“It’s Not My Job to Change Your Mind, It’s My Job to Just Live Authentically”: Factors in the Decision to Be ‘Out’ and Experiences of LGB+ NCAA D-I Assistant Coaches of Women’s Sport

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my participants, who whole-heartedly shared their experiences. I hope this project makes you feel both seen and recognized for the positive impacts you made or are currently making as LGB+ NCAA D-I assistant coaches of women's sport. Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me; it was my pleasure and my honor to try my utmost to bring those experiences to light and do them justice.

Abstract

Intercollegiate athletics is well defined in sport scholarship as a realm permeated by homonegativity, heteronormativity, sexism, and racism. While socio-political developments over the last few decades show a cultural progression toward LGBTQIA+ inclusion and acceptance, the evidence of such an evolution in sport is fragmented. Scholars point to increases in visibility, allyship and advocacy organizations, and the implementation of new rules and resolutions evidencing commitment to diversity and inclusion. However, even with these changes, the literature shows that homophobia and heteronormativity, in addition to sexism and racism, are still present in sporting spaces and institutions. This study builds on previous work documenting that university-sanctioned online coaching biographies contribute to the preservation of heteronormativity in intercollegiate coaching (Calhoun et al., 2011; LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). Based on family narratives collected for all paid coaching positions in NCAA D-I women's sport as part of the annual *Women in College Coaching Report Card*™, this study seeks to explore the experiences of LGB+ assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's athletics, as well as decision-making structures and outcomes for including or excluding a same-sex partner in one's online coaching biography. Utilizing a Foucauldian lens and the ecological-intersectional model, this qualitative interview-based study illustrates coaches must navigate dominant heteronormative narratives in intercollegiate coaching, though individual experiences may be largely positive and point to a changing landscape. Implications of the study and recommendations for future research are offered.

Keywords: intercollegiate coaching, LGB+ coaches, Foucault, intersectionality, ecological-intersectional model

Table of Contents

List of Tables

"It's Not My Job to Change Your Mind, It's My Job to Just Live Authentically": Factors in the Decision to Be 'Out' and Experiences of LGB+ NCAA D-I Assistant Coaches of Women's Sport

In less than 50 years, the United States has moved from homosexuality as a mental illness listed in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Puar, 2017) to the majority of U.S. citizens supporting gay marriage (Kazyack & Stange, 2018). As U.S. public opinion on gay marriage reflects an upward trend in acceptance of homosexuality (Kazyack & Stange, 2018), it is also clear that approval of gay marriage does not necessarily accompany support for LGBTQIA+[1] rights beyond the marital variety (Kazyack & Stange, 2018). Nonetheless, legislative changes at the highest level, such as the Supreme Court rulings on *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, *Bostock v. Clayton County* in 2020, and President Biden's Executive Order 13988 in 2021, provide clear evidence of a cultural movement toward inclusion and acceptance.

Scholars note a similar progressive trajectory toward inclusivity in the sporting realm (Anderson, 2011; Messner, 2012); there is more visibility for women and gender/sexual minorities both in and out of sporting spaces, as well as more ally programs and new rules for greater inclusion of transgender and intersex athletes (Krane, 2019). Scholarly work and popular media outlets, including espnW and Outsports.com, spotlight LGBTQIA+ athletes, coaches and administrators who are publicly open with their identities (Krane, 2019). The growth and reach of advocacy groups and educational initiatives, such as LGBT SportsSafe, Athlete Ally, and the NCAA Inclusion Forum, are also evidence of the increasing strength in the movement toward inclusion in sport

(LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). However, these developments are not reflected universally in sporting spaces.

This study is an extension of a LaVoi and Glassford's (2021) study on same-sex family narratives in NCAA D-I online coaching biographies, and also builds upon the work by Calhoun et al. (2011), who also examined family narratives within intercollegiate online coaching biographies. In documenting the experiences of LGB+[2] NCAA D-I assistant coaches, both those who are explicitly out in their coaching biographies and those who are not, this study has the potential to increase awareness for how coaches who have less power in the organizational hierarchy navigate heteronormative sporting spaces based on intersecting identities. Moreover, through its utilization of Foucauldian theory on power and social relationships within systems, results herein may allow for the translation of awareness into systemic change by acknowledging the role of institutions in creating inclusive environments.

Literature Review

This section provides background information and scholarship on intercollegiate athletics. It outlines the ghosts of homophobia and sexism that are still thriving in these spaces and examines why it is so vital to focus not only on these, but also on the impacts of race. Then it gives a picture of the occupational landscape of intercollegiate sport coaching by exposing the lack of diversity and slow shifts within this context. The section concludes with a summary of the landscape of online coaching biographies and the rarity of same-sex family narratives to provide a basis for the study at hand. The theoretical framework of this study is outlined, along with how it pertains to exploring

the distinct experiences of LGB+ NCAA D-I assistant coaches of women's sport. The significance and implications of the study are also discussed.

The Sport Landscape

Legislative rulings, shifting public opinion, and growth in advocacy and education, while positive developments, have not yet been able to transform the long history of homophobia and sexism prevalent in U.S. sporting institutions. In particular, the U.S. intercollegiate sporting landscape has been well documented as a homophobic and sexist space for decades (Calhoun et al., 2011; Griffin, 1998; Kalman-Lamb, 2020; Krane & Barber, 2005; Messner, 2012). Sport, a historically male-dominated social space, is built upon reinforcing hegemonic forms of masculinity, and is thus a space in which marginalized masculinities—often those not meeting norms of Whiteness[3] and/or heterosexuality—and feminine or gender non-conforming identities are actively subjugated (Anderson, 2011; Anderson, 2015; Kalman-Lamb, 2020; Messner, 2012). As Kalman-Lamb (2020) points out, this is not to say that more inclusive forms of masculinity have not emerged within sporting spaces; however, a traditional sporting masculinity based on characteristics such as strength, work ethic, heterosexuality, violence and assertiveness, valuing career over family, and domination of marginalized genders or gender expressions still holds sway as the exemplary masculine form in sport (Ricciardelli et al., 2010, as cited in Kalman-Lamb, 2020).

In alliance with hegemonic masculinity and in agreement with Judith Butler's (2006) heterosexual matrix, Ahmed (2006) asserts that sex, gender, and sexuality are "kept in line, often through force, such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect" (p. 557). While this argument is not specific to sport, evidence suggests this compulsory

order of sex, gender, and sexuality also prevails in sport (Waldron, 2016). This alignment of sex, gender and sexuality serves to further what Waldron (2016) termed the 'myth of the lesbian athlete', in combination with the belief that a woman in sport must be a lesbian. This means that women in sport are already suspect when it comes to their sexuality. Moreover, as explained by Kauer and Krane (2013), hegemonic femininity is also pervasive in sport. Kauer and Krane (2013) articulate that this hegemonic form of femininity emphasizes White upper-class values of femininity such as meekness, poise, humility, and restraint, and it is reinforced by individuals with high feminine capital who aim to keep such status. In sport spaces, women are evaluated not by their competence as coaches, but by their gender expression (Mann & Krane, 2019). Ahmed (2006) further argues that spaces are already oriented as straight, making queerness feel and appear out of place. Given the entrenched nature of hegemonic femininity, but especially of hegemonic masculinity and its associated heteronormativity and sexism, sport can be considered a space that is oriented to straightness. However, straightness is not inherent to the sporting space; van Ingen (2003) claims this to be a dynamic process where a space's straightness is "actively produced" (p. 206). (Re)production creates a sporting realm where individuals must navigate heteronormativity and homonegativism with varying degrees of difficulty based on intersectional identities (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021).

Yet, only seeing intercollegiate athletics as privileging straight men is problematic, because this view assumes Whiteness (King, 2008). So, while many studies in sport sociology outline the significance of power structures based in sexism and homophobia, it is important also to focus on the impacts of racialization and class

inequalities. These other axes of identity inform van Ingen's (2003) dynamic process of producing heterosexual spaces such that the alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality described by Ahmed (2006) and Butler (2006) are experienced differently across individuals of varying identities.

Sexuality as Intersectional

Since Whiteness is normative and often left unquestioned, the experiences of people of color within the matrix of racialized heteropatriarchy in sport is often unaddressed. This is problematic especially in sport, which Hylton (2009) calls "a racialized arena" (p. 7). Much of U.S. scholarship in sport either focuses on race by exploring the experiences of Black men or looks at gender and sexuality by investigating the experiences of White women (McDonald & Shelby, 2018). However, Hylton (2009) reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneity of experience among people of color in sport, rather than creating a homogenous picture where other intersectional identities are left unaddressed. Ferguson (2005) asserts that sexuality "is not extraneous to other modes of difference. Sexuality is intersectional. It is constitutive of and constituted by racialized gender and class formations" (p. 88). This intersectionality of sexuality means that playing into this diversity of experience in sport is how racial and class identities interlay differently with sexism and homophobia. For example, Newhall and Buzuvis (2008) outline that Black women athletes must carefully navigate the sport sphere to "avoid being stigmatized as lesbians by the dominant culture" (p. 352). This is because even though homophobia is a force acting on all women athletes, it operates distinctively on Black women; they often cannot meet the normalized

criteria for White femininity when many Black feminine norms are interpreted by dominant (White) culture as lesbian or masculine (Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008).

Research like that of Newhall and Buzuvis (2008) shows that only addressing gender and sexuality leaves out critical nuances of experience, in addition to uncomplicating the phenomena at play within intercollegiate sport at the expense of adequately addressing existing inequalities. Additionally, King (2008) points out that studies limited to White participants cannot be excluded from providing a racial analysis; absence has meaningful implications. It is problematic that sport scholarship focusing on gender or sexuality is often not informed by an intersectional perspective (Watson, 2018; Watson & Scraton, 2013); and focusing on Black men when exploring race, or White lesbians when exploring gender and sexuality, is not enough.

The Occupational Landscape and Lack of Diversity

The occupational landscape of intercollegiate sport is well documented to lack diversity with regards to both gender and race (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020). The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) does an annual analysis of NCAA intercollegiate athletics. In the TIDES *2019 Racial and Gender Report Card: College Sport* (Lapchick, 2020), women accounted for 40.6% of head coaches in NCAA D-I women's sports. Meanwhile, the report card states that 83.2% of head coaches were White in the same academic year (Lapchick, 2020). In NCAA D-I women's sports, White student-athletes make up 64.1% of all student-athletes on women's teams (Lapchick, 2020). From these data, it is clear that many women, especially women of color, competing in NCAA D-I sport do not see or work with individuals who look like them in the authoritative role of head coach. Unfortunately, the situation is not much better for

NCAA D-I assistant coaches of women's teams, as 72.6% of these positions are filled by White coaches and 46.8% are held by women (Lapchick, 2020; LaVoi et al., 2020). Relatively low numbers of women in coaching means that young women and girls have fewer same-gender mentors in sport (Midgley et al., 2020). This is problematic because research shows that women who participate in intercollegiate athletics benefit from seeing women in coaching roles, because they have access to same-sex role models, inspiration to go into coaching themselves, and sources of support in how to navigate the coaching landscape, in addition to the visible reminder that successful leaders can be women (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Baeth, 2018; Midgley et al., 2020). Same-gender role models also are valuable for women because they serve to counteract negative gender stereotypes (Midgley et al., 2020). From these benefits of women being coached by women, it is probable that a diverse range of people holding authoritative roles is also impactful in other ways, not least of which is the reminder that successful leaders are not only White, heterosexual men.

Despite the low numbers of women in coaching, evidence shows increases in hiring women in assistant coaching roles (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Darvin and Sagas (2017) contend this may be due to the perceptions that the assistant coach is a more "traditionally feminine [role] within sport organizations" (p. 182), while men have more access to higher levels of authority such as head coaching roles and administrative leadership roles like that of athletic director. It also could be that men have the ability to coach in both women's and men's sport; they can leave assistant coaching positions on the women's side to move over to the men's side in the same (or similar) sport, which opens coaching positions for new candidates and creates opportunities to hire more

women within sport organizations (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Interestingly, the presence of homologous reproduction based on gender, which has been strongly supported in how athletic directors hire head coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Boucher, 2019; Burton & LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; Norman et al., 2018; Stangl & Kane, 1991), is not supported in the case of head coaches hiring their coaching staff (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Rather, while women head coaches hire more women assistant coaches, men in head coaching positions are also hiring more women and have an increasing number of all-women staffs (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). This positive development can have meaningful implications for young women athletes, as mentioned above.

In addition to homologous reproduction based on gender, this phenomenon is prevalent when looking at race. Studies of organizational hiring practices in sport acknowledge homologous reproduction occurring in recruiting, hiring, and retaining women and men of color in coaching and administrative roles (Carter-Francique & Olushola, 2016). Additionally, research also suggests homologous reproduction based on racial identity in the hiring of assistant coaches by head coaches (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). Given that 84.5% of D-I athletic directors are White and 86.4% are men (Lapchick, 2020), it is likely that this chain of homologous reproduction impacts the level of racial diversity in college coaching; in other words, this is a powerful way that sport remains a space by and for White men. This has direct implications for athletes and who enters and remains in the coaching pipeline.

Assistant Coaches and Same-sex Family Narratives

Nearly all existing literature on women and LGB+ individuals in sport coaching pertains to head coaches. Outside of hiring practices, there is a lack of scholarship on

intercollegiate assistant coaches; and what is available is often focused on differences in experience and plans to move up to head coaching roles based on gender (Cunningham et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2014; Sagas et al., 2006; Wells, 2016). It is unknown how assistant coaches, who lack power in comparison to head coaches, navigate sport as a heteronormative space dominated by hegemonic masculinity. It is clear that all coaches who do not identify as straight must operate within a sport space saturated with heteronormativity, if not outright homophobia. Scheadler et al. (2021) outline that despite the rewarding experience that is intercollegiate coaching, LGB+ coaches do not always have access to the same opportunities and positive outcomes that their straight counterparts experience. Instead LGB+ coaches face negative stereotypes and potential decreases in status (Scheadler et al., 2021). There are many ways researchers have shown how these individuals navigate the occupational landscape, especially lesbians who are head coaches (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Davis-Delano et al., 2009; Felshin, 1974; Griffin, 1998; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005; LaVoi & Glassford, 2021; Norman, 2010; Norman, 2016).

One tangible strategy LGB+ coaches employ to navigate the coaching landscape is to be publicly and visibly out by including a same-sex family narrative in their online coaching biography on the university-sanctioned athletic website (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). Only 33.4% of all NCAA D-I coaches of women's teams, in any coaching role, with coaching biographies on their institutional website include a family narrative; in other words, 3,353 coaches out of the 10,032 coaches in NCAA D-I women's athletics with institutional coaching biographies include a narrative (LaVoi et al., 2020). Of these coaches with family narratives, 91.5% include a heterosexual narrative and 1.3% include

a same-sex narrative, while the remaining 7.3% include a generic mention of "family" or only mention children (LaVoi et al., 2020). This means that 3,067 coaches out of that group of 3,353 include a heterosexual partner and only 42 include a same-sex partner (LaVoi et al., 2020). Individuals who listed their same-sex partners are primarily head coaches (22, all women), while 13 assistant coaches include a same-sex partner (12 women, 1 man) (LaVoi et al., 2020).

Clearly, 1.3% of coaches with family narratives including a same-sex narrative is a very small percent of NCAA D-I coaches of women's sport. This is, however, an increase from Calhoun et al.'s (2011) findings in which two head coaches in D-I institutions listed a same-sex family narrative in their online coaching biography (0.01%). It is also an increase from LaVoi and Glassford's (in press) findings in which 18 head coaches included their same-sex partners in their coaching biographies (0.05%). However, even with the inclusion of assistant coaches and other positions in the occupational hierarchy, the intercollegiate sport occupational landscape does not appear to be significantly more inclusive of LGB+ family narratives, in spite of sociocultural and legal changes in the U.S. Extending examination to include assistant coaches is important to adequately assess this phenomenon of very few coaches including their same-sex partner in their online coaching biographies, given that assistant coaches' experiences are likely unique due to their differential access to power within the organizational hierarchy. It is also important to explore how assistant coaches navigate institutional homophobia and heteronormativity, especially since they are the future generation of LGB+ head coaches — if they can be retained in a system that is not always welcoming.

Since most coaches in same-sex relationships do not include their partner in their biography, the presence of LGB+ coaches in sport is erased and dominant heteronormative narratives are primarily maintained (Calhoun et al., 2011; LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). LaVoi and Glassford (in press) found that head coaches who include same-sex partners in their online coaching biographies directly advocated for their partner's inclusion or were approached by their sports information director (SID). Lesbian head coaches did not experience any pushback and described any initial absence of their family narrative as an oversight (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). These coaches explained the small number of same-sex family narratives in terms of individual factors related to being openly LGB+, generational factors and a reluctance to be out, fears about job security and career trajectory, concerns about negative recruiting, and geographical and cultural factors related to how liberal or socially progressive the campus and surrounding area may be (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). LaVoi and Glassford (in press) further found that these head coaches describe including their family narrative as part of being authentic and fully themselves, as a way to normalize families and relationships like theirs, and as a way to practice "positive recruiting…[which] includes owning your LGBTQ family narrative authentically, and thereby creating a goodness-of-fit filter for recruits and their families" (p. 23). Often, coaches assess the inclusivity of an athletic department during the hiring process, whether explicitly out during that process or not (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021; Mann & Krane, 2019). Since coaches in same-sex relationships are seeking out welcoming and inclusive environments within the sport context, sport organizations can and should create inclusive climates as "a business imperative for talent acquisition" (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021).

However, unlike the hiring process of a head coach, which happens with the athletic director and other administrators who have power within the athletic department organizational structure, research shows that head coaches are the ones choosing and hiring their assistants (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Darvin & Sagas, 2017). Less involvement of the athletic director and other administrators may mean assistant coaches are more reliant upon a head coach's values for inclusivity and/or may have a slightly more difficult read during the hiring process on whether institutions are welcoming of coaches in same-sex relationships. Navigating the coaching landscape could be simpler when only gauging one person's support (head coach), rather than an entire athletic department. Krane and Barber (2005) discovered that coaches often came up against athletic department hiring practices that discriminated against LGB+ coaches, and that coming out could be accompanied by a sudden uptick in negative coaching evaluations. Thus, if hiring is funneled through the head coach, and the assistant will work more closely with their team's coaching staff and less closely with other administrative staff, assistant coaches may in this way prioritize positive within-team dynamics and values for LGB+ inclusion. This could mean coaches enter a job regardless of broader institutional dynamics and values for inclusivity.

Assistant coaches who aim to eventually become head coaches understand that assistant coaching roles are a required stepping stone to be competitive for head coaching jobs (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). However, some women assistant coaches do not aim to be head coaches, whether due to experience as an assistant, lack of mentorship, lack of coaching self-efficacy, or lack of a flexible or supportive organizational culture (Morris et al., 2014). Unfortunately, Darvin and Sagas (2017) further reveal that minority coaches

are often prevented from taking on bigger, more important tasks and are thus blocked from "critical credential building activities and [building] on valuable human capital" (p. 174). This could mean that fewer LGB+ assistant coaches want to claim their status as a sexual minority, which may affect how assistant coaches navigate intercollegiate sport.

Indeed, assistant coaches may navigate sport by more often choosing to be less visibly or publicly out. There are proportionally more NCAA D-I coaches who are "out" in associate head coach roles (0.73%) and head coach roles (0.62%) than in coaching positions lower in the leadership hierarchy, such as assistant coaches (0.26%) and directors of operations (0.13%), and no graduate assistants (0%) are "out" in their online biographies (LaVoi et al., 2020). This suggests that coaches who are lower down within the organizational hierarchy and thus have less power, may have less authority over their own self-presentation as LGB+ coaches; or they may simply go through a different decision-making process and weigh their cost-benefit options differently. This is as yet unexplored, as current literature has not focused on LGB+ assistant coaches and how they navigate being out (or not) in intercollegiate coaching.

Given that head coaches have more authority and power within the sport organizational hierarchy than assistant coaches, this study examined whether or not LGB+ assistant coaches navigate sport spaces differently than their head coach counterparts. Given sociocultural shifts and legal rulings in favor of the LGBTQIA+ community in broader U.S. society, this study sought to replicate and extend LaVoi and Glassford's (in press) examination of lesbian head coaches' family narratives in online university-sanctioned coaching biographies to examine the state of heteronormativity in intercollegiate sport coaching. This study investigated the comparative decision-making

process and outcomes for assistant coaches with same-sex partners who include their family narrative in their biography, and it also investigated the decision-making process and experiences for assistant coaches who do not include a same-sex partner in their coaching biography.

It is important to emphasize again that nearly all of the NCAA D-I coaches who explicitly include a same-sex partner in their online coaching biography are women (all 22 head coaches and 12 out of 13 assistant coaches), except for one assistant coach. Scholarship already evidences that men and women in sport experience homophobia differently, since women's sexuality is automatically put into question by their participation in sport, a climate that marginalizes women, femininity, and any masculinities that do not meet hegemonic ideals (Anderson, 2011; Anderson, 2015; Kalman-Lamb, 2020; Messner, 2012; Norman, 2012). The literature on the homophobic climate of sport for women is highly documented, but explorations of the experiences of men are not as abundant; what scholarship exists shows that "gender, power, and sexual identity are inseparable in sport and play out in different ways for male and female coaches" (Calhoun et al., 2011, p. 303).

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a critical feminist perspective that aims "to account for difference [and] tackle inequality" (Mansfield et al., 2018). This study is located within multiple levels of the ecological-intersectional model (EIM, LaVoi, 2016) in order to examine and fill knowledge gaps at the multiple levels at which human experience is influenced. The EIM theoretical foundation allows for the exploration of four social-ecological levels that influence individual experience: individual, interpersonal,

organizational/structural, and sociocultural (LaVoi, 2016). At the individual level, emphasis is placed on intersectionality in order to better understand how coaches may experience homophobia and other forms of oppression in unique ways according to different axes of identity (LaVoi, 2016). To genuinely address difference and its resulting consequences of inequality and the interrelated identities that people hold (LaVoi, 2016; Watson, 2018), a multilevel lens is warranted to counter the normalized and assumed Whiteness in sport scholarship; this is especially critical since an intersectional approach is not yet common in sport research (Watson, 2018; Watson & Scraton, 2013). Despite this study's emphasis on individual experience and action, this study places individual experience and behavior in relation to their specific context, the social systems individuals navigate (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Contextualization is critical in an intersectional approach, because it allows for the examination of the "dynamic interplay of individual expression and the social relations within which leisure occurs" (Watson & Scraton, 2013, p. 36). Beyond individual experience, the EIM calls for exploration of the interpersonal relationships assistant coaches have with head coaches and other departmental coaches and administrators, the organizational structure, and the wider socio-cultural context. In this case, the experiences of assistant coaches in same-sex relationships are explored within the organizational landscape of athletics departments, within the wider sociocultural context of NCAA D-I intercollegiate athletics and the broader sociopolitical and sociocultural movements toward LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

A further advantage of the EIM is that power runs through and overlays every level of the model, which "makes explicit the need and willingness to interrogate power at every level, and from the top down and bottom up" (LaVoi, 2016, p. 18). To

understand the experiences of participants, Foucault's work (1978; 1983; 1985; 1986) was used to examine power as it overlays the multilevel EIM. This is particularly useful because a Foucauldian concept of power is relational, diffuse, and recognizes agency (LaVoi, 2016). Thus, a Foucauldian lens is helpful "for understanding the constitution of individuals' subjectivities, social relations and the workings of power" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 4). Foucault's concepts are particularly useful to address the complexities of individuals moving through complex webs of what Foucault (1987) called 'relationships of power'. Foucault's focus on discourse is pivotal to how he understood and discussed power. Pringle (2007) outlines that the Foucauldian concept of discourse is a referent to a "set of ideas that people use to navigate social life and make sense of their experiences...discourse refers to the unwritten rules that guide social practices, produce and regulate the production of statements and shape what can be perceived and understood" (p. 387). Discourse is thus central to how individuals navigate relationships of power. Foucault assumed that individuals are subjected to power and are simultaneously active subjects within relationships of power (Markula & Pringle, 2006). This means that in using a Foucauldian perspective, it is possible to account for possibilities for change in power dynamics or resistance on the part of the individual; his concept of power is not so all-encompassing as to remove individual or group agency (Markula & Pringle, 2006). A Foucauldian lens provides capacity to account for power's dynamism, which is what allows this perspective to help coaches question and confront existing narratives of what it is to coach and be a coach (Stangl, 2013, as cited in LaVoi, 2016).

Foucault is also particularly useful because his scholarship on sexuality views sexuality as identity only because it is constituted by discursive social processes and is established "through disciplinary and regulatory practices, which simultaneously shape social relations and the production of subjects" (Lock, 2006, p. 159). The process of subjectification, achieved through what Foucault (1986) terms the technologies of the self, is what allows an individual to "form oneself as a subject within power relations" (Thorpe, 2008, p. 209). As Thorpe (2008) asserts, Foucauldian technologies of self allow researchers to explore "the ways in which power operates within everyday relations between [people] and [institutions]" (p. 224). This focus on power's day-to-day enactment, function, and contestation allows for a deeper understanding of how every person exists within relations of power yet maintains the ability to utilize their own agency to "reconfigure -- not dissolve -- power relations" (Magquire, 2002, as cited in Thorpe, 2008).

The application of Foucauldian theoretical insights situates this study within an established area of the field of sport sociology. Foucault has been utilized in a wide array of sport scholarship, such as: swimming pools as a panoptic space; discipline and surveillance in contemporary sport stadiums; automatic docility in modern sport; discipline, surveillance, sexuality, and population regulation in boxing and cinematic institutions; and governance in the case of the National Race for the Cure 5k in Washington, D.C. (Cole et al., 2004). Foucault has increasingly been applied directly to coaching or utilized to understand coaching practice, but existing scholarship relating Foucault and coaching focuses on head coaches' practices, coaching development, and the coaching of high-performance athletes (de Haan & Knoppers, 2019; Denison, 2019;

Denison & Scott-Thomas, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2014; Mills & Denison, 2016; Mills et al., 2020; Shogan, 1999). A Foucauldian lens has not yet been applied to assistant coaches and their experiences in the racialized heteropatriarchy of the sporting realm.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is multifaceted and fills a number of existing gaps in the current literature. A variety of contributions to the existing literature in sport sociology and sports coaching are offered in this study, including applying a Foucauldian lens to assistant coaches' experiences, extending research regarding online coaching biographies and heteronormativity into the population of assistant coaches, and providing a comparative analysis of coaches who include a same-sex partner in their biographies with those who do not to gain a deeper understanding of the variety of factors that influence the decision to be publicly "out" as an LGB+ assistant coach. This study also emphasizes the importance of an intersectional perspective and adds to the relatively small body of intersectional research in sport.

Foucault has never been employed to examine assistant coaches, and adds to a small body of researchers who have included Foucault into examination of coaching science. This study extends the benefits of a Foucauldian analysis into the understudied group that is U.S. intercollegiate assistant coaches, because their position within the organizational hierarchy means that they lack power in the system.

This study is an addition to the scholarship on the progress or decline of institutionalized homonormativity through observing online coaching biography narratives (Calhoun et al., 2011; LaVoi & Glassford, 2021), and it extends this research by focusing on assistant coaches in particular and the implications of power and

organizational position. Furthermore, the study extends existing research pertaining to online sport coach biographies that showed the near full erasure of LGB+ coaches in this new media landscape and the resulting reinforcement of the heteronormative status quo in intercollegiate athletics (Calhoun et al., 2011). The inclusion of information in university-sanctioned websites communicates who and what is valued and celebrated given a public audience. The reinforcement of dominant heteronormative ideologies in online coaching biographies (Calhoun, 2011; LaVoi & Glassford, 2021) is thus relevant to question whether coaches feel that institutions do fully embrace, value, and celebrate them as employees.

This work also extends on existing scholarship regarding decision-making structures and outcomes for lesbian head coaches who include a same-sex partner in their biography (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). Using *Women in College Coaching Report Card*™ data on same-sex family narratives by coaching position that shows fewer out LGB+ assistant coaches than head coaches, this study seeks to explore how and why the intercollegiate sport occupational landscape is differentially or similarly inclusive of LGB+ family narratives in online coaching biographies based on occupational position. It propels the exploration of coaching biographies into the understudied group of LGB+ NCAA D-I assistant coaches of women's sport to provide an account for the differential experiences of assistant coaches in intercollegiate athletics. This study may thus provide a better understanding of how differential access to power and authority influence feelings of support among LGB+ coaches.

Utilizing a comparative approach that allows for a deeper understanding of the factors that assistant coaches weigh when deciding whether to be publicly or explicitly

"out" in their online coaching biographies, this study is unique. The utilization of a comparative approach is a novel addition to existing scholarship, which includes head coaches who are out in their biographies and does not address those who are not explicitly or publicly out in this way (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). Including assistant coaches who list a partner in their biography, as well as coaches who do not, allows for a stronger analysis of the cost-benefit approach that coaches may take when considering the inclusion of a partner in their online university coaching biography. This twofold analysis may give a better understanding of how sport organizations can better promote inclusivity. Moreover, given the relative lack of scholarship on assistant coaches, this study is intended to fill a gap in the literature regarding how assistant coaches navigate and experience intercollegiate athletics.

Watson (2018) contends that an intersectional approach is not yet common in sport research, so this study is intentionally focused on intersectionality and the impacts of race as it intersects with gender and sexuality in coaching spaces. In this way, the study offers a deeper analysis of the varying experiences among LGB+ assistant coaches in D-I women's sport. Furthermore, this work extends previous research by adding to the limited existing scholarship that takes a multilevel approach and utilizes an intersectional approach.

The following research questions (RQ) guided examination and analysis:

- Research Question 1
    - RQ 1A: For the LGB+ assistant coaches who included same-sex partners in their online biographies, what ecological factors influenced their decision?

    - RQ 1B: For the LGB+ assistant coaches who self-identify as LBG+ who do not include same-sex partners in their online biographies, what factors influenced their omission decision?

- Research Question 2
    - RQ 2A: For the LGB+ assistant coaches who included same-sex partners in their online biographies, what outcomes have resulted from choosing to include a family narrative in their coaching biography?
    - RQ 2B: For the LGB+ assistant coaches who did not include same-sex partners in their online biographies, what outcomes have resulted from choosing not to include a family narrative in their coaching biography?

Methods

Research Design

The design employed for this study was an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, in that it utilizes the results of quantitative research and builds on these results with qualitative research to explain the quantitative results in more detail (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This study is based on quantitative research conducted by the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport as part of their annual *Women in College Coaching Report Card*™ (LaVoi et al., 2020). Descriptive data were collected between November 1st, 2019 and January 1st, 2020 for all coaches of women's NCAA D-I teams within online coaching biographies on university-sanctioned websites (LaVoi et al., 2020). Similar to the 2012-2013 report, the

2019-2020 edition of the annual report contained information about all individuals employed in paid coaching positions within NCAA D-I women's sport, and data included coach name, position, sport, gender, etc. (LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi et al., 2020). Data were collected by a research team, who visited each D-I institution's athletics website and reviewed the coaching staff for all women's teams (LaVoi, 2013; LaVoi et al, 2020).

Relevant to this study, the data included gender of coach and family narratives within the coaching biographies of all individuals on the coaching staff. Out of the 10,032 coaches in D-I women's sport, 3,353 (33.4%) of them included a family narrative in their online coaching biography (LaVoi et al., 2020). Of the 3,353 with family narratives, 42 (0.01%) coaches included a same-sex family narrative. Out of these 42 coaches, 13 assistant coaches (one man and 12 women) with a same-sex family narrative were identified (n=13 of 3,353, 0.004%) (LaVoi et al., 2020). To further explore and explain the results that came out of the quantitative research collected for the *Women in College Coaching Report Card*™ (LaVoi et al., 2020), the qualitative phase of interview-based research around LGB+ coaches and family narratives began.

Sample

The sample of participants in this study were drawn from two populations. The first population was the group of 13 assistant coaches of NCAA D-I women's sport with a same-sex family narrative in their university-sanctioned online coaching biography. The population is made up of 12 women and one man. One individual is Black or African American, and one person is Asian; all others are White. Twelve of the individuals are married and one is engaged, and seven out of the 13 have one or more children. Since this population of interest is very small, all individuals within the population were

purposefully sampled (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) for the study. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, all 13 of these assistant coaches were invited to participate in the study. Seven of the 13 (53.8%) coaches agreed to participate and were subsequently interviewed (see Appendix A).

The second population in this study was comprised of assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's sport who identify as LGB+ but do not include a same-sex partner in their university-sanctioned online coaching biography. The size of this population is unknown; but based on Gallup Daily Tracking Survey data, the general population of cisgender LGB+ adults in the United States is estimated to be 9,946,000, or just under 4% of the U.S. population (Conron & Goldberg, 2020). If that percentage was also reflected among the 5,066 assistant coaches of NCAA D-I women's sport, we would expect our population of LGB+ assistant coaches to be around 200 people. Coaches who were not explicitly out in their online coaching biographies were selected via purposeful sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and recruited through a referral sampling technique that was a combination of a site-based approach with a gatekeeper and snowball sampling, due to their relative invisibility as LGB+ coaches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Singleton & Straits, 2010). Seven coaches opted into the study this way. Four of the seven are men and three are women. One has a child, two are married, one is partnered (not married), and three are single. All coaches are White, except one who is Hispanic or Latinx (see Appendix A).

Rather than relying on the concept of data saturation and considering the sample sufficient when interviews no longer provided new or surprising information (Smith & Sparkes, 2016), this study instead followed Braun & Clarke's (2021) critical approach to

saturation. Sample size in qualitative research is reliant upon a combination of "interpretive, situated and pragmatic judgment" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 211). In this study, the sample of seven out of 13 coaches who include a same-sex partner and seven coaches who do not include a same-sex partner in their biography (for a total of 14 coaches) is appropriate for an in-depth analysis of the varied experiences of LGB+ assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's sport.

Data Collection

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, based on the previous work of LaVoi and Glassford (in press), that relied on focused yet open-ended questions and probes (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2016) and lasted between 40 and 75 minutes. Due to geographic spread, in addition to COVID-19 mitigation considerations, interviews were conducted via phone or audio conferencing, recorded, and then transcribed. Similar to previous work done by LaVoi and Glassford (in press), interviews with coaches including partners in their biographies focused on the coaches' experiences of being explicitly out, factors that contributed to their decision to include their life-partner in their biography, how this decision was made, who was involved, and any resulting outcomes. Interviews with coaches who did not include partners in their biographies similarly focused on their experiences as LGB+ assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's sport, factors contributing to not including a partner in their biography, and how this decision was made.

Interviewing was particularly fitting as a method due to its effectiveness at allowing participants to richly describe their experiences, perspectives, and reflections (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Per feminist research practices, the semi-structured nature of

the interviews allowed the study's participants the flexibility to speak on what they found to be important in the moment and freely provide their views and opinions, rather than limiting them to only what the interview guide asked of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Singleton & Straits, 2010). The conversation was able to move more fluidly, and participants were able to tell their story and describe their experiences and insights on their own terms within the interview. This study employed an iterative process of data collection and data analysis, in which these took place roughly concurrently (Hesse-Biber, 2014), allowing for the interview guide to be refined throughout the process as interviews began to yield findings and themes began to emerge among participants. Refinement of the interview guide was also vital to ensuring that questions were prompting the collection of data relevant to the research questions (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Interviewees were questioned about hypotheses and ideas coming out of previous interviews and about specific situations, capturing any additional thoughts or perspectives on these concepts (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Singleton & Straits, 2010).

Trustworthiness

Transcripts were sent back to participants for member checking prior to analysis by the research team, which served as a tangible way to promote trust, show respect to the participants, and increase trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Given the population of individuals who are explicitly out in NCAA Division-I women's collegiate coaching is small, the "out" coaches in this sample could be identified fairly easily; thus, to protect the identities of participants in the study, pseudonyms were assigned, and other identifying information was changed in both field notes and the resulting paper (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Maintaining

confidentiality was also vitally important to the coaches who are not explicitly "out" in their biographies; though they are not part of a publicly identifiable group and would be harder to identify with basic demographic information, they are similarly protected for consistency and to respect their privacy as coaches who are not explicitly or publicly "out" as LGB+. To further protect the confidentiality and identity of all participating coaches, no additional demographic information will be provided herein. The interview guide is available by request.

Positionality

As a researcher, I am highly committed to reversing the institutionalization of heterosexism and heteronormativity in the coaching profession. Therefore, I believe the inclusivity (or lack thereof) in intercollegiate coaching is worthy of deeper investigation. My interest in this subject is furthered by my own identity as a gay woman in a same-sex relationship who is an NCAA D-III assistant coach. As a scholar who values feminist methodology and is dedicated to reflexivity and giving space for participants to be the expert on their own experience (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018), I owned my shared identities with participants to build rapport. As found by Krane and Barber (2005), my shared experience as an LGB+ coach seemed to create a sense of comfort for participants to discuss their experiences. While I did claim my identities to build rapport and provide space for questions regarding my own background and interest in this area of study, I did not centralize my own experiences in any step of the research process.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were read multiple times for familiarization and then coded with a combination of an inductive and deductive approach for common and/or meaningful

themes or patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Braun et al., 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A flexible thematic analysis, or what Braun & Clarke (2019) later call a 'reflexive analysis' was most analytically productive, as this analytical style allows for the analysis of participants' experiences and any underlying processes/factors that influence specific phenomena (Braun et al., 2016). Blending inductive and deductive approaches was important because it allows the researcher to base codes on experiences participants describe in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Furthermore, it allows the researcher to draw on theoretical constructs "to render visible issues that participants did not explicitly articulate" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 60). Such a style of analysis was beneficial in identifying patterns in participants' experiences as LGB+ coaches, as well as any patterns in internal and external decision-making processes about whether to include their same-sex partner in their online coaching biographies. Any exceptions to emerging patterns were also noted.

To prevent bias and maintain reflexivity, as well as analytically engage with the data throughout analysis, memoing was used (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Memoing as a practice is a critical part of the process because "writing and analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research -- from informal writing of notes and memos to the more formal process of analysis and report writing" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 69). The final codes, after two rounds of coding to ensure a robust and coherent set, were then clustered into themes to describe larger patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Braun et al., 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). These were further refined and then reviewed to confirm that the resulting analysis fit the coded data and entire original data set and addressed the research questions (Braun

& Clarke, 2012; Braun et al., 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Peer debriefing and collaboration were utilized to achieve intercoder agreement, in which the primary researcher brought in another individual to cross-check and confirm codes and themes and thus further address bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

Results

The LGB+ assistant coaches in this study provided similar experiences and decision-making structures as the head coaches of NCAA D-I women's sport in LaVoi and Glassford's (2021) study. They similarly described individual-level considerations, such as comfort with oneself as an LGB+ person. The group of assistant coaches with same-sex partners in their biographies also talked about comparable experiences with the departmental process to include their partner in their coaching biography, often mentioning a fairly unremarkable and casual conversation with a Sports Information Director (SID). Assistant coaches talked about the outcomes of being open about their LGB+ identity with their colleagues, teams, and recruits. They also spoke to their unique position within the organizational hierarchy of intercollegiate coaching, and how the power dynamics at play impact their experiences.

Ecological Factors to Including a Partner

My first aim was to explore the ecological factors that influenced LGB+ assistant coaches to include a same-sex partner in their online biography. I hoped to explore how and why NCAA D-I assistant coaches include same-sex partners in their biographies and see how they navigated their institutional structure to do so. I hoped to explore why NCAA D-I assistant coaches may not include a partner and see whether and how they navigated the coaching landscape as openly LGB+. First and foremost, all the assistant

coaches in this study outlined the individual-level factors that impacted their level of openness. Despite the fact that one group did not include partners in their online coaching biographies, all coaches in the study were out in some capacity. The assistant coaches also talked about interpersonal relationships that influenced their decisions around being out or including a same-sex partner in their coaching biography. These interpersonal-level factors were closely tied to and intermingled with organizational/structural factors due to the structure of an athletic department. The interpersonal relationships with one's colleagues are often linked to the organizational structure of the institution. Moreover, coaches talked about larger sociocultural factors they have noticed, whether regarding sport or society more broadly. These factors were closely integrated with organizational and structural factors in sport institutions, and thus these were combined.

Individual Factors

The coaches in this study outlined several individual-level factors that affected how open they were about being LGB+. First and perhaps foremost, every coach narrated their own personal journeys of coming out and self-acceptance as LGB+ individuals, whether in general, or in sport more specifically. This was true for both those coaches including a partner in their biography and those who did not. Coaches also discussed other factors, such as gender and race/ethnicity, as having a part in their decision to be publicly or explicitly out.

Personal Journey of Self-Acceptance. Coaches in both groups recognized the importance of their individual journey to coming out to themselves first before being comfortable with outward openness about their sexual identities. One assistant coach who did not include a partner in his biography talked about his journey by saying, "It was

slow, ‘cause it took me a long time to accept myself.” He understood that to be related to where he grew up and how negatively being gay was presented in his family and his community. He said the following:

> “And I don't care what anybody says. Saying the words ‘I am gay’ in a mirror’s the hardest thing in the world to do. As easy as it sounds like, it, I mean, when you finally look at yourself in the mirror and you finally say and admit it? It's like okay, it's like a sledgehammer, you know, all that weight’s finally gone.”

Other coaches seemed to agree with this coach’s assertion that one’s personal journey is a foundational factor in deciding how open to be, whether you include a partner in your online coaching biography or not. One coach concluded that self-acceptance was vital, describing how it can instill confidence to be open:

> “I didn't give it a second thought. It wasn't even something that I paused on. It was like — put it in there because that's my family. To me, at that point, I — and I’m getting better, and I think everybody does as they get older — I’m happy with myself. I’m happy with our family. I’m really proud of us. We love each other and I don't really care what anybody thinks.”

For this coach, part of the comfort with being more open seems to be tied to the simple process of aging and growing into yourself.

Gender as a Factor. Some coaches observed how gender impacted their experience. Both men and women in this study saw gender affecting how they were perceived as LGB+ individuals, whether in sport specifically, or in terms of broader sociocultural norms. One man who did not include his husband in his biography said:

> "Well, I also think that, like I could totally be off base, this is just my personal lived experience and what I've seen in the South, [but] it was way more acceptable for women to blur the line than it was for men...being fluid, being gay...like it was more common, I guess and potentially viewed as more acceptable. Like it was less of a, an attack on normalcy than it was for men to be gay."

He went on to specify that the South where he grew up has what he called, "very specific social norms", which may affect how he perceives the differential impact of gender on LGB+ individuals. This was affirmed by another LGB+ coach I spoke to. He said:

> "I don't know. I don't have a reasoning for this. I do just feel that in general, sometimes men have a tougher time coming out because it's the… I mean, this wasn't my thinking whenever I was coming out, but I have heard some people be like, it's tough because some people think it's a knock against your masculinity. But to me, that has nothing to do with it."

Another coach almost seemed to put it in terms of different levels of scrutiny in men's college sports versus women's. He said:

> "I guess I don't want to say it's easier, but just coming from the outside looking in, it's easier for an athlete to, as a female, to you know, be open and stuff, because it's not as much societal pressure as it is for the guys… And, you know, you just see a lot more of the females and stuff because it's, you know, just one of them things, whereas with guys and stuff it's, you know, that's why you don't see as many professional athletes and stuff that are gay or come out and say they're gay, because they're afraid to. Because of the reaction and stuff and societal

> pressure and the way people look at it. The connotations and stuff. And that's just the same way it is for, in the college ranks of coaching, even playing and stuff…[there's] more societal pressures on the sports world, because of the way people are looked at and stuff with it, and they're put under such microscopes and stuff."

However, he did point out that the level of scrutiny "depends on the size of the school." The male assistant coaches I spoke to agreed that being an LGB+ man in sports is difficult, although some coaches pointed out that coaching women's sports lessened that burden somewhat.

Two coaches who were single talked about how being a gay male coach made them less 'threatening' in some way to their women student-athletes. One talked about being concerned as a younger coach that the athletes would think that he was likely to hit on them due to closeness in age, so being gay and being able to "convey the message, 'hey I'm not into you guys, trust me'" made them more comfortable. He also talked about his sexuality in terms of departmental checks and balances, saying, "I'd have to have a sit down with compliance and go through everything, and they tell me 'don't hook up with any of the athletes' and stuff, and I'm sitting there, 'you don't have to worry, wrong sort for that.'" The second coach talked about how being a gay man coaching women's sport was almost an advantage, especially given the present cultural moment and the #metoo movement in sport. He said:

> "I feel like it's not as big of an issue [to be a gay coach] as some people may think it is. I don't think it's an issue at all really, to me. It's just part of who I am, so sometimes I even forget that. I don't even bring that up. I don't even like... It's not

> something I even ask like, ‘Oh, how do you feel about having a gay coach?’ I don't know. I don't feel like I have to ask that because I feel like, ‘How do you feel about having a straight coach? With the culture of [women’s sports] right now, how do you feel? Would you rather have a straight coach or a gay coach?" And with the culture and the sexual abuse and all that stuff that's happened in [women’s sports] recently...I feel like I have a huge benefit of, obviously, not being into women and being gay. And so, I'm there fully to support them and be there.”

At some level, choosing to coach women’s sport, rather than men’s sport, afforded gay men and the women they coach to feel more comfortable in a broader sport culture dealing with misogyny and poor treatment of women athletes.

Another coach talked about how being around a women’s team was more tolerable or acceptable as a gay man, saying:

> “I feel like I’ve come across women are more inclined to accept you in a way, I feel like, than straight men. Straight men are always like, ‘Oh god, he’s going to hit on me. Oh god.’ It’s like, ‘Do you hit on every woman that you like or see?’”

Coaching on the women’s side of intercollegiate sport meant that the hegemonic masculinity on the men’s side that utilizes homonegativity to reinforce itself was much less of a factor. The LGB+ men in this study feel more comfortable and less like their sexuality is threatening when coaching on women’s teams.

While the LGB+ men in this study saw their gender as hindering them in coming out due to norms of masculinity, they also pointed out several advantages of being an LGB+ man in women’s sport. However, the LGB+ women in this study often viewed

their gender as an additional barrier in a sport world that values men's leadership more highly. Some coaches talked about how the limited numbers of women coaches put extra pressure on LGB+ women coaches. One said:

> "I felt a lot like I was, I had to make a decision like am I going to be a coach or am I going to be a lesbian? Like that I couldn't be both. And, and obviously I know I can now, um but, but I think that that was something that was in my mind, a lot is just I didn't I felt like I had to make a choice. So I think that's why, when you think of that number, I think a lot of especially female coaches, who may be working female sports, especially, which is the majority of us, are probably concerned about that...Because we don't see anyone else doing it. Which, if everybody thinks that way, I'm making the assumption that's why there's only 13 of them...it's like female coaches, I think there's a low number because women don't grow up in our sport -- this is crazy -- I mean, I am most of, for most cases, the first female coach they've ever had, period...So forget it. Yeah, right, and so forget about like a female coach who's out, who's you know, so like for sure I'm just being a, you know, a little bit of a first time for most of the athletes that I've come across. So yeah, I think there's just, yeah there's the stig-- not for me, it's just been the stigma of like, I have to make a choice...I couldn't do both."

She saw the lack of publicly out LGB+ coaches to be similar to the lack of women coaches in women's sport. As she's saying here, she is often the first woman coach her athletes have worked with, and almost always the first out LGB+ coach they've had. Not seeing others like herself, especially in a sport dominated by male coaches, made it feel like being a woman coach and being LGB+ on top of that, was a challenge. Claiming her

identity as LGB+ was difficult when she already felt like a minority in her sport due to her gender.

This gendered barrier of claiming oneself as LGB+ was also addressed by another coach, who explained that there are still jobs and institutions that are not okay with LGB+ coaches. She outlined:

> "So, already being a female in the college world, we know that there's not enough women in coaching positions. Our networking as a female is much more difficult than a man. If you think in your mind that being LGBTQ and labeling yourself as that is a hindrance and a negative mark on your resume, then you're not going to want to put that on your resume."

Similar to the coach above, this assistant coach felt that being a woman coach and being LGB+ on top of that, was a challenge. When sport leadership positions are already going to well-networked men, it is more difficult to out yourself as an LGB+ woman and seek coaching positions. In a similar way that men coaches are normalized and valued, Whiteness is heavily normalized in sport leadership. So while gender creates differential experiences of being an LGB+ coach, being a BIPOC individual is another intersecting identity that influences a coach's experience.

Race/Ethnicity as a Factor. Although most of the coaches referenced or participating in this study (16 out of 20) identify as White, many of the coaches acknowledge that race and ethnicity play a role in being open as a sexual minority. Several White coaches talked about how their non-White peers face additional barriers in intercollegiate coaching that they do not. One White coach said, "I believe this data could be representative that White people feel more comfortable revealing this information.

Perhaps this is because people of minority ethnicity/race are hesitant to reveal themselves as an additional minority." This was reinforced by another coach, who said, "It's already hard being LGBTQ. It makes you a minority and a target for discrimination and hatred. Being a person of color *and* LGBTQ is a double whammy." A White coach who included her wife in her online coaching biography remarked:

> "As far as the percentage of White people who disclosed, it doesn't surprise me. When you think of intersectionality, and I am making huge generalizations here with the best intent, you can consider my identities of White, gay, and woman with a dose of privilege that a Black, gay woman or man does not experience."

Although the majority of the coaches in this study did not face additional barriers as people of color in coaching, they saw that their BIPOC colleagues faced additional obstacles when it came to expressing themselves openly as LGB+ coaches.

The Hispanic and Latina coach who did not include a partner in her online coaching biography spoke about how her intersecting identities serve to create challenges as a coach:

> "I was probably the only female Hispanic lesbian in the whole town, like I guarantee you that was -- I was probably very right on that...I mean, it's like you break me down into like a very small minority group, right...You know, it's like I don't want to make assumptions, I still like -- is someone seeing me differently? But, but you're right, I mean, it's, it's a lot of things that make me even more of a minority versus who's just their sexuality might not be conforming to what society will say, or you know think of as what the majority of people are, so yeah."

She felt that being a woman in coaching, in addition to being a Hispanic Latina lesbian, created a sense of being in the minority among her colleagues in many different ways simultaneously, which made her feel like others may see her differently from her White, heterosexual male peers.

Interpersonal and Organizational/Structural Factors

The assistant coaches in this study noted a few primary interpersonal and organizational/structural factors that came into play when it came to either including a same-sex partner in their online biography, or not doing so. Interpersonal and organizational/structural factors were closely tied for most coaches in this study, as their working relationships were greatly impacted by the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletics. For all the coaches in this study, marriage was mentioned as a moment when including a partner in one's professional biography made sense. Other factors around interpersonal relationships like one's romantic relationship or relationships with family were important to the decision as well. The LGB+ assistant coaches also discussed how relationships with other coaches and administrators in the athletic department came into play when it came to including a family narrative or not.

Marriage. Prior to reaching out to someone in the athletic department about including a partner, the coaches all identified a moment when the timing felt right to include their partner. The primary interpersonal-level factor in making the decision to include a same-sex partner was a relationship milestone. For some coaches, this was marriage. For others, this was having kids. One of the coaches who included her wife in her coaching biography said that marriage "changed things". She felt more comfortable being publicly explicit about her family because of the cultural emphasis on marriage as

giving relationships a perception of higher validity. She said, “It felt, in an unexpected way, maybe a little more legitimate. It felt different to say my wife than my girlfriend or partner. I felt much more confident saying that, and I did not anticipate that.”

Another assistant coach seemed to agree with this idea of marriage as an important relationship milestone for including one’s partner in a coaching biography. This coach went further, in explaining that while marriage was an important step in this decision-making process, it wasn’t necessarily the only way to measure a long-term commitment:

> “I think for me, I never would have thought about including something if I wasn’t married, just because I know that for me, I wanted to get married -- and eventually, hopefully, that was going to happen. If I was the type of person that was just going to have a partner and have a partner for life and not get married, I probably would have included that sooner. But for me, I knew that marriage was my goal, and so I just said I’m going to wait until marriage.”

This perspective seemed to acknowledge the cultural importance of marriage while also stipulating that it should not be the only type of relationship worthy of inclusion in a university-sanctioned coaching biography. A few coaches who included their same-sex partner in their biography discussed how having children was the relationship milestone that first prompted them to think about including a family narrative. One coach said that after getting married and having their first child a year later, that was when she felt like it was time to include something in her work bio. She explained how proud she was and that she wanted to share her family with everyone:

> “I think when we had our first son, that was the first time... When you're a young coach and your bio is just like — how can I get my next job? You're building your resume and you put all your great things. And then we got married the year before we had [our son]. So, then I was like — okay, well, now we're like a family. I’m proud of who we are and what we've accomplished in bringing another person into the world. So, I want them to know that I care about them and that they're an important part of who I am as a person and coach. I think it's fair to have my... I mean, it's my bio. That's my life. I didn't think much of it until we were married and I was like — yeah, that's a profile. That's a thing about me that I want people to know. It was just like and now we have a child. Let's throw it out there and everybody can get pumped about babies. Yeah, it wasn't anything that I thought about until we were married because it wasn't... Nobody puts their significant other in there unless you're like, I guess, married or legitimate or whatever you want to call it but yeah, it was kind of a no-brainer to me.”

Echoing what the other coaches said about including their partners, marriage was an impactful piece of the decision for this coach. Given that 12 of the 13 coaches with a same-sex partner in their online coaching biography were married (with the thirteenth being engaged to be married), the cultural weight of marriage to legitimize a partnership is a large factor in making this decision. In addition, including a spouse is normalized in institutional coaching biographies, with 91.5% of NCAA D-I coaches of women’s sport including their opposite-sex fiancé or spouse (LaVoi et al., 2020). LGB+ assistant coaches saw their marriages as ultimately similar to those of their heterosexual coaching colleagues and thus equally worthy of inclusion like heterosexual family narratives.

The weight of marriage among these LGB+ assistant coaches was true even among those coaches who were not yet married. All of these coaches talked about marriage as being the point where their person would be shared in their biography. One single coach said:

> "And for me, I think that's really it. I want to make sure that I'm set, I'm married, that person is for me, that person wants to have children, that person wants to make a life with me. And then, of course, if that is the person for me, they would be shared to the world. There's no secret. And it's not even about being a secret. If I had a relationship, I'm just not going to announce it to the world on my work bio unless it's like, "That's my person. We're getting married. We have an adoption setup," things like that, then you know it's real time and it's real thing. So, I think that's important. I don't think straight couples would be like, "This is my girlfriend." Usually, it's like if they're married, they post like, "This is my wife. We got married last year. We've been together four years," something like that. It's a little different. I feel like that's why. And I don't think that straight couples just post their significant other unless they're married...but yeah, I would be more than happy as a coach to share that on my bio, if that was my person."

The norms around marriage and inclusion in coaching biographies that this coach mentions (though as they state, that norm overwhelmingly involves opposite-sex partnerships) carries over to these coaches who identify as LGB+. And since marriage has been legalized, all of the coaches in this study, whether they feel there are exceptions or not, see marriage as the most accepted form of expressing long-term commitment in their relationship -- especially in a work biography.

In fact, marriage is so well understood as the moment to include a family narrative (whether same-sex or not) that a few coaches saw this as a large reason for the low numbers of assistant coaches with a same-sex partner in their biography. One assistant coach who did include her partner in her bio said:

> "I think just that life event [marriage] for assistant coaches that are out. I don't know if they're really happening yet, because I think I do think we're a young group too, that are comfortable with it, being out. I think that might be a, and I would say a barrier, just that life event hasn't happened yet for them to put it in there yet."

Another coach seemed to confirm this idea, and he put it in terms of marriage sometimes happening later in life for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, because they're on a personal journey to self-acceptance or because they're trying to overcome other barriers by establishing their skills. He said:

> "I think marriage or the family part, having children or all that stuff plays a big role in whether you post them or not and share that information to the world. So, I just think in the LGBT world that it comes a little later in life because they're so focused on other things and overcoming those barriers to be a good coach and be a good person and let their voice be heard and be open and have that weight off their shoulders and kind of focus on doing them a little bit more. And then the family stuff will roll out and be just as good. Now, that's not the case for everyone. But for me, that's kind of what I'm focusing on more is, 'How can my career be better here? How can I be better?' And when I'm at my best, then I can

> be focused on making my relationship the best and having a partner that I can put attention to."

This coach, who was single and thus did not include a partner in his bio, additionally felt that marriage in one's bio looked good. He said:

> "When you post your loved one or who you're with, it's kind of a power move too, like, 'I'm married. I have my life together. This is my wife. She does this.' And so, I feel like that looks good, right? And to big schools and to big things, that looks good like, 'Oh, they're married. They maybe have their life together more.' And I don't want that to be a reflection of whether you have your life together. And I think sometimes that is it, like, 'They're married. They've been married for two years. She has kids, and she's 26. She's got her life together.' I'm like, 'Does she?'...But I think it is like a power move in a sense. It looks good on paper. It looks good for the administration to be like they're family oriented. And I think that's the big thing is like, 'Oh, they have a family. They have kids. That will look good. That'll help our culture because our culture is all about family.' And when you hire a single LGBT person, it's like, 'How are they going to be involved in our family? And how do they represent family?'"

Interestingly, a few of the coaches who did not include their partner in their biography, whether single or partnered, mentioned being out in their social media profiles. One single coach talked about somebody like himself simply not yet having anyone in his life to list in his work biography, saying, "I'm not, also not just going to put in my bio like -- is gay. If you look at my [social media] bio, it's there, the flag, but you know, yeah. Like I said, if I was married, I would absolutely put it in." Yet despite not

having a partner to explicitly mention in his coaching narrative, he wanted to identify himself as part of the LGBTQIA+ community by referencing as much in his social media presence. He said, “I actually, whenever I follow recruits on [social media], I actually have it in my bio, a Pride flag emoji, so that like there’s no questions here.” He saw this as a way to be publicly or explicitly out even though he did not yet have a partner to include in his university-sanctioned online coaching biography. Thus, including some marker in a social media profile is a way in which young and/or unmarried coaches can identify themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ community even if they are not in a committed relationship that would warrant a family narrative in their professional profile on an athletic department website.

Among the coaches who did not include a partner in their biography, the two who were married had simply never thought about their biography including their spouse. One of them talked about including his husband in his social media presence. He said, “I would consider myself pretty out on my social media as well...I mean, I’ve got like photos from our wedding on [social media] and that sort of thing.” Despite this transparency on his publicly available social media profile, mentioning his husband in his professional coaching biography had never crossed his mind. The other married assistant coach talked about how he had never really considered putting his husband in his biography; and as he talked through why his husband was missing, he talked about how much he wanted to include him:

> “I mean, I would, I...yeah I guess I haven't even thought about it. It's just, I mean, I guess, because they took, it was my bio from when I first came in, and they just updated those few years that were up. And at that point, I was, I was not, I mean, I

> guess, I was out but not fully. So yeah, I mean that is something that I feel like now, it makes me want to put it in there, like that's because I have no I've, you know, I have nothing to hide from anybody else. Like, I would happily have him in there. I guess I just never, I really didn't ever think about it. Because to me, I see like it's not, it's written in paragraphs, but I see bullet points of like just the things I've done. Not necessarily who I am, which it probably should be a part of it. These are people that you're surrounded with for, you know, so much of the time that you're with them, and they should know every part of you. I mean, I want to know every part of my athletes' lives so, because I want to be able to build a relationship with them. That's how you, that's how we begin to trust each other, so I feel like if that information is out there it's -- we're able to build a little more trust even sooner, maybe before they get here. Yeah, I, it makes me want to message our, our media relations contact…"

In learning about the dearth of same-sex family narratives compared to opposite-sex family narratives, this coach felt strongly about his spouse being just as legitimate to include as his straight colleagues' spouses. And he also felt that other interpersonal relationships, such as those with incoming or current athletes, would be positively impacted by being publicly and explicitly open about his same-sex relationship.

The separated coach had included her same-sex partner when they were still married, but again, only after they were married. She talked about how she didn't initially put her wife in her biography after they got married. Similar to the other two married coaches without partners in their bios, she had never even thought to do so. She did not include her wife until someone else in the athletic department brought it up. However,

looking back, she talked about how she never would have included her partner before being married:

> "I definitely felt different, because it was like, I think, because I think, you know, society tells us that, like when we get married, that's like a big step. And that's like, that becomes more real. And so maybe it felt like oh, well, I'm married now, so I can put my person in my bio, whereas if I was just dating them, or we were just girlfriends, maybe I wouldn't, because it's not as permanent, or I don't know, like it's not as, I don't know, people don't typically put like my boyfriend or my girlfriend in their bio, and so I don't know if I would have done it then, but I think because I'm married with a family, it it made perfect sense to put it out there."

She also made a point to almost apologetically admit that she felt the reason she had never thought to include her partner -- and only did so after a colleague talked about it -- was because her partner was a woman. She said, "I mean, I think, I feel like if I was...if I was -- this is sad -- but I feel like if I had been married to a man and had kids with this man, that I would have put it in there [my bio]. Like, I would have thought to, because I've seen it so many times, you know?" She went on to talk about how maybe if she had seen more same-sex family narratives in coaching, she would have thought to include it herself. But because she didn't see other LGB+ coaches including same-sex partners in their coaching biographies, she said it wasn't as automatic to include. She said, "The more we see it, the more it's like that, automatic, but we just don't see it, so then even the lesbians with wives don't think about it." That is why she did not consider including her ex-wife until her head coach suggested she was more than welcome to do so.

Romantic Relationships and Family as Barriers or Supports to Inclusion. A couple coaches who did not include a partner in their online coaching biography framed the biggest factors that would preclude this decision as interpersonal factors. One coach considers herself out publicly and has identified herself as part of the LGBTQIA+ community on publicly-available online platforms. However, she framed her inability to include her partner in her online coaching biography this way:

> "I have a partner who, who isn't fully out. So that makes it really hard. Even, I think, if I was going to make that choice, I think that will get in the way right now. But I mean, I think now that I've been out publicly, I will feel really comfortable putting that on my social media, the only thing getting in the way again is it's her journey and her being okay with that."

Her partner's situation prevents her from including a family narrative in her online coaching biography, because her partner is not out. However, similar to the assistant coaches who are single and marking themselves as LGB+ on social media, this coach wanted to be open in her social media profile(s) about her identity.

Another assistant coach who is single was not out with specific individuals in his family and his community who are important to him. Growing up with and still living in close community with a father who was serving in a Southern church, a religious family, and a small conservative Southern community meant that he limits who he is out to. He did not see himself including a partner or a reference to being LGB+ in his social media presence, saying, "In regular life, I guess you could say it's always felt like, you know, I'm having to watch my...over my shoulder and stuff, you know, especially down this part of the country." He feels limited in his ability to be publicly explicit about his LGB+

identity due to these interpersonal relationships, although he has coached his teams openly identifying as gay with colleagues and student-athletes. Being able to work with another coach who openly identifies as gay, and work with student-athletes who were out, he has found coaching to be a place where he can be open about his identity, whether or not he is out publicly. Family was also initially a barrier for another coach. She said, “My experience coming out to my family wasn’t a positive one, so I think that that has lingered for a long time…” She illustrated that when the people closest to you are initially unsupportive, it can be harder also to be open with those further outside your circle.

Fortunately, some coaches’ families bolstered their confidence to be publicly out and include a same-sex family narrative in their coaching biography, rather than being a barrier to doing so. A coach who included her wife in her biography said that once she was out with her family, it didn’t matter whether others found out. She described it this way:

> “I think the hardest part for me was my 93-year-old grandma understanding that [I’m gay], because 93 is different than 23. She was great. She was like, "Okay." She had a bunch of questions...I was more worried about how she would react than she actually reacted. Once my 93-year-old grandma knew and she was okay with it, I was like, ‘Well, I don't care what anybody else thinks.’ She was going to be the toughest one in my family and it wasn't even difficult at all. Once I got past her, I was like, ‘Okay, I don't care.’ If somebody doesn't like me for that, then they're not important to me. That's, I think, sad, because some people probably lose a lot of friends over that. I’ve been lucky. I’ve been, I’ve surrounded myself

> with really good people, just luckily, I think. Some by design but some, I got lucky. I haven't had to deal with much of that. But once I got past my family — because if your family cuts you off, that hurts. But if strangers don't like you, I don't even know. Being out to the world sounds good. Doesn't bother me at all."

For this coach, the importance of close interpersonal relationships outweighed any potential fallout with proximal relationships or strangers. This was echoed by another assistant coach, who said, "I never felt like I was hiding once I told my mom. It was more of just -- am I sharing it publicly?" For both of these coaches, with family support it was easier to face that there will be others who do not like or accept you simply for being LGB+.

Including a Partner: Support or Censure from Colleagues. Most of the coaches in this study who included a same-sex partner in their online coaching biography either asked an SID to include their partner, were approached by an SID to include their partner, or were asked by a head coach whether they wanted their partner to be included in their biography. One coach who included her partner outlined the process of including her, saying:

> "So, it really was as simple as our head coach just explicitly saying, 'Hey, if you want to include [your partner] in your bio, make sure to mention that.' It was that simple...it just came down to that, that she just very casually mentioned, 'Hey, if you want to include her in your bio, go ahead.' And that was that. Our head coach connected me with our SID and it was really just a, 'Hey, can you kind of send me a background on you?' I think she had also kind of done her homework and pulled some from my last job and said, 'Hey, this is what I have. What do you

> want to add to it?' And then just kind of sent her an email, and then she put it all together and had me approve it, and then she put it on the website."

The assistant coach from above who talked about how it wasn't automatic to include her ex-wife in her biography detailed how a head coach who included her same-sex partner in her biography mentioned that the assistant coach could do the same if she felt comfortable, leveraging a sort of positive conspiratorial relationship to bolster comfort to be publicly out:

> "Yeah, so I actually did, I put her and [the kids] in my bio, just last year, I think, or just this year, maybe? I think after a year -- I didn't do it at first, and I probably wouldn't have thought of it until [current head coach] said it. So she said she was going to do it, and she wanted to know, she's like, 'It's totally up to you, you don't have to, but if you want to, like I encourage you to, because you know straight coaches have for years had their, you know, so and so lives and blah blah blah with her husband and her kids blah blah, you know, like. And it, yeah, should have totally had -- like it should have happened years ago. It should be a normal thing, but it wasn't, it isn't. And so when she said it, I was like, 'Duh, of course I'll do that, like, I would love to do that.'"

This assistant coach had a colleague who was also LGB+ and willing to be publicly out with her. This served as the prompt to include a family narrative at all, which this coach had never thought to do, despite being married to her wife for about a year. It also made the decision easier, because she wouldn't be alone as a publicly out LGB+ coach in the department. However, not all assistant coaches worked with such supportive colleagues or administrators.

One assistant coach viewed a head coach's support as so important that it is a primary factor to explain why so few assistant coaches include a same-sex family narrative. This coach said, "My reaction to that [small number of coaches with a partner in their coaching biography] is that the assistants don't feel that they have the support of their head coach, number one." Without the support of a head coach, this assistant felt that it was more difficult to feel comfortable and accepted for one's LGB+ identity. This was corroborated by another assistant coach's negative experience with a previous boss who would not acknowledge her long-time partner prior to their marriage, other than to refer to her now wife as her "special friend". This coach went on to say, "[he] did not remember her name, like would not say her name the whole entire time that we were there." She talked about how this heteronormativity and refusal to acknowledge her relationship meant that "it wasn't a warm and welcoming place from that standpoint, especially in my immediate office."

Beyond the head coach, sometimes the administration would not support a LGB+ coach to the same degree as their heterosexual colleagues. For example, the same assistant coach illustrated how at a different institution, heterosexual couples were treated very differently than her and her spouse. For example, if her wife wanted to come to an away game and stay in her hotel room, administrative staff told her, "This is a business trip. They cannot stay in your room." She clarified that the room was already paid for, so having her wife stay was no additional cost. She went on to point out the inconsistency on the part of the athletic department, saying, "That's not the same for other [heterosexual] coaches in the department, whose wives could stay in their room if they wanted." She said, "It was clear that my way of living was not treated the same as

heterosexual coaches who have the same family, so a spouse and a child. They were not afforded the same opportunities or acknowledgement." Furthermore getting her spouse in her bio was more or less difficult depending on the institution. Although she never got a direct refusal to include her wife, there was a dragging of feet at a previous institution compared to a different "wonderfully open" institution where "it was such a non-thing [to include my wife]." She said:

> "I had submitted my bio and it was trimmed probably to like 30% and that line [about my wife] was omitted. So, I asked, and it took two weeks for it to appear. And then it took a few days when we had our [child] for [that] to appear as well.They just omitted the... It was like one line and they omitted it. I was like, 'Uhm.' I didn't even notice right away, and then I was like, 'This is missing. Can you please be sure to add it?' Two weeks. There was no response. It was just, 'Well, yeah, I'll get to it,' and it just took two weeks. What is the problem?"

On top of other experiences with homonegativity and differential treatment for her and her spouse, the slowness to address cutting her partner from her biography felt like her relationship was being afforded less legitimacy. These experiences showcased just how important it was to have a supportive head coach and a supportive administrative staff.

Unfortunately, experiences like this were not unique. Another assistant coach talked about how she had worked with a head coach who did not want her talking about her sexuality with recruits or around the team. She said:

> "Yeah, yeah, I've had coaches say that -- that's been a while, uh, that's a long time ago. But I mean, 10 years ago, yeah someone said that [I couldn't be open]. 10 years ago, you know, I couldn't bring -- it's understood -- I couldn't bring [my

> wife] around, and then it's like one day that just flipped, you know, and then she was around the team, around with our travel, around team events."

Unlike these assistant coaches, who were out in some capacity within their departments and facing differential treatment or being encouraged to separate their personal from their professional life, one LGB+ assistant coach described why she put off coming out to any athletic department in which she worked or in any public way. She was in graduate school and doing some private coaching on the side, and had not yet become a paid intercollegiate coach. During this time, a mentor told her that she could either have a career or be an out lesbian, but not both. She recounted:

> "I had a mentor when I was in grad school, who I opened up about my sexuality, this is way before I started really coaching. And I remember a few of her advice words were to, to make sure that I was if I was going to come out, that I was going to be ready for whatever the world or however, the world was going to react to that. And that sometimes that could get in the way of you know my success. And so, you know as a 22-23 year old, who doesn't know a lot about, you know, what's what out there and what I wanted out of my career, I think, in that respect that had -- for for my mentor at the time in school -- I took it to heart, you know? I was like yeah and I have to, I have to be a coach. I mean, this is something that I shouldn't even be talking about, and I think that that was that was you know now looking back it was definitely a big, you know, turning point for me where if I was even thinking about you know coming out and my workplace, that I think that comment from someone I really respect, I think that definitely opened my

> eyes and you know shifted me to the maybe the wrong direction of of not being publicly out with with my sexuality."

Believing that her mentor was right, and that she would not be able to find success as an LGB+ coach, meant that this assistant coach did not feel comfortable being open or explicit about her identity in her professional life for a long time, including with her team, her department, and in any public way.

Organizational/Structural and Sociocultural Factors

Coaches in this study thought that things were changing for the better in sport, and they discussed broader sociocultural factors they see at work. These larger factors are closely tied to how they viewed and understood organizational/structural factors within athletic departments, and they often drew connections between these levels. Coaches saw this relationship between the organization/structure of intercollegiate athletics and larger society as potentially helpful; however, they also asserted that change is not happening in a perfect upward trajectory. One coach reported:

> "I think that for being a gay woman, I think it's changed. I think it's just becoming more normal. I don't think it's like, again, that hush-hush or you can't talk about it, or I don't want to be out because it's going to affect my coaching career. I just think unfortunately, just being a woman is the f-ing hurdle we have to continually overcome and just advocate for, and those types of things. Maybe that's me being naive that if I'm, if I'm going to be excluded from a job selection or a pool or this or that, but again, I think that speaks to more about the athletic department than it does society, because I think society's come... I don't know. I

> feel like people don't have to really come out as much anymore. It's more just like it just is what it is..."

She felt that society was improving, and she felt that this translated within sport to mean it is more acceptable now for coaches to be out about their non-heterosexuality. However, she did think that sport still has an issue with gender, and that being a woman in sport leadership is still a barrier.

Another assistant coach also brought up gender and how he saw sport as lagging behind society:

> "You know, and I think that that as that that narrative continues to change and it and it gets more acceptable for people in society to be out and be who they are, I think that will filter more into athletics. I do think it's easier to be out in the general world than it is to be in athletics... You know, like there is this whole concept of machismo and like what does what does it mean to be a man and how do you perform that and how do you, you know, how do you be male? And, and I think that as time goes on, that idea, that concept is changing. Like that social construct is being torn down and rebuilt, and I think the more that we can continue on this path, the better it's going to be…"

This concept of sports lagging behind society was not unique to these coaches who focused on their gendered experiences of being LGB+ coaches. Another assistant coach saw sports lagging behind society when it comes to LGBTQIA+ issues writ large. She said:

> "I just feel like sports, yeah, can just be a little behind in times, but it's at least they're making progress and they're making changes because of social media and

> society like calling people out now and calling out businesses and corporations about how inclusive they are…"

One coach explained why sport was behind on LGBTQIA+ inclusion by saying:

> "...we are not having enough conversations...are they just not interested, you know, are you just, do you not think it's important? You know, do you not think you're going to have athletes who might need your support, even if you're not in the [LGBTQIA+] community? You know, so I think it goes back to like the education piece...we're not talking about that enough."

Although most coaches saw positive changes in society and in sport, a couple also talked about how these changes are not necessarily benefitting all LGB+ coaches in intercollegiate coaching. For example, one assistant talked about the older generation of LGB+ coaches:

> "So the coaches that are 50-60 that are definitely gay, maybe not married because they're not ever going to do that, because they can't and they won't put it in their bio...because that age or that generation, it's not acceptable to… Maybe they're not okay with who they are, or maybe their families… Everybody's situation is different, but I think if you chunk it by age -- this is totally my observation and opinion...but I think that range is just kind of, 'I'm good keeping it to myself because this is what I've been doing forever and I'm not going to change now, because what good is it going to do?' And then the younger you get, it's like, 'Why do I have to hide from everybody, because I'm a human being as well?' And then after that, it's like, 'Oh, this is me and here I am.' I think that older generation, I feel sad for them because it's got to be exhausting to -- not

> outwardly deny it all the time, but just to kind of pretend that it doesn't exist…I wish it were different, and I'm glad that it is getting different for younger generations, but that older group, I feel bad for because it's got to be exhausting."

This generational idea of society and sport's upward trajectory of LGB+ acceptance was corroborated by almost all the other coaches to some degree. One assistant coach witnessed how older LGB+ coaches were "forced in the closet for so long, it's habit now. I think that's their comfort zone and they don't really want to come out." However, most coaches pointed out sociocultural progression by talking about how the younger generations they are currently coaching are more open and less concerned with acknowledging their sexuality. They observed their athletes being comfortable with their identities to a degree that they themselves and their peers were not as student-athletes, and they were especially impressed by younger people's openness, and to some degree their own networks of LGB+ coaching colleagues, compared to the coaches they had in high school and college.

Another coach thought that sport could do better if it simply acknowledged that "so many people love sports, like it's a common thing in this country that all different kinds of people like sports, you know, not just straight White men." She wanted sport to progress beyond only catering to one group of people who are already privileged based on their identities. She went on to say,

> "And if we could just promote to them [those who are not straight, White men] and to like, you know, acknowledge them and include them, I think there might be less homophobia and less racism and less problems within sport, because you definitely still see it."

This idea that sport was behind and needed to do more was shared by a few other coaches, and they saw their choices to be visibly out and open as a small way to rectify the lack of progress for LGBTQIA+ people in sport.

Outcomes of Including a Same-Sex Partner or of Being Out as LGB+

My second aim was to uncover what outcomes have resulted for the coaches who chose to include a same-sex family narrative in their coaching biography. I also wanted to explore what the coaches who do not include a family narrative feel about not doing so, and whether/how they are out and their experiences due to how open they are about their identity as LGB+. All of the coaches in this study were out in some capacity, whether they included a family narrative in their online coaching biography or not. Coaches talked about authenticity and recruiting, normalizing LGB+ identities, role modeling, and making change through visibility. They also talked about whether/how they would seek inclusive athletic departments and institutions, since they are all out to some degree. This was closely related to an unapologetic ownership of their LGB+ identities.

Authenticity

Coaches spoke about feeling more open and like they were not hiding once they were out with their teams and colleagues. Furthermore, they felt like they could be authentic in their relationships within their job. One coach put it this way:

> "But it just it makes it so much more enjoyable too because now, it's like the players understand where you're coming from. You can talk about your wife. You can talk about wanting to have kids and not — so, when they find out it's with another woman, what are they going to say? It makes it so much more enjoyable,

> the day-to-day is so much more enjoyable because you're not worried about what's going to pop over your shoulder to out you."

A lot of coaches also situated this appreciation of being authentic in comparison to their experiences prior to being open or out. One talked about how the joy of being authentically herself meant that she was unwilling to sacrifice that again. She said:

> "I know what the other side feels like of lying and hiding and being ashamed and having guilt, and that shame and guilt is not worth it. The freedom and the peace that I feel and the happiness of being authentically myself is worth any job I don't get. I'm not willing to compromise that."

While some coaches agreed that living openly and authentically as themselves was freeing and joyful, one coach explained the importance of being authentic even in the face of negativity:

> "It's not my job to change your mind, it's my job to just live authentically and be who I am and let that speak for me...So, if you want to focus on who I love rather than how I love, then I'm certainly not going to be the one to change your mind."

This coach felt that authenticity was vital in her job. At the same time, she was unwilling to challenge every homophobic person's ideas to create change. This coach explained that being her authentic self was enough to create incremental change over time with her colleagues and her athletes, and she did not see the need to fight every small battle to combat homonegativity.

Recruiting

Recruiting often primarily falls under the purview of an assistant coach. So while a program in a lot of ways belongs to the head coach, the assistant coach is often at the

forefront of a recruit's first exposure to a program. And while some coaches did not include a same-sex family narrative in their online coaching biographies, most coaches in both groups were open about their LGB+ identity in the recruiting process, whether indirectly through relying on their social media presence or family narrative in their coaching biography, or through explicitly bringing up a partner or spouse during recruiting. One coach who includes her partner in her online coaching biography said:

> "I like that my players or other recruits that are struggling can pop on and see my bio and be like, "I'd feel comfortable here." I'd want to play for that coach who's comfortable in herself. I think I love that. In some way, hopefully, I can be influential for the right reasons."

She framed it as an important way to be visible for recruits who are struggling with their sexuality. However, some coaches saw it more as a filter to weed out players who would not be okay with working with an LGB+ coach. In this way, they were enacting what LaVoi and Glassford (2021) termed 'positive recruiting.' For coaches without a partner in their bio, they sometimes seek to be more explicit since athletes may not know they are LGB+ prior to having a conversation. One coach who had not previously considered including his husband in his biography said the following:

> "Yeah, I -- that those are situations that I go out of my way to bring up my husband very early on. Um you know, like I as a program we just don't have the time or the space or the patience, you know, like um. And I, it's important that all the student athletes that are coming into college athletics that like they know what they're getting up front. Because if you sell them something, and they get there and it's something completely different, no one's gonna be happy. It's going to be

> an awful experience. You know, and my, obviously my husband is important to me. He's involved in the program, you know, like whenever we need help with anything he's there. You know, and the girls know him pretty well, and they all get along and he loves hearing about them and, you know, so I think it's it's in so much as it's fair to me for for those people to not have [our school] on their list, it's also very fair to them if that's not something they respect or want to be around -- there are plenty of other places that you can go in and have a great experience."

However, even if coaches were including a partner in their online coaching biography, several of them mentioned that they did not imagine that assistant coaches' bios get much attention from recruits. One said, "But I guess most people aren't really looking at the assistant coach's bios all that often...I think if I was a head coach, more people would read that more often and take note of that." This was yet another reason for coaches to bring up their families explicitly throughout conversations with recruits. And for those who were single, it was another reason they felt strongly about including a mention of their partner or a marker like a pride flag in their social media profile that identifies them as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Recruiting, despite being primarily the assistant coach's domain, was another way in which coaches outlined the importance of a supportive head coach or other recruiting assistants. As outlined previously, one coach talked about how a decade ago, she could not be open with recruits about her wife; however, she sees her openness about her sexuality as a non-issue now, as does her head coach. Another coach felt that he was only able to become comfortable practicing positive recruiting due to the support of his head coach and the rest of the coaching staff. His head coach told him directly that if anyone

wasn't okay with him being openly gay, then "they're in the wrong program," and added that intolerant people "don't belong with us in this group, because that's not who we are." This assistant coach further described the process of becoming comfortable being open during recruiting like this:

> "I'm learning now more about myself that I think, ever since [head coach] said they don't belong in this, you know they don't belong here if they don't feel the same way we all do about you and everybody else in the diversity within our program, then they should be somewhere else. That, that immediately made me feel like then I should I should put myself out there, and I should let people know and use the phrase my partner or my husband, so that people know where I am. And if it's something they're uncomfortable with, then they may not say anything about it and they may just go find somewhere else. And that's the right thing, then it's not the right fit for them."

The support of his head coach emboldened him to own his LGB+ identity authentically and create the goodness-of-fit filter that LaVoi and Glassford (2021) found among lesbian head coaches.

Normalizing LGB+ Identities, Role Modeling, and Making Change Through Visibility

Making sure their relationships were just like their peers' and working to normalize their same-sex relationships was important to these coaches, and they also saw their ability to be out and open as an opportunity to be a role model for athletes who were questioning their sexuality, or even for athletes who had not been exposed to much diversity prior to attending university. The assistant coaches in this study felt strongly that being visible was going to be a way to make change, and that having visible

examples of being open and successful is something they would have wished for themselves as college athletes. One coach commented:

> "I felt like there is a much larger benefit in being open. And maybe it was just my perception because when I started questioning my sexuality and figuring out what I was doing, I was college age. So I don't know if that was that relationship, but I felt like there could be a bigger benefit to those players in having the visibility of an out-and-gay coach, whether that's for a player that's questioning their sexuality or whether that's to help create more allies, kind of those heterosexual players that have a gay coach are okay with it and I can kind of help normalize it, I guess."

Normalizing their relationships was important to these coaches, and a big part of that was being very open with their colleagues and student-athletes, as well as recruits. Almost all of the coaches in this study either included a partner in their biography, or planned to do so when they got married. One reason for this was that it is normal to put a spouse in a bio, so they did not believe their same-sex relationship would be any different in that regard. One coach who did include her wife remarked:

> "Quite frankly, obviously that [the low numbers of coaches with same-sex partners in their bios] beared no weight on my decision to do it. I wasn't trying to start a movement, it was just — this is my wife. Joe Schmoe's wife is on the website. She should be on the website. I want you to know. Quite frankly, I want you to know, parent, if you're reading, this is who I am."

Coaches saw their heterosexual colleagues openly including their spouses and families, and they felt they should be able to do the same.

When it came to being a role model themselves, some coaches hesitated to embrace the term for themselves, but in practice, they wanted to be role models to their student-athletes. One stated:

> "I always struggle to put the role model term on myself, but yes, a little bit. I had a really, really rough go of it in college trying to figure out my sexuality and I think that largely came down to being in [state in the South], being in a place where a lot of people were incredibly homophobic and horrific people. Having a straight, male, older coaching staff it was not as attuned or approachable. Just situations like that. I think I just think back to that and if I can help anyone have an easier time, I'm all for that, all for being that coach."

A couple other coaches regarded being a role model by being open and out as a necessity because of the messages you could send to your student-athletes. One assistant thought that "hiding as a coach, you are also telling them subliminally it's not okay to be out." She did not want to further the narrative that "we don't talk about it, we hide this" and negatively impact either her athletes who are figuring out their sexuality, or the athletes who may not have been exposed to individuals of diverse sexual identities. Another assistant coach saw role modeling by being openly LGB+ as an extension of the everyday role modeling that comes with the job:

> "So, if I'm a coach and I'm trying to be a role model, which you coach, we try to be role models every day, if I am lying, hiding or concealing who I am, then the message I give to every young person and anybody I come in contact with is — be ashamed of who you are. Who you are is wrong and you should hide it and lie about it. I went through many years feeling that way and working through

> counseling and getting a whole lot of help realizing that's not healthy and that's not good. I never want to project that or exemplify that to anybody else ever again. Love yourself, be yourself, find your tribe and be authentically you and be proud of that and love yourself. That's just kind of my motto."

In fact, several coaches reported that student-athletes had confided in them or sought advice from them around the issues of coming out and figuring out one's sexuality, and they recognized that they may not be viewed as a safe resource on these issues if they were not out as LGB+.

Seeking Inclusive Athletic Departments and Institutions

Before some assistant coaches would even look at an institution, they would look at where the job would take them. Many coaches in the study talked about wanting to know that wherever they ended up, they would have access to either a LGBTQIA+ community or would be in a community that would welcome and accept them as LGB+ people. One assistant stated,

> "I obviously looked at the city, the town. I tried to search things like that, or community. How does the community support them? How does the university support them? So, I looked up stuff like that just to see what the community is like around the campus. Not so much like a town. Obviously, when you're coming from [a city], and the city just absorbs the diversity of the LGBTQ community, everything. So, when you come to a smaller town, that's such a scary feeling. And you're moving from [millions of] people to a town of 100,000 people. And you're like, 'Okay, going back to a small town, middle of nowhere. Is this going to be good? Is this going to be not?'"

And another coach mentioned that while moving to a smaller place where one may not find a LGBTQIA+ community can work, it would not be ideal:

> "I could take it for a year or two being in the middle of nowhere. But I definitely look at where jobs are location-wise, like is this city or is it middle of nowhere or is it a big college town. I take those things into perspective."

Location and access to a welcoming community or an LGBTQIA+ community was important to the single assistant coaches who saw themselves eventually wanting to have partners and get married. While a few of them were in no rush to find a partner, they still expressed a desire to have friends within the community who would understand them in ways their straight colleagues and friends do not. In fact, the location of one's job was so important that some married coaches joked that their spouses would divorce them if they moved to middle-of-nowhere, stereotypically homonegative environments. One coach laughed, "I think if we left [where we are] and went elsewhere, and it was not a big city, my husband would divorce me." Once coaches deemed a potential job to be in a location they liked or could deal with, they employed other strategies to filter and vet institutions and athletic departments for a good fit.

The power structures at play in an intercollegiate athletic department mean that assistant coaches often rely on head coaches to set an inclusive tone. Although it was dependent to some degree on the institution, many assistant coaches in this study spoke about caring more how a head coach felt about their LGB+ identity than how the institution at large felt. This was because most of the assistant coaches were closely integrated within the culture of their respective sport staff, but had much less interaction with others in the athletic department. One coach put it best when she said:

> “Because it's kind of weird, I think, in athletics. The only person I really need to, as an assistant, that I need to make sure I’m good with is my head coach. And obviously, if I’m compliant and those types of things, but at the end of the day, like I report to my head coach. It's different for a head coach because you have to be good with your admins and those types of whatever. It's not that I’m not good with our admins, but I’m not the one having meetings with them…I think that the more honest, again, I can be about who I am, what I need, and those types of things, it has to be with my head coach...”

The structure of the department was not always the most important factor in determining whether a job would be a good fit for an LGB+ coach, because their position in the organizational hierarchy means that they work closely with their head coach and often have less direct working relationships with other administrative staff.

However, it is not guaranteed that a head coach will be supportive. As previously mentioned, one assistant coach’s previous boss would not acknowledge her long-time partner, other than to refer to her now wife as her “special friend”. Some coaches -- in direct contrast with the idea that an inclusive head coach is all you need as an LGB+ assistant -- said that before they would even consider talking to a head coach about a job with an institution, they would look to see whether inclusivity is an institutional value. One assistant coach captured this by saying:

> “Yeah, I needed to assess the whole department and even the school at large because again, seeing certain cultures or teams or programs, whether it's from my experience or the experience of friends, I saw what it did to teams, to athletic departments. For me, I’m thinking, okay, when I coach a player, I think

> holistically, the player as a whole. They're a soccer player, they're a student, they're a person, they have religion, they speak languages, their ethnicity, whatever, like all these things that create this human being. Well, it's the same thing for a university, the holistic part of a university. What does the president support, what does a president tolerate, what is their vision, what's their mission statement, what are their hiring and firing practices, because that trickles down to the athletic director. If the athletic director is family friendly, if they're open, if they are welcoming, if they accept and celebrate diversity, then that trickles down to the other coaches, that trickles down to clubs and programs. That influences how you recruit, how you talk to your kids and how you ultimately run your program. I can have the world's greatest head coach, but if I work at an institution and it is written in their HR statement that they are allowed to fire me if they find out that I'm gay or LGBTQ, it doesn't matter how cool of a head coach I have. I absolutely went about finding it as far as a department and a university. If I look at a university and there's a job opening, the first thing I look at is in their clause, does it say sexual orientation welcome or not. And if it doesn't have that in there, I don't even bother applying for the job."

This coach was unwilling to rely solely on a head coach's support, and instead wanted to make sure the institution at large would support her as her authentic self. Another coach similarly looked at broader institutional cues instead of relying on a head coach's values. After hearing about a job opening, she discovered the institution was religious and did not seem welcoming to LGBTQIA+ individuals. She emphasized that she did not even apply once she saw their affiliation, stating, "I wouldn't want to go to a school where I

know that these are their core beliefs and be who I am. That would be a disservice to me and them." Both of these coaches, along with a few others, were wary of solely vetting a head coach, because if the department and university at large does not champion LGBTQIA+ inclusion, that may still impact a coach's experience.

Unapologetic Ownership of LGB+ Identity

All of these coaches discussed their personal journeys of coming out and self-acceptance, and most of them discussed how once they had done that hard work, they weren't going to hide or apologize for who they are. One coach said:

> "I'm very much out. I'm not hiding it from anybody. I even have these rainbow shoes that I wear around work every now and then...if people don't know, they know. I'm not making an effort to come out to people that don't know me, just because I myself am out. I guess that's the way, the way to say it. If they were to ask me, I would right away be like, 'Yeah, I'm gay.'"

Even though this coach didn't feel the need to explicitly tell everyone he meets he's gay, he is open and unwilling to hide his identity. This was mirrored by other coaches. One said, "I never lied if somebody asked, but I didn't lead with it. I didn't volunteer or lead with it..." Another coach talked about how he's never hidden his LGB+ identity, but he also said:

> "As a gay individual, every time you meet someone, it's a coming out agenda. You seem like you're always coming out. It's a never-ending story. So, to me, do I find that I need to tell people? No, if people ask or question, sure. I'll talk about it and talk to them about it...But I still feel like it shouldn't be my responsibility to come out...Like I said, I don't hide it, but I also am not super outspoken about it

> either. I don't want to be the mainstay of attention, but I do want to be supported -- and I do want people to know."

This concept of not hiding but not wanting to always have to come out explicitly was common. However, most of the assistant coaches in the study described this as an evolution, where they were less open earlier in their career, less willing to lead with that information, and over time they became more explicit and more willing to share their partner or their LGB+ identity.

Power Dynamics Affecting Assistant Coaches' Experiences and Decisions

The assistant coaches in this study saw their position in a variety of ways. Many coaches recognized that assistant coaches have a less outward-facing position than head coaches do. One assistant stated:

> "I mean [a head coach], you get in front of the AD a lot more often, you're getting front of compliance more often, you get you know in front of donors more often, you get in front of is just yeah the, the – you're kind of the face of the program versus an assistant who's maybe a lot more involved with the internal side of the sport. And the head coach gets to get more into the external side of it."

Some of them felt their lower position and more background role in the organizational hierarchy to be freeing, while others talked about feeling limited in some ways, since they had less autonomy. One coach who has worked in the corporate world as well as intercollegiate coaching had this to say about the power dynamics and organizational structure of D-I sports:

> "In corporate America, it seems -- and I only have one experience -- but it seems that the CEO and the executive team determine their values for who they are and

> their mission and for how they're going to do things and everything from there trickles down. The finance team buys into that, this team buys into that. Each team is a part of this organization's mission and goals. Athletic departments do not function like that. You can find a mission statement on most athletic department websites, but to your point, have you interviewed with an athletic director in any of the jobs that you've gotten? That was like, if they had time and I was on campus, they might meet you. But they have no...it's 32 autonomous teams operating under one roof. This team can have their values, but as long as you all win, you keep your jobs...I'm generalizing and maybe that's not entirely it, but I'm pulling out kind of the worst to make a point. My point is this, it's like once you're head coach, that's your team."

Rather than one set of values being set by the athletic department as a whole and then passed down to the individual teams, this coach saw it as dependent on how the head coach sets the tone. Other coaches seemed to reinforce this, with one saying:

> "I know as an assistant and how I feel about what I maybe put or portray or do, I unfortunately like don't have the autonomy that a head coach does. I think that a head coach has a little more control over, obviously, themselves, their program and their narrative."

However, some coaches saw their position within the organization as freeing. Since an assistant coach is not under as much pressure and is not as responsible for how the team is run and represented, they undergo less scrutiny. One coach, who had been both a head coach and an assistant at different points in her career, noted:

> "Yeah I think, I mean I've been both. I prefer to be an assistant because probably [laugh] because I'd rather be told what to do, instead of being in charge. But I think yeah, I think, being an assistant you're not as seen, you're not as, like you're not at the front of it, you're not representing -- the head coach represents the program because they're the ones making the decisions. They're the ones creating the culture, creating the rules, you know, having the final say on athletes, for the most part, recruiting. Yeah they are seen, and so I definitely feel like I can be more myself as an assistant than a head coach, because every little every little decision you make as a head coach can affect your program; and whereas as an assistant is kind of less visible and not the person in charge, like not the top of the, you know, pyramid and I look at it that way. Like, so I definitely feel more free and open as an assistant, than if I were the head coach."

The power dynamics within an intercollegiate coaching structure are differentially impactful on assistant coaches. In some ways, it frees them up by lessening the scrutiny they face. However, the inability to set the tone for the team's values means that assistant coaches are often at the mercy of the head coach's views on LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

The assistant coaches in this study seemed to think that it was expected for an assistant coach to seek a head coaching position at some point. One coach explained that "assistant coaches in every sport, they turn over a lot more because somebody's always looking for their next job or they want to go be a head coach." Some assistant coaches in this study saw themselves moving up the organizational hierarchy in the future, but others felt it may be more difficult than it was worth to find that coveted D-I head coaching

position. One coach mentioned that finding an assistant coaching position that was a good fit became the primary goal, rather than pursuing a head coaching job:

> "I was ready to be an assistant there for 20 years. I started to see that becoming a head coach was going to be a slippery challenge and therefore — okay, if that's not going to be the case, where could I be happy?"

She was not sure it was going to be an attainable goal, and so she prioritized finding an assistant position where she saw longevity for herself.

Other coaches imagined themselves ultimately becoming D-I head coaches at high-level institutions that can make appearances in NCAA tournaments, and most of the coaches who explicitly outlined this goal were men. However, the coaches who expressed these aspirations were careful to emphasize that the way to achieve those goals was, as one coach outlined, "to become just a really good coach and form really good bonds with [your] players and then the rest takes care of itself because you're such a good coach." Furthermore, these assistant coaches who described a head coaching job in their future often highlighted the importance of learning all they could as an assistant coach and finding the 'right' way to move up. One coach mentioned his thought process around how he would eventually move up after learning more as an assistant coach:

> "But there's always that thought in my mind where I've like, 'If I took over a smaller school and became a head coach there, but then I wanted to go to a bigger school, would I be demoted to an assistant and just be an assistant there? Having been a head coach for two years or something, and then go there and be an assistant, would that look bad? I was a head coach, and now I'm back down to an assistant.' I don't think it would. I really don't. But I think the title change would

> kind of play with your mind a little bit like, 'Oh, I was a head coach. For the last two years, I've made the decisions.' And now, you're like, 'Oh, I'm back to the assistant.'"

Assistant coaches, whether ultimately hoping to be a head coach or not, are intimately aware that assistant coaching positions are seen as stepping stones to those head coaching roles. They see and experience the high turnover in assistant coaching; and they are cognizant of their lower position in the organizational hierarchy and the expectation that they aim to move up in that hierarchy. While these coaches did not point to their LGB+ identities as a barrier to accomplishing those goals, they recognized that, as mentioned previously, they would have to filter and vet any potential institutions. Whether this was based on institutionally outlined values of inclusion such as HR statements, or conversations with administrators, coaches also outlined they may feel more comfortable within certain geographical areas than others.

Discussion

The coaches in this study provided a depth of data that indicate a lasting impact of heteronormativity and homonegativity in intercollegiate coaching. However, the coaches in this study are all navigating the intercollegiate coaching landscape by being out to some degree. Whether they have a partner in their online coaching biography or not, all 14 coaches in this study were out in their workplace and with their teams. Similar to the findings of LaVoi and Glassford (2021), the assistant coaches recognized that they have faced barriers as LGB+ individuals within sport leadership. However, they all felt strongly that they would rather be out than try to hide their LGB+ identities. This strongly suggests that more and more coaches are not willing to sacrifice their authentic

selves despite a sporting space that is well documented as homonegative and sexist (Calhoun et al., 2011; Griffin, 1998; Kalman-Lamb, 2020; Krane & Barber, 2005; Messner, 2012) and that Ahmed (2006) would say is oriented as straight. This desire to be open and out, whether in one's coaching biography or not, is in alignment with the work of LaVoi and Glassford (2021) where lesbian head coaches did not want to employ impression and identity management strategies such as remaining closeted and conforming to standards of hegemonic femininity.

The theoretical foundation of LaVoi's (2016) EIM was fitting, as coaches' experiences and decisions were mediated through individual, interpersonal, organizational/structural, and sociocultural levels. The interconnected nature of these social-ecological levels that influence individual experience were particularly true for the interpersonal, organizational/structural, and sociocultural levels. Coaches understood and described their beliefs and experiences in such a way that showed how interpersonal work relationships are both part of and shaped by the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletics, and they also found broader sociocultural factors to be influential and tied to the structures they moved within in the sporting realm.

Perhaps the primary factor that all coaches mentioned was the personal journey involved in accepting oneself as LGB+. Every coach had to reach a point where they both understood their own identity, and were confident and comfortable enough with their identity to even consider being open with others. This directly supported the findings of LaVoi and Glassford (2021), where head coaches felt that acceptance of one's identity was a barrier in that some LGB+ coaches are not "ready to be explicitly out in their bios due to personal or situational factors" (p. 10). In this study, assistant coaches pointed to

self-acceptance as a primary reason for a coach not to be out to their team and/or colleagues. On a similarly individual level, the assistant coaches felt that their experiences were mediated by other identities they held. For example, the coaches identified how their experiences were gendered, as well as shaped by their racial/ethnic identities. This reinforced the importance of maintaining LaVoi's (2016) EIM with an emphasis on intersectionality at the individual level. These coaches emphasized how their experiences of heteronormativity were shaped in unique ways according to different axes of identity.

Power ran through and overlaid every level of LaVoi's (2016) EIM. By utilizing a Foucauldian lens to explore the power dynamics at play, it was possible to explore "the constitution of individuals' subjectivities, social relations and the workings of power" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 4). A Foucauldian perspective showed how the coach's experiences and actions were shaped by existing discourse in sport that reinforces gender stereotypes and heavily gendered norms. As stated by Pringle (2007), a Foucauldian discourse "refers to the unwritten rules that guide social practices" (p. 387). These rules of conduct are particularly shaped by individual identity, especially including gender and race/ethnicity. In fact, Calhoun et al. (2011) stated that "gender, power, and sexual identity are inseparable in sport and play out in different ways for male and female coaches" (p. 303). The men in this study felt that hegemonic masculinity in sport made it more difficult to be openly LGB+ because it threatened existing ideas of sexuality and gender expression that are especially pervasive in sport. However, accounting for individual agency and Foucault's assumption that individuals are active subjects within relationships of power (Markula & Pringle, 2006), these men made choices that made

them feel more comfortable expressing themselves authentically. For example, they explained that being part of women's sport rather than mens' conferred advantages they otherwise would not have. They were less beholden to standards of hegemonic masculinity when working with women's teams. They were also viewed as less threatening than their heterosexual male colleagues may be in a women's sport world reckoning with its own #metoo movement.

Meanwhile, the women in this study recognized the interlocking barriers of homonegativity and sexism in sport leadership. As women in coaching, these assistant coaches already felt pressure to work harder than their male counterparts. They reinforced that their position as women in sport leadership created additional scrutiny; they affirmed Mann and Krane's (2019) finding that with the pervasive hegemonic masculinity in sport, these women were evaluated not by their abilities as a coach, but by their ability to meet standards of hegemonic femininity. Deciding to be explicit about their LGB+ identities initially felt intimidating when it came to finding success as an intercollegiate coach. In intercollegiate sports, which is inundated with sexism (Calhoun et al., 2011; Griffin, 1998; Kalman-Lamb, 2020; Krane & Barber, 2005; Messner, 2012) and gives men more access to leadership roles, it is unsurprising that the women in this study saw their gender as a critical factor shaping their experiences, both as coaches in general and as openly LGB+ individuals. Interestingly, while the men in this study expressed the desire to role model inclusion, acceptance, and normalize their LGB+ identity, the women were additionally adamant that they were modeling what is possible for the athletes with whom they work. Scholarship shows the benefits for women in intercollegiate athletics to see women in coaching roles, such as access to same-sex role

models, inspiration to become a coach themselves, and sources of support in navigating a coaching career, as well as the basic visible indication that women (and not just men) can be excellent leaders (LaVoi, 2016; LaVoi & Baeth, 2018; Midgley et al., 2020). The LGB+ women in this study wanted to model that not only could their athletes be women and coaches, but they could be LGB+ women and have a happy and successful future in the intercollegiate coaching occupational landscape.

However, all of the coaches in this study saw that those who move through the coaching landscape as White benefit from the normalized and assumed Whiteness in sport leadership. This reinforced that Hylton (2009) was correct to name sport a "racialized arena" (p. 7), and it also shows how Ferguson's (2005) assertion that sexuality "is constitutive of and constituted by racialized gender and class formations" (p. 88) is true for coaches in this study. Assistant coaches who were White explained that their experiences around their sexuality were different from their BIPOC LGB+ colleagues, and they felt that their path to being open about their sexual identity was easier in some ways due to their racial privilege in a sport realm that assumes and normalizes Whiteness. Meanwhile, the coaches of color in this study identified an added reluctance to being open with their LGB+ identity, citing it as an additional way they felt marginalized within sport spaces. Given that 72.6% of NCAA D-I assistant coaches of women's teams are White (Lapchick, 2020), it is clear that assistant coaches of color could feel conspicuous. The coach who identified as Latina explained that her intersecting identities added a feeling of scrutiny beyond what she thought any White heterosexual man in her position would face. In other words, the relationships of power through which these

LGB+ assistant coaches navigate in sport are dependent upon intersecting identities in a sport space that normalizes Whiteness.

The interpersonal level of decision-making and coaches' experiences was exceedingly complicated. In agreement with the findings of LaVoi and Glassford (2021), the assistant coaches in this study attributed the inclusion of a partner (whether they themselves have included a partner or not) to life events such as marriage or having children. All coaches agreed that marriage was an established moment where one would include a partner in an online coaching biography (whether heterosexual or LGB+). The Foucauldian concept of discourse accounts for this association between marriage and online coaching biographies. Pringle (2007) calls Foucault's concept of discourse "the unwritten rules that guide social practices, produce and regulate the production of statements" (p. 387). The rule in intercollegiate athletic coaching biographies is that spouses are worthy of inclusion. This discourse is so pervasive that 12 of the 13 NCAA D-I assistant coaches with a same-sex family narrative in their coaching biography were married, and the one coach who was not married was engaged to be so. This overwhelmingly affirms the cultural weight of marriage as a legitimizing factor that facilitates the inclusion of a same-sex partner in a coach's professional work biography. Even those who were not yet married mentioned marriage as an essential life event that would facilitate the inclusion of a partner in one's online coaching biography. That said, there were a range of other experiences with partners, family, and colleagues that impacted how open a coach was within and beyond their workplace.

While some individuals in this study were limited in their ability to be open about their identity due to the relationships of power they navigated as assistant coaches, many

were active subjects and enacted their individual agency to change or resist these existing power dynamics. For example, this allowed coaches to undermine negative recruiting by engaging in positive recruiting (LaVoi & Glassford, 2021). As previously found by LaVoi and Glassford (2021), the coaches in this study, whether including a partner explicitly in their coaching biography or not, saw being open about their LGB+ identity as a filter for student-athletes. More than one coach mentioned feeling intimidated to be open in recruiting, but were met with reassurance and support in this positive recruiting approach by head coaches who said student-athletes who were not okay with an LGB+ coach would not be a good fit for their programs. With the support of their head coaches, these assistant coaches were empowered to practice *positive recruiting* and own their LGB+ identity when talking with recruits. They also described that being out in recruiting was a way to signal to incoming athletes that the team is a safe place to be LGBTQIA+.

Within their own teams, the assistant coaches also felt that they were able to positively influence student-athletes and other colleagues by cultivating authenticity and openness despite having less power in the organizational hierarchy. They navigated having less control over the team's values and expectations than a head coach by setting boundaries of expression for themselves that maintained their ability to be out as LGB+. These interpersonal relationships were often closely intertwined with organizational/structural systems, and the assistant coaches in this study were not immune to negative experiences. Some of the events in their careers suggest that Scheadler et al. (2021) were correct to outline that despite the rewards of coaching, LGB+ coaches do not always have access to the same opportunities and positive outcomes as their heterosexual colleagues. Rather, Scheadler et al. (2021) outlined that

they face negative stereotypes and decreases in status. However, the coaches in this study have agency within the webs of relationships of power they navigate, and "the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault, 1983, p. 219). When the assistant coaches in this study were acted upon by institutions or individuals in homonegative ways, they had the agency and ability to act in their own best interest and respond. Foucault (1983) points out that individuals have freedom, as power can only be exercised over one who is free, individuals "who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (p. 221). The LGB+ assistant coaches in this study all chose to be open and out as a way to execute their own power in sport spaces.

The organizational/structural level, closely interrelated with their professional interpersonal relationships, showed that assistant coaches are still navigating heteronormativity and homonegativity in intercollegiate sport spaces. Many of the assistant coaches in this study described their sexuality as shaping their social relations in some way. From simple assumptions of asking what a spouse does in heteronormative terms to disallowing same-sex partners to travel with teams despite opposite-sex partners doing so with impunity, the assistant coaches in this study reported a range of negative experiences. These "disciplinary and regulatory practices" (Lock, 2006, p. 159) made their sexuality into the whole of their identity, in what can be seen as a Foucauldian discursive social process. Having one's sexuality so deeply tied to the process of subjectification in these spaces is something these coaches' heterosexual peers never experience. This shows how Foucault's (1986) technologies of the self, which allow an

individual to “form oneself as a subject within power relations” (Thorpe, 2008, p. 209) reveal the operations of power in daily interactions (Thorpe, 2008). Being seen only for one’s LGB+ identity, especially if it is in a negative or merely tolerant way, can put undue scrutiny on coaches. As a result, they all eventually utilized their individual agency to seek institutions or head coaches who would be supportive and inclusive, documenting a wide variety of words and actions that made them feel welcomed and accepted as openly LGB+ coaches. This supported the findings of LaVoi and Glassford (2021) with head coaches, as they “filtered and vetted both the institution and leadership” (p. 17) to find an accepting and welcoming work environment.

The coaches in this study were concerned with geography and location of any potential institution, just like the participants in LaVoi and Glassford’s (2021) study with lesbian head coaches. However, the assistant coaches in this study employed a broader array of strategies to identify these spaces due to their lower position in the organizational hierarchy and the resulting differences in hiring process where head coaches often choose and hire their assistants directly (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Darvin & Sagas, 2017). From looking for institutional resources and mission statements that include diversity, equity, and inclusion to looking for a head coach that espouses those values, coaches navigated the complex web of intercollegiate sport to locate institutions where they would feel supported and comfortable as themselves.

At the sociocultural level, the assistant coaches believed that things are getting better for the LGBTQIA+ community, although they held that this was not universally true, and it depended on several factors. They outlined that it was a slower march of progress depending on where in the United States one lives, intersecting identities such as

race/ethnicity and gender, lasting generational norms, and whether one is considering improvements in society at large or in sport itself. Coaches touted how far things have come by sharing how open and comfortable their student-athletes are with LGBTQIA+ identities. Even so, many believed that sport has lagged behind society when it comes to inclusivity for LGBTQIA+ people. They believed that sport at large, and especially intercollegiate sport, needs to be more willing to engage in conversations around LGBTQIA+ issues. Some of them pointed to the ironic disconnect that sports have often been cited as a haven for LGB+ women, and yet women's sports try to cater to the heterosexual male gaze instead of embracing inclusivity for their own.

The unique position of assistant coaches within the power structures of intercollegiate athletic departments created particular experiences for the LGB+ assistant coaches in this study. As previously mentioned, assistant coaches navigate a different hierarchy of professional relationships than do head coaches. Their hiring may be essentially under the sole purview of a head coach (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Darvin & Sagas, 2017), rather than meeting with athletic directors and other administrators who have power within the athletic department. Moreover, once they are hired, the assistant coaches in this study shared that many assistant coaches work directly with their own coaching staff and hardly ever work closely with other more prominent departmental staff and administrators. Assistant coaches also recognize that they are in roles that are understood as a stepping stone to head coaching jobs (Darvin & Sagas, 2017). However, while some coaches discussed wanting to become head coaches at some point in the future, other coaches either did not see those head coaching jobs as attainable or felt that assistant jobs were more comfortable for them. Darvin and Sagas (2017) assert that

assistant coaching positions are a "traditionally feminine [role] within sport organizations" (p. 182); and while most men in this study expressed a desire to be a head coach in the future, some women wrote it off as unreachable or undesirable. The assistant coach who felt more free to be her authentic self as an assistant coach due to the lower position in the organizational hierarchy had been a head coach previously, but she actively preferred the assistant coaching role. She said not only was it more freeing, but she would rather not be in charge. And while she wrote it off as a personal preference, the gender discrepancy even within this study appears reflective of Morris et al.'s (2014) findings that some women assistant coaches simply do not aim to be head coaches due to their experiences, lack of self-efficacy, lack of mentorship, or lack of a supportive organizational culture.

Practical Implications

This study's findings suggest several points of intervention to create meaningful change for LGB+ assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's sport. Assistant coaches can and do seek out accepting and inclusive athletic departments by employing a variety of vetting strategies. Often, they are reliant on head coaches' values for inclusivity since they have less power in the intercollegiate coaching system. This means that athletic departments and institutions need to create and sustain efforts to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion training. A basic way that athletic directors, sports information directors, and head coaches, as well as heterosexual allies throughout athletic departments, can be more inclusive is by using gender neutral language when referring to colleagues' significant others or spouses until learning otherwise. Rather than assuming an opposite-sex or opposite-gender partner, keep the language neutral to minimize

heteronormative assumptions and their impact. For example, rather than assuming the new assistant coach with a ring on her left hand is married to a man, use neutral language until told otherwise. This is a simple way to make non-heterosexual coaches feel more comfortable talking about the relationships outside of work that are important to them.

If a department is going to set expectations around how coaches interact with their partners/spouses in professional or team settings, that must be consistent across heterosexual and non-heterosexual relationships. For example, athletic departments should avoid situations like the one in which the assistant coach's same-sex partner was not allowed to travel to away games despite straight male colleagues' wives getting to travel with their teams. Special treatment should not be afforded to coaches in straight relationships, or the department risks alienating LGB+ coaches and creating an environment that is unwelcoming. On a fundamental level, LGB+ coaches' relationships should be treated like those of their heterosexual colleagues. For another example, if an SID typically asks new coaches whether they want to include a family narrative, that should be true whether the new hire is LGB+ or not.

Given the findings in this study illustrating that assistant coaches rely heavily on head coaches to set values for a team that are inclusive and accepting, head coaches need to be aware of the power they hold to create a welcoming team culture, both for their student-athletes and for their coaching staff. The support of a head coach is an invaluable resource for LGB+ assistant coaches. When head coaches are welcoming and inclusive, assistant coaches find it easier to be their authentic selves in all aspects of their job, and especially in recruiting. When head coaches do not fully welcome LGB+ assistant coaches or downplay their romantic relationships as friendships, assistants report a

negative experience and often seek out employment elsewhere to be more comfortable and accepted for their full selves. Therefore, head coaches need to be explicit with their teams and with their staff and outline the expectation that theirs will be a safe space for diverse identities.

LGB+ assistant coaches should also recognize that like the participants of this study, they have the agency to find institutions, athletic departments, and head coaches who will support them. Being a successful assistant coach, as well as an openly LGB+ assistant coach is possible. If changing a culture within an institution where LGB+ identities are not welcomed is not possible or will require too much energy, it is okay to seek to further one's coaching career in a healthier, more supportive space. Feeling unwelcome in a coaching environment does not mean that all intercollegiate coaching spaces will feel the same; coaching as a career is not entirely unavailable to LGB+ people. The current landscape is unevenly improving, however, so finding a space that is inclusive may mean filtering out some institutions that would otherwise be a good fit.

Future Research

This study is based around university-sanctioned online coaching biographies. However, the way in which information is diffused has changed dramatically. A university's athletic teams' news, whether related to performances, incoming recruits, or coaching staff changes, are often circulated through their social media presence. Moreover, college recruiting is shifting over to social media platforms. These spaces, as evidenced by coaches in this study who are out as LGB+ in their social media profiles, are also important when exploring the visibility of LGBTQIA+ coaches in college sport.

The gendered experiences of LGB+ coaches reflected in this study are an important addition to the literature, but more research is necessary to explore further why fewer LGB+ men are visible in women's intercollegiate sport. This is especially necessary given the positive impressions of the LGB+ men in this study, who reported feeling more comfortable and accepted within women's sport than men's. Furthermore, this study reinforced that the racial and ethnic component cannot be left unaddressed in studies on LGB+ coaches. However, this study was limited in the variety of experiences of participants, given that the majority were White. Although all coaches recognized that Whiteness conferred advantages given how normalized Whiteness is in sport leadership, future studies with more diverse participants would be beneficial to allow for a fuller exploration of the experiences of BIPOC LGB+ coaches.

Limitations

The populations captured by this study included one population of LGB+ assistant coaches in NCAA D-I women's sport who include a same-sex family narrative, a population that is small in size (N = 13). The other population of LGB+ assistant coaches who do not include a same-sex family narrative is unknown in size, and so this study is not generalizable to the broad range of experiences and decision-making structures that come with navigating NCAA D-I women's sport as LGB+ assistant coaches. Additionally, as mentioned above, the study included a majority of individuals who identify as White, which limited this research's ability to explore the experiences of LGB+ BIPOC assistant coaches. Despite these limitations, the data collected herein speaks to the institutional structures that are unique to assistant coaches' position in the

organizational hierarchy. The findings are still beneficial to understanding whether and how intercollegiate sport is changing as a homonegative and heterosexist space.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that assistant coaches must navigate complex relationships of power on many levels. Unlike head coaches, who must find a fit within the department and with the institution, assistant coaches had to decide whether it was necessary to navigate these institutional pieces in addition to making sure they would be working with a head coach and coaching staff that was supportive. Their close working relationship within their staffs was not always accompanied by close interactions with the broader athletic department. Assistant coaches did not set the tone for inclusivity or team expectations, so they sought jobs where those values were present. The data collected affirm that LGB+ assistant coaches face complex interrelated barriers at multiple levels. It also confirmed that while family narratives in online coaching biographies are a space that reinforces heteronormativity, things are (slowly) changing. Moreover, online coaching biographies are only one way in which coaches are explicitly and publicly out, demonstrated by the coaches who are open and explicit about their spouses, partners, and identities on social media platforms.

Despite the barriers and difficulty that these assistant coaches face, they all resoundingly had more positive experiences than negative. They all identified real progress for LGB+ coaches that they are seeing develop in front of their eyes, dating from their time as student-athletes to the present as coaches. Fourteen LGB+ coaches who are flourishing, whether they remain in intercollegiate athletics or not, show that it is possible for coaches to successfully navigate the racialized heteropatriarchy of sport

spaces. However, this is not to say that their experiences and the factors they weighed in their decisions were not instructive to where intercollegiate sport can improve. Athletic departments need better training around diversity, equity, and inclusion so that language does not reinforce heterosexuality as the norm. Institutions need to treat coaches and their spouses/partners equally when it comes to things like events and travel, no matter the gender of the coach's partner/spouse. All of the coaches in this study, by living authentically and being open about their identities, are role models whose visibility is a valuable asset in the push for progress in sport. They serve to model inclusion and acceptance for their colleagues and their student-athletes, whether heterosexual or not, and illustrate that it is possible to be a thriving LGB+ assistant coach in NCAA D-I women's sport. While they saw their openness as a potential catalyst for change, many of them did not feel like it was their job to convince people who are aggressively anti-LGBTQIA+ that they are wrong. They simply felt that living authentically could create positive change by initiating opportunities to have conversations, educate others, and normalize sexual diversity.

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Notes

1 The term “LGBTQIA+” is utilized throughout the paper to refer broadly to individuals who identify themselves as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender people. The “A” in this case is to recognize individuals on the aromantic/asexual spectrum, not for ‘allies’.

2 The term “LGB+” is used because there are no coaches in NCAA D-I women’s sport who are out as transgender or gender non-conforming. This study, therefore, focuses on a population of individuals that do not identify as heterosexual (lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.). In recognition that some people use the term “queer” to self-identify as non-heterosexual, Q is not included because it can also be used to express non-cisgender identities; thus, a “+” was included to acknowledge other non-heterosexual identities such as pansexual, queer, and more.

3 ‘White’ and ‘Black’ have been capitalized per APA standards. Additionally, as created social categories with very real implications and in keeping with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, denoting ‘White’ as a proper noun holds White people accountable to join in conversations about race and acknowledge and address White people’s/institutions’ involvement in racism (Thúy Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020).

Appendix A

Participant Demographics

Tables include relevant demographic information for study participants. Table A1 below includes all individuals within the population of 13 coaches who include a same-sex partner in their online coaching biography. All 13 coaches in the first group are included in the table, rather than only including the seven individuals who participated in this study. This is intentional so that the participating seven coaches remain unidentified.

Partner in Online Coaching Biography	**Children**	**Relationship Status**	**Coach Gender**	**Coach Race**
Yes	Yes (3)	Married	Woman	Black or African American
Yes	No	Married	Woman	White
Yes	No	Married	Woman	White
Yes	Yes (1)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	Yes (2)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	No	Married	Man	Asian
Yes	Yes (2)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	Yes (1)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	No	Engaged	Woman	White
Yes	Yes (2)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	No	Married	Woman	White
Yes	Yes (2)	Married	Woman	White
Yes	No	Married	Woman	Black or African American

Table A1. Characteristics of all 13 assistant coaches with same-sex partner in online coaching biography during 2019-20 season.

Table A2 below includes demographic information for the seven coaches in this study who did not include a same-sex partner in their online coaching biography.

Partner in Online Coaching Biography	**Children**	**Relationship Status**	**Coach Gender**	**Coach Race**
No	No	Single	Man	White
No	Yes (1)	Separated/Divorced	Woman	White
No	No	Single	Man	White
No	No	Partnered (not married)	Woman	Hispanic or Latinx
No	No	Married	Man	White
No	No	Single	Woman	White
No	No	Married	Man	White

Table A2. Characteristics of assistant coaches without same-sex partner in online coaching biography.