



Student-Athletes Perceptions on the LGBTQIA+ Member Inclusion in Gender- specific Sports in the Philippine Educational System

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ABSTRACT

This study explored and analyzed the perceptions of students' athletes regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion in gender-specific sports in the Philippine Educational System. In order to better understand the perceptions of student-athletes from about LGBTQIA+ participants in 4any gender-specific sports, we used structured interviews. This study was led by a qualitative methodology, especially a phenomenological research design. Through this design, we investigated how student athletes perceived the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people in gender-specific sports from various perspectives. This study come up different results, Inclusion and Acceptance of LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Sports, Gender-Inclusive Practices and Competence in Sports, Mitigating Gender Identity Discrimination, Identity Expression, and Comfort in Sports, Equality and Equity in Training Regardless of Identity, Gender Identity in Sports, Absence of Gender Identity-Based Exclusions and Inclusion Efforts. In conclusion, having a member who identifies as LGBTQIA+ is not a curse nor a blessing because athletes do not find it offensive; instead, it brings them joy at the end of a long day. Athletes contribute what they can because they feel respected by their teammates.

RESUMO

Este estudo explorou e analisou as percepções de atletas estudantes sobre a inclusão LGBTQIA+ em esportes específicos de gênero no Sistema Educacional das Filipinas. Para entender melhor as percepções de atletas estudantes sobre participantes LGBTQIA+ em quaisquer esportes específicos de gênero, usamos entrevistas estruturadas. Este estudo foi conduzido por uma metodologia qualitativa, especialmente um desenho de pesquisa fenomenológica. A fenomenologia é um método de pesquisa qualitativa que é, em última análise, adequado para obter uma compreensão completa do processo efetivo que descreve as experiências de vida do informante. Por meio deste desenho, investigamos como os atletas estudantes perceberam a inclusão de pessoas LGBTQIA+ em esportes específicos de gênero de várias perspectivas. Este estudo apresentou resultados diferentes, Inclusão e Aceitação de Indivíduos LGBTQIA+ em Esportes, Práticas e Competências Inclusivas de Gênero em Esportes, Mitigação da Discriminação de Identidade de Gênero, Expressão de Identidade e Conforto em Esportes, Igualdade e Equidade no Treinamento Independentemente da Identidade, Identidade de Gênero em Esportes, Ausência de Exclusões Baseadas em Identidade de Gênero e Esforços de Inclusão. Concluindo, ter um membro que se identifica como LGBTQIA+ não é uma maldição nem uma bênção porque os atletas não acham isso ofensivo; em vez disso, isso lhes traz alegria no final de um longo dia. Os atletas contribuem com o que podem porque se sentem respeitados por seus companheiros de equipe.

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Introduction

Gay and lesbian athletes have historically faced a range of difficulties while competing in sports. These challenges include both overt forms of discrimination, such as physical and verbal assaults, and more subtle expressions of prejudice in modern times (Braumüller et al., 2020). Although blatant homophobia has declined, more quietly expressed prejudice still persists today (Cunningham, 2014). Over time, the experiences of gay and lesbian athletes have evolved from facing direct hostility to encountering more covert forms of discrimination (Shadbolt, 2004).

There is a consensus among academics that LGBTQIA+ individuals have been marginalized within sporting cultures, and that scholarly literature has often failed to fully address their experiences. The rigid binary distinctions between male and female, particularly in gender-specific sports, have frequently excluded or marginalized people who do not fit neatly into these categories (Sobal & Milgrim, 2017).

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in studies focused on LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports, exploring a range of themes, including the participation of young LGBTQIA+ people in physical activity (Anderson, 2000). However, LGBTQIA+ athletes still face significant challenges, such as homophobia and discrimination against transgender athletes, in sports settings. While public perceptions on these issues continue to evolve, prejudice remains widespread. Media coverage and social commentary have played a substantial role in shaping societal views on LGBTQIA+ athletes, sometimes perpetuating stereotypes or fostering negative biases. These forms of prejudice can negatively impact the mental and physical well-being of LGBTQIA+ athletes, leading to stress, anxiety, and exclusion within the sporting community. Addressing these challenges is crucial to fostering more inclusive and supportive athletic environments (Schinke et al., 2017).

Athletes, coaches, and administrators who identify as homosexual or lesbian have been the focus of several sports studies (Cunningham, 2014). Numerous studies have revealed that many sporting environments are both homophobic and sexist (Evans & Broido, 2002). These studies have linked bias and discrimination against gay and lesbian athletes to specific issues such as stereotypes, verbal insults, social isolation, homophobic harassment, bias in team selection, and inadequate media coverage.

Athletes who identify as homosexual or lesbian may face bias and discrimination in various ways, including verbal insults, social isolation, homophobic harassment, bias in team selection, and adverse media coverage. We can strive for a sporting setting that appreciates diversity, respects human rights, and gives equal chances for all by recognizing and addressing the unique needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ athletes (Arora et al., 2022).

Sport has not always been the most accepting environment for LGBTQIA+ athletes, but as it has developed, more accepting environments are being built for these athletes (Herrick &

Duncan, 2020). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual athletes have achieved significant milestones in sports, contributing to increased visibility and inclusion. Additionally, athletes with diverse identities—such as transgender, two-spirit, genderqueer, and gender non-binary individuals—are now experiencing a more welcoming atmosphere in athletics, thanks to growing social acceptance. However, despite these advances, transgender, two-spirit, genderqueer, and non-binary athletes still face unique challenges compared to their cisgender counterparts (those whose gender identity matches the one assigned to them at birth). These challenges include social exclusion, bias, and the struggle for full acceptance and inclusion in sports and society at large (Gooren & Bunck, 2004).

The study on how LGBTQIA+ members perceive inclusion in gender-specific sports among student-athletes towards LGBTQIA+ is essential because it will reveal athletes' attitudes, convictions, and viewpoints regarding inclusivity. This study can help us understand how LGBTQIA+ people are welcomed in the sporting communities and offer helpful information for fostering tolerance, diversity, and fair participation in sports. It might also impact rules and procedures to foster a more welcoming atmosphere for all athletes, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This study focused on the perceptions of the student-athlete's inclusion in gender-specific sports. The study determined the significance of fostering an inclusive and accepting sports organization and culture. The critical informants of this study were ten student-athletes of Visayas State University.

Methodology

Study Design

This study was guided by a Qualitative method, specifically a Phenomenological research design; we utilized structured interviews to understand the perceptions of student-athlete from Visayas State University towards LGBTQIA+ members in any gender-specific sports. Phenomenology is a qualitative study that is eventually well-suited to gain an in-depth comprehension of efficient procedure that describes the informant's lived experiences. Through this design, we explored the different perceptions of student-athletes towards LGBTQIA+ member inclusion in gender-specific sports.

Locale

This study was conducted in the Visayas State University (VSU) Main Campus. Since this study is confidential, their profile will remain highly privatized, meaning the question does not require sensitive information.

Informants

The key informants of this study are the student-athletes from Visayas State University (VSU) Main Campus. They were selected through purposive sampling, a method in which participants are chosen based on specific criteria. In this case, athletes from each sport were considered eligible to be part of the sample, ensuring the inclusion of relevant individuals for the study. The study includes ten (10) informants, selected from student-athletes participating in volleyball, swimming, basketball, softball, and badminton. These specific sports were chosen by the researchers as they are considered suitable and relevant to the objectives of the study.

Instrumentation

This study utilized structured interviews. We used cell phones for video and audio recording for effective and efficient data gathering. Developed and generated a summary of the results of the informant's answers. The interview consists of only five (5) item open-ended questions that are answerable only by Yes or No. The questionnaire is an adaptation from the survey's questionnaire of Waselewski about LGBTQIA inclusion in gender-specific sports. The questionnaire adaptation was only for the student-athletes of Visayas State University.

Analysis and Data Collection

The researchers transcribed the interview audio recordings from each informant to gather data. The act of transcribing is through recording spoken words in writing. In qualitative Research, individual or group interviews are frequently transcribed verbatim (exactly word-for-word). After the data had been gathered, the researchers used the informant's responses to identify codes, categorized the codes according to their ordinary meaning, and then identified the significant codes to analyze the data using the thematic method.

In this study, the researchers used structured interviews in gathering the data. Moreover, it was recorded and interpreted. The interview questions cover topics such as the student-athletes' attitudes and conduct toward LGBTQIA+ members. The data are recorded based on the student athletes' perceptions to determine significant differences. Interview responses were analyzed thematically.

Ethical Consideration

In the interview, consent was presented to the informants, specifically the student-athletes at Visayas State University, before conducting the interview. Considerations of the interview included: informants will voluntarily participate and may refrain from responding if he/she may feel uncomfortable during the interview. We ensured that the data and information gathered were protected. The results of the data gathered by the researchers are

confidential. In exchange for their participation, the token is given to the informants participating in the interview.

Results

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Inclusion and Acceptance of LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Sports

This study analyzes the experiences of student-athletes at Visayas State University regarding LGBTQIA+ members' inclusion in gender-specific sports and what could happen if student-athletes and LGBTQIA+ members were present in the same environment. It involves a review of their perspectives on LGBTQIA+ members.

Subtheme 1.1. Embracing diversity.

The act of appreciating and recognizing variations among people, groups, cultures, and opinions within a society, organization, or community. It entails accepting that people have different backgrounds, experiences, identities, and points of view and that this variety enhances our shared understanding and experiences.

"For me, I am a person who is comfortable with anyone as long as he or she is not disrespectful to me; as long as they can help the team, and we can reach the goal, there is no problem for me." – KI-1

"Yes, I feel comfortable ahmm... I started playing this event, I am open on this kind of situation, and I think that it is normal for us to have a teammate that is a member of LGBTQIA+" – KI-2.

"Yes, I am comfortable if there is an LGBTQIA+ member on our team; in fact, I am happier if I have teammates who are LGBTQIA+ because most of our training, even if we are tired, they can find a way to help and we are happy and can help reduce the tiredness..." – KI-3.

"Yes, I do not have any issues about having a teammate that is a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. I am comfortable around them unless they have other intentions rather than just being a teammate." – KI-5

"Yes, I feel comfortable as long as they contribute to our team, as long as they contribute and respect each other, especially our coach, there is no problem." – KI-6.

"Of course, if a member belongs to LGBTQIA+, I feel comfortable because, honestly, most of my teammates belong to LGBTQIA+ like members of LGBTQIA+. Ahmm, as long as we respect each other." – KI-7

"Yes, I'm comfortable; I have a lot of friends, family, and I know someone who is LGBTQIA+. It is okay." – KI-9.

Creating a supportive and welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ teammates is essential for fostering comfort and inclusivity within a team. This involves recognizing and understanding how individuals' gender identities can influence their interactions and dynamics within the team. By promoting an atmosphere of ease and recognition, LGBTQIA+ teammates are encouraged to express themselves authentically, leading to enhanced collaboration and diversity. Developing an environment where LGBTQIA+ people feel included and appreciated is crucial for their confidence in expressing their identities. Cultivating acceptance and respect within the team ensures that LGBTQIA+ members feel valued for who they are, which ultimately contributes to a more cohesive and effective team. Ensuring a respectful and comfortable environment for all team members highlights the value of inclusivity in fostering team cohesion.

Emphasizing the significance of both comfort and respect in embracing individual differences creates an environment where diverse team members feel valued and respected. Recognition and embracing of individuals without judgment or prejudice are fundamental in creating an inclusive team culture. Incorporating and welcoming diverse individuals while embracing their unique identities fosters a sense of belonging and encourages full participation. Individual liberty to pursue and express one's interests and desires wholeheartedly should be upheld within the team. Involvement in competitive sports should be determined by an individual's personal characteristics or attributes, ensuring fairness and equal opportunities for all team members.

Theme 2: Gender-Inclusive Practices and Competence in Sports

It is implementing laws, arrangements, and methods that promote respect, equality, and participation for people with all gender identities in all aspects of sports. In order to establish an environment that is inclusive, diverse, and supportive of all people regardless of their gender identification, it is necessary to move beyond the old binary concepts of gender (male and female).

Cultivating an environment in which LGBTQIA+ team members feel at ease and accepted for who they are, while encouraging an acceptance and respect culture within the team. Enabling diverse participation within the team, ensuring that all members are involved and valued for their unique perspectives and contributions.

Subtheme 2.1. Navigating Gender Diversity.

Understanding, recognizing, and effectively resolving the intricacies and variances in gender identities in various circumstances. This notion involves attempts to establish inclusive

environments that recognize and support people of all gender identities, including transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming people.

The key informants stated:

"In my opinion, if they are part of the LGBTQIA+ gender, you should play with them in the particular of their assigned sex during birth." – KI-1

"I favor those athletes who aim to promote gender equality amid playing sports. Ahmm though athletes nowadays can identify themselves from another gender identity, for me, whatever gender identity they may want to belong themselves, it is crucial to mind the respect between genders." – KI-3.

"They should play sports according to their sex assigned at birth. The usual way, since the strength of each gender still varies." – KI-6

"If you join them in competitive sports, I believe it will not be based on their gender identification as assigned at birth, because playing sports rely on your talents and aptitude, not your gender." – KI-7.

"For me, it's just their assigned sex at birth because if there is a category like lesbian or bisexual, I've seen many of them on social media. It is said that they like to be accepted in society, but how can they be accepted if they do not get along with society? They will only look for their category." – KI-9.

Adopting an all-encompassing strategy in sports involves acknowledging and respecting diverse gender identities. This means ensuring that individuals of all gender identities receive equal treatment and opportunities in competitive sports. While traditionally involvement in sports has been determined by the gender assigned at birth, there's a growing recognition of the importance of basing participation on skill and aptitude rather than solely on factors like gender or identity. By recognizing and valuing the capabilities and qualities present within various gender identities, sports can become more inclusive and representative of the broader population.

It's important to understand that the personal sense and expression of gender—whether male, female, or non-binary—can influence an individual's participation in sports. Creating an environment where athletes feel comfortable expressing their gender identities is essential for their overall well-being and performance. This may involve implementing policies and practices that promote inclusivity, providing education and training to coaches and staff, and fostering a culture of respect and acceptance within sports organizations. Ultimately, by

embracing diversity and inclusivity in sports, we can create opportunities for all individuals to participate and excel based on their abilities, regardless of their gender identity.

Theme 3: Mitigating Gender Identity Discrimination

The proactive steps and strategies taken to reduce, prevent, and address discriminatory practices and biases that target individuals based on their gender identity. This concept acknowledges that transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals often face discrimination, bias, and unequal treatment due to their gender identities. Mitigation efforts aim to create a more inclusive and equitable society where everyone can live free from discrimination and prejudice.

The key informants stated:

"Yes, I know one University in Manila that doesn't allow Gays to their team... The sport is Volleyball." – KI-3

"So far, I haven't" – KI-4

Individuals often encounter significant limitations and challenges when expressing their gender identity due to societal constraints. This can lead to unfair treatment or prejudice based on their gender identity, including within the realm of sports activities. In many societies, traditional gender norms dictate strict expectations for how individuals should express their gender. This can create pressure for individuals whose gender identity does not align with these norms, leading to feelings of exclusion and discrimination. In sports, where gender roles have historically been rigidly defined, individuals who do not conform to these norms may face particular challenges.

Transgender and non-binary individuals, for example, may encounter barriers to participation in sports due to policies or practices that are based on outdated notions of binary gender. They may face discrimination or bias from teammates, coaches, or administrators, which can manifest in various forms such as exclusion from teams, denial of opportunities, or verbal harassment. Additionally, transgender individuals may face obstacles in accessing gender-affirming facilities, such as locker rooms and bathrooms, which can further marginalize them within sports settings.

These societal constraints can have significant negative impacts on individuals' mental health and well-being, as well as their ability to fully participate and excel in sports. Addressing these challenges requires proactive efforts to create inclusive and affirming environments within sports organizations. This includes implementing policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender identity, providing education and training on LGBTQ+

inclusion for coaches and staff, and ensuring access to gender-affirming facilities. By actively working to dismantle societal constraints and promote inclusivity, sports organizations can create environments where all individuals feel respected, valued, and able to fully express their gender identity.

Theme 4: Identity Expression and Comfort in Sports

Individuals' ability to authentically express their identities and feel at ease and well-being while participating in sports and physical activities.

Subtheme 4.1. Unveiling Authenticity.

The process of discovering and accepting oneself, values, views, and identity without fear of criticism or rejection. This notion highlights the significance of being authentic, truthful, and honest about oneself, regardless of cultural expectations, conventions, or pressures.

The key informants stated:

"Hence the answer is simple, as an athlete, regardless of gender, you must train, and hence you must wear the prescribed sort of outfit..." – KI-1

"Yes, because it is the appropriate attire, we must abide by the norms established by the superior authorities, and it is for our protection. Denim pants might be uncomfortable to wear when playing softball, especially if you run a lot." – KI-2

"Yes, it is our responsibility as athletes to wear the required attire; however, if we are members of the LGBTQIA+ community, we must still do so even if we are not directly involved." – KI-3.

"Yes, you must wear the prescribed uniform regardless of your gender." – KI-4

"Yes. For most athletes; it is common sense to wear proper attire while training. Wearing appropriate clothes for training reduces the risk for injury, and maximizes comfort, allowing the athletes to perform best during training and even in competitions." – KI-5.

"They should wear proper attire depending on the sports they are into, as long as it respects the rules of the said sports and as long as it doesn't bother anyone; for me, it's okay as long as they're happy and comfortable." – KI-6.

"Yes, everyone must wear proper uniform in order to perform properly in their chosen sport to play." – KI-8

"No, for me, I think that if you are a male, there are rules...it is okay to be feeling women..., I will be fine too, I don't have any problems." – KI-9.

"Yes, because it's a formality, and it's not good if someone is different so your teammates will feel comfortable also." – KI-10

In sports, adherence to clothing and equipment regulations is essential for ensuring safety, fairness, and optimal athletic performance. These regulations are often put in place to standardize attire and gear, minimize injury risks, and maintain a level playing field. However, it's crucial to consider how these regulations can intersect with personal identity factors, including gender identity, to ensure inclusivity and respect for all athletes. While it's important to follow clothing and equipment rules, practical considerations should also be taken into account. This includes ensuring that regulations are feasible and practical for athletes to adhere to, considering factors such as climate, comfort, and individual preferences. Furthermore, clothing and equipment regulations should not be biased towards any specific gender. Athletes should be able to comply with these rules regardless of their gender identity, without facing discrimination or exclusion.

Optimizing athletic performance is a key goal of clothing and equipment regulations. Athletes rely on appropriate attire and gear to enhance their abilities and protect themselves from injury. Therefore, adherence to these rules is crucial for maintaining a competitive and safe sporting environment. Comfort is another important aspect to consider when it comes to clothing and equipment regulations. Athletes perform best when they feel comfortable in their attire, allowing them to focus on their performance rather than discomfort or distraction. Additionally, clothing and equipment can play a role in expressing personal identity. It's important for athletes to feel comfortable and confident in their attire, which may include options that align with their gender identity and personal preferences.

Creating adaptable clothing rules can help accommodate the diverse needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports. This may involve offering a range of options for attire and gear that allows athletes to express their identities while still meeting regulatory requirements. Overall, clothing and equipment regulations in sports should prioritize safety, fairness, comfort, and inclusivity, while also recognizing the importance of personal identity and expression. By striking this balance, sports organizations can create environments that support all athletes in achieving their full potential.

Theme 5: Equality and Equity in Training Regardless of Identity

We are providing equal treatment and equity, especially regarding training, regardless of a person's identity.

Subtheme 5.1 Promoting Inclusive Excellence.

It is utilizing diversity's capacity to succeed at greater levels while guaranteeing everyone a fair chance to contribute and gain. It is an all-encompassing strategy acknowledging the connections between diversity, quality, equity, and active engagement.

The key informants stated:

"Ahhmm yes, even though you are part of the LGBTQIA+, the training has no exemptions unless your reasons are valid; the training should be equal for everyone." – KI-1

"No, everyone has a skill. Once you join the team, it is agreed that everyone should receive the same amount of training to achieve your goal: to win or enhance your skill." – KI-2.

"No, because a good coach must treat his/her athletes equally. There must be no discrimination, and everyone should be involved in the training program which the coaches made." – KI-3.

"Ahhmm, no, because everyone must have training equally regardless of any gender you have."
KI-4

"No. Any athlete, regardless of gender, can give their best and be good at what they do. As an athlete, I always tell myself that success is the result of hard work, and I know all athletes know that. Everything is all in the mind. Gender doesn't define what we're capable of." – KI-5.

"No, everyone must be treated equally." – KI-6.

"So, as for me... I believe the athlete is not under-trained in any sport since he competes in that event because he is strong. He has the power to perform those sports where you thrive, which means that LGBTQIA+ athletes are not under-trained and are included because they have potential." – KI-7.

"For me, it is situational. It depends on the sports they're playing. It is situational in a way that athletes should play physical sports based on the sex assigned to them at birth. In contrast, mind sports like chess, other board games, etc., will be fairly acceptable even if the athlete plays the game based on gender identity." – KI-8.

Ensuring fairness in training opportunities while respecting individual identities is paramount in fostering an inclusive sporting environment. This involves providing equal access to training resources and opportunities for all athletes, regardless of their gender

identity or any other personal characteristics. By offering identical training opportunities to all athletes and refraining from any form of discrimination, sports organizations can create a level playing field where everyone has an equal chance to develop their skills and reach their full potential. This approach not only promotes fairness but also cultivates a sense of belonging and unity within the team. It's important to consider individual circumstances and needs when determining participation in training activities. Factors such as physical abilities, preferences, and any specific accommodations required should be taken into account to ensure that all athletes can fully engage in training sessions.

Adopting a training approach that treats all individuals equally and provides fair opportunities for growth is essential. This means recognizing and nurturing the potential of each athlete, regardless of their gender identity or background, and offering tailored support to help them succeed. Organized efforts and collaboration play a crucial role in facilitating LGBTQIA+ involvement in sports. By working together to create inclusive policies, provide support, and raise awareness, sports organizations can create environments where individuals of all gender identities feel welcome and valued. Ensuring there are no exclusions based on gender identity is fundamental to promoting inclusivity in sports. Sports organizations should actively work to eliminate any barriers or biases that may prevent individuals from participating fully based on their gender identity. Overall, by prioritizing fairness, respect, and inclusivity in training opportunities, sports organizations can create environments where all athletes have an equal chance to thrive and succeed, regardless of their gender identity or any other personal characteristics.

Theme 6: Gender Identity in Sports.

Refers to a person's passionate perception of their gender, which may not match the sex assigned to them at birth. This idea has critical sports-related implications since it calls into question participation, justice, inclusivity, and the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people.

The key informants stated:

"From what I have noticed, I didn't see a gay playing basketball with boys. However, lesbians can play basketball together with girls. So, for me, it is up to the coordinator if they will be allowed LGBTQIA+ in any sports." – KI-4

"So far, I haven't come across that case." – KI-6

"So far, I haven't met anyone who wouldn't allow him/her to participate in sports because he's gay, a homosexual. Instead, I know someone, she's a lesbian, but she's already one of the boys.

Therefore, she was permitted to play in a game and is now one of the boys' basketball players."
– KI-7.

"Nothing at all..." – KI-9

"So far, I haven't encountered that case." – KI-10

The statements from the key informants highlight varying perspectives and experiences regarding LGBTQIA+ individuals' participation in sports. While some informants expressed a lack of awareness or encountered no instances of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, others acknowledged existing disparities and challenges. The observation that lesbians may be more readily accepted in certain sports, such as basketball, while gay individuals may face more barriers, suggests that perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports can vary depending on the specific context and cultural norms within different sports communities.

The role of coordinators and authorities in determining LGBTQIA+ participation in sports underscores the importance of inclusive policies and practices at all levels of sports organizations. While some informants noted positive experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals being accepted and integrated into sports teams, there may still be systemic issues or implicit biases that need to be addressed to ensure equitable opportunities for all athletes, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Overall, these insights emphasize the ongoing need for awareness, education, and advocacy to promote inclusivity, justice, and the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people in sports. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including sports organizations, policymakers, and LGBTQIA+ advocates, are essential in addressing these critical sports-related implications and creating more inclusive and supportive environments for all athletes.

Discussion

The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected student-athletes from Visayas State University, focusing on their attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ teammates. Using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, the researcher followed an inductive approach to identify themes directly from the data. The six phases of analysis began with familiarization through transcription and reading, followed by generating initial codes such as "uniformity and fairness" and "identity in sports rules." These codes were grouped into themes, refined, and reviewed to ensure alignment with the dataset. Themes like

"Promoting Equality Through Uniformity" and "Identity and Gender-Specific Rules" highlighted key perspectives, such as the importance of adherence to uniforms and birth identities while promoting equality.

This systematic process ensured the findings were grounded in the data and presented in a coherent narrative emphasizing inclusion, fairness, and respect for all athletes. Most student-athletes at Visayas State University share similar attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ teammates, believing that as long as the player has good intentions and contributes significantly to the team, their identity is acceptable. The majority of key informants emphasized that LGBTQIA+ athletes should adhere to the required uniform for the sake of uniformity and protection, and should not be exempt from this rule.

Furthermore, they suggested that LGBTQIA+ individuals should act in accordance with their birth identities. As key informant 3 expressed, "Yes, even if they are a member of the LGBTQIA+ group, they need to stand where they belong. For example, due to the different rules in my sport of softball, lesbian athletes are not allowed to compete against men."

Key informant 5 added, "There is no case that suggests gay athletes require more training because they play the same sports." None of the informants reported having witnessed discrimination or exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports. Athletes also agreed that LGBTQIA+ players should wear the designated uniform and should not receive undertraining simply because they may excel in a particular sport. Overall, the athletes emphasized that sports should promote equality, respect, and acceptance for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, acceptance and a sense of belonging are vital components of sports culture. Having teammates who identify as LGBTQIA+ is not a negative aspect; rather, they contribute to a joyful environment, even after a challenging day. Key informants emphasized that, as everyone on the team strives toward the same goals of success, fostering acceptance and respect is crucial for building a successful team. This reflects a broader shift in our generation's embrace of the LGBTQIA+ community, highlighting the importance of inclusivity in achieving shared objectives.

Recommendation

The study's authors strongly advise setting aside a sizable amount of time, allowing for months of continuous data collection from VSU student-athletes who participate in gender-specific sports on LGBTQIA members. This approach will make it possible to gather a lot of valuable data. Additionally, a more extended period will give the researchers a deeper

understanding of the issue, enabling more sophisticated data to be collected. Furthermore, performing follow-up interviews that dig further into the justifications for each belief produced greater insight.

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