allowed. Which brings into question Title IX and equal opportunity for scholarship irrespective of sex.

In *O'Bannon v. NCAA (O'Bannon II)*, 802 F.3d 1049 (9th Cir. 2015), the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of collegiate football and basketball players, allowing them to be compensated for their name, image, and likeness in a broader scope to uphold antitrust laws (No. 19-15566, 9th Cir. 2020). This case is important in the literature because it sets precedent for *Alston* in its analysis of the Sherman Act and unreasonable restraints on trade.

### **3. The law and legislation on LGBT+ rights in sports**

Idaho has been the recent battleground for LGBT+ rights in sports. An article in *The Washington Post* by Roman Stubbs renders the story of Lindsay Hecox, a runner for the university of Idaho and her fight against legislation banning her participation in female athletics as a transgender individual. Stubbs shares,

“House Bill 500, known as the Fairness in Women’s Sports Act, states “athletic teams or sports designated for females, women, or girls shall not be open to students of the male sex,” and also requires that girls and women have genital and hormonal testing if their biological sex is challenged. Idaho’s new law, coupled with another recently passed state law banning transgender people from changing their birth certificates to match their gender identity, is emblematic of the legislation challenging transgender rights across the country over the past year” ( Stubbs 2020).

Globally there is also backlash against the rights and equal access to sports for transgender and intersex individuals. Another article in *The Washington Post* covers recent changes in the lifelong battle of Olympic Gold Medalist, intersex, 800-meter runner Caster Semenya. Rick Maese reports that a panel of arbitrators,

“agreed that the IAAF rules are discriminatory in nature, “but the majority of the Panel found that, on the basis of the evidence submitted by the parties, such discrimination is a necessary, reasonable and proportionate means of achieving the IAAF’s aim of preserving the integrity of female athletics,” the court said in its executive summary. By a 2-1 margin, a panel of three arbitrators sided with the IAAF, allowing the sport’s international governing body to maintain its restrictions on athletes such as Semenya, a female competitor who is believed to have an intersex condition that causes her body to naturally produce testosterone at levels much higher than most women” (Maese 2019).

If anything, these legal decisions, and congressional acts show that there are still great strides to be made in the area of LGBT+ inclusivity in the world of sports.

## **B. The LGBT+ Athlete Experience of Discrimination**

In 1999 the sports news website Outsports was founded by Jim Buzinski and Cyd Zeigler. Outsports remains a one-of-a-kind organization globally. Over the past 20 years only 580 amateur and professional athletes who identify as LGBT+ have shared a coming out story

with Outsports. That being said, over the last decade LGBT+ visibility, equality, and advocacy in the world of sports has moved in a tremendous positive direction. Nike's Be True movement and collection of gear, shoes and apparel was started by Nike employees in the Pride Network with the aim of advancing LGBT+ equality in sports. You Can Play, the social activism campaign was founded by Patrick Burke, a scout for the Philadelphia Flyers and his son who played hockey for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Their campaign was founded around the concept and slogan, "If you can play, you can play" – that is, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity.

In the world of college athletics in the United States there have been few but notable efforts to understand and positively impact the culture of college athletic environments surrounding LGBT+ individuals. The organization Athlete Ally was created by Hudson Taylor in 2011. Athlete Ally has pooled the largest set of data about sports policy regarding LGBT+ athletes across NCAA Power Five Institutions using their "Athletic Equality Index," (a measurement tool that audits handbooks of power five schools to find their policies on LGBT+ members).

### **1. Literature addressing stereotype threat and athletic performance.**

Stereotype threat is "the risk of confirming negative stereotypes about an individual's racial, ethnic, gender, or cultural group" (The Glossary of Education Reform). This social, psychological, and neurobiological phenomenon can manifest in various situations and contexts and can hold different nuances. The most widely cited example is that African American students have been measured to perform worse on standardized tests when they were reminded prior to taking one such test that "African Americans did, or statistically were reported to be

doing, worse on these tests.” In short, the threat of a stereotype manifests the reality of that stereotype itself. Jennifer A. Mangels and her colleagues in their 2012 study, “Emotion Blocks the Path to Learning Under Stereotype Threat,” found that stereotype threat has the same impacts on women taking math and science-oriented tests such as the GRE as it does on African Americans taking college entry tests such as the ACT. “Gender-based stereotypes undermine females’ performance on challenging math tests” (Mangels et al. 2012). As an important discovery in neuroscience, Mangels et al. unveiled that emotional responses to stereotypes are the mechanisms in the brain responsible for lack of performance. For reference to better understand these findings ST stands for stereotype threat and NT stands for Neutralizing Threat. FRN stands for Feedback Related Negativity, that is, following error on participants taking tests. Mangels et al. write,

“Under stereotype threat, emotional responses to negative feedback predicted both disengagement from learning and interference with learning attempts....Under non-threat conditions, emotional responses to negative feedback did not curtail exploration of the tutor, and the amount of tutor exploration predicted learning success...This finding suggests that stereotypes may indeed selectively increase the emotional burden of negative feedback on learning.” (Mangels et al).

These findings are groundbreaking because they reveal that the mechanism behind stereotype threat are the emotional processing and reaction systems in the brain. Mangels et al. continue:

“In the presence of negative stereotypes about their math ability, females fulfilled this prophecy by underperforming on a math test compared to their unthreatened peers....Our main finding was that the paths to this successful learning differed as a function of ST,

with threat increasing the dependence between females' emotional response to negative performance feedback and their error correction success. Specifically, females who demonstrated evidence of enhanced initial detection of negative outcomes (i.e. FRNdiff), perhaps stemming from greater overall vigilance for ability-impugning information, disengaged earliest from their exploration of subsequent learning opportunities, whereas those who demonstrated poorer regulation of their attention to and arousal from the negative feedback (i.e. LPPdiff) failed to receive significant learning benefits from any tutorial information they may have explored. Neutralizing threat not only liberated learning from dependence on these emotional responses, but also from prior measures of ability (i.e. Math SAT)...These results are broadly consistent with recent fMRI findings that females' threat-induced performance deficits on math-relevant tasks are related to increased activity in neural regions associated with emotional conflict and its regulation, including the ventral anterior cingulate cortex (Wraga et al., 2007; Krendl et al., 2008)" (Mangels et al).

How is this connected to LGBT+ people and how stereotype threat may impact their performance in sports? We know that finding a mental state of emotional cool is vital to top level performance in every sport. Anecdotally and empirically, this has been proven time and again. This fact is so true that an entire field of psychological support, sports psychology, has been created to help athletes reach peak performance. Not to mention, whole books have been written and terms coined explaining how athletes can and should harness their emotions to aid in their performance instead of hindering it. See, for example, the work of Eetu Griffith in *Reaching the Flow State: Get Into Your Zone: The Practical Psychology of Peak*. Ask any athlete in any sport and they can tell you how they won or lost a race, meet, match, or game because they kept their

emotions where they wanted them or let them take over and distract them. If anything, else, this captures the essence of the importance of the mind, emotion, body connection in the world of sport.

Therefore, if we take the axiom that many cultures across the globe hold stereotypes that LGBT+ people don't belong in sports, much like cultures across the modern globe hold that women do not belong in STEM roles, we can logically assume that “neural regions associated with emotional conflict and its regulation,” are responsible for undermining performance in the sports world. Eliud Kipchogae, the first human to ever break 2 hours in the marathon says, “only the disciplined are free.”

It is clear that stereotype threat impacts mental performance, and it is clear that mental performance impacts athletic performance. For more detailed discussion of the stereotype threat and its effects on athletic performance, see Appendix A.

## **2. Literature on how NCAA institutions have begun the conversation of climate for LGBT+ athletes.**

“Leadership Styles of College and University Athletic Directors and the Presence of NCAA Transgender Policy” by Bowden et al. (2016) provides a meaningful contribution to the literature because they explore the point that institutions matter when it comes to climate for LGBT+ athletes. Specifically, although guidelines may be mostly unanimous across the NCAA, there is still a wide range of factors that influence the implementation of guidelines into policy

and practice. In this case, athletic directors were contacted and interviewed about how they decided to implement policy and practice in accordance with NCAA guidelines and best practices on transgender inclusion:

“Although the NCAA has addressed practices for athletic administrators, it does not mandate member institutions to adhere to them (Office of Inclusion, 2011). By doing so, the NCAA has left this issue open to individual institutional athletic directors to make the decision of whether or not transgender issues are important to them and/or are important on their campuses” (Bowden 267).

This finding forms an important conversation in the body of relevant literature because it uncovers that simply auditing the NCAA handbooks of an NCAA Institution to assess whether they have implemented successful policy and practice to support LGBT+ athletes may fall altogether short. For the purposes of a study into the culture, which by definition goes deeper than policy, findings by Bowden and colleagues certainly suggests that a deeper more interpersonal research design is called for.

Literature on culture and climate in NCAA athletics for LGBT+ people is limited. Atteberry-Ash, et al. (2018) offer an important lens into studies that measure culture, climate and allyship. They explain how measuring allyship in NCAA institutions through asking heterosexual students about their support for policies protecting LGBT+ athletes can be very helpful in measuring overall athlete culture and climate. That is because understanding the views of non- LGBT+ individuals regarding LGBT+ individuals if understood accurately forms an

understanding of what values in place may be impacting culture. In other words, do the formal policies in place have real impact on actual athlete culture and climate.

University of Missouri-Kansas City researcher Robert Greim took a specific look at the question of how both LGBT and Non-LGBT student athletes perceive the climate in NCAA athletic departments. This research explores how institutions can investigate their own climates for LGBT athletes. Their most pertinent findings to my research are as follows:

- “[N]o significant relationship was found between LGBT identity and perception of LGBT climate” (Greim 134). This is very illuminating because it indicates that people have a good perception on the climate of a culture for a specific group regardless of if they belong to that group or not.
- No significant relationship was found between risk of sport injury and perception of LGBT climate (Greim 134). This finding came in testing the question, “Do student-athletes on teams with lower risk of injury report a more LGBT-friendly athletics climate than others?” This particular study singling out impact sports perhaps missed the subtler point of which sports have historically more homophobic cultures than others. As homophobia and transphobia can take lots of different forms and permeate so many domains of culture, this finding is not surprising.
- The study “found a significant relationship between having an out coach or teammate and perceived LGBT climate within the department. In the study’s model, student-



athletes who do not have an out coach or teammate are 2.8 times more likely to report a warm LGBT climate within athletics than those who do have an out coach or teammate” (Greim 134).

This last finding is particularly important because it indicates that visibility is an important factor to measure and understand when it comes to studying the sports culture of LGBT+ athletes.

### **C. Research from the LGBT+ Rights in Sports Advocacy Community Focused on Attitudes and Climate**

You Can Play Project is a social activist campaign that is centered around the idea that is concisely captured in their slogan, “if you can play, then you can play” that is irrespective of your sexual orientation or gender identity. In their words they work, “to ensure the safety and inclusion for all who participate in sports, including LGBT+ athletes, coaches and fans. We achieve this by creating a community of allies that is able to foster a true sense of belonging” (youcanplayproject.org). You Can Play was founded by Patrick Burke, Brian Kitts.

Understanding this organization is essential to this case study because it lays the groundwork for models of inclusive sports inclusion slogans at the amateur and professional level.

According to their website, “Outsports is a sports news website focusing on LGBT issues and personalities in amateur and professional sports. The company was founded in 1999 by Cyd Zeigler, Jr. and Jim Buzinski. The Outsports Revolution, by Cyd Zeigler Jr. and Jim Buzinski, was released in 2007” (Outsports). Outsports incredibly useful and informative to this study

because they are the nation's leading movement on providing lived experience from LGBT+ athletes. This Lived experience will both help inform the questions on surveys and interviews, as well as serve as a good indicator simply by noting that only one NCAA CU athlete has published their story with Outsports.

The Athletic Equality Index was developed by Athlete Alley, an organization dedicated to inclusive athletic environments for LGBT+ individuals. Athlete Alley created a measurement tool to rank Power 5 NCAA program's inclusivity for LGBT+ athletes. In their words, "The Athletic Equality Index was developed as a way to measure LGBT+ inclusion, policies, and practices in collegiate athletic spaces. Launched in 2017 and updated in 2019, this first-of-its-kind report provides a comprehensive look at how member programs of the NCAA Power Five conferences are supporting their LGBT+ student-athletes, coaches, administrators, staff, and fans. To do this, a scale was developed that scored the implementation and accessibility of critical LGBT+-inclusive policies and best practices" (Athlete Alley 2017). These policies and practices include:

- Nondiscrimination Policy,
- Accessible Resources,
- LGBT+ inclusive Fan Code of Conduct,
- Follows NCAA Guidelines for Transgender Inclusion,
- LGBT+ student Group Initiative,
- Out or Allied Staff,
- Collaboration with Campus Group,
- Pro LGBT+ Equality Campaign Statement.

Athlete Ally is helpful to this case study because it is a relatively good indicator of where CU's policies rank in regard to inclusivity for their LGBT+ athletes. Therefore, it is a good way to measure CU Athletics policies in comparison to culture.

#### **D. Controversial Opinions**

The NCAA's "Transgender Student-Athlete Policy: How Attempting to Be More Inclusive Has Led to Gender and Gender-Identity Discrimination," by Elliot Rozenberg, provides a list of nuanced and insightful views into how "identity politics" such as the use of hormone therapy in order for transgender athletes to play can hurt LGBT+ student athletes themselves. This literature is helpful to this case study project because it provides a lens into the kind of questions that can be asked in interviews and surveys that are eye opening but nontraditional in more than one way.

The reviewed literature discussed here shows that when it comes to legal analysis, there have been great strides to protect and further the rights of LGBT+ people, but that there are still barriers in the way of elevating the inclusion of LGBT+ athletes, for example, diversity scholarships cannot be given explicitly to LGBT+ members here at CU. This literature also shows that LGBT+ people have faced and still face discrimination in sports. In recent years there has been much more attention given to understanding how and why and where discrimination takes place in sports, specifically school sports. However, there remains a significant gap in case-by-case and in-depth understanding of the culture surrounding athletics for LGBT+ people at specific NCAA member institutions. We know that there has been an explosion of social activist

campaigns in recent years which aim to further the rights and visibility of LGBT+ athletes. What effect has this had on collegiate athletics?

In political science scholarship and our national conversation on LGBT+ rights there has been a limited body of research and conversation about how LGBT+ people experience culture and succeed in sport across the NCAA system. To date, there has never been a case study that explores in depth the culture of sports for LGBT+ people at one single NCAA institution. Using the background legal, athletic culture, and policy literature as a starting point, this research aims to fill this specific gap in the literature surrounding LGBT+ visibility and equality in sports by launching such a study at the University of Colorado Boulder.

## Chapter Three: Research Design

What is the culture of University of Colorado (CU) Boulder athletics like for LGBT+ student athletes, coaches, and administrators? As detailed in the literature review, many laws and policies have been adopted over the past several decades to protect and advance the rights of the LGBT+ community, including LGBT+ athletes. Have these policy changes led to attitudes of support across the athletic community? This is a question that remains largely unanswered.

To date, there has never been a case study that explores in depth the *culture* of an athletic department for LGBT+ people at one single NCAA institution--and notably at a Power Five Institution. (*Power Five* is an informal reference to the set of five conferences that encompass the most competitive college football teams across the U.S.) This research aims to fill this specific gap in the literature surrounding LGBT+ visibility and equality in sports by launching such a study at the University of Colorado Boulder.

### A. Hypotheses

The question of LGBT+ culture in university athletics remains widely open. This study tests two hypotheses to build understanding, both of the broad questions as well as in specific application to CU Boulder's athletic program.

**Hypothesis 1:** CU Boulder athletics has an incredibly supportive culture for its LGBT+ members.

Some of the available information provides evidence for this hypothesis. For example, CU Boulder scores at the top among the Pac-12 schools (the conference covering the top-competing Western university athletic programs), recognized on the Athlete Equality Index for its culture of inclusive excellence. This index was developed by an LGBT+ advocacy group, Athlete Ally, as a way to measure LGBT+ inclusion policies and practices. Many assume that policy change leads to changes in attitudes and culture. This hypothesis tests the assumption that policy adopted is correlated with changes in attitudes.

**Hypothesis 2:** CU Boulder’s athletic culture does not include open and inclusive attitudes towards LGBT+ members.

Informal evidence suggests that CU Boulder Athletics may not be living up to its reputation and policy commitments. For example, some of the athletic leadership have noted that “there are no openly LGBT+ male student athletes who are a part of the CU NCAA athletics program.” The question of sports culture and climate moves beyond athletes to include coaches and administrators as well. What is it like more generally for LGBT+ athletes, coaches, and administrators at CU Boulder?

As the statement of these two hypotheses suggests, it is very unclear as to the true nature of the sports climate for LGBT+ athletes and other members of the athletic community at CU Boulder. Indeed, the purpose of the study is to build understanding. In this light, it is probably more accurate to state that the underlying hypothesis for this project is neutral. In other words, there is no prediction of a positive, negative, or neutral sports climate for LGBT+ athletes, coaches, and administrators at CU Boulder.

The study being undertaken here is of major interest to both the researcher and the CU Boulder Athletics Department. The methods were developed in cooperation with CU Athletics staff with the goal of improving the sports climate and culture of the department and to advance CU Boulder Athletics as a national leader for inclusive excellence and diversity. The results of this study will be used by the CU Boulder Athletics Department to bridge the gap between tolerance and acceptance for LGBT+ athletes, both at CU Boulder and nationwide.

## **B. Data Gathering Methods**

Two different methods are used in this study to test the attitudes of the CU Boulder Athletic community: a broad survey systematically distributed to the entire set of individuals currently associated with CU Boulder Athletics, with results analyzed using statistical methods; and in-depth interviews to gain greater understanding of the lived experiences of the members of the athletic community at CU Boulder. See Appendix B for a complete listing of survey questions and interview questions.

The population from which individuals will be invited to participate in both the survey and interviews includes 581 people. This includes the 372 NCAA student athletes enrolled at CU Boulder in 2021; and 209 individuals who comprise the CU Boulder Athletic Department coaching and administrative staff.

The goal in designing both the survey and interview instruments was to formulate questions that would reveal insights on both the experiences and attitudes of the participants. The

effort to develop effective questions started with outreach to the CU Boulder athlete alumni community as well as subscribers to Outsports, a sports news website focusing on LGBT+ issues and personalities in amateur and professional sports. Reaching out to solicit this kind of input was very helpful for this case study because it informed questions on issues such as allyship, as discussed in the literature review. Allyship between LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ athletes is considered one of the most important results of anti-discrimination policy, practice, and culture. Will this be observed in the CU Boulder athletic community? Further, taking the concept of measuring culture through the eyes of vulnerable populations as well as privileged populations informs the collaborative approach of the research design for this case study. Roughly 1,160 contacts were sent out to LGBT+ and CU alumni athletes asking them to help generate the kinds of questions they would want to be asked if they were participating in the survey.

A survey was sent out to roughly 1,160 individuals requesting input on question-wording. This initial survey was sent to CU Boulder athlete alumni and Outsports members who were asked to help generate one to two questions that they would like to be asked if they were the ones that were part of a study about sports culture in regard to LGBT+ people. The responses received were compared and selected by the researcher, with input from Athletic Department staff, and then final sets of questions drawn up for the survey and interviews. A total of eight questions were included in the final survey instrument. (See Appendix B for a list of the official survey questions.)

The survey instrument was designed for distribution to the entire current population of the CU Boulder Athletic Department – athletes, coaches, and administrators. The cooperation



and assistance of the Athletic Department was critical to gaining access to all necessary contact information, as well as to aiding with communications with members of the athletic community to alert them to the survey and encourage their participation.

Interviews were designed to take place over 30-minute intervals via Zoom, with a range of questions to elicit both specific and open-ended responses. The questions vary depending on whether the interview subject is an athlete or a member of the coaching or administrative staff. As with the survey, the Athletic Department staff assistance was critical for establishing contact and communicating to the full set of potential participants to set up a full schedule of interviews with as many as possible. (See Appendix C for a list of the official interview questions.)

### **C. Methods of Analysis**

The data collected for this research allows for both statistical and qualitative analysis. Data from surveys will be analyzed statistically, identifying important patterns among the results. These might include documenting different levels of attitudes and experiences. Interview transcripts will be assessed for patterns of responses, identifying key themes, common patterns, and unusual responses.

These two forms of data will be compared and corroborated in order to look for linkages, between the numbers and the described experiences, as well as any disparities between the two. All data will be kept anonymous. Both the survey and interview results will be shared with the Athletic Department. Finally, a set of recommendations will be drawn from the research

findings and delivered as a final report to the university's Athletic Department. A longer-term goal is to use the research and findings to assess whether CU Boulder Athletics is at the tolerance or acceptance level for LGBT+ athletes. Based on the results, an action project is planned for following up to raise CU Boulder to the highest level of acceptance for LGBT+ athletic members, and to serve as a national leader on LGBT+ inclusion in sports.

## **Chapter Four: Survey Results, Discussion and Analysis**

### **A. Summary of Survey Interview and Data Analysis Process**

Two different methods are used in this study to test the attitudes of the CU Boulder Athletic community. First, a survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions was systematically distributed to the entire set of individuals currently associated with CU Boulder Athletics. Results were analyzed using statistical methods and in-depth interpretation of written text box responses. Second, comprehensive 30-minute interviews were held over Zoom to gain greater understanding of the lived experiences of the members of the athletic community at CU Boulder. The main tool used to inform this thesis is the survey instrument, supplemented with interview results which gained fewer responses due to the time commitment for participants.

To inform the survey, eight questions were selected out of the total 42 responses returned from Openly LGBT+ sports members and CU alumni. (See Appendix B for a list of the official survey questions.) The survey instrument was designed for distribution to the entire current population of the CU Boulder Athletic Department – athletes, coaches, and administrators.

During the survey process: A total of exactly 581 invitations were sent to possible participants. Of these invitations, 209 were sent to coaches and administrators within the university's NCAA Athletic Department, and 372 invitations were sent to all NCAA student athletes enrolled during the spring semester of 2021. Surveys were sent out using the university's secure data collection tool, Qualtrics. A consent form was the first thing that all participants

viewed in this survey. Participants could only continue their survey if they gave their consent. The survey was kept open for 9 days. All participants were sent a reminder that the survey was closing three days out before the end of the survey.

4 interviews were conducted over Zoom. Interviews were recorded. All data was kept on a secure cloud. Consent was gained for both surveys and interviews and both the survey and the interviews were approved by the IRB Institutional review Board for human subject research.

80 responses were recorded in total. By luck, the sample size of the survey and of the Outsports members and CU alum who were contacted to help generate questions are all within 20 of 580 contacts. However, 6 CU Boulder student athletic alumni responded to question generation and 32 Outsports members responded to question generation, in comparison to the 80 responses to the study. All three of these categories were collected over qualities in a very similar manner. Not all respondents responded to all the questions.

Text entry responses were processed individually and categorized into patterns of key findings. Section questions were processed using descriptive statistics in R Studio. The four interviews were recorded by video and supplement the findings of the survey when applicable. Interview findings are sprinkled throughout the analysis in the following pages.

The outright limits of this study are, of course, that I could not ask for identifying information across sexual orientation and gender identity. That being said, a number of respondents self-identified as LGBT+ in their responses and all respondents offered meaningful

insight. Many respondents indicated their effort to put themselves in the shoes of LGBT+ members while others shared that they believed that they could not speak on lived experiences outside of their own. This, by itself, offers insight into the cultural awareness of the CU Athletic community.

**As a reminder for Better Context of the Results, the Hypotheses Under Investigation:**

The question of LGBT+ culture in university athletics remains widely open. This study tests two hypotheses to build understanding, both of the broad questions as well as in specific application to CU Boulder's athletic program.

**Hypothesis 1:** CU Boulder athletics has an incredibly supportive culture for its LGBT+ members.

Some of the available information provides evidence for this hypothesis. For example, CU Boulder scores at the top among the Pac-12 schools (the conference covering the top-competing Western university athletic programs), recognized on the Athlete Equality Index for its culture of inclusive excellence. This index was developed by an LGBT+ advocacy group, Athlete Ally, as a way to measure LGBT+ inclusion policies and practices. Many assume that policy change leads to changes in attitudes and culture. This hypothesis tests the assumption that policy adopted is correlated with changes in attitudes.

**Hypothesis 2:** CU Boulder's athletic culture does not include open and inclusive attitudes towards LGBT+ members.

## **B. Results**

The results from this survey are best understood and presented question by question. The questions on the survey were carefully designed to try to understand different aspects of what the sports culture at CU Athletics is like for LGBT+ members. Some questions were designed with text entry options in order to encourage participants to share freely their opinions, insights and lived experiences within the parameters of the topic of the question.

Other questions were designed as yes/no selections, and one as a feeling thermometer on the ease of coming out within CU sports on a scale of 1-5. These questions were designed to gain a quantitative understanding into the descriptive statistical realities of the culture of CU Athletics for LGBT+ members. The results are as follows. **Questions as they appear on Qualtrics 1-3 all involve informed consent.**

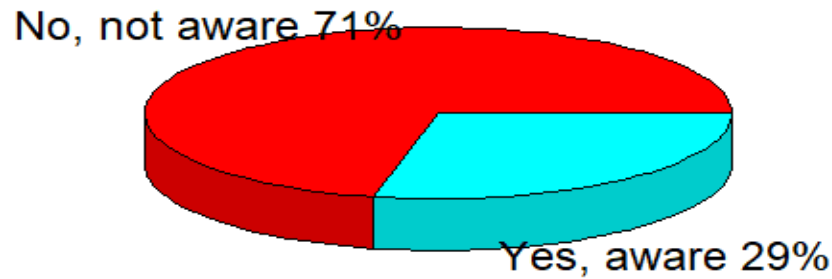
***Question number 4 (Q4) Reads: Are you aware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide-Champions of Respect?***

Instead of assessing the opinions of participants, as most questions do in this survey this question was designed to gather information on awareness of the NCAA's initiatives to include LGBT+ athletes in member institutions. Sometimes awareness of overarching policy can demonstrate if a culture is in alignment with this policy or not. Of the 80 participants who

responded to the survey, 63 responded to this question. 18 people were aware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide – Champions of Respect. 45 people were not aware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide. **Figure 1 depicts these results.**

**Figure 1**

**Awareness of NCAA's LGBTQ Inclusive Initiative Framework**



**Figure 1** shows that most people within CU Athletics are not aware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide – Champions of Respect. There is no clear causal connection between being aware of this framework and a warm inclusive environment at CU for LGBT+ athletes. Instead, what this may show is that most members are not aware of the policies the NCAA lays out for inclusion expectations around LGBT+ athletes. In the current climate of policy, the NCAA may be more inclusive than most

member institutions and their subsequent members are aware of. There may not be a divide between positive policy for LGBT+ inclusion and a positive culture, and it appears members of CU athletics are not very aware of the NCAA's stance. This may become of specific relevance in context of transgender athletes where people may not realize how much the NCAA supports their participation.

***Question number 5(Q5) reads: How would you describe the sports climate.  
at CU for LGBT+ athletes?***

This question was also specifically worded to ask about athlete experience, although athletes, coaches and administrators were also asked to respond. This question was formatted as a text entry option and designed to gather qualitative data. Respondents' answers fell into four main categories of analysis: (1) The sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes is **Inclusive**. (2) The sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes is **not inclusive**. (3) The sports climate for LGBT+ athletes at CU is a **mixed experience** with different nuances in the culture surrounding LGBT+ athletes. (4) Respondents were **either unsure or believed they could not speak as an authority** about what the sports climate at CU is like for LGBT+ athletes. The numbers of responses in each category should not be over-emphasized. This is because the responses were somewhat subjectively categorized based on some similarities, though differences also remain. For example, other people would have put a mixed response in an inclusive/not inclusive category or vice versa.



23 responses fell into category #1 and made explicitly clear that the sports climate of CU for LGBT+ athletes was inclusive. 5 responses fell into category #2 and were explicitly clear that the sports climate of CU for LGBT+ athletes is not inclusive. 19 responses fell into category #3 and made it clear that a more nuanced sports climate at CU made for a mixed cultural experience for LGBT+ athletes at CU. 6 responses fell into category #4 and made it clear that they were either unsure or believed they could not speak as an authority about what the sports climate at CU is like for LGBT+ athletes. 27 respondents did not answer this question in the survey.

Of the 53 respondents that did answer this question, 43.4% believe that CU athletics has an inclusive environment for LGBT+ athletes. 9.43 % of respondents believe that CU athletics does not have an inclusive environment for LGBT+ athletes. 35.85 % of respondents reported a mixed cultural experience for LGBTTT+ athletes at CU. 11.32% of respondents were either unsure or believed they could not speak as an authority about what the sports climate at CU is like for LGBT+ athletes.

***Key Finding From Q5 Under Inclusive Category: Suggest CU Departmental Leadership and Administration are Outwardly Inclusive.***

An in-depth analysis of participant responses reveals that CU athletic administration and departmental leadership does an effective job at providing an inclusive environment for LGBT+ athletes. Departmental leadership is responsible for the creation and implementation of policy. Therefore, this finding in my study corroborates the finding that The University of Colorado

Boulder scores 95/100 on the Athlete Ally “Equality Index” and is among the top of Pac 12 schools for their inclusive policies for LGBT+ Athletes.

*One respondent shares:*

**“I feel that in recent years, the climate has become more welcoming as the Athletic Dept. and University as a whole have grown in their embrace of the LGBTQ community”**

*While another respondent comments:*

**“I think we are trying to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ athletes and staff. There are educational opportunities and communications pushed out constantly to try to improve our climate. I know we have work to do in this area, but we are talking about it more than we ever have before.”**

These responses are supported by a response with one interview participant. The participant was asked, *“Do you believe CU’s athletic community does a good job asking*

*questions about things they do not understand on the topic of LGBT+ people in sport?* This participant answered this question by specifically speaking to how CU's Athletic Department leadership makes significant and meaningful effort to advance an outwardly supportive and welcoming environment for LGBT+ members.

*This same interview participant also stated:*

**“Yes, over the years I have attended numerous training sessions over the years. We have had some very open discussions and meetings in person. We covered a lot of items in those meetings. Rick George (CU’s Athletic director) wants it to be a safe and open department. We are all considered a big team. I am sure some people do not feel that way, but I have not encountered them. Football will come over at times and go to women’s volleyball and basketball.”**

All three of these responses made it clear that both the impact and the intention of CU Athletic Departmental leadership and administration have been, and are to be, in alignment with creating the most inclusive and welcoming environment possible for LGBT+ members. Many participants used language focused on intentionality when it came to departmental leadership administration and other aspects of the culture.

Intentionality is an important measurement when assessing the sports culture for LGBT+ members. For one – as noted by many participants in the language they used about changing times – inclusion for LGBT+ people in sports is a relatively new national and global discussion. In other areas of the nation there is either nonexistent or negative sentiment in including, supporting, and protecting the participation of LGBT+ people in sports cultures and organizations. For example, in 2021 Kansas passed a State Senate Bill banning the participation of male to female athletes in women’s school sports. In short, having inclusive intention and outspoken inclusive policies sets CU’s leadership and administration apart from much of the nation when it comes to its inclusive culture for LGBT+ athletes. One participant points out that the culture of CU is reflective of the greater Colorado Boulder community.

*They share:*

**“Boulder in general is a very liberal place. I think the climate is as accepting as it can be for LGBTQ athletes.”**

This quote suggests that the culture among leadership, within the department and across teams is accepting because of a greater geographical attitude toward LGBT+ people in general. This quote also draws attention to the concept that participants are aware of the context that sports have historically been a harder institution to navigate for LGBT+ people.

As for a second point on intentionality, in this case, it is fair to consider that when one participant used language about desired positive impact, they also reflected on room for growth in inclusion. Inclusion for LGBT+ athletes at CU only stands to gain from this kind of reflection. Drawing attention to, **“I know we have work to do in this area, but we are talking about it more than we ever have before.”** This portion of the above response suggests that not only do CU administration and leadership have inclusive intentions, but they are also aware of potential growth they could make in the area.

***Key Finding from Q5 Under Inclusive Category: Suggests the Sports Climate for LGBT+ Athletes on Many Teams is Warm and Accepting***

Many participants also reveal that the sports climate for LGBT+ members on teams and throughout coaching experiences is warm and accepting. Many of these responses were the most direct and positive.

*Some of the more notable responses that suggest this include:*

**I believe CU has a very welcoming atmosphere for the LGBTQ  
community**

**An active, inclusive atmosphere that allows for individual expression**

**I would say the climate attempts strongly to advocate for diversity and inclusion of all athletes**

**Very good! Everyone is accepting and sexuality/gender is not a taboo.**

**The sports climate at CU for LGBTQ is very inclusive. A majority of my team identifies as lesbian or bisexual and it does not change our perception of the person. Sexuality is not a problem within my team because we are inclusive and see each other as teammates. In regards to CU as a whole, CU is inclusive to the LGBTQ athletes.**

These responses strongly suggest that CU is doing a lot of things right with its athletic culture for LGBT+ athletes. This positive momentum should not be understated. It can also be conjectured that one of the reasons CU has had so much success in the Pac 12 and at the national level with so many of its sports is because of the strong inclusive culture it has been fostering around areas of social salience for years.

***Key Finding from Q5 Under Not Inclusive Category: The Sports Climate at CU for LGBT+ Athletes Appears To Differ in Inclusivity Across Sport and Gender Categories***

Some respondents suggest that the sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes is not inclusive/supportive. Understanding these responses in their nuance is paramount to gaining a meaningful understanding as to what the sports climate at CU Athletics actually is like for LGBT+ members. These responses are very important and should not be ignored, but they also do not nullify the positive responses. As mentioned earlier, the largest limitation in this study is the fact that identifying information could not be collected on sexual orientation and gender identity.

It should be recognized that those who identify as LGBT+ are already a minority in the US and world population. Most reports guess that the total population of LGBT+ people is about 10%, although this is widely contested now. Nonetheless, the number is a minority. This minority is even more pronounced in athletic communities where LGBT+ people have been historically excluded. Therefore, the responses that indicate that CU is not inclusive must be given credibility in the context of the study. That being said, all experiences are valid. When looking at qualitative data each person's experience and opinion matters and do not necessarily cancel out the other. Rather the point here is to paint a complex picture of respondents' opinions and experiences to shed light on the inner workings of the culture at CU Athletics for LGBT+ members.

The most striking finding apparent in the not inclusive category of the survey is that the difference in inclusivity at CU Athletics, seems to run across gender and sport lines.

*One respondent shares:*

**Honestly pretty terrible at least among the football team.**

This response indicates that LGBT+ athletes may experience a more exclusionary culture in male revenue-generating sports. This finding is largely consistent with national cultural realities surrounding LGBT+ status in sports. But as is the theme, nuance is the name of the game in this context.

Out of their roughly 580 personal stories published since their inception in 1999, Outsports documents that 8 openly gay and bi college players have shared stories as of 2019. This fact lends evidence to the notion that male revenue-generating sports in college athletics across the nation have room to grow when it comes to their inclusion of LGBT+ athletes. When it comes to NFL players, Outsports reports that 39 non-LGBT players across 22 NFL teams have reported playing with an open-to-their-team gay or bisexual teammate. This shows positive movement. That being said, it remains a fact that there has never been anyone who is publicly out while playing football in the National Football League. Further, sometimes professional cultures are, well, more professional than college ones. That is, college football in America may deal with more homophobia than the NFL. It is fair to say that football and other male revenue-



generating sports, as a national culture, deal with a relatively higher level of homophobia than other sports. It is also fair to say that this culture is improving across the nation.

Of course, the culture at CU is the point at hand. From the text entry above it appears that it is not a good culture on the football team at CU. Perhaps the most important question that remains is, **Why?** Is the culture of CU football simply reflecting national realities of homophobia among male revenue generating sports? Is there culture within the team itself that may be challenging for LGBT+ athletes separately apart from the greater social cultural fabric? Are both of these things true? Are neither of them true and there is a different explanation? These are questions that could be explored by the athletic department and through further research.

***Key Finding From Q5 Under Mixed Category: Further Elucidate How The Sports Climate at CU for LGBT+ Athletes Seems to Differ in Inclusivity Across Sport and Gender Categories***

Findings in the mixed category of responses of question 5 corroborate findings from the not inclusive category of responses. These findings strongly suggest that inclusivity for LGBT+ members at CU, and more specifically athletes, run across gender and sport team lines.

*Respondents share:*

**It is 100% dependent on the sport and the coach of that sport in my experience.**

**I think that it depends on the team. There are many coaches and teams that are very supportive and want to be inclusive; however, there are some teams that may not have that culture. There is always improvement to be made for how to be more inclusive. I think that CU has done a good job in some regards but can always do better (have more trainings, open communication with staff/student-athletes, provide resources, etc.).**

**I do feel we have a culture of inclusion and respect around LGBTQ and I would hope athletes who identify as LGBTQ would feel comfortable and accepted in the department but I do suspect that it might differ from team, especially in regards to male sport teams vs. female sport teams. I do not identify as LGBTQ so cannot speak for how LGBTQ athletes feel in the**

**department but as an ally I strive to be inclusive and provide a safe space for athletes.**

**It is supportive especially for women. I imagine that men in revenue sports may feel less so, partially due to national culture in general.**

**We are likely safer, healthier, and more inclusive than many institutions, but also greatly behind being able to best serve all of our student athletes. In regards to the next question, each sport program would likely assign a different number depending on the climate within the team and staff. I will write my answer as if it were someone on my team... knowing that it is not easy to come out even if you feel supported and welcome.**

**I do feel we have a culture of inclusion and respect around LGBTQ and I would hope athletes who identify as LGBTQ would feel comfortable and**

**accepted in the department but I do suspect that it might differ from team, especially in regards to male sport teams vs. female sport teams. I do not identify as LGBTQ so cannot speak for how LGBTQ athletes feel in the department but as an ally I strive to be inclusive and provide a safe space for athletes.**

**I believe it is a very inclusive environment in specific sports, but others are not welcoming**

**I imagine the climate is sport-dependent. But I think most athletes and staff are inclusive of and welcoming to LGBTQ athletes and treat them the same as non-LGBTQ athletes.**

**I think it depends on the sport. For sports like women's basketball, where a lot of the team is openly a member of the community it is a lot easier, vs. for**

**someone on the football team where it is not as common to be openly in the community.**

**Accepting across most sports, but some sports not as accepting. I am not in the locker room or among the athletes, so this is speculation.**

Out of the 19 responses that fall into the mixed category under question #5, 10 responses all mentioned something about differences from team to team or from one gender category to another, or both in regard to the culture at hand. One participant mentions specifically that they believe that revenue generating ,male sports have a more challenging environment for LGBT+ athletes because of the broader national culture. This finding is one of, if not the most clear and specific trend among text entries through the entire survey. These findings are grounds to explore in depth this complex cultural interplay in depth.

***Key Finding From Q5 Under Mixed Category: Individually Descriptive Responses:***

Respondents under the mixed category of question number 5 reveal descriptive nuances in the culture they perceive or guess is around them for LGBT+ athletes.

*One respondent shares:*

**I have not been here long enough to give too many examples, especially with most of my time being remote since I started working at CU. I think there are aspects that make the climate inclusive here at CU like representation of sexual orientation and gender identity amongst staff...but whether the athletes realize that they have allies among them might be another story. Additionally, there have been instances where inflammatory remarks have been made that make the environment less inclusive, such as being on a team call and someone (not realizing they were unmuted) commenting that someone sounded "so gay" and laughing**

This text entry box suggests that there may be a greater divide between coach and administrative culture and athlete culture. Although athlete culture appears to be nuanced at CU, the world of being a student athlete and the social cultural pressures within is very different from that of an administrative and coaching role.

*Another participant shares a different descriptive response and states:*

**I believe more and more student-athletes are out these days and feel comfortable within their teams. I think most coaches are ok with it. Some probably do not know how to address the topic so they don't.**

This response reveals that part of the inclusive culture at CU for LGBT+ members includes the dynamic that CU coaches and administrators have, again, good intentions, but may not know how to foster levels of comfort, outward love, and inclusion.

Two interview responses from student athletes and a text response from the same student athlete at one interview share that the culture for athletes could be more inclusive if more outwardly proactive stances were taken by student athlete allies. For example, this could take place within SAAC, the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, or through a pride student athlete group. A student athlete explains in their interview that they would be heartened to see, **“LGBT+ SAAC sub committees and sensitivity training”** to help people **“notice the things they say.”**

In their interview one student athlete noted that they would like to see coaches and administrators, but especially athletes take a more, **“proactive and less reactive approach”** when it comes to LGBT inclusion.”

*This same student athlete says in their text entry response:*

**We are an inclusive program but I am unaware of what framework and what resources we offer. I feel like more education and awareness can be made on what programs that we have. Additionally, we may need to establish a space of LGBTQ+ SA's and policy so that we can be proactive instead of reactive.**

***Key Finding From Q5 Under Unsure Category: Some CU Athlete Allies Seem to be Aware of Privilege Dynamics and use Their Voice to Speak Constructively and Humbly:***

The respondents that selected that they were unsure as to the sports culture of CU Athletics for LGBT+ members may serve as evidence for the aware, if not inclusive, environment for LGBT+ Athletes within CU Athletics.

*A student athlete shares:*

**I have lots of gay female friends in athletics. I feel like they are supported within their team and the athletic department, but I cannot know if they feel that way. CU promotes inclusivity pretty well.**

*Another student athlete says:*

**In my experience the climate is open and accepting but I also am a cis male who passes as white so I accept that I may be blind to a great deal of adverse situations that are present for those athletes.**

Both of these responses from student athletes explain that from their perspective the sports climate for LGBT+ athletes is good at CU. While explaining this valid observation both of



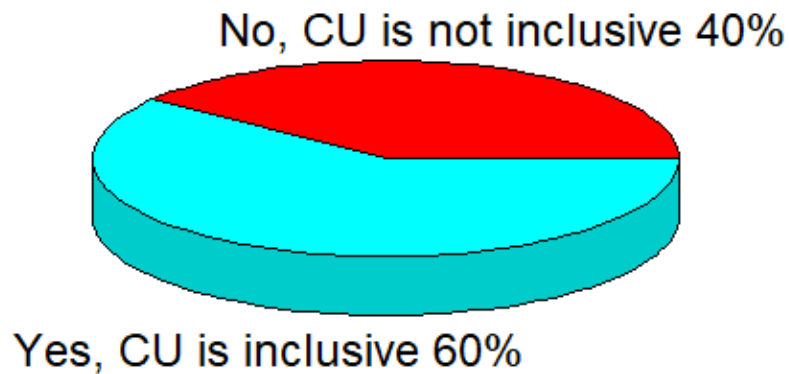
these student athletes also do a tremendous job at recognizing their own privilege in speaking to the situation. This in itself is strong evidence to the kind of ally's LGBT+ members may have within CU Athletics.

***Question number 7 (Q7) Reads Do you Think and or Feel CU Boulder Has a Supportive and Inclusive Environment for Transgender Athletes Specifically?***

Inclusion for transgender athletes across the country is an issue surrounded by ignorance, stigma, and gender hierarchy. The participation of athletes in the gender sports team of the gender athletes – will, are currently, or have transitioned into – is still widely questioned and excluded. This question was designed to plainly gather the opinions on members of CU Athletics on the inclusivity of the program and teams for transgender athletes. Out of the 58 responses to this question 23 participants believe that CU does not have a supportive and inclusive environment for transgender athletes specifically, while 35 participants believe that CU has a supportive and inclusive environment for transgender athletes specifically. **Figure 2** illustrates these results.

**Figure 2**

## Inclusivity for Transgender Athletes in CU Athletics



There are a number of ways to interpret **Figure 2**, and they are all important. First, is in the context of the greater lack of acceptance for transgender student athletes in sport. The fact that 60% of CU's Athletic community believe that they comprise an inclusive community means CU most likely stands out as better than the national average for transgender student athletes. By the same token, the fact that there is such a lack of inclusion for transgender student athletes across the nation means that respondents may be operating from baseline expectations of inclusion that may not really give transgender student athletes what they need insofar as inclusion, visibility, and support.

Further, the numbers show us that 40%, almost half, of respondents do not believe that CU fosters an inclusive environment for transgender student athletes.

*One respondent shares in regard to how they observes transgender student athletes are treated at CU:*

**There is a harsh gender binary in collegiate sports. I cannot speak to all of the sports teams in regards to their inclusivity with regards to sexuality, but my personal experience as a member of the LGBTQ+ community has been tricky.**

This student athlete re-emphasized this point in their interview and explained that she sees ignorant and transphobic attitudes circling CU's sports teams.

Another interview respondent shares in the context of track and field and transgender athlete participation, **"I think that sports is about teaching life lessons and opportunities, rather than being about gender binaries and fairness in female sports."** This statement is at the heart of national discourse surrounding transgender inclusion in sports. The point of this research is not to dive extensively into this discourse. However, there is often a dramatic overstatement and a lack of understating surrounding male to female transgender athletes and fairness in female sports categories. Regardless, this interview participant at CU shows that there are allies at CU for transgender athletes specifically.

Of course, the biggest gap of knowledge in **figure 2** arises from the fact that I was unable to collect identifying information along gender identity in this study. That being said, this data makes it clear that more questions could and probably should be asked to further elucidate the sports climate at CU for transgender athletes.

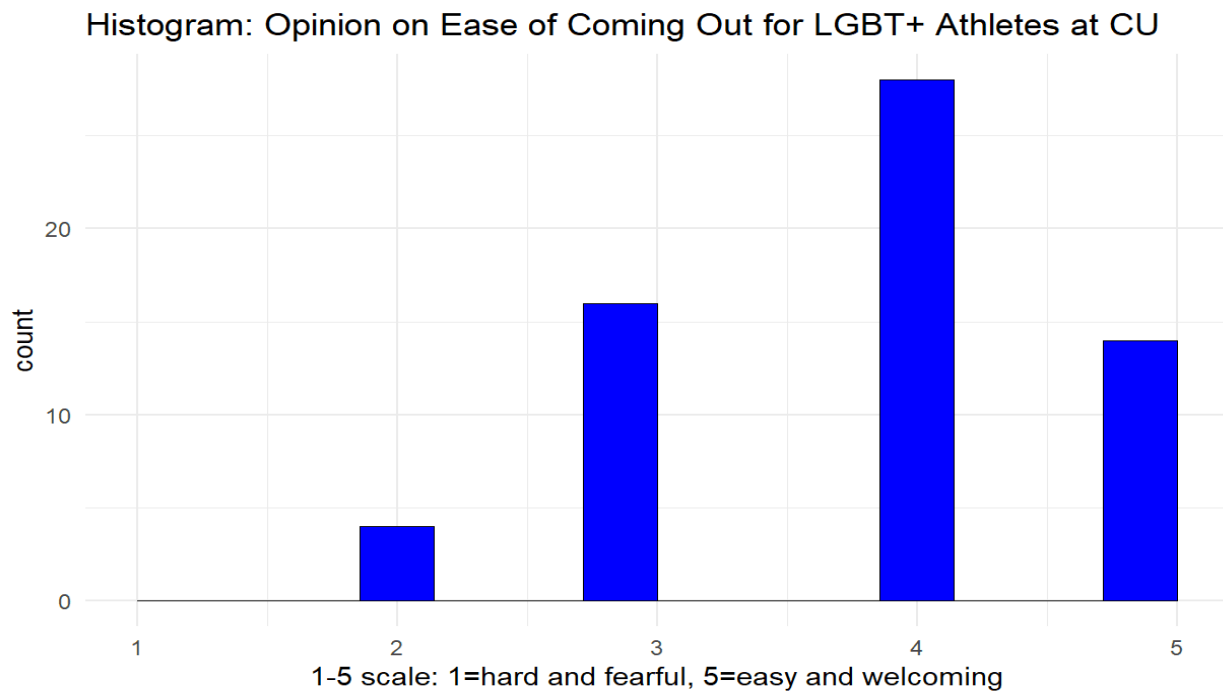
***Question number 6 (Q6) reads: On a scale of 1-5 do you think the sports climate at CU would make it easy and welcoming for an LGBT+ athlete to come out to their teammates and coaches? With 1 being hard and fearful to come out and 5 being easy and welcoming to come out?***

Coming out is categorized as a complex and often difficult cultural experience for individuals who identify as LGBT+. Our social world may be trending toward greater acceptance of LGBT+ people. However, at the core, coming out is often seen as a difficult and challenging personal and social experience. The culture of any environment contributes to the ease or lack thereof for a person in their coming out experiences. This question was designed to gauge opinion on the ease of coming out for LGBT+ athletes at CU in relation to the Athletic Department's culture in order to help shed light on how welcome CU Athletics is to the coming out process. This question was designed to measure the experience of athletes specifically.

Out of the 80 recorded responses on the survey, no respondent believes that coming out at CU as an LGBT+ athlete would fall on a "1," indicating that it would be a "hard and fearful" experience. 4 respondents reported that they believe that coming out at CU as an LGBT+ athlete would fall on a "2," indicating that it would be a mostly "hard and fearful" experience. 16 people

reported that they believe that coming out at CU as an LGBT+ athlete would fall on a “3,” indicating that it would be a natural experience. 28 respondents reported that they believe that coming out at CU as an LGBT+ athlete would fall on a “4,” indicating that it would be a mostly “easy and welcoming” experience. 14 respondents believe that coming out at CU as an LGBT+ athlete would be an easy and welcoming experience. **Figure 3 depicts these results.**

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** indicates that slightly more participants believe that coming out as LGBT+ would be relatively difficult and fear involved than it would be relatively easy and welcome. That is, 2 more participants believe coming out would be relatively difficult and fear involved, than participants believing that it would be relatively easy and welcoming. A clear majority

indicate that they believe coming out would be mostly easy and welcoming within CU athletics, while a small minority believe that coming out within CU Athletics would be mostly hard and fear filled.

There is an interplay of complex factors that could inform responses from participants. These include, but do not exhaust personal experience with coming out, wanting to come out, or lack of experience thereof. What is more, among LGBT+ participants who have a closer experience with the cultural concept of coming out, beliefs and comfort levels vary greatly because of things like family history, personal value structures, and support networks. A class colleague in a gender and sexuality in the law class (taken during the term that I wrote this study) points out that even if an environment is very welcoming to come out in, the internal process can still be very challenging because of greater societal messaging over time. This colleague also pointed out that coming out is a harder process in environments where there is a presumption of “straightness” or non-LGBT+ status. It is clear that this is often the case in sports environments. These things being said, **Figure 3** suggests that the culture of CU Athletics lends itself to a fairly broad experience when it comes to the ease of coming out for LGBT+ athletes. Within these broad experiences **Figure 3** also strongly suggests that CU athletics creates a mostly easy and welcoming environment for LGBT+ athletes to come out in.

It should be noted that out of the four responses that fell into category “2,” mostly hard and fearful, one text box entry from the same respondent on a different question made it clear that the culture for LGBT+ athletes on the football team was, “**honestly pretty terrible.**” This question will be explored in depth in its respective question category. It is of relevance here

because it lends itself to the finding in **Figure 3** that coming out experiences for athletes in relation to sports culture can vary widely. A consistent finding across question categories is that culture from one sport to another within CU Athletics can be different. The obvious and notable limitation to this question is that I did not only ask LGBT+ people their opinion on the ease of coming out at CU for protection purposes in order to not out any participant. Without a doubt, those who have experienced the dynamics of the cultural concept of coming out as applied to themselves are the best people to speak on the experience. However, **Figure 3** is still incredibly informative.

*Question number 8 (Q8) Reads: In a comprehensive Pennsylvania State climate survey researchers found that student-athletes identifying as LGBT+ were less likely to identify as an athlete in their given sport because of an indirect link to a lower perception of the athletic department addressing discrimination and exclusion.*

- *From your own personal knowledge and perspective, anecdotally do you believe that this finding does or does not hold true for LGBT+ athletes at CU?*

The question above describes a concept which can be categorized as stereotype threat. Please see Appendix A on neuroscience and stigmatized identities and the literature review found in Chapter 2 for a more in depth understanding of this phenomenon. This question was

designed to gather a feeling thermometer on whether or not members of CU's sports climate believe that LGBT+ student-athletes suffer from stereotype threat around their identity as an athlete because of a negative climate at CU. In other words, do CU student-athletes identify less with their athlete identity because of stigma about LGBT+ people not belonging in sports due to CU's culture? Although the information necessary to make causal claims to assert this connection go far beyond the scope of this survey, the results to this question present meaningful and informative understandings.

This question was formatted as a text entry option and was designed to gather qualitative data. Respondents' answers fell into four main categories of analysis. (1) Participants believe the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey **holds true**. (2) Participants believe the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey does **not hold true**. (3) Participants responded to this question in their **own descriptive way outside the scope** of the Pennsylvania State climate survey's framework. (4) Participants were **not sure or felt they were not an authority** about the question.

7 participants fall into category #1 and believe that the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey **holds true**. 27 participants fall into category # 2 and believe the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey does **not hold true**. 5 participants responded to this question in their **own descriptive way outside the scope** of the Pennsylvania findings. 5 participants were not sure about the answer to the question. 44 participants did not respond to this question. As with other questions, the specific number of responses in each category should not be given too much emphasis; the actual text responses from each respondent are instructive.



Of the respondents that answered this question, approximately 16% fall into category #1 and believe the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey **holds true**. 61% of respondents that answered this question fell into category #2 and believe the finding in the Pennsylvania State climate survey does **not hold true**. 11% of participants responded to this question in their **own descriptive way or slightly outside the scope**. A remaining 11% of the participants were not sure about the answer to the question. A clear majority of athletic members does not believe this finding holds true at CU.

***Key Finding From Q8 Under Holds True Category : Respondents Agree on Lower Athletic Identity Feelings Among LGBT+ Athletes at CU and Disagree on the Cause:***

Some responses from participants suggest that LGBT+ athletes at CU grapple with how stigma impacts how they identify with their athletic identity. Three more in-depth responses that fall into this category draw out different conclusions as to why this may be happening for LGBT+ athletes at CU.

*One participant attributes lower perception of athletic identity to broader discrimination and exclusion:*

**Unfortunately, this finding is likely true based off of decades of discrimination and exclusion. I believe CU is making great strides to**

**improve, but we are running at marathon pace when we all wish that we could sprint to a successful outcome.**

*Another participant seems to agree and points out that lower perception of athletic identity for LGBT+ athletes in their respective sports is occurring, but not only within CU Athletics:*

**I think it holds true in any athletic setting**

*A third participant's response falls directly in line with the finding in the Pennsylvania State Climate Report and explains that they believe student athletes are less likely to identify as an athlete in their given sport because of the absence of the athletic department addressing LGBT+ discrimination.*

**This holds true at CU. The athletic department's attempts to address diversity and inclusion have been lackluster. I have never seen a mandatory meeting that more than passively addresses discrimination of LGBTQ+ athletes. It all depends on how comfortable someone is with their teammates and sport to claim their identity proudly alongside athletics. The athletic department should at least try to destigmatize queerness in athletics.**

Three participants draw a clear link between how they observe or experience stigma around LGBT+ identity impacting a baseline level of athletic identity for athletes. One participant states very clearly that they believe that the athletic department could do a better job at combating animus throughout sports teams in order to attenuate the impacts of stereotype threat lowering athletic self-esteem for LGBT+ athletes. Two other participants note that they believe the cause of stereotype threat comes from a greater social and cultural fabric and **“decades of discrimination and exclusion,”** which may impact how LGBT+ student athletes connect with their athletic identity in their given sport. This may hold especially true for transgender student athletes.

*One participant states:*

**I don't think so, but I could imagine that it would be hard to be a transgender athlete.**

This response suggests that inclusion for transgender athletes may be lower and in turn inhibit transgender student athletes at CU identifying with their athlete identity.

***Key Finding From Q8 Under Does Not Hold True Category: Being a Student Athlete at CU (and within a healthy athletic environment) Helps Student Athletes Identify More, Not Less, With Their Athletic Identity, and in Healthy Ways with Their LGBT+ Identity.***

Perhaps one of the most fascinating and potentially inspiring findings is that respondents share that their experiences at CU as LGBT+ athletes have allowed them to find greater confidence and visibility within their own LGBT+ identity while also strongly identifying as being top caliber Pac 12 Division I collegiate athletes.

*An athlete participant asserts:*

**I am a part of the LGBTQ community because I am gay, and I can actually say that being a part of the athletic department has allowed me to be more open about my sexuality. This is because there is a pretty large amount of gay female athletes at CU, so it helped me to feel comfortable and open knowing that I was not the only one.**

*Another athlete participant states:*

**I would not agree with this for CU I feel that being an LGBTQ athlete makes me unique and diverse and CU welcomes that**

The identity of sports holds immense power in our society. Just as stigma in areas of athletics can cause LGBT+ athletes to feel like they do not belong in that identity, these responses suggest that inclusive sports environments for LGBT+ athletes can act as an accelerator for LGBT+ people. An accelerator that may help people feel like they belong

strongly with their athlete identity and help them foster healthy and visible relationships with their LGBT+ identity. A self-identified gay athlete shares in their interview that they may at times subconsciously identify less with their athletic identity but that the “Open environment (at CU) helps me associate as an athlete.” These responses suggest that the culture at CU Athletics is fostering an environment which makes LGBT+ athletes feel “**uniquely diverse and welcome**” in their athletic identity as LGBT+ student athletes. This hypothesis is supported by one staff member's explanation that they believe that role modeling of visible LGBT+ and ally coaches and staff have helped LGBT+ student athletes identify as athletes.

*This staff member states:*

**Things have improved considerably during my time here (16 years). This is largely due to improved awareness and commitment to making the experience for students more holistic. I think it is safe for staff generally speaking. This is due to having good staff role models.**

*Key Finding From Q8 Under Descriptive or Outside of Question Slightly Outside the Scope*

*Category: Participants answered this question as and/or a coming out question.*

Some respondents answered slightly outside of the scope of the question. A pattern among answers that fell slightly outside of the scope, was a discussion about the coming out experience of LGBT+ athletes, instead of their identification with athlete identity, or in addition to their

experience of athlete identity identification. Due to the fact that this was a pattern suggests that there may be a connection between perception of visibility along LGBT+ identity and perception of comfort in how LGBT+ people identify as athletes.

*One Participant Shares:*

**I think that depending on the team, student-athletes may or may not feel comfortable coming out as LGBTQ and/or identify as an athlete based on their experiences. I think that our department takes discrimination and exclusion very seriously but my biggest concern would be that people may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences.**

*Another Participant shares:*

**I think its subjective to each person and their individual experiences. I think that CU has made it a little easier but it is a difficult time for everyone trying to come out.**

These participants tie the experience of coming out closely with the experience of identifying strongly with their athlete identity as an LGBT+ student athlete. If there is a meaningful association between being out and visible and identifying strongly with athlete identity for LGBT+ people in their sports, multiple complex questions and discussions could be generated.

From the text entry responses in this study, it appears that being out and visible may also elevate athletes' tendency to identify as the athletes they are. Following up on this finding will be important, and I hope future studies, and perhaps CU's athletics department, will ask **Why?** One hypothesis is that acceptance around a person's LGBT+ identity from their athletic community reinforces beliefs that they belong in their sport as LGBT+, and in turn may boost their perception of themselves as an athlete. This kind of positive reinforcement is much more tangible if a person comes out and is accepted.

***Key Finding From Q8 Under Descriptive or Outside of Question Slightly Outside the Scope***

***Category: It Depends on the Sport.***

Two participants share that they believe LGBT+ student athletes in different sports may experience different levels of stigma around their LGBT+ status and feel more or less comfortable or inclined to identify with their athlete identity.

*They share:*

**I think it depends on the sport that they're in - I believe that the administrators and majority of the coaching staff are very inclusive and welcoming, but that some of the athletes have a long way to go**

**Again, I think it depends on the sport**

These responses corroborate the finding that CU's sports climate for LGBT+ athletes differ across sport teams.

*Key Finding From Q8 Under not sure or felt they were not an authority: Similar Dynamics are at Play Along Lines of Race Identity: Not Sure About for LGBT+ Athletes.*

I designed this question because [Medford Moorer](#), former Executive Chair of Diversity and Inclusive Excellence for CU Athletics, explained to me in a meeting that his research dealt with how African American student athletes may be more likely to “over identify” with their athlete identity and under identify with other parts of their student identity because of culturally salient stereotypes about over-represented African American athlete identities. This made me curious about if an opposite effect was at play for LGBT+ athletes at CU due to cultural stereotypes of underrepresented LGBT+ athletes.

*One current respondent explains:*

**I don't know that I can speak to this. I have heard feedback from a race perspective that people disassociate from athletics because of negative perception.**



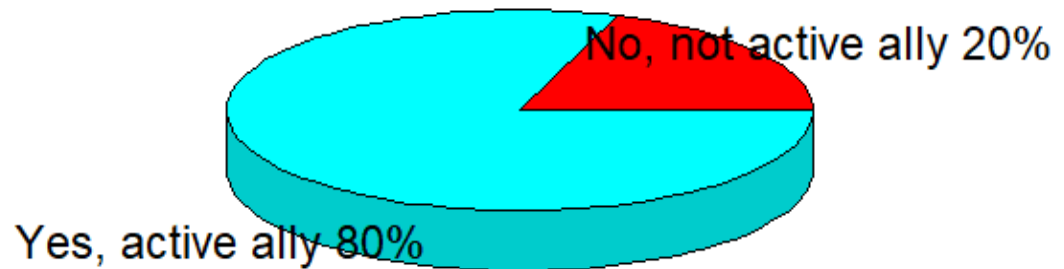
What is clear from this response is that CU is aware of the dynamics of stereotypes that impact how people perceive and associate with parts of their identity. This is meaningful in terms of a discussion around culture because it suggests that members of CU Athletics are thinking in complex ways when it comes to areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion for LGBT+ athletes and beyond.

***Question number 9 (Q9) reads: Do you think CU athletes, coaches, and administrators serve as active and outspoken allies for LGBT+ individuals in sports?***

A clear majority of participants believe that CU athletes, coaches, and administrators serve as active and outspoken allies for LGBT+ individuals in sports. Out of the 61 people that responded to this question, only 12 of them believe that CU athletes, coaches, and administrators do not serve as active and outspoken allies for LGBT+ individuals in sports. In contrast, 49 respondents found that CU athletes, coaches, and administrators serve as active and outspoken allies for LGBT+ individuals in sports. **Figure 4** depicts these results.

Figure 4

**CU Athletic Community Serves as Active/Outspoken Allies  
for LGBT+ Members**



These results suggest that CU Athletics as a sports community are doing a good job acting as outspoken and active allies for their LGBT+ members. As is a trend in this study, that does not give reason to ignore the people that say CU sports members are not acting as allies and being outspoken. Again, what if all LGBT+ members fell into the 20% who believe that meaningful allyship is lacking? That is not the case as seen by other answers to questions, but these kinds of things must be taken into consideration in the context of my research limitations.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions

This research set out to understand what the culture of University of Colorado (CU) Boulder athletics are like for LGBT+ student athletes, coaches, and administrators. Legal protections have grown over time to address discrimination against members of the LGBT+ community. Inclusive policies have been adopted, and LGBT+ rights in sports are now written into collegiate athletic programs across the country. But policy is not the same as practice. Does the collegiate athletic culture reflect the policy commitment to fostering an inclusive culture? This study set out to examine how the culture is perceived by members of the athletic community at CU Boulder and to compare that to their inclusive policies.

In order to answer this question a Qualtrics survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions was administered to inquire about the culture of the sports climate for LGBT+ members at CU, along with an invitation to participate in a 30-minute Zoom interview doing the same. The survey and interview invitation was distributed to all 581 athletes, coaches, and administrators within CU's Athletic Department. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics in R Studio and through a close and in-depth analysis of the text entry survey and interview responses looking for key patterns.

The findings were complex and multifaceted. Some of them raised more questions than they answered. The key findings include:

- 1. CU departmental leadership and administration are outwardly inclusive.*

2. *The sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes appears to differ in inclusivity across sport and gender categories. Specifically, male revenue sports appear to be less inclusive.*
3. *CU athlete allies seem to be aware of privilege dynamics and use their voice to speak constructively and humbly about LGBT inclusion.*
4. *Being a student athlete at CU (and within a healthy athletic environment) helps some student athletes identify more, not less, with their athletic identity, and in healthy ways with their LGBT+ identity.*
5. *Some respondents agree on lower athletic identity feelings among LGBT+ athletes at CU but disagree on the cause. Specifically, some participants believe that this is because of a larger cultural social fabric, while others believe that it is because of lack of the department more directly addressing discrimination.*
6. *Coming out and being out and visible may help athletes at CU identify strongly as an athlete and in healthy ways as an athlete and a LGBT+ person.*
7. *Opinion on the ease of coming out within CU Athletics falls in a wide continuum trending toward being an easy and welcoming experience.*

8. *A vast majority (80%) of participants believe members within CU Athletics serve as active and outspoken allies of their LGBT+ members, while only 20% believe that this is not the case.*
  
9. *Nearly two-thirds (60%) of participants believe CU Athletics is an inclusive place for transgender student athletes, while 40% believe that it is not a supportive place for transgender student athletes.*
  
10. *While there are many signs of policy change in CU Athletics, most (71%) are unaware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide-Champions of Respect. Related to this, most CU Athletic members are not terribly aware of why they score so high among power five schools for their inclusiveness using national policy measurements.*

There are many findings of note in this study, but there are limits as well. One of the most important limits is due to the fact that participants identifying information could not be obtained across lines of LGBT+ identity. It would be valuable to know if there was a systematic difference in responses by those who identify as LGBT+ versus others, including those who consider themselves strong allies. Nonetheless, the results are meaningful, with special thanks to those who chose to self-identify themselves along these lines. Future researchers may seek to do a similar study with this information to find greater causal links. Or perhaps they would like to understand why male revenue generating sports at CU seems to have a less inclusive environment for LGBT+ athletes.

From the results of this study, it appears that in key areas CU is excelling at providing a warm outwardly inclusive and supportive environment for its LGBT+ members. In other ways it seems that CU may have ways to grow so that it can take on a role as a national leader in combating complex cultural dynamics of transphobia and homophobia that have thwarted national sporting and non-sporting communities for generations. Perhaps the most important question that remains is, what better medium than sport to create these dramatic demonstrations of radical love and social acceptance across the world? This research is relevant in the canon of political science research because it discusses the implications of college athletics and their power to create widespread social acceptance and change for LGBT+ people.

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## **Appendix A: On Neuroscience and Discrimination for LGBT+ Populations**

An Integrated Process Model of Stereotype Threat Effects on Performance, by Toni Schmader and colleagues, published through the national center for biotechnology information reveals that stereotype has direct impact on sensorimotor functions. Sensorimotor functions, as the name suggests, involve both sensory and motor functions. Relevant examples include, catching a football, jumping over a hurdle, hitting a baseball etc. Schmader et al. state,

“Stereotype threat disrupts performance via 3 distinct, yet interrelated, mechanisms: (a) a physiological stress response that directly impairs prefrontal processing, (b) a tendency to actively monitor performance, and (c) efforts to suppress negative thoughts and emotions in the service of self-regulation. These mechanisms combine to consume executive resources needed to perform well on cognitive and social tasks. The active monitoring mechanism disrupts performance on sensorimotor tasks directly” (Schmader 2008).

This evidence is very important when it comes to building a design that underlies deeper and more specific research into how stereotype impacts LGBT+ athletic performance. Specifically, many of the mechanisms that are explored in Scamander’s study that explain exactly how sensorimotor skills are inhibited by stereotype threat have a lot in common with anecdotal and societal knowledge of the experience of protected classes. First, a “physiological stress response that directly impairs prefrontal processing” means that when people are feeling threatened physically or emotionally they can lose their ability to use their executive functions. Executive functions are key when it comes to thinking clearly in sports. Second, “a tendency to

actively monitor performance” means that people who are experiencing stereotypes spend more of their mental energy trying to appear acceptable than actually focusing on the complex and intensive task at hand. Third, “efforts to suppress negative thoughts and emotions in the service of self-regulation” means that people spend more mental energy suppressing fear and negative emotions than they do, again, on the task at hand. Again, this inhibits sensorimotor functions.

There is specific research that explores how stereotype type impacts athletic performance. *Battling Doubt by Avoiding Practice: The Effects of Stereotype Threat on Self-Handicapping in White Athletes*, by Jeff Stone--explores the impacts of stereotypes that white people have a lower baseline of athletic ability. He shares,

“Using sports as the performance context, it was predicted that if a sports test was framed as a measure of “natural athletic ability,” White participants would feel threatened about confirming the negative stereotype about poor White athleticism and would practice less before the test as compared to control groups. The data from Experiment 1 supported the prediction and showed that the effect of stereotype threat on self-handicapping was moderated by participants’ level of psychological engagement in sports. Experiment 2 showed that engaged White participants practiced less than engaged Hispanic participants when their performance was linked to natural athletic ability” (Stone 2002).

The implications of Stone’s research when it comes to the questions I am asking are straightforward yet profound. 1. they prove that stereotype threat works directly when it comes to athletic performance. 2. They show that stereotype threat is complex and works by means of any

message broadcasted across society about a group of people, even if this group of people do not have to face the more insidious and harmful impacts of being an oppressed class--even if they are white, cisgendered, male. This suggests that the impacts of stereotype threat are indeed significant. This also means that when a person is a member of an oppressed class and is experiencing a particular stereotype threat during performance, they have multiple layers of outside social pressures that may weigh on their mental processing.

There are fascinating findings on factors that make individuals more or less susceptible to stereotype threat. *Twenty Years of Stereotype Threat Research: A Review of Psychological Mediators*, by Charlotte R. Pennington, and colleagues--discusses these factors. She finds,

Research has identified numerous moderators that make tasks more likely to elicit stereotype threat, and individuals more prone to experience it [30,31]. From a methodological perspective, stereotype threat effects tend to emerge on tasks of high difficulty and demanding [32,33], however, the extent to which a task is perceived as demanding may be moderated by individual differences in working memory [34]. Additionally, stereotype threat may be more likely to occur when individuals are conscious of the stigma ascribed to their social group [32,35], believe the stereotypes about their group to be true [36,37], for those with low self-esteem [38], and an internal locus of control [39]. Research also indicates that individuals are more susceptible to stereotype threat when they identify strongly with their social group [40,41,42] and value the domain [10,13,15,33,43]. (Pennington 2016).

The complex interplay of factors that make a person more prone to fall prey to the negative impacts of stereotype threat are fascinating and relevant to LGBT+ people in sports. The fact that, “stereotype threat effects tend to emerge on tasks of high difficulty and demanding,” relates specifically to sports, because by nature, they are highly difficult and demanding. Perhaps the most relevant contribution when it comes to who is most susceptible to stereotype threat is that “stereotype threat may be more likely to occur when individuals are conscious of the stigma ascribed to their social group.” This suggests that when it comes to the athletic environment and an athlete’s performance it matters very much if LGBT+ athletes are surrounded by people and institutions that remind them that they do belong or that they don’t. It is arguably impossible to be unaware of societal stereotypes at large about groups of people. However, because these messages are inescapable to some degree, and often combated by positive messages at a societal level, many people have a relatively easy time overriding them for the discrimination they are. However, when a person is constantly reminded by the people who they practice and play with of what these people think about their inherent athletic ability, to override negative messages becomes much harder. Therefore, the athletic environment and the messages given to LGBT+ athletes about who they are inherently matters very much when it comes to performance.

## Appendix B: Official Survey and Interview Questions

### Survey Questions:

4. Are you aware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide-Champions of Respect?

5. How would you describe the sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes?

6. On a scale of 1-5 do you think the sports climate at CU would make it easy and welcoming for an LGBT+ athlete to come out to their teammates and coaches? With 1 being hard and fearful to come out and 5 being easy and welcoming to come out?

7. Do you think and or feel CU Boulder has a supportive and inclusive environment for transgender athletes specifically?

8. A comprehensive Pennsylvania State climate survey researcher found that student-athletes identifying as LGBT+ were less likely to identify as an athlete in their given sport because of an indirect link to a lower perception of the athletic department addressing discrimination and exclusion.

- From your own personal knowledge and perspective, anecdotally do you believe that this finding does or does not hold true for LGBT+ athletes at CU?

9. Do you think CU athletes, coaches, and administrators serve as active and outspoken allies for LGB+Q+ individuals in sports?





## **Interview Questions:**

### **For Coaches:**

Do you have any practices in place to make your athletes know they are safe and accepted as either a closeted or as an out LGBT+ member of your team?

Hypothetically or in reality would you or do you feel comfortable as an open or closeted LGBT+ coach in your administration and in front of your team?

### **For Athletes**

Do you feel that LGBT+ athletes are respected by your teammates both on and off the field?

Do you hear homophobic slurs while playing your sport or around your teammates, coaches, and administrators in any setting?

Do you believe LGBT+ people feel included on sports teams at the University of Colorado?

What, if any, impact would be having one or more of your coaches explicitly say they will be accepting and affirming of an athlete or coach who identifies as LGBT+?

What has the CU athletics department, your coaches/teammates, etc., done in terms of LGBT+ inclusion on your team at the University of Colorado?

Would you feel comfortable coming out to your team as LGBT+?

How would you feel about competing on the same team with a person who identifies as LGBT+?

Are there discussions amongst out athletes at CU about creating their own support group or Athlete Ally chapter?

Do you believe that athletes at CU are comfortable having teammates who have different sexual orientations or gender identities than they do?

Would you in reality or hypothetically stay in the closet to be selected by the coach for a game?

If you hear homophobic jokes while playing sports, which remarks are acceptable for you and what is too far for you?

Do you hear homophobic slurs while playing your sport or around your teammates, coaches, and administrators in any setting?

Do you hear homophobic slurs while playing your sport or around your teammates, coaches, and administrators in any setting?

Do you feel like you have to hide some of your true self in order to participate in your sport?

Were CU's views on LGBT+ individuals and the community apparent before you decided to attend?

From your experience, is the NCAA more or less exclusionary than any private sports clubs you are a member of?

Have you ever responded to hearing homophobic slurs while participating in sport?

During your time at CU, did you have an LGBT+ coach?

During your time at CU, have you had an LGBT+ team captain?

Do you feel that you have to hide or otherwise not bring your authentic self to practice/games/events/team socials?

Have you ever felt pressured by teammates or coaches to release information about your sexual or gender identity?

How do you navigate using your team's locker room as a LGBT+ athlete?

How do you feel about competing on the same team with a transgender student athlete?

**For Everyone:**

Do you think LGBT+ athletes have had different experiences at CU than non-LGBT+ athletes?

How many LGBT+ support groups do you know of on campus for athletes and or students?

Hypothetically, or in reality, have you felt, or would you feel comfortable coming out as an LGBT+ athlete, coach, or administrator to your team or to the broader sports community at CU?

Have you ever been part of the coming out process of a fellow LGBT+ student-athlete, coach, and/or administrator?

From your experience are some NCAA sports more exclusionary to LGBT+ athletes? If so, what sports are these?

From your personal knowledge and perspective, do you believe that LGBT+ student-athletes at CU identify as athletes in the same way their non-LGBT+ counterparts do?

Without naming names or otherwise, distinguishing individuals do you know any self-identified openly out LGBT+ athletes at CU?

What 5 words would you use to describe the explicit attitudes of your team toward LGBT+ individuals and athletes?

What 5 words would you use to describe the implicit attitudes of your team toward LGBT+ individuals and athletes

Are you prepared to be an ally for fellow athletes and communities whose identities related to sexual orientation and race intersect in culturally complex ways?

Do you think CU athletes, coaches, and administrators serve as active and outspoken allies for LGBT+ individuals in sports?

How would you propose inclusion in sport?

From your experiences and perspectives, which sport teams tend to have the most out athletes? And why do you think that is?

Do you believe CU's athletic community does a good job asking questions about things you do not understand on the topic of LGBT+ people in sport?

What events have you attended that were in clear support of the LGBT+ community (i.e., Pride night)?

If you have attended none, why is that?

What kind of protections do CU LGBT+ athletes have at away games?

What actions have the staff, fellow players or administration at CU done to address issues of equity and participant safety, specifically relating to LGBT+ athletes?

How many, without naming individuals, closeted people do you know on campus or in athletics?

How would you address overhearing a teammate/coach/administrator use a homophobic slur?

Do teams/coaches/players have pride nights?

What more do you think could be done to ensure LGBT+ athletes feel welcomed and supported by teammates and coaches?

Do you feel that certain genders have a more difficult time within the LGBT+ athletic community at CU than others?

How would you feel about introducing your coach, teammates, other athletes, or colleagues or other CU athletics staff to a significant other?

Do you ever feel like LGBT+ athletes are treated differently between the time that you are playing your sport, and the time you are with your teammates not actively practicing or competing?

Do you believe LGBT+ athletes receive equal medical and mental support from medical trainers, physical therapists, and counselors?

Hypothetically or in reality what have been or would be the largest barriers for you to come out to your teammates and or your colleagues?

