LGBTQ+ experiences within and across physical activity contexts

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Abstract

Research suggests that LGBTQ+ adults, when compared to cis-heterosexual counterparts, have higher rates of chronic diseases as well as physical and mental health concerns; many of which can be prevented or mitigated through regular engagement with physical activity. However, LGBTQ+ individuals also experience unique and disproportionate barriers to physical activity, such as homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, and exclusion that complicate participation and exacerbate health disparities. The overall purpose of my dissertation was to develop a deeper understanding of how previous and current LGBTQ+ experiences within and across physical activity contexts influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity. In study 1, I explored past and present LGBTQ+ locker room experiences by thematically analyzing 1,067 responses to an open-ended response question. My first study's findings provide pivotal insight into how homophobia, transphobia, and fatphobia intersect within locker rooms and complicate access for LGBTQ+ adults. In study 2, I investigated how interpersonal relationships within sport influenced LGBTQ+ athletes' sporting experiences, as well as their later-in-life perceptions of physical activity, by analyzing 741 responses to the open-ended question, "how would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?" Participant responses from my second study highlight how negative adolescent sporting experiences greatly influenced how participants currently viewed sport and physical activity contexts. Contrastingly, supportive relationships with coaches and teammates fostered feelings of relatedness among participants and helped establish LGBTQ+-inclusive sport contexts. Given that adolescent experiences played an influential role in how LGBTQ+ adults currently viewed physical activity, in study 3, I conducted a systematic scoping review of peer-reviewed literature exploring

LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education. The minimal literature (N = 8) retained for review highlight the present dearth of physical education research that includes LGBTQ+ participants. My third study's findings also illustrate how LGBTQ+ student experiences are greatly impacted by cis-heteronormativity which validates homophobia, transphobia, and prevalent (mis)gendering processes within physical education. In study 4, I explored experiences and conceptions of LGBTQ+ resilience within and across physical activity contexts through a series of online focus groups with LGBTQ+ adults (N = 36). Findings from my fourth study suggest that individual and community resilience significantly influence LGBTQ+ experiences and participation in physical activity. Previous research has predominantly focused on the unique stresses and barriers LGBTQ+ individuals experience within physical activity, however, my fourth study's findings also demonstrate the significance of LGBTQ+ resilience with respect to physical activity participation. Overall, my dissertation findings helped develop a stronger, more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within and across physical activity contexts. Specifically, youth experiences within sport and physical education greatly influenced how LGBTQ+ adults perceived and engaged with physical activity contexts. Negative youth experiences seemed to support aversion towards and avoidance of physical activity, whereas positive adolescent experiences, despite being rarer, seemed to encourage regular physical activity participation throughout adulthood. Subsequently, efforts are needed to improve overall LGBTQ+ youth experiences across physical activity contexts as well as improve LGBTQ+ adults' perceptions of and relationships with physical activity.

Résumé

Les études démontrent que les adultes LGBTQ+ ont un taux plus élevé de maladies chroniques par rapport à leurs homologues cis-hétérosexuels ainsi que plus de problèmes de santé physique et mentale, dont beaucoup pourraient être évités ou atténués en pratiquant régulièrement une activité physique. Cependant, les individus LGBTQ+ font face également à des barrières uniques et disproportionnelles telles que l'homophobie, la transphobie, la discrimination et l'exclusion qui compliquent la participation et exacerbent les disparités en matière de santé. L'objectif global de ma thèse était de mieux comprendre comment les expériences antérieures et actuelles dans divers contextes d'activité physique influencent les perceptions et les attitudes à l'égard de l'activité physique ainsi que l'engagement des individus LGBTQ+ dans l'activité physique. La première étude examine les expériences antérieures et actuelles d'individus LGBTQ+ dans les vestiaires en analysant thématiquement 1 067 réponses à une question ouverte. Les conclusions de cette étude fournissent des renseignements essentiels sur la façon dont l'homophobie, la transphobie et la grossophobie s'entrecroisent dans les vestiaires et compliquent l'accès d'adultes LGBTQ+. La deuxième étude interroge comment les relations interpersonnelles ont influencé les expériences sportives d'athlètes LGBTQ+ ainsi que leurs perceptions ultérieures de l'activité physique en analysant 741 réponses à la question ouverte « Comment décririez-vous vos relations antérieures et/ou actuelles avec vos coéquipiers/coéquipières, entraîneurs/entraîneuses et d'autres membres du personnel sportif ? » Les réponses des participants à la question de la deuxième étude soulignent comment les expériences sportives négatives en tant qu'adolescents ont fortement influencé les perceptions actuelles des participants à l'égard du sport et de l'activité physique. En revanche, les relations de soutien avec les entraîneurs/entraîneuses et les coéquipiers/coéquipières ont favorisé les

sentiments de solidarité parmi les participants et ont permis d'établir des contextes sportifs inclusifs de la communauté LGBTQ+. Étant donné que les expériences vécues pendant l'adolescence ont joué un rôle décisif dans la perception actuelle chez les adultes LGBTQ+ à l'égard de l'activité physique, dans la troisième étude j'ai procédé à un examen systématique de la portée de la littérature scientifique examinant les expériences d'étudiant·es dans l'éducation physique. Seuls 8 documents ont été retenus, ce qui démontre la faible disponibilité d'études sur l'éducation physique impliquant des participants LGBTQ+. Les conclusions de ma troisième étude illustrent comment la cis-hétéronormativité, qui réaffirme l'homophobie, la transphobie et les processus répandus du (mé)genrage (c'est-à-dire la mauvaise interprétation du genre d'une autre personne) dans l'éducation physique, a d'importantes répercussions sur les expériences d'étudiant·es LGBTQ+. La quatrième étude se base sur une série de groupes de réflexion en ligne avec des adultes LGBTQ+ (N = 36) pour analyser les expériences et conceptions de la résilience LGBTQ+ dans divers contextes de l'activité physique. Les résultats de ma quatrième étude laissent entendre que la résilience au niveau de l'individu et de la communauté exerce une influence considérable sur les expériences et la participation de personnes LGBTQ+ dans l'activité physique. Des études antérieures portaient principalement sur les barrières et les stress propres aux expériences d'individus LGBTQ+ dans l'activité physique ; toutefois, les conclusions de ma quatrième étude démontrent l'importance de la résilience LGBTQ+ en ce qui concerne la participation à l'activité physique. Globalement les conclusions de ma thèse contribuent au développement d'une meilleure compréhension plus nuancée des expériences LGBTQ+ dans divers contextes d'activité physique. Plus précisément, les expériences des jeunes avec le sport et l'éducation physique influencent fortement les perceptions et l'engagement de ces personnes en tant qu'adultes LGBTQ+ dans divers contextes de l'activité physique. Les

expériences négatives des jeunes semblaient engendrer une aversion pour l'activité physique et une tendance à l'éviter. Bien que plus rares, les expériences positives pendant l'adolescence semblaient encourager la participation régulière à l'activité physique tout au long de la vie adulte. Par conséquent, plus d'effort est nécessaire pour améliorer les expériences globales des jeunes LGBTQ+ dans divers contextes de l'activité physique ainsi qu'améliorer la façon dont les adultes LGBTQ+ perçoivent et se réconcilient avec l'activité physique.

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Thank you to my supervisor Dr. Lindsay Duncan for your guidance, patience, and support all these years. I still vividly remember how on the way to a swimming competition, I was talking about my passion project, Queerobics, while in a line-up for coffee at Tim Hortons. Without your observation that I have a 'career's worth of questions,' and your continued encouragement afterwards—I sincerely doubt I would have stumbled upon my current path. There are not enough words of thanks to express all that you are to me: a coach, a teacher, a mentor, a supervisor, a friend, and hopefully, soon to be colleague. I am forever grateful for your gracious introduction to this amazingly frustrating world of academia.

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Contributions to Original Knowledge

My dissertation is comprised of four original manuscripts that each uniquely contribute to the literature and deepen our collective understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within and across physical activity contexts. My first study explores LGBTQ+ experiences within a pivotal access point across physical activity settings: locker rooms. Prior to this study, the bulk of research had been comprised of smaller-scale, qualitative investigations into LGBTQ+ locker room experiences. This study, in using an optional, open-ended response question within a survey allowed for over one thousand LGBTQ+ adults to share their personal experiences with locker rooms. In addition to corroborating previous findings in this field, my first study includes and amplifies the locker room experiences of previously underrepresented identities, namely bisexual, queer, and transgender adults. My first study also provides a level of undeniability to the widespread and nuanced concerns locker rooms pose to LGBTQ+ communities and puts forth the following recommendations: (a) increased privacy options be made available in all locker rooms, (b) gender-neutral locker room creation be prioritized and advocated for, and (c) the binary division of locker rooms be challenged.

My second study explores the varied interpersonal relationships in sporting contexts experienced by LGBTQ+ adults. Using similar methods to my first study, an optional open-ended response question allowed for 741 LGBTQ+ adults to reflect on and share their experiences with teammates and coaches in sport settings. My second study provides valuable insight into the variability of relationships in sport and how these relationships influence sport participation as well as LGBTQ+ in/exclusivity within sport. Negative youth sporting experiences predicated on hostile and unsupportive relationships seemed to inform current, adult perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity. Findings from my second

study also suggest that different identities nestled under the LGBTQ+ umbrella experience different forms and severity of discrimination within sports, while also providing evidence that strong similarities of LGBTQ+ experience in sport exists across identities. My second study demonstrates that despite strides towards LGBTQ+ inclusivity within sport, there are still pervasive vestiges of intolerance that need to be engaged with and deconstructed so that all LGBTQ+ athletes can truly feel like they belong.

My third study was the first systematic scoping review of literature exploring LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education. The minimal literature (N = 8) retained for review highlights the current dearth of physical education (PE) research that includes LGBTQ+ participants. Findings from my third study illustrate how LGBTQ+ student experiences are greatly impacted by cis-heteronormativity which influences the organization and structuring of PE, as well as validates homophobia, transphobia, and prevalent (mis)gendering processes within PE. In addition to suggestions from my first study, findings from study three also support the revaluation of the time allotted for students to change for PE as the time provided may be insufficient for students to change comfortably.

My fourth study explored LGBTQ+ experiences and conceptions of resilience within physical activity through a series of ten online focus groups with LGBTQ+ adults (N = 36). To date, the bulk of LGBTQ+ research in physical activity has focused on unique stresses and barriers. This study is the first exploration of LGBTQ+ resilience(s) within physical activity contexts. Findings from this study provide pivotal insight into various aspects of LGBTQ+ individual and community resilience within physical activity contexts. Study findings outline the significance of self-compassionate aspects of LGBTQ+ individual resilience in physical activity such as adaptability, tenderness, and resistance to dominant norms. Findings from this study also

demonstrate how resilience is often framed as an individual issue, in lieu of developing spaces, practices, and resources required to bolster LGBTQ+ community resilience within physical activity.

Contributions of Authors

My dissertation includes four original manuscripts, led and written by me, with supervision and contributions from my supervisor, Dr. Lindsay R. Duncan. My co-author on Study 2, Alexandra Moisan, was an undergraduate student from the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education completing her undergraduate practicum.

Contributions to Chapter Three

The manuscript entitled "Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults" is published in the *Journal of Exercise and Sport Psychology* and was co-authored by myself and my supervisor, Lindsay R. Duncan. This paper received the *Journal of Exercise and Sport Psychology* Excellence in Research Award for 2020 which acknowledges this study as the most outstanding article in the 2020 volume of the *Journal of Exercise and Sport Psychology.*

- Shannon S. C. Herrick: As first author, I led the conceptualization, data collection, data analyses, and all phases of manuscript writing. I was responsible for submitting the manuscript to the journal and all edits and phases of the review process. I serve as the corresponding author on the publication.
- Lindsay R. Duncan: Dr. Duncan contributed to the conceptualization of the study, served as a critical peer in the data analysis, and played a major role in editing and refining the manuscript up to publication.

Contributions to Chapter Four

The manuscript entitled "The role of coaches and teammates in supporting and thwarting sports participation among LGBTQ+ individuals: A large-scale online qualitative study" is currently under review at *Sport, Education and Society*, co-authored by myself, Alexandra Moisan, and Lindsay R. Duncan.

- Shannon S. C. Herrick: As first author, I led the conceptualization, data collection, data analyses, and all phases of manuscript writing. I was responsible for submitting the manuscript to the journal and all edits and phases of the review process. I serve as the corresponding author on the publication.
- Alexandra Moisan: Alexandra assisted with the data analyses and was involved in drafting and editing the manuscript.
- Lindsay R. Duncan: Dr. Duncan contributed to the conceptualization of the study, served as a critical peer in the data analysis, and played a major role in editing and refining the manuscript up to publication.

Contributions to Chapter Five

The manuscript entitled "A systematic scoping review of physical education experiences from the perspective of LGBTQ+ students" is published in *Sport, Education and Society*, and was co-authored by myself and my supervisor, Lindsay R. Duncan.

- Shannon S. C. Herrick: As first author, I led the study conceptualization, design of the review protocol, article collection and organization, data extraction and analyses, and all phases of manuscript writing. I was responsible for submitting the manuscript to the journal and all edits and phases of the review process. I serve as the corresponding author on the publication.
- Lindsay R. Duncan: Dr. Duncan assisted with the data analysis and played a major role in editing and refining the manuscript up to publication.

Contributions to Chapter Six

The manuscript entitled "'There may not be a rainbow sticker at the door, but there are my rainbow shoes': A qualitative exploration of resilience among LGBTQ+ adults in physical

activity contexts" is currently under review at *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* and was co-authored by myself and my supervisor, Lindsay R. Duncan.

- Shannon S. C. Herrick: As first author, I led the conceptualization, data collection, transcription, data analyses, and all phases of manuscript writing. I was responsible for submitting the manuscript to the journal and all edits and phases of the review process. I serve as the corresponding author on the publication.
- Lindsay R. Duncan: Dr. Duncan contributed to the conceptualization of the study, served as a critical peer in the data analysis, and played a major role in editing and refining the manuscript up to publication.

List of Abbreviations

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and people of colour

GLSEN: Gay, lesbian, and straight education network

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identities and communities that do not adhere to cis-heterosexuality

MVPA: Moderate-to-vigorous physical activity

MSM: Minority stress model

PE: Physical education

SDT: Self-determination theory

Preface

My dissertation is organized following a manuscript-based format, including four studies, for a total of seven chapters. Chapter One provides a brief introduction to how heterosexism and cissexism intertwine and influence the public health of LGBTQ+ communities, as well as outlines the overall goal of my dissertation and the subsequent purpose statements of each of my manuscripts. Chapter Two provides a detailed literature review of LGBTQ+ experiences within and across three distinct and interrelated physical activity contexts: sport, physical education, and exercise. Chapter Three includes an original manuscript, published in the *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology,* exploring the experiences LGBTQ+ adults have within locker and changing rooms. Chapter Four is an original manuscript currently under review at *Sport, Education and Society,* that explores the past and current interpersonal relationships experienced in sport contexts by LGBTQ+ adults. Chapter Five is an original manuscript, published in *Sport, Education and Society,* and details a systematic scoping review of literature exploring LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education. Chapter Six is an original manuscript, submitted to *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, that explores experiences of LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity contexts. Chapter Seven encompasses a general discussion, situating the findings from my four manuscripts within the current literature, discussing the contributions of my overall findings, and presenting future research directions.

Chapter One: Introduction

Western society was born out of, and continues to perpetuate, complex systems of oppression (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991). Heterosexism is one such system that historically has been used to intimidate sexual minorities, maintain social control, and uphold the current sexual paradigm of western culture, which is focused on sexual reproduction (Flowers & Buston, 2001; Herek, 1990). Heterosexism is based upon the assumption that heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation in society and can include the presumption that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. Heterosexuality is defined as experiencing sexual attraction to the opposite sex, meaning female-male pairings. Subsequently, heterosexuality and by extension heterosexism are simultaneously defined by and reinforce the gender binary (i.e., a system of gender classification in which all people are categorized as being female or male) within society. As a result, heterosexuality is not just a form of sexual expression, it is an institutional organizing structure that confines sexuality to one orientation while simultaneously restricting gender to the rigid binary division between men and women (Jackson, 2006; Seidman, 2009).

Heterosexism is enacted through a variety of institutions, operates across multiple levels, and has historically depended on the exclusion of other sexualities to uphold its legitimacy and maintain the illusion of normalcy (Jackson, 2006). For example, homosexuality was classified as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) until 1973 when it was removed from the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Framing sexualities that deviate from heterosexuality as illnesses ultimately justified the use of conversion therapies, as well as encouraged discrimination against and the persecution of sexual minorities (Haldeman, 2002). The influence of these legacies of institutional discrimination against sexual minorities

are still felt today, with Canada only recently passing legislation deeming conversion therapy illegal (Aiello, 2022). Heterosexism has also been engrained in western society through national bans on gay marriage (Lewis, 2011) and the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy dictating that military personnel 'don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue, and don't harass' in relation to non-heterosexual individuals serving in the military (Burks, 2011). These policies, which have since been revoked, serve as powerful reminders of how society can misuse legislation to police and persecute citizens that do not conform to heterosexuality. However, western progress towards institutional acceptance of sexual minorities is not linear, as exemplified by the recent passing of the 'Don't Say Gay' bill in the state of Florida that bans classroom instruction on sexuality, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ history in elementary schools (Press, 2022). The institutionalization of heterosexuality (i.e., heterosexism) and the gender binary (i.e., cissexism and sexism) is characterized by cis-heteronormativity, which designates heterosexuality as the normative, default sexuality in society and inherently restricts gender to the rigid sex binary of male vs. female. It is well-documented that sexual and gender minorities that do not subscribe to cis-heteronormativity, experience discrimination, stigmatization, and marginalization on a variety of institutional and personal levels (e.g., Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Meyer, & Busch, 2014; Jackson, 2006; Williams & Mann, 2017; Yep, 2002).

LGBTQ+ is an abbreviated acronym used to acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other communities that do not adhere to prevalent cis-heterosexist assumptions that everyone is (a) heterosexual and (b) cisgender or cis (where your gender identity matches your sex assigned at birth). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ defy these widespread and seemingly compulsory assumptions about sexuality and gender that govern society. The constant adversity experienced by LGBTQ+ persons culminates into unique forms

of stress, commonly referred to as LGBTQ+ minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Minority stress is the unique product of a minority identity, generated by the distinct experiences associated with belonging to a minority group in a society that has been built to favour the majority or the 'norm'. Some sources of LGBTQ+ minority stress, or LGBTQ+ minority stressors, are homophobia, transphobia, exclusion, harassment, rejection, and other forms of discrimination (Cook et al., 2014; Meyer & Frost, 2013; Rood et al., 2016; Williams & Mann, 2017). Incidents of LGBTQ+ minority stress are high, according to Statistic Canada (2021), hate crimes against sexual minorities increased by 41% in 2019 from the previous year with over half of all the reported hate crimes classified as violent and 88% specifically targeted towards lesbian and gay Canadians. In 2020, crimes in Canada motivated by hatred of a sexual orientation made up 10% of all police-reported hate-crimes, which is in sharp contrast to the estimated 4% of the Canadian population that identifies as a sexual minority (Statistics Canada, 2021). According to the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, sexual minority Canadians were almost three times more likely than heterosexual people to experience violent victimization (Jaffray, 2020). In 2018, sexual minority Canadians were also twice as likely as heterosexual Canadians to report experiencing inappropriate behaviours in public, at work, and online (Statistics Canada, 2021).

LBGTQ+ minority stress often manifests in the form of mental and physical health consequences, such as depression, anxiety, and various self-destructive behaviors including substance abuse and self-harm (Cochran & Mays, 2007; Conron, Mimiaga, & Landers, 2010; Cook et al., 2014; Daniel & Butkus, 2015; King, 2008; Lick, Durso, & Johnson, 2013; Mereish & Poteat, 2015a; Williams & Mann, 2017). Overall, sexual and gender minority Canadians were more than twice as likely to report poor mental health when compared to cis-heterosexual Canadians and were more likely to report having a mood or anxiety disorder, as well as having

contemplated suicide in their lifetimes (Statistics Canada, 2021). Research has also suggested that when compared to their cis-heterosexual counterparts, LGBTQ+ adults are subject to higher rates of chronic diseases and health concerns such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and limited mobility later in life (Caceres, Makarem, Hickey, & Hughes, 2018; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shui, & Bryan, 2017; Institute of Medicine Committee on Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender People, 2011). Among elderly transgender individuals, there has been a clinical concern about the prevalence of diabetes, ovarian disease, and stroke (Institute of Medicine Committee on Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender People, 2011). An analysis of data from the 2013-2014 National Health Interview Survey examined the disparities in chronic conditions and health indicators among American sexual minority and heterosexual adults aged 50 years and older (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shui, et al., 2017). Findings from this study indicate that when compared to heterosexual counterparts, older sexual minority women were more likely to report having arthritis and asthma, having experienced a heart attack or stroke, as well as currently experiencing a higher number of chronic health conditions, whereas older sexual minority men were more likely to report having angina pectoris, cancer, and a weakened immune system (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shui, et al., 2017). Rates of mental distress and disability were also higher among older sexual minority adults than older heterosexual adults (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shui, et al., 2017). These emerging health issues are further augmented by social conditions, like the increased likelihood of LGBTQ+ individuals to live in poverty and have limited access and/or increased barriers to adequate, affirming healthcare (Hafeez, Zeshan, Tahir, Jahan, & Naveed, 2017; Redman, 2010). Subsequently, the American College of Physicians' has acknowledged the complexity of LGBTQ+ health disparities and has recommended concerted

efforts from medical, academic, and activist communities to effectively address them (Daniel & Butkus, 2015).

Many of the chronic diseases being diagnosed at higher rates among members of LGBTQ+ communities can be prevented or mitigated through regular engagement with physical activity. Regular physical activity can minimize the physiological effects of an inactive lifestyle and increase active life expectancy by limiting the development and progression of chronic diseases and disabling conditions like depression, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes (Chodzko-Zajko et al., 2009; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). In addition to the physiological benefits, physical activity has been shown to have a positive impact on overall psychological health, personal well-being, and quality of life (Chodzko-Zajko et al., 2009; Penedo & Dahn, 2005; Warburton et al., 2006). Regular physical activity has also been identified as an essential protective factor in the general health of older LGB individuals (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Emlet, et al., 2011), and as a valuable coping mechanism for dealing with minority stress among LGBTQ+ adults (Iwasaki, Mackay, Mactavish, Ristock, & Bartlett, 2006).

LGBTQ+ adults experience unique and disproportionate barriers to physical activity participation, such as homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, and exclusion that reduce physical activity levels and exacerbate health disparities (Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Landi, Flory, Safron, & Marttinen, 2020; Pérez-Samaniego, Fuentes-Miguel, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, & Devís-Devís, 2019). For example, an international study surveyed sexual minority (n = 7, 000) and heterosexual (n = 2, 494) adults from English-speaking countries and found that 80% of respondents had experienced or witnessed homophobia in sport (Denison & Kitchen, 2015). Additionally, spectator stands followed by physical education classes were found to be the most likely locations for homophobia to occur (Denison

& Kitchen, 2015). Similarly, a survey examining the inclusivity of sport in the European Union found that among the 5, 524 LGBTI+ respondents, 90% considered homophobia and particularly transphobia to be current issues in sport (Menzel, Braumüller, & Hartmann-Tews, 2019). Survey responses also indicated that there was a small tendency towards homophobic and transphobic language being witnessed more often in other leisure activities (e.g., exercise) than sport (Menzel et al., 2019).

The prevalence of sexual and gender-based prejudice against LGBTQ+ communities across physical activity contexts complicates participation in regular physical activity. In Canada, data show that only 53.8% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual-identified individuals are moderately physically active (Statistics Canada, 2015). A study comparing physical activity behaviors between LGBTQ+ (n = 71) and cis-heterosexual (n = 335) college students found that LGBTQ+ students engaged in 17% less aerobic and 42% less resistance exercise, and were 2.2 times less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than their cis-heterosexual counterparts (Frederick, Castillo-Hernández, Williams, Singh, & Evans, 2020). Similarly, a study analyzing disparities in physical activity participation among American high school students (N = 13,933) found that sexual minority boys and girls were significantly less likely to be physically active than their heterosexual counterparts (Mereish & Poteat, 2015b). Current physical activity discourses and contexts for LGBTQ+ individuals may be insufficient, insensitive to the needs of, or ineffective at helping diverse LGBTQ+ communities. There is a need for an increased understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within and across a multitude of physical activity contexts to help inform tailored physical activity interventions designed to support LGBTQ+ communities (e.g., Barefoot, Warren, & Smalley, 2015; Cary et al., 2016; Fogel, Young, Dietrich, & Blakemore, 2012; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, & Barkan, 2011; Garbers et al., 2015;

Grogan, Conner, & Smithson, 2006).

Overall Objectives

The overall purpose of my dissertation was to develop a deeper understanding of how previous and current experiences within and across physical activity contexts influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity among self-identified LGBTQ+ individuals. To accomplish this goal, we conducted four studies that each addressed specific research questions and explored different physical activity contexts. The first study had the goal of broadly exploring a multitude of LGBTQ+ experiences with locker and changing rooms across physical activity contexts. The second study explored how interpersonal relationships within sports influenced LGBTQ+ athletes' sporting experiences, as well as their later in life perceptions of physical activity. The third study is a systematic scoping review of LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE conducted to thematically analyze collective findings and identify current gaps in the literature that need addressing. The fourth study explored experiences and conceptions of LGBTQ+ resilience within and across physical activity contexts through a series of focus groups. Collectively, these four studies provide insight into the complicated and nuanced relationships between LGBTQ+ experiences in and across physical activity contexts, as well as how experiences in one physical activity context can influence attitudes toward physical activity within others.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Physical activity is defined as any type of voluntary bodily movement. Subsequently, physical activity is a broad concept that refers to a variety of unique and interconnected contexts and practices. Although a breadth of activities fall under the umbrella of physical activity, such as active transportation and physical labour, this work attends to LGBTQ+ experiences within three distinct, interrelated physical activity contexts: (a) sport, (b) physical education, and (c) exercise. This focus allows for the exploration of relationships between experiences within and across these three, interconnected physical activity contexts.

Sports

Historically, sports were often involved in the preparation and training of men in society for war and conquest. Since the introduction of formalized sports in 776 BC at the first Olympic Games, classical sports were designed to glorify feats of strength, aggression, and dominance (Kyle, 2013). Given that participation in and spectatorship of classical sports was solely restricted to men, these attributes became synonymous with masculinity and sport became another stage for patriarchal power.

Sport as we know it today, commonly refers to a set of activities developed under the specific social conditions of rapid industrialization in 19th century Britain that were disseminated to the rest of the world through imperialism, colonialism, and emigration (Kidd, 2013; Messner, 1992). Specifically, the British used team sport to instill a specific kind of ‘manliness’ in boys that focused on dominance over others as well as deference to authority (Messner, 1992). This articulation of masculinity that promoted mental and physical toughness alongside obedience and loyalty was developed to prime elite boys for careers in business, colonial administration, and the military (Kidd, 2013; Messner, 1992). The expansion of sport over time to include men in lower

classes and men of colour was viewed as a means to integrate immigrants and the working class into the growing capitalist order (Messner, 1992). The modern social institution of sport was also formed during a time period when women en masse were beginning to challenge existing gender norms and roles that positioned them under the control of men (Griffin, 1992; Messner, 1992). Medical establishments dissuaded women from questioning their exclusion from sport by warning about the 'masculinizing' effects and the debilitating physiological consequences of athleticism on the female reproductive system (Griffin, 1992). However, these medical claims were proven untrue in the 1920s and swiftly replaced with a strong social stigma associated with female athleticism (Griffin, 1992). In summary, sport as a social institution throughout history was developed by and in the interests of those who held power, namely white, upper-class, heterosexual cismen.

At the turn of the 20th century, Freud's theorizing of homosexuality as a negative Oedipus complex further intertwined conceptions of gender and sexuality (Anderson, 2015; Griffin, 1992), wherein deviations from gender norms were interpreted as indicators of homosexuality. Meaning that men performing femininity and women performing masculinity were coded as gay and lesbian regardless of their sexualities. Throughout history, sport was purely a masculine domain and as a result, women who liked and excelled at sports were viewed as inherently masculine and therefore assumed to be lesbians (Griffin, 1992), whereas men who did not like or excel at sports were viewed as feminine and therefore assumed to be gay (Messner, 1992). Homophobia, the dislike and fear of homosexuality, is a powerful policing mechanism that functions to maintain the heterosexist and sexist status quo (Griffin, 1992; Messner, 1992). For example, the fear of being labelled gay or lesbian reinforced the boundaries of acceptable behaviours for both men and women in society. These beliefs set the foundations for prevailing

sport stereotypes that are still in circulation today about effeminate gay cismen and masculine lesbian ciswomen (Eng, 2008; Fink, 2008; Hekma, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006; Krane, 2016). Due to the continued conflation of sexuality and gender, sexual minority women are presumed to excel at sports that are still viewed as masculine such as contact sports (i.e., hockey, rugby, etc.) and in contrast, sexual minority men are presumed to excel at sports that are viewed as feminine (i.e., figure skating, gymnastics, etc.).

The most recent consensus statement on the mental health of athletes issued by the International Olympic Committee identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer athletes as a high-risk population for experiencing non-accidental violence in sport, the enduring impact of which was associated with loss of self-esteem, eating disorders, self-harm, depression, anxiety, and suicide ideation among athletes (Reardon et al., 2019). Great emphasis has been placed on the exploration of LGBTQ+ experiences within and across sporting contexts, as evidenced by several recent literature reviews (e.g., Denison et al., 2020; Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017b; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Rollè, Cazzini, Santoniccolo, & Trombetta, 2021). A recent review of the quantitative research exploring experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in sport concluded that LGBTQ+ discrimination is still a prevalent issue across sporting contexts and recommended solution-focused approaches (Denison et al., 2020). Contrastingly, a systematic review of research on expressed homonegativity among athletes and the discrimination perceived by sexual minority athletes found that half of the 38 included articles identified positive attitudes towards homosexuality, typically among younger generations (Rollè et al., 2021). However, positive attitudes towards homosexuality in sport did not necessarily correspond with LGBTQ+ acceptance, inclusion, or protection as veiled discriminatory practices were found to still persist within sport, typically in

the form of disparaging terms used to question the masculinity of opponents or teammates when faced with injury or defeat (Rollè et al., 2021). Similarly, a scoping review of literature focused on the sporting experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes and coaches found that although sporting experiences substantially differed across the 58 studies reviewed, even in the most tolerant environments (where overt forms of discrimination were absent), homophobic and transphobic discourses were still slow to change (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). Of the articles reviewed, 47% explored LGBTQ+ identity formation and navigation in sport and found that hierarchies between different genders and sexualities existed, privileging certain players over others (e.g., femme lesbians privileged over butch lesbians). Among the 13 studies (22%) that explored LGBTQ+ discrimination in sport, the most mentioned consequence of discrimination was experiencing negative emotions (e.g., distress) followed by negative engagement, such as disliking, avoiding, or quitting sport (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). Some research (19%) was also dedicated to exploring the experiences of coming out in sport and highlighted the expectations of rejection associated with publicly identifying as LGBTQ+ as well as the protective influence of athletic capital. Within 10 studies (17%), social change for LGBTQ+ athletes and coaches was a central focus. The most common strategies for social change in sport were enhancing LGBTQ+ representation and visibility as well as the development of queer alternative spaces for physical activity. Given that the bulk of literature reviewed relied on participants that identified as either lesbian ciswomen or gay cismen, Kavoura and Kokkonen (2020) also recommended that future research explore bisexual, transgender, and intersex athlete and coach experiences.

Recent population studies have demonstrated that when compared to heterosexual peers, sexual minority youth have lower participation rates in sport (Doull, Watson, Smith, Homma, &

Saewyc, 2018; Kann et al., 2018; Kulick, Wernick, Espinoza, Newman, & Dessel, 2019a). A longitudinal study using pooled data from Canadian high schools (N = 99, 373) as well as the 2017 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey of American high school students (N = 14, 959) found that sexual minority youth were consistently less likely to report playing on a team sport than their heterosexual peers (Doull et al., 2018; Kann et al., 2018). Disparities in team sport participation have also been demonstrated to be more pronounced between gay and heterosexual males (Denison, Jeanes, Faulkner, & O'Brien, 2021; Doull et al., 2018; Elling & Janssens, 2009). An online survey of sexual minority youth (N = 1, 173) from six English-speaking countries found that of the 975 LGB youth who played on a team sport, 41.6% reported being the target of homophobic behaviour with 2.1 times higher odds for males than females (Denison et al., 2021). At present, findings with regard to lesbian and bisexual female youth athletes are heterogenous, with some studies demonstrating higher sports participation rates (Doull et al., 2018; Jin-Ho & Wi-Young, 2013), some indicating lower sports participation rates (Beach, Elasy, & Gonzales, 2018; Kann et al., 2018), and others showing no significant difference in participation rates (Elling & Janssens, 2009) when compared to heterosexual counterparts.

Studies exploring the experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming youth in sport are scarce. Sport is organized according to the traditional sex binary of male vs. female and subsequently fails to recognize the complexity of gender while perpetuating the exclusion of transgender and gender-nonconforming athletes (Dubon, Abbott, & Carl, 2018; Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; Travers & Deri, 2011). In recent years, several studies exploring adult transgender experiences within sporting contexts have been conducted (Herrick, Rocchi, & Couture, 2020; Jones et al., 2017b; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). Jones and colleagues (2017b) conducted a systematic review of literature pertaining to transgender sport

participation as well as international sport organization policies which included eight studies and 31 competitive sport policies. Across articles, the lack of trans-inclusive and supportive environments was found to be the primary barrier to sport participation among transgender athletes (Jones et al., 2017b). Most of the competitive sport policies reviewed were discriminatory against transgender sport participation and eligibility requirements were typically based on indirect, inconsistent, and ambiguous scientific evidence (Jones et al., 2017b). A qualitative meta-synthesis of literature exploring transgender experiences in sport and physical activity reviewed 12 qualitative studies (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). The majority of studies found that experiences with locker and changing rooms were especially uncomfortable, problematic, and traumatic for transgender participants (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). For example, in a study of barriers to and facilitators of transgender sport participation in which semi-structured interviews (N = 14) and thematic analysis were conducted, all of the participants described how changing facilities were one of their biggest environmental barriers to participation (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017a). Additional findings from this qualitative meta-synthesis include the use of various concealment and 'transgendering' strategies like wearing a false package to be read as male or padding sports bras to be read as female to gain gender legitimacy in sport (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). The prevalence of overtly gendered language in sport (e.g., let's go ladies!) also significantly influenced transgender sport experiences, with participants across studies recalling incidences of being misgendered by strangers, coaches, and teammates (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). Across the 12 studies included in this review, abjection, which refers to being cast off and separated from norms, was also a common feeling experienced by transgender athletes within sport (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). Qualitative research findings suggest that, despite recent shifts in policy and societal

awareness, marginalizing sporting environments continue to complicate the experiences of transgender athletes (Caudwell, 2014b; Cohen & Semerjian, 2008; Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Hargie, Mitchell, & Somerville, 2017; Klein, Krane, & Paule-Koba, 2018). Despite experiences of social exclusion and alienation within sport, some transgender athletes have acknowledged how sport was personally empowering as well as allowed them to connect with and explore their transitioning bodies (Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Herrick et al., 2020). In addition to the (re)organization of sporting policies, the role of coaches has also been identified as being integral to establishing and maintaining trans-inclusive sporting environments (Birch-Jones, 2017; Dubon et al., 2018; Herrick et al., 2020; Lucas-Carr & Krane, 2011).

In general, researchers have reported that sport structures ultimately failed to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of gender and sexuality (Caudwell, 2014b; Symons et al., 2010; Travers & Deri, 2011). Findings from a recent scoping review of LGBTQ+ athlete and coach experiences support that rigid perceptions of masculinity/femininity and gender stereotypes are antecedents of homophobia and transphobia in sport (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). Subsequently, the inextricable interconnection between cissexism, sexism, and heterosexism within sport should not be ignored when posing questions of inclusivity. Alternatively, LGBTQ+ friendly sporting leagues (e.g., softball; Travers, 2006; Travers & Deri, 2011) and international sporting events (e.g., The Gay Games; Davidson, 2007; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002) have actively sought to create sporting contexts free of heterosexism. However, these alternative LGBTQ+ practices often reiterate white homonormativity and continue to privilege gay cismen and lesbian ciswomen—the “LG” of LGBTQ+ (Caudwell, 2014b; Davidson, 2014).

Physical Education

Physical education (PE) is situated in a complex system of structured social relations between educational authorities, PE teacher educators, PE curriculum writers, health and sport professionals who have influence over curriculum and practices, individual school administrators, PE teachers, and the PE students mandated to participate (Hunter, 2004). Historically, PE was integrated into school curricula to train and discipline students' bodies for eventual battle and war (Phillips & Roper, 2006; Wright, 1998). Within westernized countries founded on cis-heteronormativity, PE was primarily introduced as a means to transform boys into strong, soldierly, heterosexual men through sports-based curricula that glorified athleticism, power, and aggression (Clarke, 2006; McCormack & Anderson, 2014; Messner, 1992). In emphasizing the physicality of student bodies, PE represents a unique context for the inculcation of particular norms, beliefs, and values that dictate what a 'normal' student should exemplify (Clarke, 2006; Hunter, 2004; Sykes, 2011).

Despite the de-militarization of education and greater socio-political shifts towards inclusion across westernized countries, PE is still interpreted as unwelcoming to students that do not embody cis-heteronormativity (e.g., Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018; Sykes, 2011; Toomey et al., 2012). LGBTQ+ experiences within PE are often complicated by instances of discrimination fueled by homophobia and transphobia (e.g., Clarke, 2012; Lenskyj, 1991; O'Brien, Shovelton, & Latner, 2013; Sykes, 2011). In 2013, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a study on LGBTQ+ experiences within PE and analyzed survey responses from 8, 584 students across the United States. Findings from this study suggest that more than half of self-identified LGBTQ+ students were bullied or

harassed during a PE class because of their sexual orientation (52.8%) or gender expression (50.9%) (GLSEN, 2013). Through PE curricula, instruction, and practice, the behaviours instilled in students work to sustain cis-heteronormativity while marginalizing students who belong to LGBTQ+ communities (e.g., Clarke, 2006; Sykes, 2011; Travers, 2018).

To assuage growing concern for LGBTQ+ students, research has continuously explored and strongly supported the development of inclusive PE curricula, policies, and teacher training (e.g., Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009; Clarke, 2012; Flores, 2012; Greenspan, Whitcomb, & Griffith, 2019). However, despite strides towards inclusion in PE policy and delivery, according to the National School Climate Surveys conducted by the GLSEN the percentage of LGBTQ+ students who avoid PE classes because they feel uncomfortable or unsafe has steadily increased from 31.9% in 2013 to 40.1% in 2019 (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020; Kosciw et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018). Subsequently, these top-down approaches towards LGBTQ+ inclusion within PE may be hindered by a simplified and homogenized understanding of LGBTQ+ student experiences.

To date, *Queer Bodies: Sexualities, Genders, & Fatness in Physical Education* (Sykes, 2011) remains a seminal text on Canadian LGBTQ+ experiences within PE. Through semi-structured interviews with adults (N = 39) that identified as a gender or sexual minority, having a physical disability, and/or having an undervalued body size or shape, Sykes' (2011) in-depth, retrospective findings demonstrate how the intersectional discrimination of queer bodies in PE maintains cis-heteronormative discourses about healthy and 'normal' student bodies. Specifically, cis-heteronormativity in PE was found to be shaped by highly visual economies within changing and movement spaces (Sykes, 2011). Three prominent discourses were found to stabilize the gender binary within PE: (a) the gendering of bodily movements as masculine vs.

feminine, (b) the history of and current curricular gendering of single-sex vs. coeducation, and (c) the architectural gendering of the built environment, namely locker and changing rooms (Sykes, 2011). All participants (N = 39) described feeling out of place within PE due to some aspect of their identity, body, and sense of embodiment (Sykes, 2011). Participants often recalled how their relationships with physical educators influenced their experiences in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways fluctuating between despise and desire (Sykes, 2011). Gender-nonconforming participants commonly recounted dealing with emotional and physical violence when accessing locker rooms and getting changed for PE (Sykes, 2011). Similarly, findings from interviews with 19 transgender youth and their parents about school experiences demonstrated how the regulation of gendered bodies accomplished by sex-segregated bathrooms is duplicated and amplified in locker rooms, as well as the sex divided/differentiated world of PE, sport, and physical activity (Travers, 2018). The maintenance of cis-heteronormativity and the foundational illusions of what constitutes a healthy, 'normal' student within PE is predicated on the continued exclusion and policing of LGBTQ+ students (Sykes, 2011; Travers, 2018).

A review of research conducted on homophobia in PE retrieved 11 eligible articles, the bulk of which focused on the experiences of lesbian physical educators (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009). Findings demonstrated the complexity and precarity associated with being a lesbian physical educator, with some physical educators choosing to combat homophobia while others distanced themselves from homophobia in and outside of class to avoid the suspicion of being affiliated with LGBTQ+ identities (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009). Although the experiences of physical educators influence and are influenced by PE practices and discourses, experiences of LGBTQ+ students within PE have been previously neglected within research (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009). A content analysis of literature exploring LGBTQ+ youth experiences within

PE from nine flagship journals, covering a 40-year span (1975-2015) did not find any articles that met their eligibility criteria, implying that this dearth persists (Greenspan, Griffith, & Murtagh, 2017).

Exercise

Compared to sport and physical education, western conceptions of and contexts for exercise are relatively new. Definitions of exercise commonly refer to engaging in some sort of physical activity with the intention of improving or maintaining one's health. Subsequently, exercise is embedded within sport, PE, and countless other institutions and practices across cultures and history. For example, the roots of western mainstream conceptions of exercise are intertwined with ancient sport in that improving physical fitness in the form of lifting heavy objects and running to improve endurance was used to train Greek and Spartan soldiers (Kyle, 2013). Interconnected with classical sport, this militaristic founding of physical training or exercise similarly conceptualized these practices as restricted to men and as another articulation of patriarchal power.

In the mid-20th century, exercise was introduced to mainstream western society as a means to improve ones' physical health and was subsequently marketed to the masses (Tipton, 2014). Since the 1950s, western exercise has evolved significantly and yet, today exercise is still designed and conceptualized in ways that reiterate and reinforce cis-heteronormativity. For instance, if you identify as a woman, it is assumed that you will use exercise as a means to lose weight, sculpt your body to become more attractive to men, and cater to the male gaze (e.g., Brabazon, 2006; Lloyd, 1996). Conversely, if you identify as a man, it is assumed that you will use exercise to obtain a more 'masculine' form with high muscular definition to earn the praise and respect of other men as well as become more attractive to women (e.g., McCreary,

Hildebrandt, Heinberg, Boroughs, & Thompson, 2007). As a result of these cis-heterosexual assumptions, exercise practices and contexts are often coded as inherently feminine (e.g., aerobic and stretching areas in gyms) or inherently masculine (e.g., weight-lifting areas in gyms).

Compared to sports and PE, little scholarly attention has been paid to LGBTQ+ experiences within exercise contexts. I conducted a systematic scoping review of literature exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ adults within exercise contexts (specifically excluding articles that explored sport and PE) and analyzed 35 eligible articles (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). Findings from this review supported that sexuality influences engagement in exercise differentially by gender identity (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). For sexual minority men, the literature suggested that increased physical activity levels are informed by an external drive predicated on an ideal body type that is both thin and muscular (Brewster, Sandil, DeBlaere, Breslow, & Auckland, 2017; Brittain & Dinger, 2015; Brown & Graham, 2008; Cary et al., 2016; Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; Mor, Parfionov, Davidovitch, & Grotto, 2014; Roper & Polasek, 2006; Sykes, 2009). Specifically, this drive for muscularity was sought in some studies through the use of two extreme behaviors: steroid use (Brewster et al., 2017; Mor et al., 2014) and compulsive exercise (Brewster et al., 2017; Brown & Graham, 2008). The emphasis on thinness and muscularity among sexual minority men was also coupled with a prevalent fat stigma (Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; Sykes, 2009). This primary narrative of aesthetically driven physical activity was juxtaposed against prevalent stereotypes that describe gay men as non-athletic, physically weak, and ‘feminine’ (Brown & Graham, 2008; Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; Grogan et al., 2006). Homophobia was identified as a harmful process that perpetuated these pernicious gender stereotypes (Brittain & Dinger, 2015; Cary et al., 2016; Mor et al., 2014). Public exercise

settings (e.g., fields) and locker rooms were also found to be sites of increased homophobic harassment for sexual minority men (Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006, 2010).

In contrast to the dominant narrative of a clearly defined body ideal among sexual minority men, dominant body norms for sexual minority women were significantly more fluid across studies (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). Unlike sexual minority men, body norms among sexual minority women were not reducible to rigid aesthetic standards of attractiveness and were predicated on an all-encompassing acceptance of diverse bodies (Brittain, Baillargeon, McElroy, Aaron, & Gyurcsik, 2006; Garbers et al., 2015; Sykes, 2009). The alternative body norms endorsed by sexual minority women, combined with the presence of homophobia, and sport stereotypes (i.e., the 'mannish' and athletic lesbian), culminated in a dominant trend across studies of decreased physical activity (Barefoot et al., 2015; Boehmer & Bowen, 2009; Brittain et al., 2006; Brittain & Dinger, 2015; Garbers et al., 2015; Laska et al., 2015; McElroy & Jordan, 2014; Yancey, Cochran, Corliss, & Mays, 2003). The literature also identified specific gender expressions among sexual minority women, explained by a butch-femme continuum, which endorsed different variations of these body norms (Bowen, Balsam, Diergaarde, Russo, & Escamilla, 2006; Garbers et al., 2015). It was suggested that sexual minority women with a more 'femme' gender expression were more likely to adhere to the standards of attractiveness traditionally held by heterosexual women (i.e., being thin), whereas butch-identified sexual minority women tended to deviate and embrace larger sizes traditionally associated with masculinity (Garbers et al., 2015; Sykes, 2009).These findings indicated that although body norms appear to be more flexible among sexual minority women, they may be heavily influenced by gender expression (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b).

The presence of homophobia in exercise settings was commonly cited as a contributing factor to the decreased physical activity levels found among sexual minority women (Brittain et al., 2006; Fogel et al., 2012; Molina, Lehavot, Beadnell, & Simoni, 2014; Yancey et al., 2003). Experiences of sexual minority women often contrasted with prevalent sport-specific stereotypes typically refered to as the 'athletic lesbian' trope (Eng, 2008). This stereotype suggests that sexual minority women are (1) competitive and, (2) clique-ish (Bowen et al., 2009; Brittain et al., 2006; Kauer & Krane, 2006). Studies suggest that these stereotypes are potential deterrents for non-athletic sexual minority women to engage in sport and exercise (Bowen et al., 2009; Brittain et al., 2006). The stereotype that sexual minority women are more athletically talented than their heterosexual counterparts often generated high levels of expectations for success that were considered unrealistic and stressful for many sexual minority women (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b).

At present, the majority of the literature focused on homonormative representations of adult lesbian ciswomen and gay cismen (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). There is a relative dearth of literature on bisexual, queer, and transgender individuals engaging in exercise. By glossing over bisexual experiences, researchers systematically contribute to a phenomenon known as bi-erasure or bi-invisibility (Elia, 2014). Findings from the few studies that acknowledged bisexual experiences suggested that exercise may be incredibly complicated with respect to the gender of the participant as well as the gender of their current partner (Bowen et al., 2009; Laska et al., 2015; VanKim et al., 2015). With regard to transgender adults, it has been found that locker and changing rooms in fitness centers are particularly anxiety-inducing (Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017a). In a study comparing transgender (n = 33) and cisgender (n = 47) adults, it was also found that transgender adults were less physically active, had a more negative self-image, and

self-reported lower social support than their cisgender peers (Muchicko, Lepp, & Barkley, 2014). However, it should be noted that of the few studies including transgender experiences in exercise, the majority have focused on 'gender-conforming' transgender people who have traversed across the binary without necessarily attempting to disrupt it (Caudwell, 2014; Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017).

To address the dearth of exercise literature with BTQ+ representation, I conducted a thematic exploration of self-identified LGBTQ+ adult (N = 42) experiences with physical activity through a series of focus groups (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). Focus group participants identified as a variety of sexualities (12 queer, 11 gay, 9 lesbian, 6 bisexual, 2 polysexual, 1 asexual, and 1 questioning) and gender identities (16 cismen, 15 ciswomen, 5 non-binary, 2 genderfluid, 2 transmen, 1 transwoman, and 1 agender individual). Complex, intersecting minority identities of sexuality, gender, race, class, and disability greatly influenced all of the participants' experiences within physical activity contexts (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). Although the focus group discussion guide focused on exercise contexts, participants' frequently referenced previous negative, formative experiences in sport and PE when explaining their current aversion towards exercise and physical activity (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). All trans-identified focus group participants (n = 11) also viewed locker room and changing rooms in fitness facilities as traumatic spaces (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). Few focus group participants felt safe engaging in physical activity and those that did had previous, positive experiences with LGBTQ+-friendly role-models (e.g., PE teachers, coaches, personal trainers, etc.) or had access to an explicitly LGBTQ+ inclusive gym (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). However, the narrow age range of participants (22-32 years; M = 28 years) implies that these results may be indicative of a specific generation. Given that the LGBTQ+ rights social movements began in the 1970s, there

exists a large generational divide among LGBTQ+ communities. This generational divide is further widened by the relatively rapid pace of overall social change associated with LGBTQ+ representation and inclusion over the past few decades (Flores, 2019).

Over time, western society's understanding of LGBTQ+ identities have shifted away from rejection and slowly towards tolerance (Renn, 2010). Increased societal understanding has helped diverse LGBTQ+ identities become more visible as they are gradually integrated from the margins (Renn, 2010). Future research needs to explore these processes of changing identity politics and their effects on physical activity participation. Considering this, my dissertation will explore all gender identities and sexualities across LGBTQ+ communities. By engaging with the full spectrum of identities under the umbrella term LGBTQ+, I acknowledge that there is a risk of perpetuating the assumption that a coherent LGBTQ+ collective exists (Caudwell, 2014b). However, in not limiting my research to one specific community, I am able to engage with the hierarchy of invisibility that seems to relegate the remaining "BTQ+" to the sidelines.

Theoretical Background

This research program will be guided by the Minority Stress Model and navigated through an intersectional framework.

The Minority Stress Model

The minority stress model (MSM) is a well-established psychological model that was originally developed to describe the complex experience of sexual minorities (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Meyer & Frost, 2013; Meyer, 2003, 2015). Over time, the MSM has been expanded, adapted, and applied to transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals (Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Breslow et al., 2015; Hendricks & Testa, 2012). This broader application of the MSM demonstrates that the

MSM has the potential to incorporate the increasing fluidity of sexualities and gender identities as they emerge in society. The MSM implies the existence of unique, psychological minority stressors that ultimately have a detrimental effect on mental and physical health (Meyer & Frost, 2013; Meyer, 2003).

Within the MSM, minority stressors vary in the degree to which they are distal or proximal to the individual. Distal stressors are external to an individual and can be caused by discrimination, victimization, and stigmatization on institutional as well as personal levels (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a). For self-identifying LGBTQ+ persons, distal stressors can be acute or chronic (Meyer, 2003). Acute distal stressors typically encompass singular events, like instances of verbal or physical violence in the form of hate crimes (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002). Chronic distal stressors such as familial rejection of ones' sexuality and/or gender identity can result in long-standing, prevalent effects such as homelessness (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012). Discrimination based on sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression are the most described LGBTQ+ distal stressors within physical activity contexts (e.g., Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009; Denison et al., 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). For example, within sport, LGBTQ+ discrimination enacted by teammates can take the form of verbal insults, threats, bullying, and physical assaults (Denison et al., 2020; Denison & Kitchen, 2015).

Proximal stressors rely on an individual's perceptions and are subsequently internal to an individual (Meyer, 2003). For individuals in LGBTQ+ communities, proximal stressors include the internalization of sexual and gender prejudice, the concealment of ones' own sexual or gender identity, and the development of expectations for future prejudice to occur (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a). For example, research has repeatedly demonstrated how internalized homophobia

(i.e., negative feelings directed at the self because of a non-heterosexual identity) is related to depression and anxiety among sexual minorities (for a review see Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Additionally, internalized transphobia (i.e., negative feelings directed at the self because of a trans identity) and expectations of rejection have also been associated with suicide ideation among gender minorities (Testa et al., 2017). Despite being pernicious LGBTQ+ proximal stressors, the concealment of one's sexuality and gender identity are commonly used by LGBTQ+ students and athletes as protective strategies to avoid discrimination or rejection. For example, a retrospective study exploring the experiences of transgender students (N = 9) in physical education found that all participants used identity concealment strategies to avoid being harassed during class (Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, Pérez-Samaniego, & Fuentes-Miguel, 2018).

In my previous work, I explored the relationship between LGBTQ+ proximal stressors and motivation to participate in physical activity through an expansion of self-determination theory with the MSM (Herrick, Rocchi, Sweet, & Duncan, 2021). Given that self-determination theory acknowledges how social environments can influence psychological need satisfaction, proximal stressors were incorporated as an indicator of the social environment to better represent LGBTQ+ experiences. Using an online cross-sectional survey completed by 778 self-identified LGBTQ+ adults, structural equation modeling analyses demonstrated how proximal stressors are negatively associated with psychological need satisfaction in physical activity (Herrick et al., 2021). Although our findings were most likely tempered through the use of measures of LGBTQ+ stressors that were not specific to physical activity contexts, this study provided preliminary evidence that LGBTQ+ proximal stressors may complicate the satisfaction of three

basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) in physical activity, which in turn could negatively influence motivation to participate (Herrick et al., 2021).

Within the MSM, the effects of LGBTQ+ stressors can be buffered by one's ability to survive and thrive in the face of adversity which is defined as resilience (Meyer, 2015). Resilience is categorized into two distinct types: (a) individual resilience and (b) community resilience (Meyer, 2015). Individual resilience refers to the qualities a person may possess that can help them successfully cope with stress (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, etc.), however it has been acknowledged that "by noting individuals *can* be resilient, we risk expecting that individuals *ought* to be resilient" (Meyer, 2015, p. 211). For example, hardiness (i.e., the personal attributes that allow individuals to persevere when others would likely succumb to defeat) has been identified as a critical aspect of resilience among LGBTQ+ adults (Smith & Gray, 2009). Contrastingly, community resilience refers to the norms, values, role-models, social resources, and social supports available to a person to help them cope with stress (Meyer, 2015). Community resilience can be related to social identity and affiliation with LGBTQ+ communities, however it is important to note that not all LGBTQ+ persons will benefit equally because of the structural inequalities within and across LGBTQ+ communities (Meyer, 2015). For example, a study exploring how the relationship between microaggressions, stress, and health among LGBTQ+ people of colour (N = 11) found that the majority of participants felt disconnected from either their racial or ethnic community because of their sexuality or gender identity as well as disconnected from LGBTQ+ communities because of their racial or ethnic identity (Ghabrial, 2017). Using semi-structured interviews, a phenomenological investigation of resilience in response to a traumatic life event among transgender people of colour (N = 11) also

found that participants' resilience was deeply connected to their families, culture, and spirituality (Singh & McKleroy, 2011).

Although resilience has been identified as a key conceptual framework within LGBTQ+ health research, more research is needed to better understand unique LGBTQ+ resilience(s) across a variety of contexts to better tailor health promotion strategies (for reviews see Colpitts & Gahagan, 2016; Szymanski & Gonzalez, 2020). Qualitative research with LGBTQ+ participants in physical activity, even when guided by research questions focused on minority stress, commonly present narratives of resistance or resilience (e.g., Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, Pérez-Samaniego, & Fuentes-Miguel, 2018; Herrick & Duncan, 2018a; Herrick et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2018). For example, I conducted a case study exploring the experiences of a transgender synchronized figure skater named Mason (pseudonym). Throughout the interviews (N = 8) with Mason, his teammates, his team manager, and his past and present coaches, it was apparent how resilient Mason had to be to continue skating (Herrick et al., 2020). In addition to being a university student and skating competitively, Mason was also in the thralls of navigating his own gender journey, struggling with feelings of gender dysphoria, experiencing transphobia, and trying to access gender-affirming healthcare (Herrick et al., 2020). However, Mason's perseverance or individual resilience coupled with his community resilience bolstered by supportive coaches and teammates, enabled Mason to continue skating throughout his transition without feeling the need to quit (Herrick et al., 2020). However, despite prevalent narratives of LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity research, LGBTQ+ resilience as a concept and framework has yet to be explicitly explored within physical activity contexts.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework and praxis refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, and sexuality (Cho et al., 2013). The term intersectionality was first used by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). Throughout two seminal essays, Crenshaw argued that the experience of being a Black woman could not be understood in terms of being Black or a being woman, but that it must include interactions between two identities that frequently reinforce as well as contest each other (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw's signature work on intersectionality was published during a significant juncture when marginalized groups challenged the power structures and epistemological authority within academia, and subsequently, represents a turning point that highlights the shifting relationships among activist and academic communities. Throughout the 1990s, intersectionality as a concept, theory, and approach gained prominence, particularly as it was further developed by the writings of Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (Collins, 2002).

The interrelated core constructs of intersectionality are as follows: (a) relationality, (b) power, (c), social inequality, (d) social context, (e) complexity, and (f) social justice (Collins, 2019). The idea of relationality is essential to intersectionality and focuses on the interconnections and relational processes between social categorizations. It is through dynamic relational processes that all systems of power are constituted and maintained in society. Power or more specifically, intersecting power relations, produce social divisions and categorizations that are unlikely to be adequately understood in isolation from one another. In other words, all systems of power and oppression are inextricably interrelated. For example, heterosexism, cissexism, and sexism are all interrelated through the underlying organization of gender as a

binary construct (male vs. female) assigned at birth. Within this binary are implicit assumptions about heterosexual desire as well as gender roles in society, wherein masculinity is lauded and femininity is subjugated. Intersectionality also rejects the normalization of social inequality (e.g., race inequality, gender inequality, etc.) as natural and evitable, instead focusing on how power relations produce social inequalities. As a framework, intersectionality stresses the significance of social context for knowledge production within both academic and activist communities. Given that intersectional approaches are iterative and interactional, complexity is essential. It is generally understood within intersectionality that complex research questions may require equally complex methodologies. Social justice, the last core construct of intersectionality, is deeply embedded within the history of intersectionality as a critical theory and praxis. Although these are interconnected, core concepts of intersectionality, intersectional projects place varying degrees of emphasis on each one (Collins, 2019).

My research is focused on LGBTQ+ experiences in physical activity contexts and as such is primarily concerned with the intersection between heterosexism and cissexism. However, as my work is committed to garnering a nuanced understanding of diverse LGBTQ+ experiences, I also attend to other power systems such as sizeism, racism, and ableism that participants are simultaneously influenced by and influence within physical activity contexts. Bounding my research to specific, interrelated physical activity contexts (sports, physical education, and exercise) enables the exploration of how systems of power and relational processes between social categorizations shape different physical activity contexts and experiences within them. All my work is transformative, meaning that it is driven by my desire to create social change, equality, and justice for LGBTQ+ communities within physical activity contexts and as such aligns with the orientation of intersectionality toward social justice.

Rationale and Purpose

LGBTQ+ communities experience a higher prevalence of chronic diseases as well as physical and mental health concerns, most of which can be mitigated through regular participation in physical activity. However, physical activity discourses, contexts, and practices often complicate or exclude LGBTQ+ participation. Given that physical activity contexts, namely sport, physical education, and exercise, are deeply interconnected, it's imperative to understand how experiences within and across these contexts influence LGBTQ+ experiences and perceptions of physical activity. Therefore, the overall purpose of my dissertation was to develop a deeper understanding of how previous and current experiences within and across physical activity contexts (sport, physical education, and exercise) influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity among self-identified LGBTQ+ individuals. To address my overarching dissertation purpose, I conducted a series of four studies spanning across physical activity contexts. My first study (Chapter Three) sought to explore LGBTQ+ experiences within locker and changing rooms, as these architecturally- and socially-gendered spaces act as key access points that traverse most physical activity contexts. My second study (Chapter Four) aimed to explore how interpersonal relationships within sports influenced LGBTQ+ athletes sporting experiences, as well as their later in life perceptions of physical activity. My third study (Chapter Five) is a systematic scoping review of LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education. My final study (Chapter Six) explored experiences and conceptions of LGBTQ+ resilience within and across physical activity contexts, with an emphasis on exercise contexts. Collectively, these studies shed light on the complicated relationships between LGBTQ+ experiences in sport, physical education, and exercise, as well as how experiences in one physical activity context can influence attitudes towards others.

Chapter Three: Study 1

Locker-room experiences among LGBTQ+ adults

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Abstract

Locker rooms operate as pivotal access points to physical activity across sports, physical education, and fitness facilities. However, locker rooms are predicated on cis-heterosexual assumptions that can be isolating to LGBTQ+ individuals. Using an online cross-sectional survey, LGBTQ+ adults ($N = 1{,}067$) were asked open-response questions about their past and present locker-room experiences. The resulting texts were independently coded by two researchers using thematic analysis and compared. All discrepancies were discussed with and rectified by a third researcher who acted as a critical peer. The results present distinct experiences across three intersecting aspects of embodiment: self-conscious—"I hate(d) being seen," sexual transgression, and gender transgression. The findings provide insight into how harmful LGBTQ+ stereotypes influence locker-room experiences and support the redesign of locker rooms to challenge the binary organization of these spaces.

Keywords: exercise; gender; physical activity; sexuality; transgender

Introduction

Physical activity takes places in a variety of settings, such as physical education, fitness facilities, and organized sports—all of which have locker rooms as critical access points (Fusco, 2006a). Locker rooms are organized according to widespread assumptions that everyone is: (a) cisgender or cis, where your gender identity matches the sex you were assigned at birth, and (b) heterosexual (Cover, 2003; Hekma, 1998). Typically, facilities only provide two locker rooms strictly coded via the gender binary of men's vs. women's spaces (Eckes, 2017; Sykes, 2011). The division of locker rooms is justified through heterosexual standards that presume men and women cannot share spaces of non-sexualized nudity (Fusco, 2006b, 2012; Sykes, 2011). Additionally, locker rooms are governed by the implicit understanding that patrons must adhere to a variety of conventions, from hygienic to behavioral standards (Fusco, 2006a). Subsequently, locker rooms have fostered a culture of surveillance where bodies and identities that deviate from a narrow range recognized as 'normal' or 'healthy' (i.e., cisgender heterosexual able-bodied, etc.) are subject to increased scrutiny from fellow patrons (Fusco, 2006c; Sykes, 2011).

LGBTQ+ is an acronym used to acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other communities that do not adhere to cis-heterosexist assumptions (Griffith et al., 2017). Transgender is an umbrella term that can be used to describe any number of experiences, expressions, and identities that are not classified as cisgender (Davidson, 2007). LGBTQ+ encompasses a range of identities and expressions that span across gender and sexuality. Heterosexuality simultaneously perpetuates and is predicated on the gender binary (Jackson, 2006) meaning that if you are assigned female at birth it is assumed that you will be sexually attracted to men and if you are assigned male at birth it is assumed you will be sexually attracted to women. Operating under the prevalent assumption that heterosexuality is the 'default' sexual

orientation, sexuality is inherently linked with sex to the point of conflation. In contrast to the rigidity of cis-heterosexuality, LGBTQ+ lived experiences can represent a multiplicity of and fluidity between expressions of sexuality and gender.

Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ defy these widespread cis-heterosexual assumptions and subsequently experience discrimination, stigmatization, and marginalization in a variety of contexts (Dermer, Smith, & Barto, 2010; Subhrajit, 2014). One such context is physical activity, where discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity complicates or excludes participation (e.g., Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, Pérez-Samaniego, & Fuentes-Miguel, 2018; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Bryan, Shiu, & Emlet, 2017; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2010). Locker rooms, in particular, operate as spaces where limited tolerance for and rejection of suspected or openly LGBTQ+ patrons is expected (Eng, 2008; Sykes, 2011). To maintain the implicit cis-heterosexuality of locker rooms, LGBTQ+ individuals are often perceived as predacious and persecuted accordingly (Eng, 2008; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). In 2017, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) conducted their biennial National School Climate Survey to document the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ middle and high school students (N = 23,001). Findings from this study show that 40% of LGBTQ+ students across the United States avoided locker rooms because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe accessing them (Joseph G Kosciw et al., 2018). Overall, locker rooms are perceived as one of the most traumatic spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals and pose a significant barrier to LGBTQ+ participation in physical activity (Fusco, 2006c; Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, & Murtagh, 2019; Jones et al., 2017b; Sykes, 2009).

Shifting societal conceptions of masculinity and increased acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in Western society are gradually influencing locker room cultures to be more

inclusive of LGBTQ+ patrons (Lewis et al., 2017; Short, 2007), most notably for lesbian and gay athletes (e.g., Magrath, Anderson, & Roberts, 2015; Mann & Krane, 2018). For example, interviews with 22 high-level cis-male soccer players revealed that heterosexual athletes were not concerned about sharing a locker room with a gay teammate (Magrath et al., 2015). Similarly, a study of cis-female intercollegiate athletes demonstrated that team sports are transitioning towards the acceptance of diverse sexual identities (Mann & Krane, 2018a). Although team sport cultures may be trending towards inclusion, locker rooms are not limited to organized sporting contexts. The qBody Project was conducted to explore the retrospective experiences of physical education through interviews with 39 adults that self-identified as having queer bodies (Sykes, 2009, 2011). Memories of locker rooms in physical education were found to be disquieting and especially traumatic for transgender individuals (Sykes, 2011). Recent studies focused on transgender experiences within physical activity have specifically problematized locker rooms for dissuading transgender participation (e.g., Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017a). A study involving focus groups with LGBTQ+ adults ($N = 42$) also found that negative childhood memories of locker rooms influenced how LGBTQ+ adults interpreted and (dis)engaged from these spaces (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). Despite these findings and reports calling for more inclusive locker rooms (e.g., Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005; Cunningham, Buzuvis, & Mosier, 2018) limited progress towards LGBTQ+ inclusion has been made.

Given the breadth of lived experiences that fall under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, this study sought to represent and further understand the multiplicity and diversity of experiences LGBTQ+ individuals have within locker rooms. Subsequently, this study sought to answer the following questions using qualitative responses from a large-scale sample of LGBTQ+ adults: (a) what are

the experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ+ adults in locker room spaces? And (b) how do these experiences influence overall physical activity experiences?

Methods

Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

This research has been primarily conducted through the lens of the first author's experiences as a self-identified white settler queer cis-femme. The first author's research is paradigmatically situated in critical theory, where in they subscribe to a historical realist ontology which assumes that realities are shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic values that determine which realities will be privileged within a research context (Mertens, 2007; Scotland, 2012). Within critical theory epistemology, knowledge claims are: (a) socially constructed, (b) influenced by power relations, and (c) inherently political (Scotland, 2012). Their transformative research has an emancipatory purpose, with this study focused on spreading awareness of LGBTQ+ locker room experiences and critiquing exclusionary practices embedded within locker rooms.

Questionnaire Development

This study received institutional approval from the McGill University Research Ethics Board (REB-II) and involves an analysis of qualitative written responses collected from a multi-component survey that explored a theoretical model for understanding how stresses associated with being LGBTQ+ relate to motivation for physical activity (Herrick, Rocchi, Sweet, & Duncan, 2019). Prior to launching the multi-component survey, its contents were discussed in a series of four focus groups by self-identified LGBTQ+ adults (N = 22) who emphasized the need to incorporate open-ended questions. For example, Christian (a 30-year-old white queer agender

individual[1]) said, "these 'rate my life on a scale of 1 to 5' questions only show part of the picture. I want—no, need spaces to really explain my experiences." Through these in-depth discussions, participants posed, deliberated, and refined several open-ended questions that they wanted to be incorporated into the survey.

Upon the conclusion of the four focus groups, the survey was modified to include seven optional open-ended questions (see Table 1) dispersed throughout the survey to explore aspects of LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity contexts. The topics addressed and wording of the questions were discussed and agreed upon within the focus groups that originally suggested their inclusion. All focus group participants (N = 22) felt strongly about the addition of one open-ended question specifically asking about their experiences with locker rooms. Subsequently, the question "how would you describe your current and/or past experiences with changing rooms or locker rooms?" was integrated into the survey.

Participants

Eligible participants (a) were 18 years or older, (b) self-identified as LGBTQ+, (c) were able to read and write in English, and (d) had access to the Internet. Data were collected about participant's age, ethnicity, highest level of education, annual household income, relationship status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and how many years they have publicly identified as LGBTQ+. Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic information associated with our participants.

Procedure

[1]Participants various identities are presented without being separated by comas to illustrate the complex intersection of a multitude of identities. Although presented in a standardized order, we would like to acknowledge that there is no implicit hierarchy of significance to our participants identities.

Participants were recruited online through public posts on LGBTQ+ community groups, LGBTQ+ campus groups, and LGBTQ+ affiliated Facebook groups based in North America (I. Meyer & Wilson, 2009). Interested individuals were directed to an online consent form detailing the study itself, the survey components, and their rights as participants. Participants that acknowledged that they had read the consent form and submitted their informed online consent were then redirected to the online survey. No incentive was offered to participants. The online survey was hosted on Qualtrics and responses were collected for six months, from August 2017 to January 2018.

Analysis

Data collection yielded responses about locker room experiences from 1, 067 participants which ranged from four to over 1, 000 words. Despite there being a specific question dedicated to locker rooms, participants also discussed their experiences with locker rooms in response to other open-ended questions. Given the breadth of responses, we opted to use inductive thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2013) to code patterned meanings observed across the large number of submitted responses (Smith & Sparkes, 2005). Before coding, the first author and a research assistant independently read all of the submitted responses twice, to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the contents of the responses. Then the two coders proceeded to independently code the responses to one question at a time. The coders were in frequent contact throughout the process to discuss and ultimately ensure consensus between codes. After each question was coded, discussions were held to explore the relationships and boundaries between the themes across all previously coded questions. These discussions facilitated an iterative analysis where, despite being coded sequentially, each question and its responses were considered as a part of a whole. The resulting candidate themes were then

reviewed by the second author who acted as a critical peer to help ensure the transparency and credibility of the results (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Both authors then engaged in collaborative discussion and came to the consensus on how the results should be presented in a way that is reflective of the data as a whole.

Results

When recalling experiences with locker rooms, participants (N = 1,067) commonly referred to aspects of their own embodiment to situate and contextualize their responses. The majority of participants expressed some level of discomfort accessing change rooms or locker rooms. Feelings of insecurity within locker rooms seemed to be related to participants' body image, sexuality, gender expression, and gender identity. Through our data analysis we generated three themes that detail how different aspects of embodiment influenced LGBTQ+ experiences within locker rooms: (a) self-conscious: "I hate(d) being seen", (b) sexual transgression, and (c) gender transgression. All of the responses from participants are presented how they were submitted, meaning that the use of parentheses is a part of the responses from the participants. Any modifications made by authors (i.e., the redaction of specific places) are marked with the use of square brackets.

Self-conscious: "I hate(d) being seen."

Locker rooms operate as sites where the naked body can be subjected to the gaze of others. For some, the nudity expressed and expected within locker rooms was intimidating and complicated to navigate. Theo, a 32-year-old white pansexual genderqueer individual, explained how, "when I use the changerooms at the gym, I feel very intimidated by all of the nudity." For some participants, these feelings of awkwardness revolving around nudity were viewed as separate from their sexuality. Eric, a 23-year-old white gay cisman, noted how "I am

uncomfortable in locker rooms, not so much because I'm gay, but because I'd just rather not be naked in front of strangers." Participants also grappled with how the nudity displayed in locker rooms inherently reinforced fatphobia and other iterations of body shaming such as thin shaming. For example, Timber (a 25-year-old mixed race bisexual cisman) explained how, "I'm stick skinny, so I don't like changing publicly. People used to call me Skeletor—which doesn't even make sense because he's pretty buff, but regardless, I still feel insecure about the way my bones stick out." Fatphobia and body shaming practices, for some participants, transcended sexuality and gender as Laura, a 24-year-old white asexual ciswoman, explained "I'm always a little afraid of being judged for my body, but that's not 100% a matter of being LGBTQ+."

Negative connotations associated with being overweight or obese seemed to be exacerbated for participants when attempting to use locker rooms, assumedly due to the expected nudity. Cynthia, a 34-year-old white bisexual ciswoman, noted that, "locker rooms are terrible, but it's not because I'm bi—it's because I'm fat. I feel watched and judged in those spaces. I hate(d) being seen." Participants commonly cited their current or past body image issues as the basis for their feelings of self-consciousness when using locker rooms. Kayden, a 22-year-old white bisexual non-binary femme-centered individual with a slight mobility impairment, expressed how, "I've never tried to use a locker room designated for anything other than the gender I was assigned at birth, but I've always felt shy to change in front of others because of my body image issues." Within locker rooms, symbolic associations between fat and femininity (in opposition to athleticism and masculinity) became extremely pronounced for some participants. For Mateo, a 32-year-old Hispanic queer cisman, locker rooms were interpreted as arenas for his masculinity to be scrutinized by other patrons:

> I still find locker rooms intimidating and try to avoid them when I can. It feels like a space to judge one another. While I'm not overweight, I have felt that because I've been working on endurance training sports and not muscle definition (an arbitrary marker of masculinity), I'm being judged for my lack of performing as a "man".

Despite not identifying as overweight, Mateo still felt that in not striving towards muscularity he was deviating from traditional conceptions of masculinity and therefore subject to judgement. Everett, a 22-year-old white queer cisman and recreational dancer echoed these sentiments by expressing how, "I have never liked locker rooms. I have always felt like the biggest guy in the room, and not in the good macho way but in the fat sissy way."

Although some participants viewed their body image as being somewhat independent from their LGBTQ+ identity, some participants did not. Adam, a 24-year-old white gay cisman discussed how "I'm only shy in locker rooms because of my weight—it's complicated for gay men. Well… it's complicated if you're gay and you're not muscular and hot." Many male-identifying participants spoke to the challenges associated with being measured by other locker room patrons against rigid standards of attractiveness for gay men. For example, Elijah (a 28-year-old white gay cisman) explained how, "I'm skinny straight but gay fat. I have to have way higher standards for the way my body looks because I'm gay, when they're actually low for my health." Among gay male communities, great emphasis can be placed on being thin and muscular in order to be considered conventionally attractive. Carter (a 23-year-old Middle Eastern gay cisman) described how, "I feel under a microscope in locker rooms—I'm a chubby gay man of colour. I'm trying to feel more confident but it's a difficult journey when gay culture says that I need to be jacked, lean, and blonde."

Participants spoke to their experiences attempting to navigate the nuanced intersection between their body image, sexuality, and gender. “I’m overweight and visibly queer,” explained Yael, a 25-year-old white queer nonbinary individual, “locker rooms are nerve-wracking to navigate. Do I not talk to anyone? Do I hide in a stall, so I don’t show my body or see others’ bodies? Am I invading a space for women to be non-sexualized?” Similarly, Leah, a 31-year-old white lesbian ciswoman explained how:

> I think my body image and LGBTQ+ identity are connected. There is nothing wrong with being a gay overweight woman. It’s weird but my lesbian-ness helped me accept my body image…well, in some spaces. Locker rooms can make me feel like it’s simultaneously not acceptable to be fat or to be gay.

For some participants that self-identified as a visible minority, intersections between race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality influenced their conceptions of body image. Roxanne, a 27-year-old black lesbian ciswoman, explained how “for me, my body image, my LGBTQ+ identity, and my blackness are themselves connected. I’m a black fat gay girl—my experiences and feelings about my body are going to reflect that.” Ari, a 23-year-old black queer ciswoman, described how:

> Society sees black women as more aggressive and less womanly than white women. Lesbians are immediately considered more masculine than straight girls. Fat people are seen as just lazy and gross. And here I am just trying to live my best life as all three, but I can’t help but feel like I’m put on display in locker rooms. I just want to change into my sports bra and get a little bit of a sweat on and everyone just seems to stare.

Harmful stereotypes and blatant societal misconceptions seemed to greatly impact how fellow locker room patrons viewed participants' bodies, as well as how participants viewed their own bodies.

Over time a few participants were able to find the confidence to challenge their own insecurities as well as the perceived reactions of other locker room patrons. Sarah, a 45-year-old white lesbian ciswoman, now frequents her local gym and explained how "I feel more comfortable with my body than I did when I was younger. I no longer feel obligated to hide or be ashamed of it. I'm old—everyone can just deal with it". Some older and confident participants shifted the onus associated with bodily shame onto other locker room patrons (and by extension society at large). These sentiments were also expressed by Kore, a 44-year-old Indigenous pansexual genderfluid individual:

> I have absolutely no fear of showing my body in locker rooms. I did as a young adult but now I have thankfully hit the age where I just don't care anymore. If people don't like it—if they don't like me, for whatever inexplicable reason—if they don't like the way I look, well then, they ought not to be looking at me. It's as plain as that.

Sexual Transgression

Locker rooms are organized along the gender binary to dissuade unwanted heterosexual advances and generate spaces of non-sexualized nudity. Individuals that do not adhere to heterosexuality, in using locker rooms, transgress the implicit heterosexual desire that maintains the binary division of these spaces. As Taylor, a 27-year-old white queer genderfluid person, aptly explains:

> I felt, especially as a teen, and continue to feel that my presence in locker rooms is a transgression. These spaces are sex segregated and the perceived reason is sexual: to

> keep people's attraction separated. As a queer person, I transgress against this system in varied ways, and it causes me discomfort and makes me feel unsafe.

The sexual transgression of locker rooms experienced by participants was informed by the pervasive stereotyping of gay men as effeminate and lesbian women as masculine. Subsequently, two prevalent stereotypes emerged: (a) the predatory lesbian and (b) the effeminate and vulnerable gay man.

Predatory Lesbian

Participants who identified as sexual minority women were stigmatized as being predatory, like Jenna (a 27-year-old white queer ciswoman) was "afraid of being perceived as an unwanted aggressor" within locker rooms. Across our survey, 217 self-identified sexual minority women communicated their experiences navigating and challenging this pervasive stereotype. Natasha, a 25-year-old white queer ciswoman recalled how, "throughout school I was very afraid of being considered predatory and this fear of being the 'predatory lesbian' has followed me into adulthood, even in contexts not related to exercise or change rooms." The "stereotype of the predatory lesbian" as titled by Blaire (a 23-year-old white lesbian ciswoman), can be fueled by homophobic locker room talk that seems to be present across physical education, sport, and physical activity settings. For Emily, an 18-year-old white lesbian ciswoman:

> The locker room isn't a good environment anywhere, sports, PE—it doesn't matter. Girls make jokes about lesbians, and there is always an implied predatory aspect to these stupid jokes. I never feel safe changing near those girls and that's a little ironic considering they'd apparently feel the same if they knew I was gay.

Although Emily was speaking to her relatively recent high school experiences, older participants also called upon their high school experiences to help explain their current feelings towards

locker rooms and by extension, physical activity. Like many participants, Joanne (a 23-year-old white queer ciswoman) tried to minimize the amount of nudity she displayed as well as observed while changing for physical education class. Joanne recalled how, "in high school I was so worried about using locker rooms that I'd literally change in a shower so I could be alone. I think since then I've associated doing exercise with the annoyance of taking for-bloody-ever getting changed." Although Joanne was, and to some degree still is, frustrated by her experiences changing in the shower cubicles, Ava (a 30-year-old mixed race bisexual ciswoman) calmly explained how "I always change in a stall. I do it to be respectful of the other women there. I'm not comfortable, but I'm not uncomfortable—I'm awkward, but that's just how it is/how it's always been." For Ava, changing in a stall was framed as a prerequisite for, instead of a hindrance to, sharing the locker room with other, assumedly straight, women. Alternatively, Hazel, a 28-year-old mixed race queer ciswoman and long-distance runner changed separately from her teammates until they explicitly invited her to change with them:

> I changed in the washroom because I didn't want to be seen as a creep, but in grade 12 all of the girls on the team confronted me and told me they didn't care that I was gay. They said that they didn't need me to go into the washroom to change and that they would prefer that I changed with them so as not to interrupt our conversation.

For some participants, previous locker room experiences engaging with these stereotypes were formative to how they currently view and engage with locker rooms. Childhood experiences of discrimination while changing for physical education class were found to be especially poignant for participants. Karen, a 27-year-old East Asian bisexual ciswoman, recalled how "my high school classmates forced me to change separately because they were worried, I might sexually assault them since I was bisexual. I still feel like a trespasser in locker rooms and

it's been like ten fucking years." For Cassady (a 25-year-old white queer ciswoman), her previous locker room experiences have culminated in her avoidance of physical activity into adulthood:

> When I came out, I was bullied mercilessly in gym class. The changing room was the worst. No adulthood supervision—so kids are free to be as nasty as they want. Locking me in the stall because I was a 'pervy dyke", so I had to crawl on the floor to get out for class. Putting my gym strip in the toilet just because. For many kids, myself included, gym class is their only time to participate in physical activity. I'm an adult now and I actively refuse to subject myself to gym settings because I don't want to use a locker room ever again.

Derogatory stereotypes are used throughout physical education settings to intimidate and tyrannize sexual minority women. Interconnected to and conflated with the stereotype of the predatory lesbian, is the stereotype of the promiscuous bisexual woman. Julia, a 21-year-old white bisexual ciswoman and Quidditch player explained how, "I've definitely had girls who were very uncomfortable in change rooms with me—thinking I would be attracted to them if I saw them half naked. I'm bisexual but that doesn't mean I'm attracted to every person I see!" Similarly, Reese, a 23-year-old black bisexual ciswoman expressed that, "when I came out as bi, I was simultaneously viewed as threatening and as competition—girls didn't know how to react in the locker room, so I think they just defaulted to being jerks."

In particular, masculine-presenting female-identified participants were subjected to additional scrutiny within locker rooms. Leighton, a 36-year-old white lesbian ciswoman reported that:

> Locker rooms can be very intimidating to anyone who doesn't conform to stereotypically feminine dress or looks. I am almost 6 feet tall, have a large frame, short hair, and am most comfortable in men's sizes/styles of clothing. I frequently get looks when entering women's locker rooms or washrooms, so I am reluctant to join gyms or pools.

Most masculine-presenting female-identified participants were worried about being told that they are in the wrong locker room by a patron. For example, Evelyn, 25-year-old Indigenous queer ciswoman described how "I've been told that I'm in the wrong change room on multiple occasions, particularly at pools, because I present as quite masculine despite being female." Addison, a 50-year-old butch-presenting white queer ciswoman explained how, "gender policing in locker rooms still happens. I've had security called on me and been escorted out several times in recent years." Many masculine-presenting or androgynous female-identified participants used similar coping mechanisms within locker rooms to pre-emptively avoid being misgendered. Maeve, a 33-year-old white androgynous queer ciswoman and current weightlifter described how:

> I am always nervous in public washrooms/change rooms/locker rooms, etc. What I do to compensate is keep my head down, making sure not to look at anyone's body. I also try to speak to someone, small talk with strangers or with a friend, and I use the highest register of my voice to indicate that I'm both female and in the right change/washroom. I find it really stressful, and have had a few (not many, but they've stuck with me) interactions where people have tried to physically remove me from the women's change room or have made comments or otherwise indicated their confusion/discomfort with my presence.

Anaya, a 29-year-old East Asian butch-presenting lesbian ciswoman, described how "when I must deal with changing rooms I try and go in with an obviously feminine-presenting woman friend, so she provides 'cover' for my existence." Some participants, like Valerie, a 27-year-old white soft butch lesbian ciswoman and current recreational softball player were able to find locker rooms later in life where their masculine gender expression did not position them as a target for judgemental strangers:

> Post high school, I was able to express my masculine side more, but this made me feel that people were staring when I was in the locker rooms. I have always tried to conceal that I'm a lesbian in sports situations, so my teammates aren't afraid I'm attracted to them, but recently I've been very happy playing in an all-gay softball league—so that's been a big weight off. Changing isn't a big deal anymore.

Thankfully, some sporting contexts are more inclusive of sexual minority female athletes and can operate as a refuge for sexual minority women. Everleigh, an 18-year-old white bisexual ciswoman and intercollegiate rugby player explained how, "strangers may think it's weird to change near me but that's pretty much it. All of my teammates are more than okay with it. It's not a big deal." For some athletes, their team and subsequently their team locker room were incredibly inclusive. Fiona, a 23-year-old white queer ciswoman and intercollegiate hockey player explained how, "on my team, it's flipped—if anything you might get singled out if you're not accepting of lesbians on the team and in the changing room." Although some participants spoke to inclusive and welcoming team locker room experiences, it is important to note that this was not always the case. For example, Kinsley (a 24-year-old Caribbean queer ciswoman) and recently retired basketball player shared similar experiences:

> I was quite hesitant as a teen to come out because I feared being ostracized in the changeroom before/after practice. I would try to not make others uncomfortable by changing either alone in a stall or much earlier before practice to ensure no rumors would be spread about me being creepy in the changeroom. I still have fears associated with using public locker rooms, but despite my fears I have continued to enjoy many different types of physical activity.

Although participants may struggle with varied feelings and experiences of embodiment within locker rooms, some participants like Kinsley persevere to engage in physical activity. Ruby, an 18-year-old white lesbian ciswoman also expressed how, "same-sex locker rooms used to stress me out. I was afraid girls would think I was looking at them if they found out I was gay. I withdrew from sports for many reasons, my sexuality being one of them." However, Ruby was recently able to re-engage with her favourite sport, soccer through an LGBTQ+ community league. Like Ruby, some participants actively sought out LGBTQ+ inclusive physical activity spaces. Sadie, a 24-year-old white queer ciswoman described how, "I feel more comfortable in spaces that are inclusive. I keep an eye out for gyms that have rainbow flags and gender-neutral locker rooms—I attend an inclusive yoga studio and my Muay Thai studio has private change rooms."

Although the majority of participants described negative feelings of embodiment when using locker rooms, a few sexual minority women did not. For example, Joyce, a 49-year-old white pansexual ciswoman explained that, "I've never had an issue with locker rooms. I chat with the ladies, in that polite 'passing through' way, and we all dress and shower and keep to ourselves." A few participants felt confident in locker rooms, like Noah, a 27-year-old white lesbian ciswoman who enjoys weight-lifting and cardio sessions at her local gym. Noah asserted

how, “I feel great in locker rooms. I mean, it’s just a place to change—it’s only awkward if you make it awkward.”

Effeminate and Vulnerable Gay Man

For some participants who identified as sexual minority men, locker rooms were viewed, in the words of Matthew (a 30-year-old white pansexual cisman), as an “absolute hell—a place to be bullied or harassed.” Across 153 participants that self-identified as sexual minority men, a fear of or experiences of homophobia within locker rooms were conveyed. Bradley, a 23-year-old white gay cisman disclosed how “the locker room has been the space where I am the most shamed, harmed, and oppressed—always verbally and sometimes even physically threatened.” For some, like Devin (a 20-year-old white gay cisman), “locker rooms are definitely my most feared part of any type of physical activity.” Previous experiences with discrimination among participants in locker rooms commonly took place during adolescence in school or sport locker rooms. Grayson, a 27-year-old mixed race queer cisman described how:

> Locker rooms are terrible, but locker rooms as a kid are the worst. Especially in school, I was pegged as gay from the get-go and needlessly tormented. I distinctly remember having to change in a stall because some asshole classmates would always try to pull my boxers down or they would flash me.

Many participants described being verbally discriminated against in locker rooms. For example, Calvin, an 18-year-old white gay cisman reported how, “I’ve been called a lot of things—sissy, pussy, homo, gaylord, whatever. Teens aren’t creative and they’re cowardly. Locker rooms, fields, hallways—just wherever or whenever teachers aren’t there, that’s when the harassment picks up.” The lack of supervision within locker rooms was cited by a handful of participants as a contributing factor to their previous experiences with discrimination. Joel, a 25-year-old latinx

bisexual cisman explained how, “locker rooms are like a perfect storm for bullying in school. Testosterone, teenage insecurities, hormones, and no supervision? Of course, that’s where anti-gay slurs go flying. Of course, that’s where I was harassed.” For many, heterosexist locker room talk reinforced the idea that sexual minority men are not welcome. Jared, a 26-year-old white gay cisman, expressed these sentiments of dread:

> I am always worried about being perceived as gay/outed in locker rooms. I fear any eye-contact, or that a wrong look could lead to physical violence. I also overhear homophobic language, which reinforces locker rooms as a “straight” place that I must pass in, out of fear of violence.

For many participants, the fear for personal safety was exacerbated by frequently overhearing heterosexist locker room talk. As Bryce, a 26-year-old queer white cisman states, “I hate locker rooms. The gym-bro talk puts me on high alert, so I don’t give off the vibe that I’m checking people out. I don’t want to suffer some sort of retaliation from someone getting the wrong idea.” Commonplace heterosexist locker room or ‘gym-bro’ talk worked to position participants that self-identified as sexual minority men as outsiders. For example, Caleb, a 20-year-old mixed race Middle Eastern and white gay cisman, explained how, “I’ve always felt quite lonely in locker rooms. They’re such masculine spaces and I couldn’t engage in most of the conversations because they revolved around sex. It made me feel uneasy, isolated, and like I just couldn’t relate.” Participants often felt that locker room talk was a method used to perpetuate the ideal that men’s locker rooms are, in the words of Wesley (a 22-year-old white queer cisman), “extremely heteronormative and aggressively masculine spaces.” Carson, a 24-year-old white queer cisman explained:

> I do not feel comfortable accessing facilities like locker rooms in gyms. I perceive these spaces are hyper masculine and heterosexual, and don't see myself fitting it. I also fear a 'what-if' scenario that an innocent glance or look to another man could be perceived negatively and put me at risk of harm. I think rationally, I know that this and many of my other fears are unfounded, but they still become an easy excuse not to engage in exercise beyond queer spaces.

Within heteronormative spaces like locker rooms, participants were often afraid of being caught in the act of looking. Phillip, a 26-year-old Hispanic queer cisman described how, "I always look down in locker rooms, fearing that someone might think I'm watching them." Other participants, like William (a 31-year-old white gay cisman and crossfit enthusiast), welcomed the prospect of being subject to the male gaze: "sometimes I catch the odd gawker now and then, but it's of no real importance to me. It's a bit flattering to be honest." In short, the dynamics involved in the male gaze that permeates men's locker rooms were experienced in a variety of ways.

Hyper or toxic masculinity characterized men's locker rooms for many participants and was often seen as a way to legitimize heterosexual men's dominant or superior social standing and justify the marginalization of others. A common stereotype used to profile and subordinate participants was that sexual minority men are effeminate and therefore weaker than straight men. Dominique, an 18-year-old South Asian gay cisman described how:

> I am stereotyped as weak and feminine. I remember waiting every day for one cubicle inside our men's locker room to get into my gym clothes. Inside the change room, my classmates were constantly judging and picking on me—claiming I was checking them out. Every day I wanted to scream "I am gay, but I have standards!" But I couldn't, I would just wait for all of them to leave or I bow my head to pass by.

> They'd call me weak, call me a girl, ask where my sports bra is—I am gay, but I am not weak. I don't want that kind of treatment just because of some stereotype they have in mind. I feel disrespected every time people pull this shit, but I can't do anything. I am just by myself when they have an army.

This fear of being perceived as feminine and 'less than' was also something experienced by more masculine presenting sexual minority men. Ryan, a 28-year-old white queer cisman and cyclist explained how:

> I've always been uneasy in locker rooms—the intensely gendered nature of it, it's a very masculine, heteronormative, male space, so I'm pretty uncomfortable. I'm a masculine guy but I feel like if I were to exercise with another queer man and to "act all gay" in the locker room, it would be frowned upon. It's like I'm worried to be seen as gay—to be seen as feminine—in locker rooms because it'll paint a target on my back.

Sexual minority men can also reiterate a hierarchy of masculinity dictated by rigid standards of attractiveness. Kane, a 20-year-old white gay cisman who has a visual impairment expressed how:

> I can't stand locker rooms. The feeling of vulnerability in a room that literally smells of masculinity is overwhelming. I try to go to the gym when varsity teams aren't practicing and when it's as quiet as possible to avoid crowded locker rooms. I don't want people to think I'm staring when I literally can't. Most of the time, I don't really want to go to the gym, but at the same time, gay men have ridiculous body-image standards, so I feel like I have to, to stay fit.

When using men's locker rooms, several participants used passing as a vigilance tactic to facilitate their personal safety and were subsequently able to use locker rooms with little incidence. Derrick, a 36-year-old white gay cisman claimed that "I've never felt uncomfortable in locker rooms because I have been able to hide my sexuality easily and no one has ever suspected that I was gay." Richard (a 27-year-old white bisexual cisman) specifically modified his dress to be read as straight, "**s**ometimes at the gym I worry that I might get assaulted in the locker room for wearing anything that could be deemed gay. So, I put on my 'bro costume' to work out. It's a small price to pay." Some participants who passed as heterosexual within locker rooms were still subject to indirect homophobia and in some cases, bearing witness to the discrimination of others. For example, Terrence, a 49-year-old white gay cis man, remembered how:

> I reached puberty before the rest of the boys in my small town and was spared the bullying other gay boys had because of my body hair, facial hair, and developed genitals. I saw terrible bullying of others, though, including an attack they called "blackballing", in which the victims' genitals were forcibly bound with hockey tape. But I never intervened and kept my head down.

Not all participants were able to or believed that they were able to pass as heterosexual within locker rooms. Some, like Sylas, a 20-year-old white gay cisman and intercollegiate cross-country runner, instead went to great distances to avoid using the locker room while still accessing fitness facilities. Sylas expressed how, "I'm terrified of locker rooms. I usually change at a friend's flat near the gym, even when it's winter and -10°C and I'm in shorts, rather than use the locker room."

Although some participants had lasting negative connotations associated with locker rooms, others found that their fears were assuaged over time. For example, Randall (a 52-year-old white gay cisman) explained how, "locker rooms were terrifying to me as a student in school because of bullying and homophobia. But now, they're pretty utilitarian. Everyone minds their business at my gym, making it very inclusive." Locker rooms in fitness facilities were often viewed as relatively safer than physical education locker rooms by participants. Lyle, a 47-year-old white queer cisman thoroughly explained how:

> I avoided school locker rooms. I kept to myself in my sport's locker room settings. At university, I found the relative anonymity freeing in locker rooms. Today I work out at [name of gym] and while I've had unpleasant experiences and I still hear gendered and/or homophobic and/or misogynist talk that makes me uncomfortable— I refuse to let that make those spaces unavailable to me.

The increased anonymity and maturity of fellow locker room patrons helped some participants feel more comfortable later in life. Some participants attributed their increased comfortability within locker rooms to elevated levels of self-confidence. Sean, a 30-year-old white gay cisman and kick boxer clarifies how, "as a queer teen, locker rooms are pretty shitty with testosterone proving ground full of idiocy. As an adult, it's a pretty neutral place. But much of that has to do with self-confidence." Other participants sought alternative or more inclusive fitness facilities, like Doug (a 29-year-old white gay cisman), "I now only workout in the gay village. The locker rooms are always full of gay men, so I haven't had any issues using them at all."

Gender Transgression

For transgender participants, locker rooms were viewed as a significant barrier to participation in physical activity. Kyle, a 33-year-old white queer transman, expressed how

"locker rooms are often the main thing that will stop me from going to a gym, event, facility, etc." In this study, 200 self-identified transgender participants expressed how the binary gender organization of locker rooms inextricably complicated their locker room experiences. Salem, a 22-year-old white queer agender person, iterated how:

> Locker rooms and bathrooms are explicitly organized by the gender binary. It's like 'here is the space for women', 'here is the space for men', and occasionally it's like 'here is the space for people with mobility impairments and families… and gender-neutral people'… we're all afterthoughts.

For transgender participants seeking gender-affirming treatments and surgeries, locker rooms were established as particularly problematic pre-medical services. Participants, like Sawyer (a 27-year-old white bisexual transman), at the beginning of their social and/or medical transition were often frustrated and overwhelmed by choosing which locker room to use. Sawyer explained how "recently I started transitioning and I just don't want to have to deal with deciding which locker room to go into—so I don't go to the gym anymore." Additionally, there is a sense of peril associated with making the 'wrong' decision as expressed by Brook, a 29-year-old Hispanic queer transwoman, "transitioning is scary. I'm not sure when I should make the locker room switch, and it feels dangerous to do it too soon or too late." However, for genderqueer and nonbinary participants (i.e., people who reject the gender binary), locker rooms persistently presented two choices that did not represent them as described by Riley, a 28-year-old white bisexual nonbinary person:

> Society is largely built to adhere to the binary, so it's hard finding spaces that are accepting to those outside it. Which locker room do I use? I hesitate before choosing

> the women's locker room because I don't feel I belong there, but I belong even less in the men's locker room.

These feelings of not belonging or being forced to adhere to the gender binary they reject led some non-binary participants to garner a strong dislike of locker rooms. For example, Celes, a 27-year-old Hispanic pansexual nonbinary person, asserted their strong sentiments towards locker rooms, "I hate them so much, because I'm nonbinary and I absolutely detest being gendered female or male." Similarly, Ainslie, a 24-year-old white queer agender person, elaborated on how either option is ultimately undesirable:

> All of my experiences in locker rooms have been extremely triggering for my gender and body dysphoria. I struggle to decide which room to go into (male/female), I face violence and harassment in whichever room I go into, and struggle to find ways to change and dress without being stared at or harassed by others.

Ainslie, like many transgender participants, conveyed how they often feel like their personal safety was at risk when using gendered facilities. Hadley, a 24-year-old white pansexual agender person, also explained how, "I feel extremely uncomfortable and unsafe because I am misgendered, gawked at, and face violence if I attempt to use a washroom, change room, or any other gendered space that doesn't fit my gender assigned at birth." Similarly, Vance, a 25-year-old white heterosexual transman with a slight mobility impairment, described how, "locker rooms are incredibly uncomfortable, dysphoria-inducing, unsafe, actively hostile, and dangerous as a transman. They're often piss-poorly designed or sometimes non-existent for someone with a physical disability. Either way I'm screwed." Some participants, like Rylan, a 22-year-old white bisexual transman, viewed locker rooms as the most exclusionary out of all gendered facilities:

> Locker rooms are the worst, they are even worse than public bathrooms, because not only do I have to pick a gendered room, I also feel more pressure to use the one associated with my assigned gender because (1) there are usually little to no stalls/privacy and (2) I have to change clothes in front of others. They make me nervous because I am exposing things that are normally hidden, like my unshaven legs and my choice in undergarments.

Some participants who directly experienced discrimination within locker rooms or who did not feel like locker rooms supported their gender identity, opted to avoid locker rooms, which sometimes led to avoiding fitness facilities and physical activity altogether. Samantha, a 36-year-old white bisexual transwoman, explained how "I don't use any gendered facilities because I don't feel safe. I don't work out because I refuse to step foot into a locker room." Similarly, Parker, a 20-year-old white asexual nonbinary person responded, "I don't go to gyms now because I don't feel safe in either locker room." For the majority of participants that identified as transgender, locker rooms were presented as a significant barrier to physical activity participation.

Transmen (female-to-male transgender individuals) in this study disclosed that when using the men's locker room, they were often concerned about being sexually assaulted. Flynn, a 21-year-old white pansexual transman, communicated that, "even though I have had top surgery, I would not be comfortable changing in a men's locker room because I do not have visibly male genitalia. I worry about being sexually assaulted, being in such a vulnerable position." Male locker rooms were regarded by some participants as spaces deeply rooted in conceptions of toxic masculinity that promote the objectification of women as well as perpetuate rape culture. Hollis, a 23-year-old white bisexual transman, clarified how, "I don't have to go into the men's locker

room to know that it's bursting with toxic masculinity and locker room talk that's misogynistic, heterosexist, and transphobic as hell." Subsequently, some participants who were assigned female at birth felt like their personal safety was jeopardized when they used men's locker rooms. For example, Daniel, a 24-year-old Indigenous queer transman, explained how "these days I just don't use locker rooms at all, I fear being outed as trans and beaten or sexually assaulted as a result. I also have to be extra careful because I have yet to get bottom surgery." These concerns were echoed by Logan, a 22-year-old white queer transman, who described how "being in locker rooms is always scary. I am always afraid someone will realize I am trans and try to hurt me." Despite their safety concerns, many participants that self-identified as transmen felt compelled to start using male locker rooms when they initially began presenting as more masculine because they no longer felt like they belonged in the women's locker rooms. Wyatt, a 27-year-old white asexual transman, explained how:

> Locker rooms have become a large issue as I have recently begun HRT [hormone replacement therapy] but still do not entirely "pass". Men's locker rooms are currently unsafe and unwelcoming. However, I'm on the cusp of being found inappropriate in a women's locker room and therefore have a difficult time finding a safe space to prepare.

Although occupying the men's locker room was consistently viewed with trepidation by participants, locker rooms with limited options for privacy were commonly regarded as the most terrifying. "Locker rooms suck when you're trans, but locker rooms with only a handful of bathroom stalls are the absolute worst. You're forced expose yourself," stated Cohen (a 23-year-old Middle Eastern bisexual transman). In particular, men's locker rooms with communal shower

areas were viewed as the most difficult to navigate as communicated by Evan, a 37-year-old white bisexual transman:

> I have scarring on my body, which is readily apparent, but not widely known as the result of a gender affirming surgery. Depending on the arrangement of the space, especially levels of privacy, I get stares, questions, and occasionally masculine-infused hostility. The open concept showers that are still so prevalent in men's change rooms are heart-stopping and anxiety-provoking (and not just trans folks, but for cis guys too).

Participants that identified as transwomen (male-to-female transgender individuals) also experienced discomfort when using the women's locker room, as exemplified by Kerry, a 36-year-old white queer transwoman, "I've never felt comfortable in locker rooms. I feel even less comfortable as a transwoman with a penis." Participants felt unwelcome in the women's locker room and these feelings were often corroborated by experiences of being asked if they are in the right locker room or being asked to leave the premises. For example, Sharon, a 27-year-old South East Asian bisexual transwoman, explained how, "locker rooms are generally difficult to navigate, I am asked at least once a week whether I am in the right change room." Additionally, Brianna, a 28-year-old white queer transwoman, expressed how "change rooms are incredibly humiliating— people have gone to the staff who have then approached me and asked me to leave." Some participants, in the words of Rachel (an 18-year-old white pansexual transwoman), believe that this maltreatment in women's locker rooms stems from the myth "that transgender women are actually just creeps trying to exploit the 'system' to ogle other women." Participants recalled how the common misbelief that transgender people, specifically transwomen, are a threat to ciswomen was often used to justify discrimination. Rayna, a 28-year-old latinx

demisexual transwoman, recollected how, “I’ve been banned from using the women’s locker room before. Obviously, I don’t go to that gym anymore. They claimed that the other women wouldn’t feel safe with me there and treated me as if I was an intruder.” However, some transwomen, like transmen, also viewed the men’s locker room as a space where their personal safety would be put at risk. Malaya, a 31-year-old Middle Eastern pansexual transwoman, communicated how, “in the men’s locker room, I’m a target. In the women’s locker room, I’m a threat. Either way I’m damned if I do, so I just avoid them altogether.” Within men’s locker rooms, transwomen are potentially subject to transphobic violence and assault, and in women’s locker rooms transwomen are viewed as a threat to cisgender female safety and are persecuted accordingly. Charlotte, a 21-year-old white bisexual transwoman, explained how, “ever since I transitioned, I have never stepped in a men’s locker room out of fear.” Some transwomen feared being sexually assaulted in men’s locker rooms. Victoria, a 25-year-old white queer transwoman, elaborated on her experiences using any sort of gendered facilities:

> Being a transwoman places me in outright dangerous situations in regard to locker rooms, bathrooms—every single time I use those facilities. Being read queer draws attention from cishet men—they become violent or threatening because of an assumed sexual predation. As if my presence as a queer (ostensibly male) person directly threatens their straight male identities. I am at a far greater risk of sexual assault here than almost anywhere else. When trying to use facilities I identify with, as a “non-passing” transwoman, I am then placed in more danger. In addition to being seen or read as a sexual threat I am also viewed, among female-bodied people, as a physical threat.

Victoria, like many transwomen, is effectively stonewalled from using locker rooms (in addition to other gendered facilities). To use women's locker rooms without incident, some participants developed specific strategies over time. Audrey, a 41-year-old white queer transwoman, explained how she navigates locker rooms:

> Two words: careful planning. Workout wear is all pre-tested at home to make sure nothing is going to be visible that shouldn't be. I wear skirts over workout gear on the way in, and then can easily change without exposure by putting the skirt on afterwards and shucking shorts/leggings from under that cover. I used to change tops in bathroom stalls as I stuffed my sports bra with silicone falsies held in with tape.

Select participants who were confident in their ability to pass as a gender associated with a specific locker room felt less anxious assessing those gendered spaces. For instance, Anthony, a 32-year-old white heterosexual transman, acknowledged that "because I comfortably pass as a man now, I feel comfortable using the men's locker room." Similarly, Rhea, a 29-year-old East Asian bisexual transwoman explained how, "I am seriously lucky because I've always passed pretty easily as a woman, and now that I'm done with my surgeries, I feel extra comfortable being naked and changing in the women's locker room."

Given that locker rooms are critical access points to most physical activities, many participants felt forced to jeopardize their safety in order to be healthy. Maya, a 29-year-old Middle Eastern queer transwoman, explained how she ironically needs to put her well-being at risk to improve her physical health, "I get anxiety when approaching and in locker rooms. I have to put on a brave face because I know my physical health is just as important as any cis person who doesn't have to think about locker rooms." Similarly, Kai, a 23-year-old white queer transman mused about how, "it's like you have to jump through all of these hoops—forget

motivation and actually getting to the gym, then there's locker rooms and transphobic gym bunnies—all to literally jump through hoops for an hour."

It is important to understand that these narratives of transgressing the gender binary are not limited to locker rooms. As Laurel, a 24-year-old white queer nonbinary person notes, "bathrooms, locker rooms, sports teams, gendered clothing, gendered language—the list goes on and on, society revolves around the binary." The gender binary is deeply entrenched within society and perpetuated through various institutions, subsequently shifts towards transgender inclusion take time, advocacy, and work. As noted by Charlie, a 22-year-old Middle Eastern queer nonbinary individual, "trans spaces are precious and needed. I'm one of the few lucky ones because my university has a gender-neutral changing room. Students had to fight for it. It's small—but it's better than nothing." Tegan, an 18-year-old white demi-sexual agender person, like our other transgender participants, was intimately aware of the real-life implications associated with not being cisgender, "this is not limited to change-rooms—Gender expression as 'other' or 'queer' can lead to anything from dirty looks to extreme violence, all of which I have experienced first-hand."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to expand our understanding of complex LGBTQ+ locker room experiences. The two research questions guiding this study were: (a) what are the experiences of self-identifying LGBTQ+ adults in locker room spaces? And (b) how do these experiences influence overall physical activity experiences?

In line with previous literature, our findings demonstrate that locker rooms pose a significant barrier towards LGBTQ+ participation in physical activity (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Herrick & Duncan, 2018a; Jones et al., 2017b; Sykes, 2011). Participants' experiences within

locker rooms were greatly impacted by their experiences of embodiment informed by body image, sexuality, and gender. Within Western society, 'healthy' or 'fit' bodies are commonly used as a measure of social success and desirability (Greenhalgh, 2012). As a result, some participants' feelings of self-consciousness stemmed from societal fatphobia and standardized conventions of attractiveness that were exacerbated by the nudity within locker room settings. Participants that self-identified as fat spoke to experiences of being subjected to heightened surveillance, judgement, and shame within locker rooms. For some participants, their body image was deeply interrelated with their sexuality, gender, and other aspects of their identity. A recent systematic review of LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity found that sexual minority men and women were influenced by different ideal body images (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). Findings from this review indicate that sexual minority men were often motivated to exercise through a rigid body image ideal that emphasized being muscular and thin (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). Within this study, some participants that identified as sexual minority men reiterated the pervasive nature of this specific body ideal and how the pressure they felt to meet it was often exacerbated by the culture of body surveillance within locker rooms. Contrastingly, sexual minority women have been found to be more fat-positive and seek to actively reject mainstream standards of beauty (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Wykes, 2014). However, it should be noted that within this study some participants that identified as sexual minority women expressed feeling self-conscious about their bodies not meeting societal standards for presumably 'healthy' or thin bodies when using locker rooms.

The sexual transgression of locker rooms experienced by participants was heavily influenced by the widespread stereotyping of lesbian women as masculine and gay men as effeminate (Eng, 2008; Fusco, 1998; Kauer & Krane, 2006). Derogatory stereotypes and

widespread misconceptions were often used to justify discrimination within locker rooms. Bullying and harassment within sport and physical education based on sexual orientation is a long-standing phenomenon (e.g., Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018; Morrow & Gill, 2003). Our findings illustrate how formative negative locker rooms experiences in physical education or athletics can be for LGBTQ+ adults. For both sexual minority men and women, pernicious locker room talk was found to reinforce the idea that LGBTQ+ persons are unwelcome. Subsequently, creating more inclusive climates in school and athletic locker rooms by debunking stereotypes and not tolerating heterosexist talk may help minimize negative experiences for current LGBTQ+ youth, which in turn may foster an increased likelihood to access fitness facilities later in life. Although some LGBTQ+ inclusive workshops and informational kits exist for teachers and coaches (e.g., Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2019; GLSEN, 2016; LGBT SportSafe, 2019), attention should be directed towards training and empowering youth to speak up against LGBTQ+ prejudices in locker rooms.

Previous research has demonstrated how locker rooms cultivate a climate of exclusion that is primed to operate as an active site of transphobia (Cunningham et al., 2018; Fusco, 2012; Hargie et al., 2017; Sykes, 2009, 2011). Hostility is often based upon the common misbelief that transgender people are a threat to cisgender livelihood (Cunningham & Pickett, 2018; Eckes, 2017). Our findings illustrate how the binary organization of locker rooms inherently impedes upon transgender access and hinders physical activity participation. These findings align with recent studies that have also identified locker rooms as a significant barrier to transgender participation in sport and physical education (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017b). However, across previous physical activity research, the transgender experiences

represented are typically limited to participants that self-identify as either transmen or transwomen (e.g., Caudwell, 2014; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Hargie et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017a; Klein, Krane, & Paule-Koba, 2018). This study provides some initial insight into the variability of transgender locker room experiences, with the inclusion of nonbinary, agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, and two-spirited lived experiences. In light of recent reports calling for more trans-inclusive locker rooms across physical activity contexts (e.g., Cunningham, Buzuvis, & Mosier, 2018; Greenspan, Whitcomb, & Griffith, 2019), the findings of this study suggest that: (a) increased privacy options be made available in all locker rooms, (b) gender-neutral locker room creation be prioritized and advocated for, and (c) the binary division of locker rooms be challenged.

We acknowledge that our results may be biased towards individuals who were specifically interested in a survey about physical activity as respondents self-selected to participate. Given that all open-ended questions were optional, participants included in this study presumably wanted to convey their experiences with locker rooms. For the sake of anonymity, we were also unable to follow-up with participants and ask for clarification on their submitted responses.

Conclusions

Locker rooms are pivotal access points to physical activity settings, however LGBTQ+ access is often complicated by varying experiences of discrimination. Prior to this research, the majority of studies have focused on traditionally smaller scale qualitative investigations into LGBTQ+ locker room experiences (e.g., Fusco, 1998; Hargie et al., 2017; Sykes, 2009). Due to the unique methods ascribed to this study, our results represent an amalgamation of over one thousand LGBTQ+ adult voices sharing their personal experiences with locker rooms. This

research corroborates previous findings in this field, as well as provides a level of undeniability to the widespread and nuanced concerns locker rooms pose to LGBTQ+ communities. Despite societal movement towards LGBTQ+ inclusion, locker rooms still represent an unsafe spaces for many LGBTQ+ adults. More research and work is always required to incite social change, however it is our hope that this study will represent a turning point where in researchers will be able to move past establishing that locker rooms are problematic for LGBTQ+ persons and instead dedicate resources to changing the culture and organization of locker rooms to be truly LGBTQ+ inclusive.

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Table 1

Open-ended questions included in online survey

Question
1. What does ‘queer’ mean to you?
2. How do you think your identity as an LGBTQ+ individual has influenced and/or currently influences your experiences with physical activity?
3. Are there any accessibility issues you might face in order to engage in physical activity (e.g., racism, financial limitations, religious affiliations, ableism, etc.)? Please elaborate.
4. In what ways do you think physical activity could be altered to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ participation?
5. How would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?
6. How would you describe your current and/or past experiences with changing rooms or locker rooms?
7. How would you describe your current relationship with exercise?

Table 2

General Demographics Variables

Variable	**Mean (SD)**	**Range**
Age	29.4 years (9.2)	18-69 years
Years publicly out	8.5 years (7.7)	0-49 years
Variable	**Frequencies (n)**	**Percentage**
Gender Identity		
Ciswoman	427	40.0
Cisman	318	29.8
Non-binary	183	17.2
Transman	88	8.2
Transwoman	51	4.8
Sexuality		
Queer	289	27.1
Lesbian	222	20.8
Gay	168	15.7
Bisexual	153	14.3
Pansexual	89	8.3
Demisexual	53	5.0
Asexual	67	6.3
Questioning	21	2.0
Heterosexual	5	0.5
Ethnicity		
White	712	66.7
Hispanic	67	6.3
Mixed race	54	5.0
Aboriginal/Indigenous	51	4.8
South Asian	49	4.6
African	46	4.3
East Asian	42	3.9
Middle Eastern	34	3.2
Caribbean	12	1.1
Education		
Undergraduate/Baccalaureate	273	25.6
Some college	211	19.8
Master’s degree	187	17.5
High school diploma/GED	151	14.2
Some college post-undergraduate	104	9.7

Vocational/training school	49	4.6
Doctoral degree	38	3.5
CEGEP or DEC	25	2.3
Some high school	17	1.6
Didn’t attend high school	7	0.7
Other	5	0.5
Annual household income ($)		
Less than 25,000	251	23.5
25,001-50,000	207	19.4
50,001-75,000	174	16.3
75,001-100,000	152	14.2
100,001-125,000	111	10.4
More than 150,001	79	7.4
125,001-150,000	67	6.3
Prefer not to say	26	2.4

Bridging Text

In Chapter Three, I explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ adults in locker rooms. Using an open-response question in an online cross-sectional survey, I analyzed the locker room experiences of over 1,000 self-identified LGBTQ+ adults. Thematic analysis of participant responses produced three over-arching themes that reflected the influences of heterosexism, cissexism, and sizeism within locker rooms. Displays of nudity associated with locker and changing rooms exacerbated participants' feelings of self-consciousness, especially feelings rooted in fatphobia. Participants also experienced feelings of sexual transgression when accessing locker rooms that were predicated on the widespread stereotyping of lesbian women as masculine (and therefore predatory) as well as gay men as feminine (and therefore vulnerable). Formative experiences of sexual transgression and discrimination within locker rooms were commonly associated with sport contexts and changing for PE. This study also provided insight into the variability and complexity of gender transgressions that participants felt when accessing locker rooms, as well as the different forms of gender policing, discrimination, and transphobia experienced. These study findings corroborated previous work with smaller samples of LGBTQ+ adults, as well as provided additional insight into transgender locker rooms experiences with the inclusion of non-binary, agender, genderqueer, and gender-fluid lived experiences. Overall, this study illustrates how locker room experiences broadly influence LGBTQ+ perceptions of and participation in physical activity. Additionally, these findings suggest that locker room experiences, particularly negative experiences, in one physical activity context (e.g., physical education) inform how participants perceive and feel about accessing other locker rooms (e.g., fitness facilities). Several participants reflected on their sporting experiences and how they struggled to or successfully navigated their sexuality around their teammates in locker rooms.

Responses from participants that engaged in sport commonly emphasized how their relationships with teammates and coaches influenced their experiences within locker rooms. Given that locker and changing rooms are just one space associated with sport, in Chapter Four, I sought to explore how interpersonal relationships broadly influence LGBTQ+ experiences across sporting contexts. To reflect the diversity of LGBTQ+ experiences as well as a variety of sporting contexts, a similar methodology was used where in an open-response question was incorporated into an online survey and administered to a large sample of participants.

Chapter Four: Study 2

The role of coaches and teammates in supporting and thwarting sports participation among LGBTQ+ individuals: A large-scale online qualitative study

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Abstract

Relationships with teammates and coaches are a significant factor in whether individuals choose to participate in sport. This may be particularly true for LGBTQ+ athletes, given their identities remain stigmatized in sport environments. Using online qualitative data collected from 741 LGBTQ+ adults, this study examined how relationships with coaches, teammates, and sport-related staff impacted sporting experiences. Participant responses were independently coded by two researchers using inductive thematic analysis. Negative adolescent sporting experiences were found to greatly influence how participants viewed sport and physical activity contexts as adults. Findings also demonstrated how supportive relationships with coaches and teammates fostered feelings of relatedness among LGBTQ+ athletes which played a significant role in the establishment of inclusive sporting contexts. Participants commonly used identity concealment strategies in sports to feel comfortable and accepted on their team. Similarly, increased athletic competence enabled some participants to feel included and valued on their team, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.

Keywords: sexual diversity; coaching; inclusivity; team dynamics; LGBTQ+

Introduction

Within sport, relationships between athletes, teammates, and coaches have been shown to greatly influence athlete motivation to participate as well as overall sporting experiences (Chu & Zhang, 2019; Pacewicz & Smith, 2021). Sporting relationships may be particularly significant to the experiences of sexual and gender minority athletes who are often discriminated against, marginalized, and stigmatized in sport contexts (for reviews see Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, & Haycraft, 2017b; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Rollè, Cazzini, Santoniccolo, & Trombetta, 2021). Subsequently, a recent consensus statement on the mental health of athletes issued by the International Olympic Committee identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer athletes as high-risk populations for experiencing non-accidental violence in sport (Reardon et al., 2019).

LGBTQ+ is an acronym used to acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other communities that do not adhere to cis-heterosexist assumptions that everyone is (a) heterosexual and (b) cisgender (where your gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ defy these widespread assumptions about sexuality and gender that govern society and by extension, sport. Large-scale studies from Canada (N = 99, 373) and the United States (N = 14, 959) found that sexual minority youth were less likely play a team sport than their heterosexual peers (Doull et al., 2018; Kann et al., 2018). Disparities in team sport participation have been demonstrated to be more pronounced between gay and heterosexual males (Denison et al., 2021; Doull et al., 2018; Elling & Janssens, 2009). Across studies, findings are mixed with regard to sport participation rates for lesbian and bisexual female youth compared to heterosexual counterparts (Beach, et al., 2018; Doull et al., 2018; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Jin-Ho & Wi-Young, 2013; Kann et al., 2018). In contrast, a literature

review exploring adult LGBTQ+ experiences with physical activity found that sexual minority women were less likely to participate due to unrealistic stereotypical expectations of athleticism whereas sexual minority men were more likely to participate in physical activity to meet strict body ideals (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b).

Studies exploring the experiences of transgender youth in sport are scarce; however, several studies exploring adult transgender experiences have shown that despite shifts in policy and awareness, marginalizing sporting environments continue to complicate the experiences of transgender athletes (Hargie, et al., 2017; Jones, et al., 2017a; Klein, Krane, & Paule-Koba, 2018). Sport is organized according to the traditional gender binary of male vs. female and subsequently fails to recognize the complexity of gender which perpetuates the exclusion of transgender and gender-nonconforming athletes (Dubon, Abbott, & Carl, 2018; Jones et al., 2017b). Despite experiences of social exclusion, some transgender athletes have acknowledged how sport was personally empowering as well as allowed them to connect with their transitioning bodies (Herrick et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2018).

Small-sample qualitative research has consistently demonstrated that sporting relationships are integral for the maintenance or disruption of LGBTQ+ athlete inclusivity (e.g., Cunningham, 2015; Denison et al., 2021; Herrick, Rocchi, & Couture, 2020; Mann & Krane, 2018a). However, sporting relationships are as varied as the people engaged in them, making it difficult to fully comprehend the variability and multiplicity of LGBTQ+ experiences in sport. A recent literature review on the sporting experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes and coaches found that although sporting experiences substantially differed across 58 studies, even in the most tolerant environments (where overt forms of discrimination are absent), homophobic and transphobic discourses were slow to change (Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020). Unsupportive relationships with

teammates and coaches can result in LGBTQ+ athletes harbouring negative emotions related to sport which can result in sport dropout (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2018; Hartmann-Tews, Menzel, & Braumüller, 2020; Kulick et al., 2019).

Given that relationships can significantly influence perceived and experienced inclusion in sport, it is imperative to understand how relationships with teammates and coaches can support or thwart LGBTQ+ participation during adolescence as well as adulthood. To fully understand the double-edged nature of relationships and their influence on LGBTQ+ sporting experiences, there is a need to hear from a broad range of LGBTQ+ voices and amplify those which have been previously understudied such bisexual, queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how diverse, self-identified LGBTQ+ adults describe their past and current relationships within sporting contexts.

Methods

Onto-Epistemological Considerations

This study was driven by and conducted through a historical realist ontology and a transformative epistemology that assumes realities are shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic values that determine which realities will be privileged within research (Mertens, 2007; Scotland, 2012). A goal of this transformative research is to create social change for LGBTQ+ communities by garnering an understanding and raising awareness of their relationships and experiences within sport.

Study Design

This research was approved by the McGill University Research Ethics Board-II. We prioritised engaging with participants throughout the research process to amplify their unique

experiences and voices (Mertens, 2007). LGBTQ+ adults were consulted during the initial design of an online survey to explore how minority stress related to motivation for physical activity (Herrick et al., 2021). The survey was informed by self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the minority stress model (MSM; Meyer, 2003). Within SDT, motivation is a multidimensional concept ranging from low (controlled) to high (autonomous) qualities of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Social contexts influence motivation through the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: (a) competence, (b) autonomy, and (c) relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). MSM was developed to describe the complex experiences of LGBTQ+ communities and maintains that minorities are subject to unique experiences that manifest as psychological stressors (Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Meyer, 2003, 2015). These psychological stressors are categorized as: (a) distal stressors caused by discrimination, victimization, and stigmatization or (b) proximal stressors which rely on individual perceptions and includes the internalization of prejudice, the concealment of ones' identity, and the development of expectations for future prejudice to occur (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a). The original intention behind the survey was to explore an elaborated model of SDT, wherein LGBTQ+ minority stressors were indicative of social contexts and thought to be negatively associated with the satisfaction of psychological needs within physical activity (for details see Herrick et al., 2021).

Through a series of focus groups, 42 LGBTQ+ adults pilot-tested and discussed the survey (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a) which was reviewed and edited according to the participants' feedback. Although the survey was initially tied closely to the specific measurement of concepts from SDT and MSM, as the focus groups progressed the survey was revised to better honour the lived experiences and desires of our LGBTQ+ participants through the incorporation of several open-ended questions. For example, Cole, a 23-year-old white queer cisman and current rugby

player, explained how, ‘there should be a specific question asking about teammates or coaches. There’s so much I wanted to tell you about them, my complicated relationships with them—but there wasn’t any space to do so.’ Inspired by participant suggestions, we included the optional, open-ended question: “How would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?” The data for this study were collected on Qualtrics from August 2017 to January 2018.

Participants

Participants were recruited online from public LGBTQ+-affiliated groups and pages on Facebook based in Canada and the United States. Participants were eligible if they (a) were 18 or older, (b) self-identified as LGBTQ+, (c) understood written English, and (d) had access to the internet to complete the survey.

Measures

Demographics. Information about the participants’ sexual orientation, gender identity, and years publicly identified as LGBTQ+ were collected in addition to their age, ethno-racial background, highest level of education, annual household income, athlete status, highest level of athletic competition, and current minutes/week of moderate-vigorous physical activity (Table 1).

Open-ended question. This study explores the text responses to the question: “How would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?”

Data Analysis

We received 741 responses to this question that ranged in length from 10 to 659 words, (M = 81 words). The first and second authors thoroughly read the data to familiarise themselves with the responses. Although deductive thematic analysis was explored, upon interpreting

poignant data-driven themes beyond the scope of SDT and MSM, the authors recognized that a deductive approach would be somewhat reductionist. Subsequently, the authors concluded that an inductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six phases would most authentically reflect the data itself (Braun et al., 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Although our results are not organized according to an SDT-MSM model, our data interpretation and discussion are heavily influenced and guided by this framework.

To become fully immersed in the data (phase 1; Braun et al., 2016), the first and second author read through the responses a second time before independently coding the texts using Nvivo (phase 2-3; Braun et al., 2016). A series of reflective meetings were held after the initial coding was complete wherein the authors discussed observations made while coding (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Any discrepancies between codes and their respective themes were resolved through in-depth discussions (phase 4; Braun & Clarke, 2020; Braun et al., 2016). Candidate themes were reviewed by the third author who served as a critical peer throughout the analysis (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Quotations were selected to represent the breadth of the data by ensuring that all were written by different respondents (Eldh, Årestedt, & Berterö, 2020).

Results

Our data collection resulted in responses from 741 self-identified LGBTQ+ adults (M = 30.2 years; SD = 6.7 years; range = 18–49). Participants identified across nine sexual orientations with the majority identifying as either gay or lesbian (n = 401; 54.1%), queer (20.1%; n = 149), or bisexual (12.3%; n = 91). Most participants self-identified as cisgender (n = 534; 72.1%) with 42.5% identifying as ciswomen (n = 315) and 29.6% as cismen (n = 219). Over a quarter of participants identified under the transgender umbrella with 15.8% identifying as non-

binary (*n* = 117), 7.3% as transmen (*n* = 54), and 4.8% as transwomen (*n* = 36). Our sample was also predominantly white (*n* = 531; 71.7%). Only 13.1% of participants currently identified as athletes whereas 35.8% had identified as athletes in the past (Table 1). Participants that never identified as an athlete (51.1%) typically spoke about adolescent sporting experiences and/or recent alternative sporting experiences.

Through the analysis we generated four major themes: (a) exclusive, (b) inert, (c) inclusive, and (d) alternative sporting environments. Sporting environments were characterized by relationships and conceptualized as a continuum (Figure 1). Mobility along the continuum was supported by identity concealment and athletic ability. Themes are presented concurrently with percentages and demographics that reflect the respondents under each theme (see Figure 1). Although numerical data are often viewed as paradigmatically inconsistent with qualitative approaches, this information is not presented to make inferences about broader populations, but instead to better characterize the results. Contextualizing results by presenting the sexualities and gender identities of respondents engages with the common misconception that a homogeneous LGBTQ+ collective exists.

Exclusive: 'they'll pick out whatever you're insecure about'

Fifty six percent of all participants (*n* = 419) spoke about feeling excluded and rejected by their teammates and coaches. The homophobic and transphobic behaviours of teammates were commonly cited as negative influences. For example, an 18-year-old white lesbian ciswoman and retired competitive swimmer explained how:

> I never laughed at the jokes my teammates made about gay guys. I felt extremely uncomfortable when they started picking fun at lesbians and claiming to be 'lesbos'

> when they joked around in the locker room, stealing each other's bras and whatnot. It was the bad environment more than anything that pushed me out of team sports.

Teammates can play an integral role in thwarting relatedness in sporting environments with complicated rules for belonging. One 20-year-old Middle Eastern gay cisman recalled how, 'I was always more graceful than powerful on the ice. When I was a kid in hockey, teammates always called me "twinkle toes" and way worse nicknames that—let's just say rhyme with "baguette."' Similarly, a 25-year-old mixed-race bisexual ciswoman lamented about how:

> Kids can be nasty, but teenagers are the absolute worst. They'll pick out whatever you're insecure about and home in on it. In high school, I was questioning my sexuality and my teammates on the track & field team just relentlessly harped on me for it.

Participants emphasised the role of coaches in maintaining negative sporting environments. Most participants felt strongly that it was the coaches' duty to ensure their team was free of discrimination. A 22-year-old white queer non-binary individual recalled how, 'I used to love being involved with sports, but because of the negative environment created by my coaches, I had to stop for my own mental and physical health.' When coaches seemingly approved of or fostered LGBTQ+ prejudice, participants felt unsupported and antagonised to the point of quitting their sport. For example, a 31-year-old white queer transwoman remembered decades later how at:

> Grade 5 volleyball team try-outs I was beaten up by the other boys trying out and the team coach said he couldn't kick the perpetrators off the team because then they wouldn't have enough players. So of course, there's no way I'd continue in that space. I was sacrificed for volleyball. My body was sacrificed for fucking volleyball.

Participants commonly recollected youth sporting experiences in response to the prompt question. For example, a 24-year-old white queer nonbinary individual recalled how, 'I quit the basketball team in high school because it was so homophobic! I have not been on a team since. Why would I subject myself to that again?' A 23-year-old mixed-race lesbian ciswoman also explained why she chose to quit her intercollegiate volleyball team:

> I love volleyball, but there's this weird pressure to be feminine. Playing in university was like a dream and a nightmare. There were these little quips about creeper lesbians in the locker room and stuff like that. I finally told my teammates that I was gay in my second year and it's not like they full-on rejected me, but everything changed. They were shy and awkward around me—I couldn't help but feel alone.

Pervasive negative perceptions of sporting contexts informed how some participants currently view physical activity. A 20-year-old Caribbean bisexual cisman admitted that 'the reason I have had so many issues regarding fitness is because of dealing with homophobic people in sports. It makes me feel fearful, incompetent, and brings a lot of bad memories—so I just avoid anything fitness related now.' Similarly, a 25-year-old Black queer ciswoman who played competitive soccer explained how, 'I'm an adult but on a field, at the gym, in the locker room—suddenly I feel like I'm 10 again and on the pitch, and I feel insecure in my body, ashamed of my sexuality, and scared.'

Inert: 'Not threatening, but not welcoming.'

Some participants (*n* = 121; 16.5%) characterised their relationships with coaches and teammates as more inert or neutral. Participants, like one 27-year-old white asexual genderfluid individual and retired competitive martial artist, described sporting environments as 'not threatening, but not welcoming.' Participants felt that relationships were often formalised due to

emotional distance strategically maintained between themselves and their teammates and coaches. One 24-year-old white bisexual ciswoman and retired intercollegiate swimmer described these relationships as, ‘mostly civil, although I’d never say I had friends among teammates or had a close bond with any of my coaches. I was there to do my best and I did that. There really wasn’t any emotional connection.’ Some participants did not view their sports as social settings and instead chose to focus on their performance. One 25-year-old white bisexual ciswoman and retired intercollegiate volleyball player explained how, ‘my team and I got along well enough to accomplish what we set out to do. That’s all I cared about at the time—winning.’ Emotional distance allowed participants to feel less likely to be exposed to exclusionary practices at the cost of feeling connected to their teammates. For example, one 22-year-old white questioning nonbinary individual and retired competitive alpine skier recalled how, ‘I never knew if they would accept the real me, so I didn’t form very emotional connections or come out to any of them.’

Participants also described difficulties bonding with their team and creating meaningful relationships. One 21-year-old white pansexual ciswoman and high-school field hockey player explained how, ‘I never quite felt like part of the team in the same way as everyone else. I was grappling with questions about my sexuality and gender that my teammates weren’t.’ Similarly, a 20-year-old Middle Eastern queer ciswoman and competitive speed skater wrote, ‘I have mostly been on the peripheral social edge with teammates. I usually did not feel at home—my skin colour and sexuality put me on the outside looking in.’ Intersections of gender, sexuality, and race commonly made participants feel ostensibly like the ‘other’ in sport. One 19-year-old Hispanic gay cisman explained how, ‘in high school, I ran cross-country and track. It felt

impossible to connect with anyone over sport when my concerns were about my sexuality and my disabled embodiment and theirs seemed only to be their 5K time.'

Inclusive: 'I am part of a team who is completely accepting of all LGBTQ+ identities.'

Participants (*n* = 150; 20.2%) that described feeling included in sports attributed their positive experiences to their overwhelmingly supportive relationships with coaches and teammates. For example, one 23-year-old Middle Eastern lesbian ciswoman and intercollegiate rugby player explained how, 'I formed my closest relationships through sport. My teammates and coaches supported me and created in part the person I am today. I'm proud and strong because of them.' Similarly, one 25-year-old Southeast Asian queer ciswoman and competitive water polo player described how:

> My relationship with my teammates and coaches has been essential to my desire to engage in sport. Without that support net I may have quit a long time ago, but I'm so glad I didn't. Practice is my favourite part of the day, in part because I love water polo—but more so because I love my team.

Although relationships between teammates were significant, participants stressed the importance of relationships with coaches. One 28-year-old white bisexual transman stated that, 'it really depends on the coaching staff. If the coach creates a positive environment, then it can be fantastic, but if the coach is oblivious then there can be a lot of internal abuse on the team, bullying, etc.' Coaches described positively by participants used their position to promote acceptance within their team. One 19-year-old white heterosexual transman recalled how:

> During high school, I had a close relationship with my rugby coach. She was one of the first people who I came out to as trans and was incredibly supportive. I didn't particularly want to come out fully while I was participating in rugby, and this

> decision served to be the better one in my opinion. I confided in some teammates, and their support was tangible in my success as an athlete. As the captain of the rugby team, it was certainly exciting to have fellow teammates look up to me and look past my identity.

Alternatives

Among 51 participants, sporting alternatives stood in contrast to traditional organized sports and represented environments that promoted acceptance through a supportive network of peers. Alternatives frequently described by participants were primarily created for adults. For example, one 41-year-old white queer transman explained how, 'I never voluntarily joined a team sport or gym until roller derby at age 34, a year after fully transitioning socially. The roller derby community is like night and day compared to other athletic pursuits—everyone is queer.' Similarly, a 22-year-old white queer transwoman explained how:

> Quidditch, which has an incredibly inclusive and queer community, was the first environment where I came out, and was incredibly supportive as I started transitioning. I feel an incredible sense of camaraderie and connection to my peers and coaches in this sport, and they have become my very best friends.

Supportive relationships in alternative sports were commonly described by participants. One 25-year-old white lesbian ciswoman acknowledged how, 'I definitely feel closest to teammates who are in my all-gay softball league. We support each other, on and off of the field. It's so much easier when you don't have to explain yourself all the time.' For many participants, LGBTQ+ specific leagues or sports teams inherently provided the team with a sense of relatedness. For example, one 30-year-old white bisexual ciswoman, described her experiences playing soccer in various leagues:

> I relate comfortably when I play on a queer team and when the coach is queer or a lesbian. I relate less with teammates who are straight women, and even less with those who are straight men. I notice I feel proudest and most connected on a team with a majority of queer women. It's much more fun to socialise with them as we have more in common.

Mobility

The closet: 'I did not feel comfortable enough to disclose my true identity at that time.'

Coming out is a complicated and often continual process, in part because there are an infinite number of 'closets' or closed social settings in which someone may choose to publicly identify or conceal their identities. Across participants (n = 402; 54.2%), 'the closet' was conveyed as a prominent and nuanced concept that significantly influenced sporting relationships. Of the participants that referred to the closet, the majority (63.4%) spoke about concealing their sexuality, whereas 36.7% spoke about their gender identity and expression. Regardless of which closet, identity concealment was often used as a defensive strategy to avoid discrimination or rejection. One 19-year-old white lesbian ciswoman recollected how on her high school basketball team, 'I often hid who I truly was in order to protect myself. I hated being in the closet, but it was better than the alternative.' Similarly, a 22-year-old white bisexual non-binary person and intercollegiate hockey player expressed how 'I was protecting myself—my teammates couldn't reject what they didn't know.' By remaining closeted, some participants felt that they were more easily accepted on their teams. Fear of rejection was sometimes rooted in previous experiences, as exemplified by the experiences of a 30-year-old white bisexual transman at his competitive martial arts club:

> My relationships with my teammates are limited because they don't know my medical history. They also wonder why my family of origin isn't a part of my life, doesn't cheer me on at exams or tournaments. Cishet people find unexplained estrangement from family of origin as a red flag, a sign that someone is untrustworthy. But I can't tell them and have them reject me like my family of origin did. So, I remain only partially part of an otherwise pretty close-knit team.

Participants indicated how they would have required more supportive relationships with their teammates to feel safe enough to come out. As a 19-year-old Middle Eastern queer transman recollected:

> Through my childhood years and teen years, I was participating in ice hockey and basketball. During that time, I had great experiences with teammates and coaches, for the most part—however, I didn't feel comfortable enough to disclose my true identity at that time. I was worried that if I did come out, it would jeopardize what I had.

Participants sometimes intentionally altered their behaviours when engaging in sports to encourage their teammates to interpret them as straight. For example, a 21-year-old East Asian gay cisman and track and field athlete explained how, 'I always had a strained relationship with my teammates. We were often friends, but I felt like a I had to put on a character to fit in with most of them. I had to downplay my "gayness" and "Chinese-ness."' Similarly, a 26-year-old white lesbian ciswoman and retired intercollegiate soccer player recalled, 'I've always had good relationships with my teammates and coaches, but I always felt uncomfortable on the inside—I just didn't let anyone see it. Being in the closet seemed like a small price to pay for playing soccer.' Respondents spoke to a catch-22 situation wherein they did not feel close enough with

their teammates to come out, but they could not establish close bonds with teammates because they were closeted. A 20-year-old Romani bisexual non-binary person and competitive high school cross-country runner classified their relationships with teammates as:

> ...close but not always close enough to come out to. I wanted to be closer with my teammates, but I couldn't do that without coming out and they just weren't ready for those conversations, and I wasn't ready to start them—so I was stuck.

Some respondents only participated in organized sports throughout adolescence. As a result, participants often questioned and struggled with their sexuality and/or gender identity while participating in sports. A 23-year-old Middle Eastern queer transwoman and retired intercollegiate soccer player explained how this period of personal development was complicated by her sporting experiences:

> I was an athlete before I knew I was queer and I was on a mostly straight male team, so most of my relationships were burdened by navigating homophobia and not knowing why it bothered me so much. I think this kept me from forming close bonds with my teammates and the coach who didn't think homophobic chatter was inappropriate.

The casual and sometimes social nature of homophobia and transphobia can make it particularly hard to ascertain how teammates and coaches will react to an out LGBTQ+ athlete. For example, a 23-year-old white lesbian ciswoman explained how on her rugby and hockey teams, 'there was lot of "no homo" in sports I used to play, and I spent a lot of time trying to hide my queerness. But I'm out, and my relationships are largely positive now. My worry was largely overblown.' The saying 'no homo' is commonly uttered after a homosocial interaction like a same-gender display of affection to confirm the heterosexuality of those involved. Although this individual

was pleasantly surprised that her fears of rejection were overblown, others found that their fears were completely justified. A 24-year-old white lesbian ciswoman and retired competitive swimmer succinctly explained how her relationships with teammates, ‘were okay prior to them finding out I was gay—not great afterwards. Everything changed for the worst.’ Some respondents spoke to experiencing negative and sometimes extreme backlashes to coming out as transgender to their teammates and coaches. For example, a 23-year-old Ashkenazi Jewish pansexual transwoman clarified how:

> Coming out as trans changed a lot of my relationships. Prior to coming out of the closet I had good relationships with fellow martial artists and instructors. After coming out all of my relationships became strained, some even became hostile. I went from being someone they knew to a stranger—with a huge emphasis on strange. They didn’t know how to act around me. Suddenly, I didn’t feel welcome in my own studio.

The binary division of gender reiterated by competitive sporting practices can render athletic spaces unsupportive of transgender participation. A 25-year-old First Nations queer transwoman reported how limited her athletic options became after coming out as transgender:

> I used to be accepted in almost any space before I came out. Now, I either play dodgeball or volleyball. That’s it. I don’t get any other choices because sports are fucking shit for trans inclusion. I can’t do what I once did anymore. Colonizers and their chokehold on sports, among other things—stifling and policing livelihoods they’re too lazy to understand. I can’t even express how fucking infuriating it is.

Although athletes can choose whether or not to publicly identify as LGBTQ+, in the words of one 18-year-old white queer nonbinary individual and high school basketball player, ‘the

closet—it's you're damned if you do, damned if you don't—especially in sports, you're just damned.'

Athletic ability: 'You can always tell when you aren't wanted.'

Participants (*n* = 358; 48.3%) also mentioned how their athletic ability influenced sporting experiences. As a result of sports celebrating physical prowess, lack of athletic ability negatively impacted 181 participants' experiences. For example, a 23-year-old East Asian bisexual genderqueer individual, who played soccer during adolescence, explained how, 'I have always been bad at sports, was always picked last etc., and I stopped doing it as soon as possible. My teammates weren't overly mean, but you can always tell when you aren't wanted.' Feelings of inadequacy were often exacerbated by competitive coaches which cemented some environments as ostensibly exclusive. A 25-year-old white demi-sexual nonbinary individual and retired hockey player stated how 'I never seemed to live up to coaches' expectations, even when they were aware of my limitations. Teammates were far more forgiving and understanding, but I couldn't shake the feeling of being "not good enough" for the coaches.' The strong sentiment of being unwanted and unvalued as an athlete, coupled with high standards for performance left some participants feeling estranged from their team and thwarted feelings of belonging. A 21-year-old Black queer ciswoman recalled how on her high school volleyball team:

> In school, I always found these relationships extremely antagonistic—from coaches who belittled me or berated me for not playing well, to teammates who were looking for an easy target to be angry at. I felt like our team was being held back because of me.

Contrastingly, some participants (*n* = 177) felt like their athletic ability encouraged teammates to accept them which fostered a more inclusive sporting environment. The bulk of

participants that viewed their athleticism positively identified as cisgender (*n* = 143) and identified as either lesbian (*n* = 68) or gay (*n* = 57). One 26-year-old white gay cisman explained how, 'people accept me for what I bring to the sports I'm involved with. Sexuality is an irrelevant side issue that attracts nothing more than a little mutually enjoyable friendly banter.' At higher levels of competition, team acceptance of participants was established through mutual respect for each other's performance. In the words of one 22-year-old mixed-race gay cisman and competitive martial artist, 'I do not necessarily feel like my team needs to know about my sexuality to support me or feel connected, because at a world-level competitive sport the judges don't care if you're queer or not. They care about how you perform.'

Discussion

This study was driven by LGBTQ+ adults who encouraged us to ask the question: How do self-identified LGBTQ+ adults describe their past and current interpersonal relationships within sporting contexts? Our findings suggest that relationships, specifically those with teammates and coaches, make or break the sporting environments experienced by LGBTQ+ athletes.

According to SDT, the three basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness can be supported or thwarted by environmental factors, in this case within sporting contexts (for reviews see Ryan & Deci, 2017; Standage & Ryan, 2020). Although many factors can influence an athletes' motivation and well-being, the coach-athlete relationship has been identified as one of the most critical (Standage & Ryan, 2020). Participants in this study described how relationships with teammates and coaches played a significant role in LGBTQ+ in/exclusivity; however, more influence was commonly attributed to coaches. With regard to SDT research in sport, great attention has been paid towards examining the effects of autonomy-

supportive coaching styles on need satisfaction and athlete motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A recent meta-analysis of 131 studies investigating autonomy support in sport and exercise contexts found that autonomy support was strongly, positively associated with athlete well-being and negatively associated with distress (Mossman, Slemp, Lewis, Colla, & O'Halloran, 2022). However, our findings emphasize the significance of relatedness, specifically for LGBTQ+ athletes. Participants describing exclusive and formal sport environments commonly referred to an inability to connect with or feel like they belonged, while participants describing inclusive sport environments often highlighted how connected to and supported they felt on their team. Although autonomy supportive coaching styles have been associated with competence and relatedness (Mossman et al., 2022), our participants did not comment on a lack of or use of autonomy support. Subsequently, future research should explore the significance of relatedness support within sport for LGBTQ+ athletes. Our findings are also corroborated by qualitative studies that have described how critical feelings of relatedness are for encouraging LGBTQ+ sport participation and to the creation of safer sporting spaces for LGBTQ+ athletes (e.g., Greenspan et al., 2017; Herrick et al., 2020; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Mann & Krane, 2018).

Over half of the participants referred to unsupportive sporting relationships that jeopardized feelings of comfort and created exclusionary environments. Sporting relationships that generated exclusionary environments, in addition to being characterized by thwarted feelings of relatedness, were also rife with distal LGBTQ+ stressors such as discrimination, harassment, and marginalization (Meyer, 2003). Previous work has demonstrated that proximal LGBTQ+ stressors are negatively related to need satisfaction in physical activity contexts (Herrick et al., 2021), however more research is required to explore how specific LGBTQ+ stressors in sport relate to each of the basic psychological needs. A mixed-methods systematic review of studies

(N = 82) exploring factors that influence adolescent gender attitudes found that across culture settings, young adolescents commonly express stereotypical, rigid gender norms (Kågesten et al., 2016). Given the propensity of LGBTQ+ individuals to challenge the gender norms and binaries that are prevalent in sport, perceived violation of gender norms may in part drives LGBTQ+ discrimination by teammates. Subsequently, interventions designed to critically engage with and transform gender norms in sport may be required, in addition to interventions designed to reduce LGBTQ+ distal stressors, to create truly inclusive sporting environments.

Participants reporting exclusionary environments commonly referred to experiences with youth sport teams. A mixed-studies review of the role of coaches, peers, and parents in the satisfaction of youth athletes' basic psychological needs (N = 20) concluded that coaches were the most important social factor influencing athlete autonomy while peers were the most important factor influencing relatedness and competence (Chu & Zhang, 2019). In the current study, lack of competence in sport or athletic ability negatively impacted 181 participants' experiences within sport. For 177 participants, who predominantly identified as cisgender and as lesbian or gay, increased athletic competence greatly influenced mobility along the continuum of sporting environments (Figure 1). Participants described how increased competence made them indispensable to their team and encouraged others to, if not accept them, at least tolerate them. An examination of bullying through one-on-one interviews with eight intercollegiate team sports captains, found that athletic ability was the most commonly-reported protective factor against being targeted (Kerr et al., 2016). These findings were supported by two studies where among gay cis-male athletes, high levels of athletic competency resulted in resistance against homophobia on their respective teams (Anderson, 2002, 2011). Future research should explore

the potential buffering relationship between athletic competence and the influence of LGBTQ+ stressors in sport.

Studies have also suggested that disparities in youth team sport participation are particularly pronounced between gay and heterosexual males (Denison et al., 2021; Doull et al., 2018; Elling & Janssens, 2009). However, in this study, negative sporting experiences were reported somewhat consistently across all sexual orientations. An exploration of sexual prejudice perpetrated by Italian sports directors (n = 128) and coaches (n = 52) towards sexual minority athletes found that subtler and more indirect forms of sexual prejudice persisted over overt sexual prejudice in sport (Amodeo et al., 2020). Our participants often described instances of subtle forms sexual prejudice within youth sport, while accounts of overt gender prejudice were more commonly recalled by transgender and gender-nonconforming participants. Both sexual and gender prejudice are LGBTQ+ stressors, however our findings suggest that gender prejudice may be more commonly experienced by athletes. Within sport, transphobic and misogynistic discourses intertwine to paint the participation of transwomen as a threat to the fairness of sport and perpetuates discrimination against transgender athletes (Bianchi, 2017; Knox, Anderson, & Heather, 2019). Given that 80% of all transwomen in this study described experiencing overt distal stressors such as discrimination and harassment in sports, gender prejudice against transwomen may be more likely to be endorsed by teammates and coaches.

Only 16.2% of participants described supportive sporting relationships and inclusive sporting experiences. The bulk of participants that described positive sporting experiences identified as ciswomen (n = 70). Participants commonly cited feeling supported by and connected to teammates as their main reason for continued participation, which suggests that feelings of relatedness are integral for LGBTQ+ inclusivity. Some participants (n = 51) sought

out explicitly LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces and programs to re-engage with sport as adults. LGBTQ+ specific sporting leagues and non-traditional sports (e.g., roller derby, Quidditch, etc.) may provide initial insight into how sports can better support LGBTQ+ relatedness and what an LGBTQ+-inclusive reorganization of sports might entail. The sporting alternatives discussed in this study catered primarily to adults. Therefore, additional research is needed to understand the (non)existence of accessible and affordable LGBTQ+ youth-specific sport alternatives.

Half of the participants described using identity concealment tactics, a common LGBTQ+ proximal stressor, to allow them to experience more inclusion within their sport. In line with this finding, a study involving interviews with 13 queer cis-female intercollegiate athletes revealed that on sports teams, athletes would often weigh potential backlash against their own discomfort before sharing their sexuality with teammates and coaches (Mann & Krane, 2018a). Although identity concealment tactics can enable LGBTQ+ athletes to comfortably participate in sport, identity concealment, even when used as protective strategy, can foster anxiety, shame, and become increasingly stressful over time (Meyer, 2003). At present, the relationship between LGBTQ+ identity concealment and psychological distress is far from clear as it seems to vary by sexuality, race/ethnicity, and age (Hoy-Ellis, 2021). Given that identity concealment can be simultaneously protective and detrimental, the influence on the satisfaction of athletes' psychological needs in sport may be even more complicated in its potential to support as well as thwart autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Of the participants in this study that referenced the closet, 147 spoke about concealing their gender identity and expression indicating that 74.2% of all non-cisgender participants used identity concealment tactics to feel accepted and safe within sport. Given the institutional and personal violence that transgender and gender-

nonconforming persons face, reliance upon identity concealment strategies may shift beyond questions of comfortability towards questions of survival (Wirtz et al., 2020).

Over the past few decades there has been notable progress towards and increased awareness of LGBTQ+ inclusion, subsequently some experiences described in this study may be more indicative of the past (Krane, 2016; Storr et al., 2021). However, negative youth sporting experiences among participants seemed to inform current perceptions of physical activity which suggests that experiencing LGBTQ+ stressors in sport can have long-term effects. Although more research is needed to fully understand how to create and maintain LGBTQ+ inclusive youth sports, future work should also be dedicated to understanding how to foster healing from previous adolescent sport trauma and support current physical activity participation among LGBTQ+ adults.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

Our final sample was comprised of responses from 741 self-identified LGBTQ+ adults. The mean age of the participants was relatively young, therefore, despite the great variability of experiences expressed, findings from this study may represent a specific generation. Future research should purposefully recruit athletes from different generations to explore the progression towards LGBTQ+ inclusion in sport over time. Our sample was predominantly white, which may reflect discourses of white privilege in sporting contexts (King, Leonard, & Kusz, 2007; McDonald, 2016). Future research should explicitly explore how intersections of gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity influence sporting experiences among athletes. We also acknowledge that our results may be biased towards individuals who were specifically interested in a survey about physical activity as respondents self-selected to participate. For the sake of anonymity, we were also unable to follow-up with participants and ask for clarification on their

submitted responses. We suggest that future studies employing open-ended response questions allow for the collection of participant's email addresses for follow-up correspondence.

Through this study, we have gained a better understanding of the variability of sporting relationships and how these relationships can support or thwart athlete participation as well as LGBTQ+ in/exclusivity. Our findings also suggest different identities nestled under the LGBTQ+ umbrella experience different forms and severity of discrimination within sports, while also providing evidence that strong similarities of LGBTQ+ experience in sport exist across identities. Although acceptance for LGBTQ+ communities is steadily growing, acceptance and tolerance are not uniformly distributed, especially across gender, sexuality, and sporting contexts. This study produces a snapshot of the varied sporting relationships LGBTQ+ individuals can experience within sport. Our findings demonstrate that despite strides towards LGBTQ+ inclusivity within sport, there are still pervasive vestiges of intolerance that need to be engaged with and deconstructed so that all LGBTQ+ athletes can truly feel like they belong.

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Table 1

General Demographic Variables

Variable	Mean (*SD*)	Range
Age	30.2 years (6.7)	18-49 years
Years publicly out	8.8 years (7.6)	0-39 years
Current MVPA	259.1 min/week (226.1)	0-2200 min/week

Variable	Frequencies (*n*)	Percentage
Gender Identity		
Ciswoman	315	42.5
Cisman	219	29.6
Non-binary	117	15.8
Transman	54	7.3
Transwoman	36	4.8
Sexuality		
Lesbian	228	30.1
Gay	173	23.3
Queer	149	20.1
Bisexual	91	12.3
Pansexual	48	6.4
Demisexual	20	2.7
Asexual	18	2.4
Questioning	12	1.6
Heterosexual	2	0.3
Identify as an athlete		
Currently	102	13.8
In the past	265	35.8
Never	374	50.5
Highest level of competition		
Recreational	199	26.8
City-wide league	118	15.9
State-wide league/Provincial	168	22.7
Intercollegiate/University	189	25.5
National	53	7.2
Professional	14	1.9
Ethno-Racial Background		
White	531	71.7

Hispanic	38	5.1
Mixed race	36	4.9
Indigenous	29	3.9
Middle Eastern	29	3.9
South Asian	26	3.5
African	21	2.8
East Asian	20	2.7
Caribbean	11	1.5
Education		
Undergraduate/Baccalaureate	192	25.9
Some college	152	20.5
Master's degree	123	16.6
High school diploma/GED	96	13.0
Some college post-undergraduate	74	10.0
Vocational/training school	31	4.2
Doctoral degree	29	3.9
CEGEP or DEC	22	3.0
Some high school	14	1.9
Didn't attend high school	6	0.8
Other	2	0.3
Annual household income ($)		
Less than 25,000	176	23.8
25,001-50,000	137	18.5
50,001-75,000	120	16.2
75,001-100,000	111	15.0
100,001-125,000	86	11.6
More than 150,001	53	7.2
125,001-150,000	37	5.0
Prefer not to say	21	2.8

Notes.
We acknowledge that 'coming out' is a nuanced, layered, and continuous process that cannot authentically be assessed using a strict binary of 'in' vs. 'out'.
We also acknowledge that "white" is not a description of ethnicity or origin, but rather a broad description of skin color or racial classification (as such, it does not represent a single ethnic group).
GED = high-school equivalency certificate; CEGEP = Collége d'enseignement general et professionnel; DEC = diplôme d'études collégiales.

Figure 1

Figure 1. Continuum of LGBTQ+ sporting experiences

SPORTING ENVIRONMENTS	EXCLUSIVE ←	INERT	INCLUSIVE	→ ALTERNATIVES
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	**Negative** relationships characterized by: -Discrimination -Homo/transphobia	**Neutral** relationships navigated through self-distancing techniques	**Positive** relationships characterized by: -Acceptance -Support	**Positive** relationships characterized by a sense of community
PARTICIPANTS Gender Sexuality	**419 (56.8%)** Ciswomen (170), cismen (122), nonbinary (70), transmen (28), transwomen (29) Lesbian (122), gay (102), queer (89), bi(58), pan (25), demi (8), ace (6), questioning (8)	**122 (16.5%)** Ciswomen (44), cismen (48), nonbinary (21), transmen (7), transwoman (1) Gay (35), lesbian (29), queer (17), bi(15), pan (9), ace (7), demi (5), questioning (1)	**150 (20.2%)** Ciswomen (70), cismen (46), nonbinary (17), transmen (14), transwomen (3) Lesbian (57), gay (33), queer (30), bi(13), pan (10), demi (4), ace (2), questioning (1)	**51 (20.2%)** Ciswomen (31), nonbinary (9), transmen (5), cismen (3), transwomen (3) Lesbian (20), queer (13), bi(5), pan (4), gay (3), demi (3), ace (3)
MOBILITY	← IDENTITY CONCEALMENT →		← ATHLETIC ABILITY →	
PARTICIPANTS Gender Sexuality	**402 (54.2%)** Cismen (127), ciswomen (128), nonbinary (66), transmen (47), transwomen (34) Gay (107), lesbian (102) queer (93), bi(65), pan (23), demi (8), ace (3), questioning (1)		**358 (48.3%)** Ciswomen (131), Cismen (113), nonbinary (74), transmen (32), transwomen (8) Lesbian (102), gay (91), queer (75), bi(58), pan (21), demi (6), ace (3), questioning (2)	

Bridging Text

In Chapter Four, I explored how self-identified LGBTQ+ adults described their past and current relationships within sporting contexts. Using an open-response question in an online cross-sectional survey, this study is based on the submitted responses by 741 LGBTQ+ adults to the question "How would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?" Through inductive thematic analysis, relationships with teammates and coaches were found to significantly influence the experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes as well as shape the perceived in/exclusivity of sporting environments. Unsupportive and hostile sporting relationships characterized by discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia culminated in overall negative experiences and sporting environments that actively excluded LGBTQ+ athletes. Contrastingly, supportive sporting relationships that were predicated on LGBTQ+ tolerance, inclusion, and acceptance created positive experiences for LGBTQ+ athletes. Through this study, I have gained a better understanding of the variability of relationships in sport and how these relationships can support or thwart LGBTQ+ participation. Specifically, negative adolescent sporting experiences were found to significantly influence how participants viewed sport and physical activity as adults. In Chapter Three, participants also described how negative adolescent experiences with locker rooms across a variety of physical activity contexts similarly influenced their current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and (dis)engagement in physical activity. Given the significance of adolescent experiences, in Chapter Five, I sought to garner an understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within the most universally-experienced physical activity context throughout adolescence—physical education (PE). In general, students are mandated to participate in PE throughout their youth which makes it an ideal context to better understand adolescent LGBTQ+ experiences with physical activity.

Subsequently, a systematic scoping review was conducted to generate a comprehensive overview of and identify gaps within our current understanding of LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE.

Chapter Five: Study 3

A systematic scoping review of physical education experiences from the perspective of LGBTQ+ students

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Abstract

Despite shifts towards inclusivity, physical education (PE) is still perceived as unwelcoming towards students who identify as sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ+). A systematic scoping review was conducted to garner an enhanced understanding of the empirical literature exploring LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE. Studies were identified by searching eight electronic databases which produced 962 abstracts from which eight articles were eligible for inclusion. Data were then extracted, summarized, and thematically synthesized into a conceptual map. The majority of the articles reviewed relied on samples that were predominantly comprised of able-bodied white cisgender individuals, with only half of the articles involving adolescent participants. Across studies, the omnipresence of cis-heteronormativity in PE adversely influenced LGBTQ+ experiences through homophobic and transphobic practices. The qualitative studies included in this review highlighted the implicit and explicit gendering processes that work to gender students as well as physical activities. Although cis-heteronormativity and its resulting exclusive practices should continue to be challenged in policies, the experiences of current LGBTQ+ students within PE should be prioritized to inform and evaluate inclusive PE policies, curricula, and teacher training.

Keywords: sexuality, gender, diversity, school, adolescence, physical activity

Introduction

Physical education (PE) plays an integral role in a student's educational experience by encouraging them to develop their motor skills, fitness, and social relationships, as well as gain an understanding of the significance of regular physical activity participation for overall health (Bailey, 2006). Within westernized countries, PE was primarily introduced as a means to transform boys into strong, soldierly, heterosexual men through sports-based curricula that glorified athleticism, power, and aggression (Clarke, 2006). Despite greater socio-political shifts towards inclusion across westernized countries, PE is still interpreted as unwelcoming to students who do not conform to or embody cis-heteropatriarchal ideals, where adherence to strict expectations for cisgender heterosexual men are privileged (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009).

For individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identities beyond cis-heteronormative assumptions (i.e., LGBTQ+), experiences within PE are often complicated by instances of discrimination fueled by cissexism (i.e., prejudice and discrimination against transgender people; e.g., Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, Pérez-Samaniego, & Fuentes-Miguel, 2018) and heterosexism (i.e., prejudice and discrimination against non-heterosexual people; e.g., Clarke, 2012). A content analysis of literature spanning 20 years (from 1998-2018; $N = 13$) exploring LGBTQ+ youth experiences with physical activity and sport found an overall pattern across studies of sexual minority youth engaging in less physical activity when compared to their heterosexual peers (Greenspan, Griffith, & Watson, 2019). In *Queer Bodies: Sexualities, Genders and Fatness in Physical Education,* 39 adults that identified as one or more marginalized identity were interviewed about their previous experiences with PE in Canada (Sykes, 2011). Narratives demonstrated that queer bodies threatened the assumed normalcy that PE champions as well as reinforced the significance of PE

teachers' influence in fostering in/exclusive learning environments (Sykes, 2011). Similarly, in *Trans Generation*, 36 youth (age 6-18 years) that identified as transgender and/or gender-nonconforming as well as their parents, were interviewed about their experiences with school (Travers, 2018). Sex-segregated facilities and activities such as bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports were particularly frustrating and in some cases, dangerous to navigate for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth (Travers, 2018). Experiences were often further complicated by the school environment itself (public vs. private), especially when the school was aligned with a particular religion (e.g., Catholicism; Travers, 2018). Through explicit and implicit practices, PE programming and practices may work to sustain cis-heteronormativity while marginalizing students who belong to LGBTQ+ communities (Sykes, 2011; Travers, 2018).

To assuage growing concern for LGBTQ+ students, research has continuously explored and supported the development of inclusive PE curricula, policies, and practices (e.g., Greenspan, Whitcomb, & Griffith, 2019). Despite strides towards inclusion in PE policy and delivery, according to the National School Climate Surveys conducted by GLSEN, the percentage of LGBTQ+ students who avoid PE classes because they feel uncomfortable or unsafe has steadily increased from 31.9% in 2013 to 40.2% in 2019 (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020; Kosciw et al., 2014). Although alarming, these statistics should be interpreted with the understanding that GLSEN, as a non-profit organization, is reliant on funding structures and may benefit from perpetuating 'at-risk' narratives that emphasize the precarity of LGBTQ+ youth over their resiliency and agency (Saewyc, 2011). Regardless, top-down approaches towards LGBTQ+ inclusion within PE may be hindered by a simplified and homogenized understanding of LGBTQ+ student experiences. To develop informed and inclusive PE policies,

curricula, and teacher training, it is integral to first understand the diverse experiences of LGBTQ+ students expected to engage in PE.

A recent systematic analysis of LGBTQ+ scholarship (defined as book chapters, reports, and empirical, theoretical, and creative manuscripts) within PE designed to identify and categorize the literature using descriptive statistics found 37 empirically-based research articles and 21 philosophical/theoretical papers (Landi et al., 2020). Further analysis of the empirical research revealed that only 70.27% (n = 26) of the reviewed research involved LGBTQ+ participants, most of which (43.24%; n = 16) were in-service teachers (Landi et al., 2020). Despite the few studies that include LGBTQ+ students, to date, no literature synthesis has been conducted to garner an in-depth analysis into our current understanding of LGBTQ+ PE experiences. Therefore, our review sought to garner an enhanced understanding of the empirical literature exploring LGBTQ+ experiences within PE. We conducted a systematic scoping review to explore the questions: (a) what is the current state of research focused on LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education? and (b) based on previous research findings, what are common LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education?

Methods

A scoping review methodology was chosen to explore the scope of research detailing LGBTQ+ student experiences in PE and identify gaps in current knowledge (Kastner et al., 2012; Munn et al., 2018). The scoping review was conducted using Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework with the addition of Levac, Coloquhoun, and O'Brien's (2010) recommendations. In line with Pham et al., (2014)'s recommendations, we also remained open to redefining and amending the review protocol as we became more familiar with the landscape of the literature.

Identifying Relevant Studies

The search protocol for this review was developed a priori and in consultation with an experienced librarian (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010). The initial search was conducted on May 14th, 2019, using eight electronic databases selected to be comprehensive and to cover a broad range of disciplines: ERIC, Gender Studies Database, Genderwatch, Global Health, PsycINFO, Scopus, SocINDEX, and SportDiscus. Initial searches were refined through database filters restricting results to those published after 19902 and written in English. The search query consisted of terms organized into two categories: (1) terms related to LGBTQ+ identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, transgender, transsexual, queer, homosexual, gender, gender identity, two-spirit, sexual orientation, sexuality, LGBT, LGBTQ, or LGBTQ+, and (2) terms related to physical education: physical education, PE, Phys. Ed, physical educators, physical health education, teaching education, teacher program, teacher preparation, teacher training, physical and health education, gym class, or gym. Each database was searched for entries that included both keyword categories (1) and (2).

Study Selection Criteria

Types of studies. Eligible studies examined LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education, were available in English, and published in peer-reviewed journals between 1990* and May 14th, 2019. Given that each institution has different publication protocols, for the sake of accessibility and feasibility, we excluded theses and dissertations from this review and limited articles to those only published in peer-reviewed journals.

*In 1990, the World Health Organization officially confirmed that homosexuality is not a mental illness.

Types of participants. Participants were anticipated to fall under two categories: (a) self-identified LGBTQ+ adolescents speaking to current and/or recent experiences in PE, or (b) self-identified LGBTQ+ adults retrospectively speaking to their past experiences with PE. Throughout the search process, these criteria were expanded to accept studies that included and identified LGBTQ+ participants within larger samples of predominantly heterosexual participants.

Article Collection

The initial search generated a total of 18, 410 entries from the eight databases. All citations were imported into EndNote X9. The flow of articles through the selection process is presented in Figure 1. Duplicate citations (n = 1, 112) as well as entries not written in English (n = 10) and not published in peer-reviewed journals (n = 1, 405) were removed.

The remaining 15, 883 titles were manually screened by the first author and irrelevant titles were excluded (n = 14, 921). The first author and a second reviewer independently screened all the eligible abstracts (n = 962). Some abstracts that focused on aspects of PE but did not contain sufficient participant information were also subject to an additional check by the reviewers where the full article was retrieved and reviewed for key terms related to LGBTQ+ experiences (e.g., sexual, gay, bisexual, trans, etc.). Articles were excluded if they did not report having any LGBTQ+ participants. Reviewers corroborated their progress on a weekly basis and came to a consensus about the 11 articles eligible for full-text review. Through collaborative discussions, the authors decided to exclude three articles from the final analysis as these studies limited their discussions to LGBTQ+ experiences within school sport contexts specifically, with little to no discussion of PE (Carless, 2012; Caudwell, 2014a; Wellard, 2006). Subsequently, eight eligible articles were retained for data extraction and analysis. Given the heterogeneity of

the articles reviewed, the quality of articles was not formally assessed (Colquhoun et al., 2014). However, all retained articles were interpreted by the reviewers to be methodologically coherent (Chenail, Duffy, St George, & Wulff, 2011).

Data Extraction

A data extraction form was created, trialed with two articles, and modified slightly before use in this study (Peters et al., 2015). The eight eligible articles were read once in full for familiarization and again for the extraction of the: title, author, year, source origin, purpose, participants, methodology, and key findings (see Table 1). Articles were also assigned a reference number according to their publication date that will be used throughout the results in superscript (Table 1).

Charting the Data

Informed by the synthesis without meta-analysis (SWiM) guidelines, the authors intentionally prioritized studies in the thematic synthesis with the majority of participants self-identifying as LGBTQ+ (Campbell et al., 2020). Both authors conducted a thematic analysis to identify prominent and recurring themes within the literature (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Within scoping reviews, thematic analysis is an appropriate method of knowledge synthesis for the investigation of overarching, interpretative patterns across studies that present qualitative and quantitative findings (Braun et al., 2016; Kastner et al., 2012).

To become fully immersed in the data, both authors revisited the full-texts and reviewed the data extraction table to inform their discussions of overarching themes across the studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Braun et al., 2016; Levac et al., 2010). Through a series of discussions, the authors agreed upon a thematic coding scheme which they used to guide their independent coding of the articles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A series of reflective meetings were

held after the initial coding was complete wherein the authors discussed observations made while coding (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). For example, the authors briefly contemplated separating studies according to their methodologies (quantitative vs. qualitative) as their associated paradigms seemed irreconcilable. Ultimately, the authors felt that each study in their varied methods exemplified a different way of knowing and understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences that worked together to generate a multi-faceted image of LGBTQ+ student experiences in PE. Once a consensus was reached with respect to the coding of the articles, the authors developed the final conceptual map by exploring the relationships between the identified overarching themes (Figure 2).

Results

The majority of the eight studies reviewed used qualitative methodologies with the notable exception of two quantitative assessments of homophobia in physical education and perceived inclusivity of physical activity climates[1,4] and one mixed-methods study exploring LGBTQ+ and ally youth experiences within school athletic settings[7].

Of the eight articles retained, four studies included adolescent participants[2,5,7,8]. Of the four studies with adolescent participants, one qualitative exploration of why girls chose to drop out of PE courses[2] did not include explicit demographic information but indicated that the participants were five young women ‘diverse in terms of race, class, and sexual orientation’ (p. 116). Additionally, a study investigating decreasing homophobia among high school PE students involved a sample comprised of ostensibly heterosexual male students (n = 15) over gay students (n = 1)[5]. Of the four studies, two were conducted with primarily self-identified LGBTQ+ adolescent participants[7,8].

The remaining four studies were comprised of mixed-gender adult participants[1,3,4,6], with two qualitative studies predominantly comprised of self-identified LGBTQ+ adults recalling their past experiences with PE[3,6]. Two quantitative studies focused on assessing homophobia within PE[1] and the perceived climate of physical activity settings[4] used mixed samples of adults (some of which included pre- and post-service physical educators) that were predominantly heterosexual.

Given the diversity of objectives, participants, and methodologies employed by the eight studies, the salient themes identified address broad socio-cultural influences on the implicit organization of PE and LGBTQ+ student experiences (Figure 2).

Intersectionality

Studies included in this review found that LGBTQ+ experiences within PE were inextricably intertwined with experiences of sexism, ableism, racism, and binarism[2-4,6]. Studies strongly advocated for intersectional approaches when investigating the multiplicity of LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE contexts[1-4,6]. An investigation of perceived climates suggested that physical activity settings were the most inclusive of racial and ethnic minorities (when compared to other minority groups)[4]. However, in an exploration of queer men's desire in PE, one-on-one interviews illustrated how PE is influenced by dominant discourses about ethnicities, genders, and sexualities that work to reinforce white supremacy and heterosexuality under the guise of 'health'[8]. Within PE contexts, these interrelated discourses worked to privilege students that exhibit able-bodied masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality while simultaneously marginalizing and rejecting students that did not[1,3-8].

Cis-Heteronormativity

Given that all studies included in this review had participants that self-identified as LGBTQ+, the intersection between cissexism and heterosexism significantly influenced student experiences within PE across all studies.

Hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a critical aspect of cis-heteronormativity, that legitimizes a masculine hierarchy where presupposed 'heterosexual' masculine cisgender men are positioned as superior to all others[3,5,6,8]. Hegemonic masculinity was often associated with a narrow conception of athletic ability that emphasized strength, competition, and aggression[2,5,6]. The glorification of hegemonic masculinity within studies was in stark contrast to the subjugation of femininity[2,6,7]. Among LGBTQ+ and ally youth survey respondents (n = 58), most students (56.9%) frequently or often heard remarks about not acting masculine enough in PE settings[7]. Through a combination of focus groups and interviews, adolescent participants (n = 13) also explained how PE teachers championed hegemonically masculine and hyper-aggressive sports in class, while simultaneously dismissing the physical and emotional needs of LGBTQ+ youth[7]. Public evaluation within PE, coupled with an atmosphere of competition encouraged participants to draw direct comparisons between themselves and their peers across several categories, from athletic ability to 'attractiveness'[2,3,6,8]. Hegemonic masculinity within PE reified cis-heteronormativity by suppressing and subjugating the multiplicities of masculinity and femininity displayed by students[3,5,6]. However, just as PE influences LGBTQ+ student experiences, LGBTQ+ students can also influence, resist, and transform PE[5,8].

Phobias

Within six studies, homophobia and transphobia were recognized by participants as common methods for reinforcing cis-heteronormativity and LGBTQ+ marginality[1,3,4,6-8].

Homophobia. Homophobia was commonly employed within PE to call into question a male student's masculinity, where being called 'gay' often implied being physically weak or uncoordinated[4,5,6]. Results from a cross-sectional survey assessing perceptions about homophobia in PE among physical educators (n = 82; 42 men, 40 women; 3 identifying as LGB) and recently graduated high school students (n = 77; 49 men, 28 women; 58 identifying as LGB) suggested that homophobia was at least as prevalent within PE as it was within the wider school population.[1] The majority of LGB student participants (82%) and 20% of heterosexual male students had experienced homophobic behaviors from their peers during PE class[1]. Similarly, a quantitative study exploring the perceived climate for minority groups across sports, exercise, and PE found that men were more likely to report hearing homophobic comments than women, especially in fields, gymnasiums, and locker rooms[4]. Over half of the youth participants (n = 58) in a survey about PE experiences indicated that they regularly heard the word 'gay' used negatively within PE settings[7]. Within PE, homophobia was also used by peers to mark female students as devoid of femininity and by extension, presumably 'lesbian'[2,3,6]. Contrastingly, one 3-month ethnographic fieldwork study of a high school PE class found that among students (N = 16) homophobia was regarded as a sign of immaturity and communally understood as a behaviour that one is supposed to grow out of[5].

Transphobia. Within PE, the underlying rigid gender binary legitimized the policing of students who did not conform to the *cis*-element of cis-heteronormativity by their peers as well as teachers[6-8]. In addition to peers being transphobic, one survey revealed that 19% of LGBTQ+ youth (n = 57) overheard transphobic remarks made by their school athletic staff[7]. Additionally, 36.2% and 22.4% of LGBTQ+ youth also reported that they had frequently heard comments about students not acting 'masculine' or 'feminine' enough for school athletics, respectively[7]. In

a retrospective qualitative study of transgender experiences within PE, participants that identified as transwomen (*n* = 5) recalled PE negatively and regarded it as demotivating while some participants that identified as transmen (*n* = 4) regarded PE positively.[6]

The Relationship between PE Teachers and Students

Across studies, LGBTQ+ students' experiences in PE were greatly influenced by relationships with their PE teachers[1,3,4,6-8]. Relationships between PE teachers and students were defined by a lack of teacher intervention in the face of homophobia and transphobia[1,3,7]. In a survey of PE teachers (*n* = 82) and students (*n* = 77), most students indicated that their PE teachers 'never' (*n* = 53) or 'rarely' (*n* = 19) openly confronted homophobic behavior[1]. In 2010, a similar survey asked about the frequency someone intervened when heterosexist slurs were used in PE and less than 10% of participants indicated that someone intervened 'always or most of the time'[4]. In a mixed-methods study of LGBTQ+ youth experiences, participants were asked how often a PE teacher or athletic staff member intervened when present during homophobic remarks[7]. Of the participants who chose to respond (*n* = 58), 20.7% of respondents indicated 'never' and 20.7% indicated 'rarely'[7]. When asked the same question about transphobic remarks, of the participants who chose to respond (*n* = 56), 20.7% indicated 'never' and 22.4% indicated 'rarely'[7]. LGBTQ+ students' PE experiences were shaped by teachers who did little to model inclusive behaviors[1,7].

Double Gendering in PE

Although physical education can provide opportunities for students to perform gender, participants who challenged cis-heteronormativity in PE were often reprimanded by teachers and targeted for discrimination by peers[3,6]. Across studies, seemingly naturalized processes by which students *and* activities were gendered worked to sustain cis-heteronormativity[2,3,6-8].

Gendering students. Although students can be (mis)gendered through a plethora of mechanisms within school contexts, sport and PE are organized by the distinct separation of students via the gender binary. A study exploring transgender experiences within PE through one-on-one interviews found participants (N = 9) often recalled feeling caught in-between and subsequently isolated from girl/boy categorizations rampant within their PE classes[6]. Furthermore, any time students transgressed gender-conforming practices and behaviours in PE they were met with negative consequences such as marginalization by their peers[3,6].

Locker rooms. Locker rooms were identified across studies by LGBTQ+ participants as being uncomfortable and unsafe to use[2,3,6,7]. Sexual minorities felt like they were implicitly transgressing the cis-heteronormative desire that maintains locker rooms and subsequently feared retaliation by other students[2,8]. Locker rooms were viewed as a structural barrier to LGBTQ+ participation in PE classes, especially among transgender students[6,7]. Survey results demonstrated that 40% of LGBTQ+ students avoided locker rooms, compared to 0% of non-LGBTQ+ students[7]. Furthermore, 29.3% of the LGBTQ+ student survey participants (n = 58) reported that they were required to use locker rooms and bathrooms associated with their legal sex and not their gender identity[7]. Young transgender adults commented on how their feelings of gender dysphoria were exacerbated by their locker room experiences[6]. Some participants developed strategies like changing as fast as possible, reducing the number of potential witnesses by waiting until classmates had left, and using toilets as privacy stalls if available, while others acknowledged how they would go to great lengths to avoid locker rooms altogether[5,6]. Across studies, locker rooms were regarded as incredibly problematic and stressful for students regardless of their sexuality and gender identity[2,3,5-8].

Division during class. Sports and sport-centric PE programs reiterated the gender binary through the separation of men and women. During class, PE teachers used 'gender-sensitive' strategies to adapt physical activities[2,7]. However, this binary-centric 'gender sensitivity' typically involved the gendered separation of students when activities required strength or body contact[2,6]. Participants across studies also recalled their PE teachers relying on differential gender-based treatment such as reducing the athletic expectations for girls in comparison to boys[2,6,7].

Gendering activities. In addition to the students being consistently (mis)gendered, the forms of movement disseminated through PE are also implicitly and explicitly gendered. Sports, and by extension sporting environments including PE, were typically regarded as hegemonically masculine, especially to the extent that sporting cultures champion aggression and competition[2,6]. Contrastingly, physical activities, like dance, typically represented an idealized form of femininity to students[2,3,6]. Dance within PE contexts was found to provide students with the opportunity to perform counter-hegemonic practices and challenge cis-heteronormativity[6]. Students who preferred physical activities that did not align with their perceived gender (male/masculine and female/feminine) were often subject to crude assumptions being made about their sexuality and experiencing homophobia employed by peers to police their behaviours[3,6].

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to enhance our understanding of LGBTQ+ student experiences in PE by addressing the research questions: (a) what is the current state of research focused on LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education? and (b) based on the literature, what are some common LGBTQ+ student experiences within physical education?

At present, there is a dearth of research that explores LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE. Half of the literature in this scoping review relied on samples that were predominantly comprised of able-bodied white cisgender heterosexual individuals (Anderson, 2012; Gill et al., 2010; Morrow & Gill, 2003; van Daalen, 2005). Throughout the article selection process, we excluded several studies that did not collect demographic information about sexuality and/or gender identity, despite investigating cis-heteronormativity within PE contexts (e.g., Hunter, 2004; Larsson, Redelius, & Fagrell, 2011). Although the absence of demographics can in part be attributed to the socio-historical context of these studies, in the past decade LGBTQ+ communities and the multiplicities of gender and sexuality that they represent are becoming more visible (Ng, 2013). As a result, PE research needs to take into account the processes of changing and fluidic identity politics as well as prioritize exploring diverse LGBTQ+ student experiences (Landi et al., 2020).

All research involving LGBTQ+ participants must entail exhaustive procedures to ensure the safety of participants, as well as their communities (Martin & Meezan, 2009). Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth may be in the thralls of navigating and questioning the fluidity of their sexuality and/or gender identity, making self-identification complex (Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009; Saewyc, 2011). Although research with LGBTQ+ youth may pose challenges, it is not enough to promote PE without understanding how it is experienced by those who are expected to participate. In this review, four studies included adolescent participants, wherein two study samples self-identified as predominantly cis-heterosexual (Anderson, 2012; van Daalen, 2005). Our findings corroborate those of a recent systematic exploration of LGBTQ+ scholarship in PE, that did not find any published studies with LGBTQ+ adolescent participants (Landi et al., 2020). There is a relative dearth of research on current LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE

that should be prioritized moving forward. Recent research, like Project RESPEQT, demonstrates that large-scale, in-depth studies with diverse LGBTQ+ youth are not only feasible but also empowering for participants and their communities (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2018; Porta et al., 2017).

Across studies, LGBTQ+ student experiences were greatly impacted by broad socio-cultural influences that influenced the organization and structuring of PE. Cis-heteronormativity was identified as an overarching concept within PE that ultimately validated homophobia, transphobia, and prevalent gendering processes (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Gill et al., 2010; Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, et al., 2019; Landi, 2019; Sykes, 2009). Variability of LGBTQ+ student experiences in PE seemed to be directly related to their PE teachers (Landi, 2019; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Sykes, 2009). Subsequently, research should focus on how to foster LGBTQ+ inclusive PE practices among educators. Through LGBTQ+ sport research, training programs have been developed and are consistently updated to provide training to educate athletic administrators, coaches, and sports staff on the best practices and policies for creating LGBTQ+ inclusive athletic communities (e.g., LGBT SportSafe, 2019). Subsequently, LGBTQ+ inclusive efforts found across sporting contexts should be compiled, adapted, and applied to PE contexts, especially for PE classes that are dictated by a sports-based curriculum. Findings from this review also suggest that general school climates of in/exclusivity are indicative of PE contexts, specifically the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia in schools (Anderson, 2012; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, et al., 2019; Morrow & Gill, 2003). Although zero-tolerance antidiscrimination and antiharassment school policies are commonly put forth to maintain student safety, all school staff must be trained and consistently encouraged to intervene when bias-motivated discrimination occurs (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez,

2011). Additionally, zero-tolerance policies when applied unilaterally may inadvertently admonish students that are in need of forgiveness, support, and further education (Travers, 2018).

Future research should also explore and challenge the ex/implicit gendering of students within PE by considering the subjective positions of potentially marginalized students (Sykes, 2011). Specifically, the binary-gender organization of locker rooms can make accessing these spaces incredibly difficult, stressful, or near impossible for students, especially for those who identify as transgender and/or gender-nonconforming (Herrick & Duncan, 2020). A qualitative study exploring the locker room experiences of LGBTQ+ adults ($N = 1,067$) put forward the following recommendations for improved inclusivity and accessibility: (a) increased privacy options be made available in all locker rooms, (b) gender-neutral locker room creation be prioritized, and (c) the binary division of locker rooms be challenged (Herrick & Duncan, 2020). In addition to these suggestions, findings from this review also support the revaluation of the time allotted for students to change for PE as the time provided may be insufficient for students to change comfortably (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; van Daalen, 2005). The differentiation of students into male/female categorizations and differential 'sex-based' treatment of students by PE teachers should also be investigated (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; van Daalen, 2005). Gender-sensitive PE programs may still reiterate the gender binary by emphasizing the integration of female students into the masculine or 'male' domain of PE. Although gender equity within PE is worth striving towards, conceptualizations of gender equity need to be expanded to include students that do not adhere to the gender binary. Future research should explore how shifts away from sport-based curricula and towards participation-based programs with a wider range of included physical activities influence gender inclusivity with PE (Devís-Devís et al., 2018;

Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes, et al., 2019; van Daalen, 2005). Allowing students to explore and celebrate a variety of physical activities may facilitate a de-gendering of movements or at the very least, allow students to question why and how movements are gendered as masculine and/or feminine. Furthermore, historically disregarded 'feminine' activities such as dance should be further explored within PE contexts, as they may present unique opportunities for students and physical educators to directly engage with the gendering of movement and the re-enactment of cis-heteronormativity (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Larsson, Quennerstedt, & Öhman, 2014).

Across studies included in this review, participants also demonstrated how racism, ableism, and sexism cannot be neatly disentangled from heterosexism and cissexism within PE contexts (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Sykes, 2009; van Daalen, 2005). Within the larger scope of PE research, several studies have explored the hegemony of whiteness and advocacy against racism from the perspective of physical educators (e.g.,Douglas & Halas, 2013; Flintoff & Dowling, 2019), as well as student experiences of racialized stereotypes within PE (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 2013). Similarly, the well-established domain of adapted physical education has engaged and challenged the inherent ableism within PE (e.g, Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Winnick & Porretta, 2016). However, the interrelatedness between social categorizations (race, gender, class, etc.), often referred to as intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991), cautions against the homogenization and tokenization of minority experiences. Select studies have explored how being a visible minority and a lesbian or gay intercollegiate athlete culminates in the complex navigation of a multitude of identities and standards (e.g., Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Given that sport and PE contexts are interconnected, LGBTQ+ BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) students in PE may face similar challenges and stereotypes to BIPOC athletes. In short, we also recommend that

future research be dedicated to an intersectional framework and intentionally seek to explore diverse LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE contexts.

Limitations

This systematic scoping review was restricted to studies written in English and published between 1990 and May 2019. By restricting included studies to those written in English due to the feasibility and costs associated with language translation (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), this review may overrepresent studies conducted in countries where English is an official language. Additionally, only studies published in peer-reviewed journals were retained which inherently excluded master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

Conclusions

Physical education is constituted by a complex system of relationships between governments, policy and curricula writers, health and sports professionals, administrators, teachers, and lastly, the students expected to participate. The omnipresence of cis-heteronormativity adversely influenced LGBTQ+ experiences in PE through homo and transphobic practices as well as im/explicit (mis)gendering processes. Findings from this review suggest that LGBTQ+ students' voices have been neglected and effectively silenced within PE research. Although cis-heteronormativity and its resulting exclusive practices should continue to be challenged in policies, greater school contexts, and sporting contexts, the experiences of current LGBTQ+ students within PE should be prioritized to inform and evaluate inclusive PE policies, curricula, and teacher training.

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Figure 1: Illustration of research process.

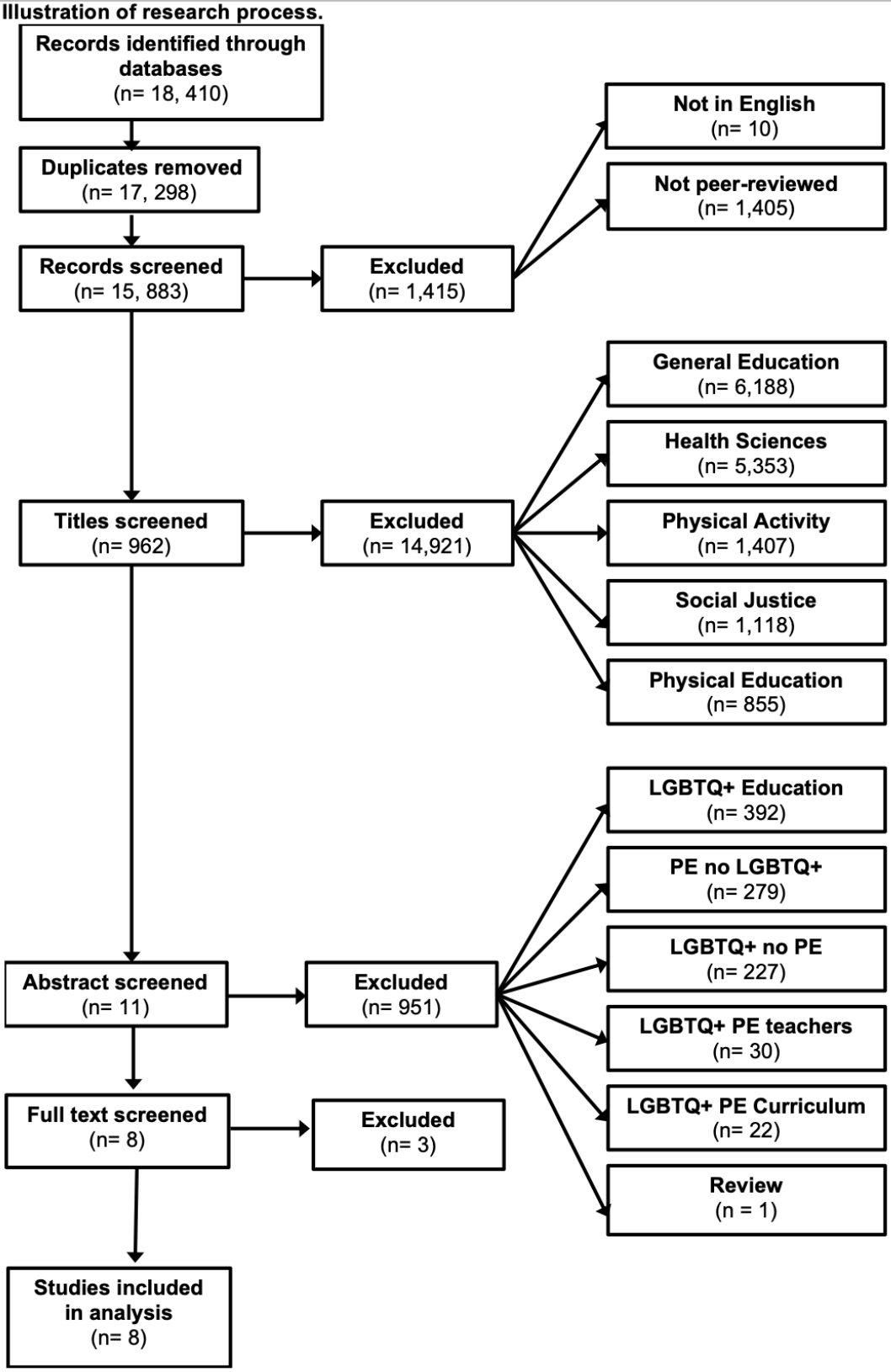

Figure 2. Conceptual map of salient themes across PE literature with LGBTQ+ students.

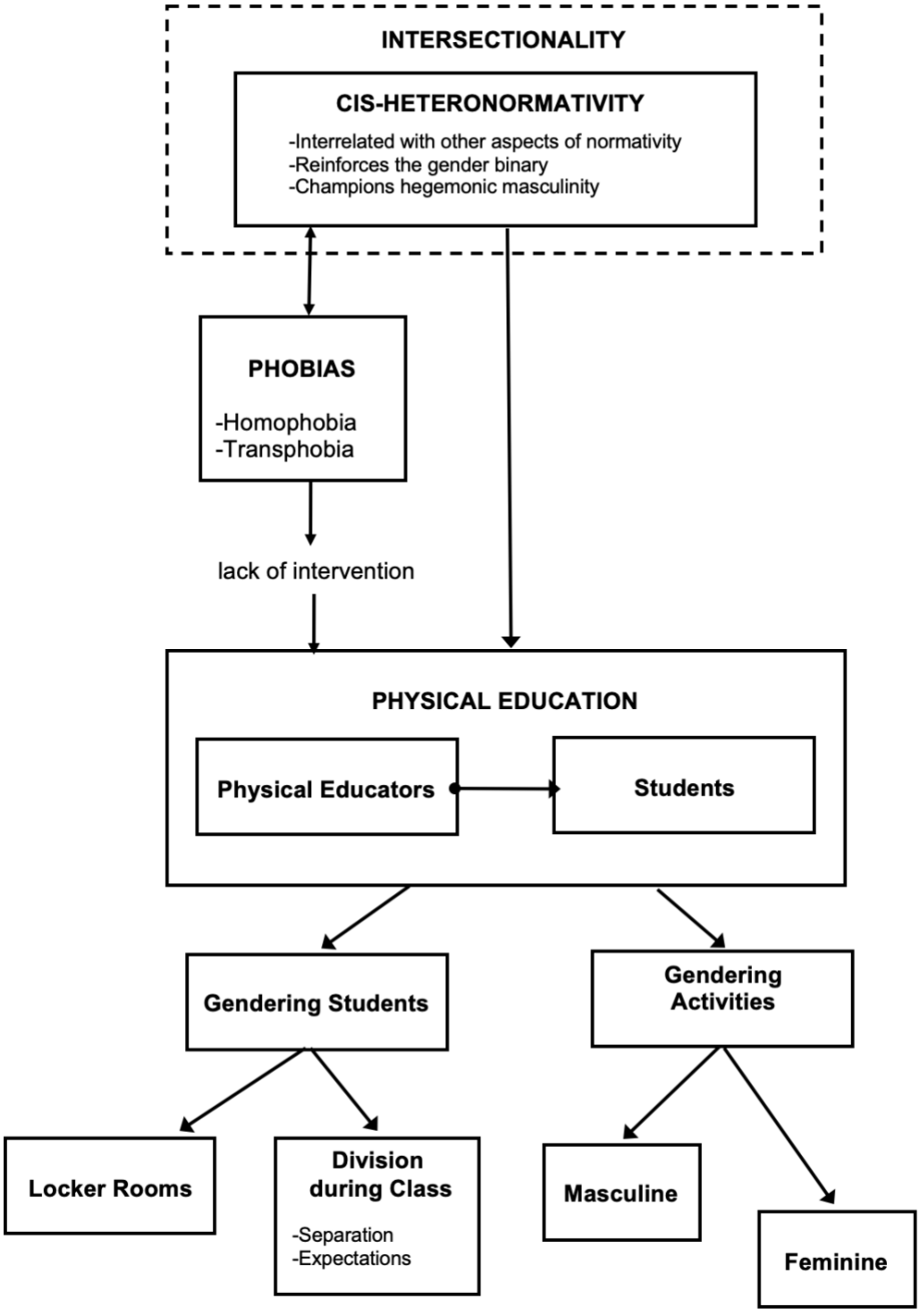

Table 1. Data extracted from articles subject to full-text review.

Ref #	Title	Author(s)	Date	Source Origin	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Key Findings
1	Perceptions of Homophobia and Heterosexism in Physical Education	Morrow & Gill	2003	The United States	Assessing the perceptions of both PE teachers and students about homophobia and heterosexism in secondary school physical education	-82 physical educators (42 men, 40 women; 3 homosexual) -77 young adults who recalled experiences in PE (49 men, 28 women; 35 gay, 20 lesbians; 3 bisexual)	-Developed a 17-item questionnaire organized into two sections (perceptions of homophobia/heterosexism and inclusive behaviours) -Survey delivered through mail or in-person -Data subject to descriptive statistical analysis	-Results suggest that homophobia is at least as common in PE as in the wider school setting -82% of teachers and 91% of students witnessed some homophobic behaviours -Most lesbian and gay students had experienced homophobic behaviour from peers -Most lesbian and gay students reported the PE teachers rarely or never create a safe space for students
2	Girls' Experiences in Physical Education: Competition, Evaluation, & Degradation	van Daalen	2005	Canada	Pilot study to explore why girls' enrollment in PE was dwindling after compulsory credits were achieved	5 young women (ages 15-17) diverse in terms of race, age, class, and sexual orientation who had decided to drop PE after grade 9	-Reflective story assignment and one-on-one interviews -Constant comparison method for analysis	-No room for sexual diversity -Closeted in PE classes and locker rooms -Fear of not being good enough at PE -Dislike compulsory competition and emphasis on athletic ability
3	The qBody Project: From Lesbians in Physical Education to Queer Bodies In/Out of School	Sykes	2009	Canada	Examine how students in physical education contexts are constituted by, and actively negotiate, a matrix of oppressive and normalizing discourses about the body	40 adults who self-identified with one or more of the following marginalized groups: sexual minority, gender minority, having a physical disability or as fat/overweight	-One-one-one semi-structured interviews about participants' experiences as students in physical education, and how this impacted their participation in physical cultures later in life	-Felt socially marginalized at school & during PE, specifically felt excluded from various regimes of normalcy (trans bodies as problematic) -Binary discourse and hegemonic masculinity pervade every level of PE - sexualities as intricate, shifting and multidimensional ways that could not be neatly isolated from other embodiments
4	Perceived Climate in Physical Activity Settings	Gill, Morrow, Collins,	2010	The United States	Assess the perceived climate	Two phases: 1. 84 undergraduate students (M=	-Survey comprised of demographics information, school climate survey, and	- Incidence of derogatory remarks was high, and intervention was low, Phase 2 majority (61.2%) said that they

		Lucey & Schultz			for LGBT youth and other minority groups (racial/ethnic minorities, older students, people with disabilities) in physical activity settings (physical education, organized sport, exercise)	20.7 years; 65 male, 84 female; 41 ESS major, 96 other; 102 white/European; 143 exclusively heterosexual, 6 other Kinsey scale positions) 2. Upper ESS students (n=22) and a campus Pride group (n=27; M=22.0 years; 22 bi/homosexual, 5 heterosexual)	physical activity climate measure (participants rated the climate in 3 PA settings) -Descriptive analyses of responses to measures and a setting by minority group (3 x 4) within-subjects multivariate comparison of physical activity climate ratings (MANOVA) with GLM procedure	did not feel safe as school (with Pride group members more likely to say no than ESS groups) - Three settings ranked: exercise as most inclusive, PE in between, and organized sport as most exclusive - The difference between most included group (racial/ethnic minorities) and the most excluded groups (gay/lesbian and people with disabilities) is greater in organized sport than exercise settings
5	Inclusive Masculinity in a Physical Education Setting	Anderson	2012	England	To explore the cultural shift away from homophobia among high school (sixth form) PE students	15 white heterosexual male students and 1 white gay male student (ages 16-18; all middle-class)	-3 months of ethnographic fieldwork teaching a PE course t and 16 one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Interviews asked about participants attitudes towards gay men, understanding of masculinity, perceptions of popularity, and other subjects related to sport in masculinity-making -Constant comparative methods of emerging themes	-Demonstrates that system of masculine stratification in PE can be at least partially undermined by a decrease in cultural homophobia -Homophobia regarded as a sign of immaturity -Evidence of inclusive masculinities: socio-emotional support, homosocial love, no fear of homosexualization, and lack of violence
6	Looking back into trans person's experiences in heteronormative secondary physical education contexts	Devis-Devis, Pereira-Garcia, Lopez-Canada, Perez-Samaniego & Fuentes-Miguel	2018	Spain	Provide insights and understanding to trans persons' experiences in PE	9 participants (5 trans women and 4 trans men; age: 23-62 years) who were educated in the Spanish secondary education (from 12-16 years old)	-Using 9 one-on-one semi-structured interviews gathered during the 2013/2014 academic year, interview guides focused on memories associated with PE experiences from classes to peers to teachers -Thematic analysis	- PE was viewed as the ultimate realm of gender segregation at school and participants felt excluded/isolated -Transmen had positive experiences with PE where they could demonstrate their masculinity -Transwomen found PE demotivating and embarrassing -Situations of stigmatization and buying in PE when participants transgressed heteronorms -Changing/locker rooms were problematic and exacerbated dysphoria - New PE should be conceived considering the subjective

								positions lived by those who are situated on the margins -More research needed on current experiences of trans students in PE
7	LGBTQ+ and ally youths' school athletics perspectives: A mixed-method analysis	Greenspan, Griffith, Hayes & Murtagh	2019	The United States	To gain a comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ+ and ally youth experiences within school athletic settings (PE, after-school sports	71 self-identified LGBTQ+ youth (ages 13-18) Survey sample: 58 participants (3 lesbians, 1 gay man, 1 bisexual, 6 pansexual, 3 questioning, 3 queer, 14 straight, 19 write-in responses; 35 cisgender female, 9 cisgender male, 2 trans female, 3 trans male, 2 gender queer, 6 write-in responses; 72.4% white) Focus group/Interview sample: 13 participants	-Convergent mixed method design: focus groups/interviews (thematic analysis) and responses to the LGBTQ Inclusive School Athletics Survey (testing reliability coefficients of subscales, descriptive statistics, assessing mean aggregate scores of sub-scales, comparing frequencies and mean scores between sub-groups)	Survey: -LGBTQ+ youth experience inequitable access to school-based athletics -68.5% did not participate in a weekly sport team activity; 39.7% do not engage and 27.6% seldomly engage in regular vigorous activity -Avoidance frequencies: bathrooms and PE class (34.5%), locker rooms (31%), school athletics facilities (24.1%), and school athletics fields (19%) Focus groups/interview: -Institutional oppression of LGBTQ+ students in school and athletics -Need for LGBTQ+ specific training among PE teachers -Desire for change (wider range of physical activities in PE, co-ed or alternative sports teams, and more support from peers and teachers)
8	Queer men, affect, and physical education	Landi	2019	New Zealand	To explore the role of queer men's desire in physical education	11 queer-identified men (ages 15-25)	-Critical ethnography (5 months) -Combination of one-on-one and group interviews -Materialist data analysis: dredging and mapping	Theme 1: Assembling and athletic and sexy body -Purpose of PE was to be healthy and have a normal weight Theme 2: Assembling queer desire -PE producing homoerotic desire (promoting same-sex touching, idealizing same-sex bodies, and desiring a sexy body) Theme 3: Changing rooms—Assembling homoerotic desire -Fear of being caught looking -Body image—desire athletic body and sexually attracted to those with it Theme 4: Queer desire as Transformative -Homoerotic desire and PE have a co-constitutive relationship

								-Chanel challenging narrow range of masculinities by wearing makeup -Challenging homophobia language PE plays an active role in the production of queer desire and subjectivities

Bridging Text

In Chapter Five, I sought to garner an enhanced understanding of the empirical literature exploring LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE. One stark finding from this study is the lack of scholarly attention that has been paid to LGBTQ+ experiences in PE as evidenced by the few studies ($N = 8$) retained for review. Additionally, the majority of the articles reviewed relied on samples that were predominantly comprised of able-bodied white cisgender individuals, with only half of the articles involving adolescent participants. Across studies reviewed, the omnipresence of cis-heteronormativity in PE adversely influenced LGBTQ+ experiences through homophobic and transphobic practices. The qualitative studies included in this review also emphasized the implicit and explicit gendering processes that work to gender students as well as physical activities, and in doing so, reinforced the gender binary and complicated transgender and gender-nonconforming students' participation in PE. Some studies highlighted the agency and resiliency of LGBTQ+ students in their ability to continually resist and challenge prominent cis-heteronormative discourses in PE, as well as persist in the face of discrimination and adversity from peers. Similarly, within Chapter Three, participants commonly shared narratives of resilience and descriptions of the wide variety of strategies they employed to comfortably and safely access locker and changing rooms in order to engage in physical activity. In Chapter Four, some participants described actively seeking out and participating in community-based LGBTQ+ friendly sports to overwrite previous negative sporting experiences and re-engage with physical activity later in life. Across Chapters Three, Four, and Five there exists a narrative thread that represents the multi-faceted resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals within physical activity contexts. However, at present, there is no study explicitly exploring LGBTQ+ resilience within and across physical activity contexts. Subsequently, In Chapter Six, I sought to explore how LGBTQ+

adults conceptualize, define, and experience resilience within physical activity. Given the conceptual complexity of resilience, a series of online focus groups were conducted with LGBTQ+ adults to allow for discussions about how resilience influenced experiences within physical activity as well as how participants personally defined and conceptualized their own resilience.

Chapter Six: Study 4

"There may not be a rainbow sticker at the door, but there are my rainbow shoes": A qualitative exploration of resilience among LGBTQ+ adults in physical activity contexts

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Highlights

- Individual and community resilience play an integral role in supporting LGBTQ+ participation within physical activity.
- Self-compassion aligns with three major aspects of LGBTQ+ individual resilience within physical activity (adaptability, tenderness, and resistance).
- More resources dedicated to fostering LGBTQ+ community resilience (e.g., explicitly LGBTQ+-friendly beginner exercise classes) should be developed and provided within physical activity contexts.

Abstract

Researchers have identified LGBTQ+-specific stresses that hinder physical activity participation; however, LGBTQ+ resilience against these stresses has yet to be explored. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how LGBTQ+ resilience is experienced within physical activity. Ten focus groups of LGBTQ+ adults ($N = 36$) were conducted online and subject to abductive thematic analysis. Experiences of individual resilience were conceptualized through the interplay of: (a) persistence-adaptability (ranging from being regimented with physical activity to being flexible and amenable to changes), (b) toughness-tenderness (possessing mental grit to self-kindness), and (c) complaisance-resistance (internalizing to resisting norms that govern physical activity). Participants also described three sites for community resilience: (a) LGBTQ+ communities that provided pivotal social support, but rarely for physical activity, (b) digital communities that could support or thwart LGBTQ+ resilience, but often prioritized aesthetics, and (c) physical activity communities that supported participation, but often perpetuated LGBTQ+ exclusion.

Keywords: exercise; gender studies; sexuality; minority stress; self-compassion

Introduction

LGBTQ+ is an abbreviated acronym used to acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other communities that do not adhere to prevalent cis-heterosexist assumptions that everyone is (a) heterosexual and (b) cisgender or cis (where your gender identity matches your sex assigned at birth). Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ defy these widespread and seemingly compulsory assumptions about sexuality and gender that govern society, and by extension, physical activity. LGBTQ+ communities experience unique stresses within and disproportionate barriers to physical activity, such as homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, and exclusion (for reviews see Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Pérez-Samaniego, et al., 2019). Sexual and gender-based prejudices against LGBTQ+ communities within physical activity contexts are prevalent and complicate regular physical activity participation. For example, a qualitative meta-synthesis of 12 studies exploring transgender experiences in sport and physical activity found that abjection, which refers to being cast off and separated from norms, was a common feeling experienced by transgender individuals (Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019). A study comparing physical activity behaviors between LGBTQ+ (n = 71) and cis-heterosexual (n = 335) college students also found that LGBTQ+ students were 2.2 times less likely to meet physical activity guidelines (Frederick, et al., 2020). Although LGBTQ+ communities experience unique barriers to and discrimination within physical activity that complicate participation, some LGBTQ+ individuals *still* engage in physical activity despite the adversity they experience.

The minority stress model (MSM), describes how unique stresses associated with being LGBTQ+ in predominantly cis-heterosexual societies manifest in the form of mental and physical health consequences (Meyer, 2003). The model also outlines how the effects of

LGBTQ+ minority stress can be buffered by one's ability to survive and thrive in the face of adversity, which is defined as resilience (Meyer, 2015). Within the MSM, resilience is categorized into two distinct types: (a) individual resilience and (b) community resilience (Meyer, 2015). Individual resilience refers to the qualities a person may possess that can help them successfully cope with stress (e.g., self-esteem, self-efficacy, etc.). For example, findings from a study exploring how sexuality and psychosocial factors influence the physical activity participation of sexual minority youth (N = 12, 779) suggest that fostering self-esteem may mitigate current disparities in physical activity participation among LGBTQ+ youth (Calzo et al., 2014). Community resilience refers to the norms, values, role-models, social resources, and social supports available to a person to help them cope with stress. For example, within a series of focus groups with LGBTQ+ adults (N = 42), the few participants that felt comfortable engaging in physical activity had previous experiences with LGBTQ+-friendly physical education teachers and coaches that acted as positive role models (Herrick & Duncan, 2018a). In addition to the evidence demonstrating how LGBTQ+ resilience(s) encourages physical activity participation, one study found that among sexual minority university students (N = 326) exercise moderated the impact of heterosexist harassment on depression and anxiety (Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015), indicating that regular exercise may contribute to LGBTQ+ resilience in its own right and be a protective factor for LGBTQ+ mental health. Subsequently, there is a need to understand the relationship between resilience and LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity.

Although LGBTQ+-specific barriers and stresses associated with physical activity participation have been investigated (e.g., Denison et al., 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019), iterations of LGBTQ+ resilience have yet to be thoroughly

explored within physical activity. Given that physical activity contexts pose unique stresses to LGBTQ+ adults, the same contexts may provide unique opportunities to foster LGBTQ+ resilience. The following study aims to explore concepts of LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity to garner a deeper understanding of how LGBTQ+ resilience can buffer minority stress within these contexts. Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions: (a) what kinds of resilience are experienced among LGBTQ+ adults within physical activity contexts? And (b) how do experiences of LGBTQ+ resilience influence participation in physical activity?

Methods

This research was approved by the McGill University Research Ethics Board-II.

Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

This study was driven by a historical realist ontology and transformative epistemology that assumes realities are shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic systems that determine which realities will be privileged within research (Mertens, 2012; Scotland, 2012). Knowledge claims are socially constructed, influenced by power relations, and inherently political (Scotland, 2012). A goal of this transformative research was to support social change for LGBTQ+ communities by garnering an in-depth understanding and raising awareness of their experiences within physical activity.

Participants

Eligible participants for this study had to: (a) self-identify as LGBTQ+, (b) be 18 years or older, (c) be located in Canada, (d) read, speak, and understand English, (e) have access to the Internet, and (f) indicate that they can speak to personal experiences within physical activity.

Procedures

Participants were recruited online through public posts on LGBTQ+ community groups,

campus groups, and Facebook groups based in Canada (Meyer & Wilson, 2009). All focus groups took place virtually using Zoom and followed a semi-structured format. Given that smaller focus groups allow participants more space and time to elaborate on their lived experiences, focus groups ranged from two to five participants and lasted from 90 to 210 minutes (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Participants were asked to reflect on challenges experienced and the role of resilience in shaping their experiences within physical activity. Participants were also asked to define resilience in general and LGBTQ+ resilience. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the discussion guide was designed to be as open as possible and was not informed by any specific theory. The first author acted as a moderator for all focus groups to maintain LGBTQ+-only spaces for sensitive discussions. Participants received an honorarium of $30.

Analysis

Focus groups were digitally video and audio recorded. The audio from each session was transcribed verbatim by the first author. Thematic analysis was used to directly and flexibly identify interpretative patterns of meaning across all focus groups (Braun et al., 2016). The authors followed Braun et al.'s (2016) six-phase model for thematic analysis. Through critical discussion, the authors agreed that an abductive thematic approach was most authentic to the data. The authors concluded that participants spoke about resilience in ways that reflected the MSM (Meyer, 2015). A deductive approach was first used to organize data into individual and community resilience, then an inductive approach was used to code themes within these overarching categories. A series of reflective meetings were held after the initial coding was complete wherein the authors discussed observations made by the first author while coding (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The candidate themes were reviewed by the second author who served as a critical peer (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Ensuring Quality

To ensure the quality and rigor of our thematic analysis, we followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15 points for quality thematic analysis. By facilitating the focus groups, transcribing, and coding, the first author ensured that the context surrounding each quotation was not lost, and that due diligence was paid to the identity of who was speaking at any given moment (Braun et al., 2016). The coding was comprehensive in that as many potential themes and patterns as possible were identified, including accounts that seemingly departed from dominant narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The original data and results were compared and subject to critical review by the second author (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Both authors engaged in collaborative discussions on how the results should be presented in a way that was reflective of the data as a whole. Quotations were selected to represent the breadth of the data by ensuring every participant had at least one quotation in this manuscript (Eldh et al., 2020).

Results

Across the ten focus groups, 36 participants discussed their experiences with resilience in physical activity. The average age of participants was 33 years old (*SD* = 9.4 years). Over half of the focus group participants identified as cisgender (*n* = 19; 52.8%), with 12 nonbinary participants (33.3%), three transmen (8.3%), and two transwomen (5.6%). Participants also predominantly identified as queer (*n* = 13; 36.1%), bisexual (*n* = 8; 22.2%) or pansexual (*n* = 6; 16.7%). For more detailed demographics, see Table 1.

Two main components of resilience were identified: (a) individual resilience and (b) community resilience. However, it should be noted that most participants acknowledged that they shouldn't *need* to be resilient to feel comfortable engaging in physical activity. Ryan explained how "in a fitness space, I shouldn't have to be resilient. That space should be able to

meet my needs and I should be able to enter it without having to worry about those things."

Individual Resilience

Most focus group participants initially responded by referring to attributes associated with individual resilience. For some participants, resilience inherently evoked a sense of agency. In the words of Maxine, "resilience is being reactionary." Across focus groups, individual resilience in physical activity was conceptualized through the interplay of three continuums: (a) persistence-adaptability, (b) toughness-tenderness, and (c) complaisance-resistance.

Persistence-Adaptability

All participants spoke about the significance of persistence within physical activity contexts. For most participants, a critical aspect of resilience was continual effort. Naomi explained how "even though you face all these difficulties, you keep showing up and you keep giving it your best." Participants commonly used metaphors to illustrate persistence as resilience. Zaniraf, when describing her trials and tribulations with finding an LGBTQ+-inclusive soccer team invoked the common expression, "if you fall off a horse, you're supposed to get back on it, right?" Similarly, Skylar shared how, "this past summer I started hula hooping. I brought a hula hoop everywhere [laughs]. The thing about hula hoop is, it's not about how many times the hula hoop drops, it's about how many times you pick it up again."

Regularly using fitness facilities was acknowledged by some participants as inherently difficult due to previous experiences or expectations of LGBTQ+ prejudices in those contexts. For example, Nolan described how:

> I would break out into a sweat just going into the locker room. I was so nervous something awful would happen. I think that exercise is something you just have to do, right? And if you really want to be active, then you have to put up with those

> terrible feelings that you're getting from it and hope that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. It was mostly just a lot of coaxing myself into doing it. A lot of going to the gym was just proving to myself that I could, and then every time I would go back, it's like 'hey, I did this again, I'm still going, and everything's okay.'

Most participants echoed narratives of convincing or hyping themselves up to consistently exercise in potentially-uncomfortable contexts, whereas a few participants recognized how unfair that additional mental toll is for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Although persistence was regarded as an integral aspect of resilience, many participants also spoke to situations where enduring negatively impacted their resilience. For example, Juniper explained this nuanced tipping point:

> In physical activity, resilience is about being comfortable with failure—whether you use that for motivation to keep at it or you don't. I've done a lot of things in my life where I really regret sticking with it for too long. Not giving myself permission to give up because I thought being resilient meant never quitting when it should have meant making a better decision for myself.

Participants acknowledged how adaptability was also a critical aspect of individual resilience within physical activity. For Annika, resilience is knowing "when to sit still and when to move. There's nothing wrong with sitting still, but it's about making the move when it's time. Resilience is that ability to recognize these opportunities—these start and stop moments and to accept them." For many trans and gender-nonconforming participants, adaptability was an integral component of their resiliency in general as well as within physical activity. Elo explained how "I need to ride the waves of how my gender identity matches with my needs for my body. When I feel more masculine, I explore that by lifting weights. On more feminine days,

I'll do something more sensual and softer." The ability to adapt to changes, be they personal or environmental, was also believed to become easier with practice. Rachel explained how:

> Now, when an obstacle comes up, I have a big enough toolbox of interests that I just go to another one…but it took time and effort to build that toolbox. Like, right now, I have a knee injury. I can't run, so I've been swimming instead.

Among participants, persistence and adaptability were not defined in opposition to one another. Instead, both attributes were conceptualized as being in a nuanced, dynamic relationship that was integral to resilience within physical activity.

Toughness-Tenderness

Participants commonly described how possessing the personal grit to push through difficult or uncomfortable situations was necessary within physical activity contexts. For example, Ember explained how, "to me, resilience is grit. You have to be gritty and tough to exist in spaces that don't accept you, to take up space and exercise where you're not wanted. You need a thick skin." Similarly, Teagan described how:

> When I go to the gym, I just do my own thing. I used to be afraid to present femme, but I'm sick of changing myself to make other people at the gym more comfortable. I'm in that mental state of I've dealt with bullshit before, I'm just going to keep dealing with it. If the bullshit is the price of being me then so be it. I'm tough.

For many participants, being tough was associated with living authentically and openly as LGBTQ+ while not caring about the consequences. However, some participants acknowledged how intersections of privilege influence who can feel comfortable and safe in certain contexts. For example, Alena explained how "I would say, with my huge amount of privilege, which I recognize because I'm queer, but I'm also white and affluent, queer resilience is all about being

queer and not being apologetic about it at all." All participants acknowledged that some level of toughness is required to simply exist as an LGBTQ+ person in society. Subsequently, some participants vocalized frustrations with consistently having to be tough in the face of adversity. Sam expressed how "pushing through suffering because you're different is exhausting, like don't call me resilient because everything that's happening around me, I didn't want any of this bullshit or ask for it, but I have to fight to persevere and survive."

In tandem with toughness, participants recognized the significance of tenderness or showing kindness, especially towards oneself. Naomi explained how, "I can be my biggest bully sometimes. There's nothing wrong with giving yourself a bit of a push as long as you're not shoving yourself over entirely. Sometimes, there is strength in being soft." Within physical activity especially, participants emphasized how important tenderness is to their sense of resilience. For example, Tila shared how:

> Resilience is compassion towards oneself after failures. Physical activity helps me to appreciate how much my body can move in the space that we're in, but also how much it can't. It helps me appreciate that developing connection with my mind, but only if I allow the time to check in with myself—to reflect on myself.

Among participants, self-reflection was a key component of tenderness within physical activity. Charlotte explained how "by nature, physical activity is uncomfortable, but pain—not just physical, but mental—you have to watch out for and listen to your body, your mind. You have to listen to yourself before you can know what's right for you."

Although toughness and mental fortitude are championed within a lot of physical activity contexts, tenderness is typically equated with weakness and viewed negatively. In contrast, several of our participants conceptualized tenderness and the willingness to be vulnerable as

integral pieces of LGBTQ+ resilience. For example, Kennedy described how:

> Vulnerability is something that we're taught not to do and from my experience, especially for people who are dealing with queer issues or gender issues, vulnerability is so important because it allows for healing. Vulnerability can be a piece of resilience. In many ways, it's one of the most difficult and transformative things you can allow yourself to be—vulnerable.

Complaisance-Resistance

Participants acknowledged how most physical activity contexts are influenced and governed by intersecting systems of power. The degree to which participants were critical of prevalent discourses within physical activity was conceptualized as a continuum between complaisance and resistance. Heterosexism, prejudice against non-heterosexual people based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, was viewed by participants as endemic in physical activity. For example, Jiang shared how "looking back, what strikes me about physical activity now is the presumed straightness of it all. It's all so stifling." Although all participants were acutely aware of heterosexism within physical activity, several participants were not as critical of other systems of oppression. Specifically, sizeism and fatphobia were difficult for some participants to challenge and resist. Zaniraf expressed how upset she was about gaining weight over the course of the pandemic, "I can't believe I'm this fat again. I've been bullied before [sighs] I had lost 50 pounds, and I didn't think I'd ever have to do it again." This admission was immediately followed by fellow participants asking why Zaniraf felt obligated to lose the weight again. It became clear over the discussion that Zaniraf felt that she would first need to lose the weight *before* playing soccer again. The discussion then progressed to explore how physical activity contexts are organized and represented in ways that inherently exclude

larger bodies. Tila then shared how, “gyms, sports, whatever—most of the time, if not all the time, they champion thin, athletic, and to be perfectly honest, white bodies. It’s so stupid because being physically fit or active or healthy doesn’t have to look like that.” In a way, the group discussion facilitated critical thinking about physical activity discourses and enabled some participants, like Zaniraf, to question their internalized fatphobia and cultivate resistance.

Several participants struggled with unlearning and challenging prominent fatphobic discourses within physical activity. Beatrice described her struggles with internalized fatphobia:

> One of the big challenges is a long-standing relationship to bodies and what we are told about our bodies and exercise. I’ve ended up occasionally in cycles of like, ‘oh, I need to exercise to lose weight,’ versus ‘I want to exercise to move my body.’ I try really hard not to play into those ideas, but it's also hard to not occasionally.

Participants commonly expressed feeling torn between complaisance with and resistance of dominant discourses in physical activity. Trans and gender-nonconforming participants, like Camden, often spoke to the personal significance of resisting gendered discourses:

> Being resilient for me in a fitness space is pushing that boundary of like guys don't have to be these big, muscular people in a gym setting. And just kind of keeping that within myself and knowing that what I'm doing is still good enough. I don't need to compare myself to people who grew up as cismen or whatever, who have all those things that were working for them since birth [laughs].

Some participants acknowledged how their experiences as LGBTQ+ emboldened them to continually question and resist prevalent discourses in physical activity. Jiang explained how:

> Queer strength is this ability to be able to use imagination. To imagine a new way of being that isn't centered around the dominant narrative and the ways that it's really

> kept people in body prisons or really dictated what bodies are supposed to do or love or their ways of being. The resiliency of queer people to have new imaginations and to be able to move more freely out of those spaces, out of those boxes.

Community Resilience

As the focus groups progressed, participants ruminated on the limits of individual resilience and expanded their discussions to include different forms and sites of community resilience. For example, Dia explained how:

> Individual resilience is exhausting. There's always going to be trailblazers, who are both so exceptional and so stubborn, that they're willing to work in the dark places of the world and continue no matter what. But not everybody has it in them to do that in physical activity or in anything else. Finding community that backs you up is a relief.

Some participants, like Sam, critiqued society's glorification of individual resilience as a method to shift responsibility onto individuals instead of creating meaningful, structural changes:

> I see resilience as community. Sometimes I have this hate on for the word 'resilience' because it triggers so much in me. It's a way for institutions to be like, 'here's your self-help toolkit,' like fuck off, go do it, and if you're not resilient, then it's your own fault. But I think resilience is more of a community responsibility.

Participants described three sites that can support or thwart community resilience: (a) LGBTQ+ communities, (b) digital communities, and (c) physical activity communities.

LGBTQ+ Communities

Among participants, knowledge of and access to LGBTQ+ communities commonly bolstered a general sense of LGBTQ+ resilience. Specifically, some participants felt like their connection to LGBTQ+ communities and ways of knowing enabled them to resist dominant

discourses, like sizeism, within physical activity. For example, Nov explained how:

> Queer folk have been queering physical activity for a long time. I learned a lot about body image, body neutrality, and ways to engage with myself and my body from other queer people. A lot of the unlearning that I did came from queer people—who I feel have incredibly nuanced ways of discussing the way they navigate our society in their bodies, they negotiate their bodies with society, and they have to change their perceptions of themselves within dominant social narratives.

A few participants spoke to how they were actively queering physical activity spaces through their participation. At her current Muay Thai studio, Annika explained how, "there may not be a rainbow sticker on the door, but there are my rainbow shoes at the door."

Some participants emphasized the personal significance of having access to explicitly LGBTQ+ friendly physical activity spaces. Olivia recalled how relieved she felt when accessing a swing class in a new city:

> My first day of class, I was so ready to put up a fight and advocate for myself. I was worried about having to be exceptional if I was going to be there—to prove myself. Then the swing scene was totally different from what I had experienced before. It's very queer. People come up to you and ask if you want to lead or follow. Most people switch. They've set a really good example of what's possible. I came into that space really expecting to have to put up a fight every minute I was there and instead, being able to show up and just learn how to swing dance was such a relief.

Unfortunately, explicitly LGBTQ+ friendly physical activity spaces are relatively difficult to come by. Damerae explained his frustrations with a local dance studio, "I'm literally here because I want to express my queerness and, if you're not safe for all queer people, I don't really

feel like expressing my queerness here." For many participants, not having access to LGBTQ+ friendly physical activity spaces seriously undermined their sense of resilience. For example, Blake shared how:

> I feel like so much of it, when we're talking about resilience and physical activity with LGBTQ+ communities, it's the spaces of themselves and being able to have space. It's not just about 'yeah, we don't hate trans people or we don't hate queer people. We're not gonna' like gay bash you when you come in the door.' Does that really make it a comfortable, welcoming, inclusive environment? No. And does that affect people's resilience? Because like even if it's not something big, does it wear you down after a while? It might. I know it does for me.

In addition to participants acknowledging the difference between being tolerated and being accepted within physical activity, some participants emphasized how even within explicitly LGBTQ+ spaces, trans and gender-nonconforming individuals may not be welcome in the same way. Vix shared how:

> I get the gender feels. That's the biggest barrier that I've had doing the exercise—not feeling welcome or feeling awkward in spaces. When I first tried to pole, I went to this studio that everyone was recommending. It was queer friendly apparently, but like we all know the queer friendly is not the same as trans friendly, and they straight up were like weird about pronouns.

Digital Communities

Participants also spoke about how digital communities could support or thwart their resilience within physical activity. Given that this research took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and coincided with lockdown periods across Canada, most participants were exploring

new ways to use technology and media to enable them to participate in physical activity as well as connect socially with others. For example, Tallis shared how, “social media helps. Posting little videos of whatever you're doing and everyone's like, ‘great job! Keep going!’ Especially pandemic times, it’s the only way that you're going to reach out to people. That’s how I stay motivated to work out.” Similarly, Kat explained how, “even finding something as ridiculous as your favorite gay Instagram fitspo influencer can make you feel more comfortable doing home workouts where nobody can see you.” Many participants used technologies to bolster their LBGTQ+ pride, resistance, and resilience within digital physical activity contexts. Maddox described how, “I recently joined a queer trainer’s online fitness class. Astonishingly, I enjoy going through all the calisthenics and exercises and doing it as a group. It's been really nice, even though I think we do too many push ups [laughs].” Dayna also explained how she and her friend used Strava (an exercise tracking application with a GPS component) to celebrate Pride:

> We did a pride 2020 virtual run. We went to the local high school track, and we paced out everything. We wanted to see if Strava could see the difference in the one meter between the tracks. It does. We did the track for the month of June. On Strava, at the end of your activity, you can click on it, and make all your lines a rainbow.

Before the pandemic, Nov spoke about using a local Facebook group to mobilize LGBTQ+ people to go to gyms at the same time, “queer folks who would message times that they were going to the gym and then a bunch of other people would go too. There would be a whole crowd taking over like a quarter of the gym. It was great!”

Participants also acknowledged the negative side of digital communities, specifically social media, when it comes to aspects of physical activity. For instance, Devon shared how:

> Sometimes I'll make a post being like ‘I did this ride today. It was really hard for me,

> but I just feel really good,' because I like to encourage myself to keep being active and be accountable to myself. But then the messages I get even from people that are my friends are like 'oh what, what did you do? How far? How many pounds have you lost?' it gets into that territory where everyone's self-consciousness comes out. And I just don't want to talk about it like that.

Specifically, participants in the thralls of unlearning and challenging sizeism found that social media could either be destructive or constructive to their personal fitness journeys. Savannah explained how, "I started being choosier about who I was following on social media, diversifying the media I was consuming. Looking at these like really, really diverse bodies and people of different ages, sizes, and ethnicities—that's been really healing for me."

Physical Activity Communities

A few participants were able to find or create small, physical activity communities that were accepting and supportive of their LGBTQ+ identities. For example, Dayna explained how one year ago, while refereeing the local women's hockey league, "at the wind-up, everyone asked, 'why don't you play with us?' I said, 'I'm not all female yet.' They said 'yes, you are.' I became their goalie. I thought 'I'm back. I found my home again with these ladies.'" Participants often relied on the support of a friend or 'gym buddy' to feel comfortable engaging in physical activity. Olivia shared how, "I would have never gotten into exercise if it weren't for my friend. They're nonbinary, badass, very fit, and knowledgeable. They showed me the ropes and made me feel safe." Engaging in physical activity with a friend also added some level of accountability for some participants. Damerae explained how, "doing classes with friends is the best. They'll be like 'see you tomorrow?' and if you don't show, it's like 'they expect to see me. I should be there!' I'll let myself down, no problem. Letting somebody else down? Problem." Some

participants who preferred group activities, like Zaniraf acknowledged how, “as a kid, I was in a lot of activities. As an adult, it's so much harder to find a group of people you can do sports and activities with. In general, there’re not the same opportunities. It’s bullshit.”

Although some participants were able to find or create LGBTQ+ friendly or accepting physical activity communities, most participants were unable to do so. For most participants, physical activity communities often perpetuated LGBTQ+ exclusion and subsequently, thwarted their sense of resilience within physical activity. Ember explained how, “the coaches and instructors I’ve had were great at motivating me to put the work in, but it came with an undercurrent of homophobia and transphobia—in the end, the price on my mental health was too steep.” For some participants, like Ashton, the fear of experiencing discrimination was enough to deter them from accessing physical activity communities:

> One of my barriers to going to the gym initially was I just didn’t want to be seen as being ‘out.’ Either out as gay or out as they can tell that I've never been to the gym before. I knew I didn’t belong for so many reasons.

In general, the dominant discourses that governed most physical activity contexts negatively impacted participants’ sense of community resilience in those spaces. Pervasive gendered discourses complicated a lot of physical activity spaces for trans and gender-nonconforming participants. For example, Braylen explained how:

> Gyms are extremely binary spaces, and I don't pass as either, especially now that I have had top surgery. You're always going to get people, especially in fitness spaces that aren't great about it. I love lifting heavy things. It’s very gender euphoric for me, but then there's this general emphasis on losing weight in fitness, and that just was never it for me. So, that can be really triggering, really damaging in fitness spaces.

Although some participants were able to create safe LGBTQ+ friendly and inclusive physical activity communities, many participants could not. In the word of Kaede, “I know that I should be physically healthy but God, at what cost? [dry laugh] like literally at what cost, and then emotionally at what cost?”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity. Findings suggest that both individual and community resilience may significantly influence LGBTQ+ experiences and participation in physical activity. Although our discussion guide was intentionally open-ended, the discussions organically explored concepts of resilience aligned with the MSM (Meyer, 2015). Initially, participants described attributes that reflected aspects of individual resilience that was conceptualized through the interplay of three continuums: (a) persistence-adaptability, (b) toughness-tenderness, and (c) complaisance-resistance.

The significance of persistence or commitment to the adoption and maintenance of regular physical activity participation has been thoroughly established (for reviews see Dishman, Sallis, & Orenstein, 1985; Sherwood & Jeffery, 2000). Our findings corroborate the importance of persistence for LGBTQ+ adults to regularly participate in physical activity. However, our participants emphasized how they needed to balance persistence and adaptability in physical activity to best meet their changing physical and mental needs. Adaptability may be especially significant for gender-nonconforming individuals who may want or need their physical activities to reflect their gender fluidity.

In previous studies, the toughness or hardiness of LGBTQ+ communities has been regarded as a critical aspect of general resilience (Smith & Gray, 2009). A survey of 277 sexual

minority adults demonstrated how psychological hardiness weakened the direct association between awareness of stigma against LGBTQ+ communities and physical health, but not mental health (Figueroa & Zoccola, 2015). These results demonstrate that psychological hardiness is an important moderator of the relationship between LGBTQ+ stress and physical health (Figueroa & Zoccola, 2015). Our findings suggest that tenderness or self-kindness may be equally as important, and should be explored, specifically how tenderness may influence the relationship between LGBTQ+ stress and mental health.

Our participants described struggles between complaisance and resistance of dominant societal narratives that regulate physical activity contexts. The prevalence of sizeism and fatphobia within physical activity and some gay communities have been thoroughly documented (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Pearl, Wadden, & Jakicic, 2021; Rich & Mansfield, 2019). However, a few of our participants felt emboldened by their LGBTQ+ identities and communities to critically question and resist fatphobia as well as heterosexism and sexism within physical activity. Similarly, a qualitative exploration of queer men's (N = 5) body narratives found that queer consciousness encouraged intersectional reflexivity and the contestation of misogyny and fatphobia (Jones, 2015). Our findings suggest that LGBTQ+ resistance and the resilience it cultivates may be crucial for the transformation of physical activity into truly inclusive contexts.

Our findings align with the definition of self-compassion that involves three interacting and overlapping components: (a) mindfulness, (b) self-kindness, and (c) feelings of common humanity or community (Neff, 2011). In our study, themes of adaptability, tenderness, and resistance all required some degree of self-awareness, kindness, and relatedness by participants. Our findings suggest that within physical activity contexts, aspects of self-compassion may be integral to the cultivation of LGBTQ+ individual resilience. A recent systematic review and

meta-analysis exploring the relationship between self-compassion and mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals found that higher levels of self-compassion were associated with less depression, anxiety, internalized homo/transphobia, and suicide ideation, as well as increased well-being and social support (Carvalho & Guiomar, 2022). Subsequently, self-compassion may be associated with LGBTQ+ resilience, irrespective of context, and should be explored in terms of LGBTQ+ minority stress buffering in the future. A meta-analysis exploring the relationship between self-compassion and physical activity demonstrated that across the 26 studies reviewed, higher levels of self-compassion were associated with higher levels of physical activity (Wong, Chung, & Leung, 2021). Although further exploration is warranted, self-compassion may be a related to individual LGBTQ+ resilience in physical activity contexts, as well as its' associated outcomes (e.g., increased physical activity participation).

Several participants reiterated a common critique of individual resilience, namely that "by noting the individuals *can* be resilient, we risk expecting that individuals *ought* to be resilient" (Meyer, 2015, p. 211). As our focus groups progressed and participants critically analyzed individual resilience, the discussions naturally shifted to explore aspects of community resilience within physical activity across three sites: (a) LGBTQ+, (c) digital, and (c) physical activity communities. Connection to LGBTQ+ communities has been previously identified as a significant source of social support and general resilience for LGBTQ+ individuals (Gahagan & Colpitts, 2017; Szymanski & Gonzalez, 2020). One of the most common recommendations from a study asking LGBTQ+ adults (N = 766) for suggestions on how to alter physical activity to be more supportive of participation was the creation and maintenance of safer spaces for LGBTQ+ physical activity (Herrick, Baum, & Duncan, 2022). Survey respondents emphasized the significance of creating LGBTQ+-only physical activity spaces, especially for beginners

(Herrick et al., 2022). Findings from our study corroborated how connection to LGBTQ+ communities in physical activity provided pivotal support for participation, while also demonstrating how LGBTQ+ communities may not be inherently inclusive of everyone. Our participants emphasized how community resilience for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals can be complicated within queer-friendly spaces. Several suggestions submitted by LGBTQ+ adults for improving inclusivity in physical activity focused on challenging cissexism through: (a) the creation of single-stall or gender neutral locker rooms, (b) dismantling gender-based sport stereotypes, and (c) challenging the binary gender divisions in sport, athletic clothing, and fitness equipment (Herrick et al., 2022). LGBTQ+ communities have been criticized for privileging white, cisgender experiences (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Weiss, 2011). Subsequently, the exploration or creation of LGBTQ+ communities within physical activity needs to be informed by considerations of systems of power (e.g., cissexism, racism, etc.) to better support connectedness and resilience.

Our participants also reflected on how digital communities could simultaneously support or thwart LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity. Similarly, an exploration of LGBTQ+ resilience within the Covid-19 pandemic surveyed 129 LGBTQ+ adults and found that providing support and building a sense of community through digital technologies fostered resilience throughout the pandemic (Gonzalez, Abreu, Arora, Lockett, & Sostre, 2021). Our findings illustrate how digital communities and technologies have the potential to support LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity, while acknowledging that social media at large commonly reiterates dominant social narratives that can thwart LGBTQ+ resilience.

Although some participants in our study were able to find or create LGBTQ+ friendly physical activity communities, most participants were unable to do so. For most participants,

physical activity communities perpetuated LGBTQ+ exclusion and subsequently, thwarted their sense of resilience within physical activity. These findings corroborate previous research that has demonstrated how physical activity commonly complicates and excludes LGBTQ+ participation (for reviews see Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Pérez-Samaniego, et al., 2019).

Limitations. This study was exploratory in nature and only represents the lived experiences of 36 LGBTQ+ adults. No data were collected on the participants current physical activity levels. Additionally, several of the online focus groups coincided with government lockdowns across Canada. Many participants were unable to engage in their usual physical activities due to Covid-19 restrictions and spoke retrospectively during focus group discussions.

Conclusions

Our findings provide pivotal insight into how individual and community LGBTQ+ resilience are conceptualized and experienced within physical activity. Findings from this study outline the significance of self-compassionate aspects of LGBTQ+ individual resilience in physical activity such as adaptability, tenderness, and resistance to dominant norms. Our participants also emphasized how resilience is often framed as an individual issue, in lieu of developing spaces, practices, and resources required to bolster LGBTQ+ community resilience within physical activity. Previous research has predominantly focused on the unique stresses and barriers LGBTQ+ individuals experience within physical activity, however, this study demonstrates the significance and variability of LGBTQ+ resilience within physical activity. Subsequently, more resources should be directed towards understanding and fostering resilience(s) across LGBTQ+ communities to better support participation in physical activity.

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Table 1. Demographic details of focus group participants.

Name	Age (years)	Gender	Sexuality	Racial-Ethnic-National Background	Experiencing Disability	Physical Activities
Alena	25	Ciswoman	Pansexual	White Canadian	No	CrossFit
Annika	28	Nonbinary	Bisexual	White Canadian	Yes	Muay Thai
Ashton	25	Cisman	Gay	White Canadian	No	Running & going to the gym
Beatrice	29	Ciswoman	Queer	White Canadian	No	Cycling, dance, exercise & yoga classes
Blake	32	Nonbinary	Queer	East Asian & White	No	Dance classes, cycling, & weightlifting
Braylen	31	Transman	Pansexual	Indigenous & Black Canadian	Yes	CrossFit & going to the gym
Camden	28	Transman	Queer	White Canadian	No	Going to the gym
Charlotte	68	Transwoman	Bisexual	Latin American	No	Long distance running
Damerae	37	Cisman	Pansexual	Black Caribbean	Yes	Weightlifting, dance & pole classes
Dayna	46	Transwoman	Lesbian	White Canadian	No	Hockey & triathlons
Devon	32	Transman	Pansexual	White Canadian	No	Spin classes & cycling

Dia	28	Ciswoman	Bisexual	Latin American	No	Diving, CrossFit, & going to the gym
Elo	41	Nonbinary	Pansexual	Latin American & White Canadian	No	Dance & exercise classes
Ember	24	Ciswoman	Bisexual	White Canadian	No	Soccer, yoga & body-weight exercises at home
Jiang	30	Ciswoman	Asexual	East Asian	No	Parkour, hiking, swimming & cycling
Juniper	40	Ciswoman	Queer	White Canadian	No	Marathon running
Kaede	27	Nonbinary	Bisexual	White Canadian	Yes	Cycling & yoga at home
Kat	35	Ciswoman	Demisexual	White European	Yes	Dance & exercise classes
Kennedy	27	Ciswoman	Lesbian	White Canadian	No	Going to the gym
Khadija	30	Ciswoman	Bisexual	North African & White Canadian	No	Dance & going to the gym
Maddox	26	Genderqueer	Bisexual	East Asian	No	Swimming & exercise classes
Maxine	28	Ciswoman	Pansexual	White American	Yes	Retired semi-professional dancer
Naomi	35	Ciswoman	Lesbian	White Canadian	No	Rugby & going to the gym
Nolan	28	Cisman	Gay	Indigenous Canadian	No	Going to the gym

Nov	25	Ciswoman	Queer	South Asian & White European	Yes	Yoga & exercise classes
Olivia	31	Nonbinary	Queer	White Canadian	No	Swing dance & going to the gym
Rachel	31	Genderqueer	Queer	White American	No	Volleyball, basketball, & swimming
Ryan	26	Nonbinary	Queer	White Canadian	No	CrossFit
Sam	35	Ciswoman	Lesbian	White Canadian	Yes	Rugby & soccer
Savannah	37	Ciswoman	Lesbian	White Canadian	No	Hiking & cycling
Skylar	32	Nonbinary	Queer	Indigenous Canadian & White European	No	Dance, cycling, & going to the gym
Tallis	62	Nonbinary	Queer	White European	Yes	Hiking & cycling
Teagan	35	Nonbinary	Queer	White Canadian	No	Weightlifting & dance
Tila	31	Ciswoman	Queer	South Asian	Yes	Dragon boat racing & yoga classes
Vix	27	Nonbinary	Queer	White Canadian	No	Pole dancing
Zaniraf	38	Ciswoman	Bisexual	Middle Eastern	No	Soccer

Chapter Seven: General Discussion

Summary of Findings

The overall purpose of my dissertation was to develop a deeper understanding of how previous and current experiences within and across physical activity contexts influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity among self-identified LGBTQ+ individuals. To add to our understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity contexts, I first explored a pivotal access point to sports, physical education, and exercise facilities: locker rooms. Although LGBTQ+ locker room experiences had been previously explored, studies commonly did not reflect "BTQ+" experiences. Using an open-ended response question in an online survey, 1, 067 LGBTQ+ adults submitted responses detailing their past and current locker room experiences. Through the thematic analysis of participant responses, Dr. Duncan and I produced three over-arching themes that reflected the influences of heterosexism, cissexism, and sizeism within locker rooms. Responses from transgender and gender-nonconforming participants (n = 322) provided insight into the variability and complexity of gender transgressions that participants felt when accessing locker rooms, as well as the different forms of gender policing, discrimination, and transphobia experienced in these spaces. Strikingly, negative adolescent locker room experiences in sports and physical education (PE) seemed to have an adverse influence on how LGBTQ+ adults currently viewed locker rooms. Several participants shared how their formative youth experiences with locker rooms encouraged them to avoid all locker rooms and by extension all physical activity contexts in adulthood. Given that sport and PE experiences greatly impacted most participants' current attitudes towards physical activity, my next two studies sought to specifically explore these two contexts.

Instead of exploring LGBTQ+ experiences in one specific sport context (e.g., synchronized figure skating; Herrick et al., 2020), I decided to take a different approach by investigating an underlying component of sports that had been previously identified as significant to LGBTQ+ athletes: interpersonal relationships. My second study aimed to explore how interpersonal relationships within sports influenced LGBTQ+ athletes' experiences, as well as their later-in-life perceptions of physical activity. Using similar methods to my first study, 741 LGBTQ+ adults submitted responses to the questions "How would you describe your past and/or current relationships with teammates, coaches, and other sports-related support staff?" Through inductive thematic analysis, relationships with teammates and coaches were found to significantly influence the experiences of LGBTQ+ athletes as well as shape the perceived in/exclusivity of sporting environments. Discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia characterized unsupportive and hostile sporting relationships between LGBTQ+ athletes and their teammates and coaches. Unsupportive sport relationships resulted in sporting environments that actively excluded LGBTQ+ athletes and culminated in overall negative sporting experiences. Contrastingly, supportive sporting relationships predicated on LGBTQ+ tolerance, inclusion, and acceptance created overall positive experiences for LGBTQ+ athletes. In line with my first study's findings, negative adolescent sporting experiences were found to significantly influence how participants viewed sport and physical activity as adults. Despite negative youth sporting experiences, a few participants actively sought out explicitly LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces and programs to re-engage with sport as adults. Of the select participants that were able to participate in LGBTQ+-friendly alternative sports, these current experiences with sport seemed to help LGBTQ+ adults view physical activity in a positive way and integrate it back into their

lives. However, the bulk of participants' perceptions of physical activity seemed to be coloured by their youth experiences in sport, especially if their experiences were negative.

To better understand LGBTQ+ youth experiences within physical activity, I chose to explore the most widely-experienced physical activity context throughout adolescence: physical education (PE). For my third study, I conducted a systematic scoping review to generate a comprehensive overview of and identify gaps within research dedicated to investigating LGBTQ+ student experiences within PE. The minimal literature (N = 8) retained for review highlighted the present dearth of PE research that includes LGBTQ+ participants. Most of the articles reviewed relied on samples that were predominantly comprised of able-bodied white cisgender individuals, with only half of the articles involving adolescent participants. Of the studies that relied on LGBTQ+ adults reflecting on their PE experiences, none explicitly explored how PE experiences influenced how LGBTQ+ adults currently viewed physical activity contexts. Across the studies reviewed, the collective findings illustrated how LGBTQ+ student experiences are greatly impacted by cis-heteronormativity which validates homophobia, transphobia, and prevalent (mis)gendering processes within PE.

Across my first three studies (Chapters Three, Four, and Five) in response to negative physical activity experiences, a clear narrative thread also emerged that represented the multi-faceted resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals across physical activity contexts. Subsequently, I sought to explore experiences and conceptions of LGBTQ+ resilience within and across physical activity contexts, with an emphasis on exercise contexts. Given the conceptual complexity of resilience, I conducted a series of ten online focus groups with 36 LGBTQ+ adults to encourage discussion among participants. Findings from the focus groups suggest that both individual and community resilience may significantly influence LGBTQ+ experiences and participation in

physical activity. Among participants, several aspects of individual resilience aligned with factors of self-compassion such as adaptability, tenderness, and resistance to norms. These more self-compassionate facets of LGBTQ+ individual resilience seemed to be integral to participants' ability to *queer* physical activity conceptually as well as experientially. As group discussions progressed, participants critically analyzed the pressures associated with and limits of individual resilience. As a result, community resilience within physical activity was discussed across three distinct, and yet sometimes interrelated sites: (a) LGBTQ+, (b) digital, and (c) physical activity communities. Physical activity communities that were unsupportive or exclusive of LGBTQ+ participation commonly thwarted participants' sense of community resilience; however, some participants were able to bolster their sense of resilience and re-engage with physical activity by accessing online or in-person LGBTQ+-friendly/-inclusive exercise classes.

Contributions to Literature

Together, findings from all four studies have contributed greatly to the development of a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how previous and current experiences within and across physical activity contexts influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and engagement in physical activity among self-identified LGBTQ+ individuals.

The bulk of my doctoral research attended to a gap in the literature that I had previously identified in my scoping review of research dedicated to exploring adult LGBTQ+ experiences in physical activity, namely the underrepresentation of bisexual, queer, transgender, and gender-nonconforming experiences (Herrick & Duncan, 2018b). Although a great deal more research with transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals is needed, my doctoral work elucidated how intersections of heterosexism, cissexism, and sizeism influence gender diverse experiences within locker rooms, as well as how transphobia is frequently used by peers (e.g., fellow

students, teammates, etc.) and authority figures (e.g., PE teachers, coaches, instructors, etc.) to protect and maintain the inherent cis-heteronormativity underlying countless physical activity practices and contexts.

In amalgamating over 1,000 LGBTQ+ experiences with locker rooms, Chapter Three, in addition to corroborating previous findings in this field (e.g., Fusco, 1998; Kulick, Wernick, Espinoza, Newman, & Dessel, 2019b), provides a level of undeniability to the widespread and nuanced concerns locker rooms pose to LGBTQ+ communities. Findings from Chapter Three also informed the following suggestions for the improved LGBTQ+ inclusivity and accessibility of locker rooms: (a) increased privacy options be made available in all locker rooms, (b) gender-neutral locker room creation be prioritized, and (c) the binary division of locker rooms be challenged. Considering Chapter Five's findings, I also posit the additional recommendation for locker and changing rooms within PE contexts: (d) the revaluation of the time allotted for students to change for PE as the time provided may be insufficient for students to change comfortably.

Although the unique stresses within and disproportionate barriers to physical activity, such as homophobia, transphobia, discrimination, and exclusion have been previously documented (for reviews see Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Pérez-Samaniego, et al., 2019), my doctoral research provided insight into how these stresses, barriers, and overall negative experiences can influence attitudes towards and engagement in physical activity. Across the first three studies (Chapters Three, Four, and Five) the long-standing significance of LGBTQ+ youth experiences in sport and PE in shaping LGBTQ+ adults' perceptions of, attitudes towards, and (dis)engagement in physical activity was pervasive. Although some participants had positive youth experiences which were often associated with

supportive, accepting, and inclusive relationships with peers, coaches, and PE teachers, the majority of participants across studies had negative experiences within physical activity throughout their adolescence. Negative sport and PE youth experiences seemed to have a significant influence on how LGBTQ+ adults currently viewed physical activity in general. Despite long-standing aversions towards physical activity, select LGBTQ+ adults were able to re-engage with and integrate regular physical activity into their lives by seeking out and accessing explicitly LGBTQ+-friendly community sport organizations and exercise classes. However, as noted in Chapter Three, the community alternatives (e.g., roller derby) discussed by participants were primarily designed to cater to adults. Subsequently, my doctoral research corroborates previous findings that suggest LGBTQ+ youth physical activity experiences are formative (e.g., Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Herrick & Duncan, 2018a), while simultaneously demonstrating how the lingering effects of negative youth experiences (e.g., aversion towards and avoidance of exercise) might be mitigated through access later in life to LGBTQ+-friendly physical activity contexts.

In line with previous research (for reviews see Denison, Bevan, & Jeanes, 2020; Herrick & Duncan, 2018b; Kavoura & Kokkonen, 2020; Pérez-Samaniego, et al., 2019), negative participant experiences in physical activity across studies could be characterized by the prevalence of LGBTQ+ minority stressors (e.g., discrimination, isolation, etc.) as defined by the minority stress model (MSM). Yet within the MSM, resilience, which is defined as one's ability to survive and thrive in the face of adversity, plays a significant role in buffering the detrimental effects of LGBTQ+ minority stressors. My final study (Chapter Six) provides the first exploration of LGBTQ+ resilience(s) in physical activity contexts. Findings from Chapter Six provide initial insight into how LGBTQ+ resilience(s) can also be fostered and cultivated in

response to commonly experienced LGBTQ+ stressors within physical activity. Although anecdotal, findings from this study suggest that more self-compassionate forms of individual resilience may play a significant role in fostering positive experiences and regular participation in physical activity among LGBTQ+ adults. Participants also emphasized how resilience is often framed as an individual issue, instead of developing the spaces, practices, and resources required to bolster LGBTQ+ community resilience within physical activity.

Intersectional Considerations

Bounding my doctoral research to specific, interrelated physical activity contexts (sports, PE, and exercise) enabled the exploration of how systems of power and relational processes between social categorizations, specifically sexuality and gender, shaped different physical activity contexts and experiences within them. Regardless of the physical activity context, cis-heteronormativity was deeply engrained and significantly influenced LGBTQ+ adults' perceptions of sports, PE, and exercise. Although my work was primarily focused on intersections of heterosexism and cissexism within physical activity contexts, I acknowledged the intersectional identities of all participants and briefly attended to more complex intersections within the discussion sections of each associated study. However, more research is required to thoroughly understand the nuanced, complicated, and dynamic relational processes between additional systems of power and social categorizations within physical activity contexts.

Across studies, participants described sizeism as inherent to sport, PE, and exercise contexts in that 'athletic' (meaning muscular and most likely thin) bodies were privileged over others. For transgender and gender-nonconforming participants, intersections of heterosexism, cissexism, and sizeism within physical activity seemed to influence participants' self-perceptions of body image wherein androgyny was often equated with thinness. These findings align with

research exploring why significantly higher rates of eating disorder symptoms have been documented in transgender youth and adults when compared to cisgender counterparts (for reviews see Coelho et al., 2019; Jones, Haycraft, Murjan, & Arcelus, 2016; Obarzanek & Munyan, 2021). For example, results from a phenomenological study exploring how transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals (N = 82) conceptualize eating and body image issues demonstrated how feelings of distress associated with gender dysphoria, concerns about pubertal maturation, the management of uncomfortable emotions through eating behaviors, and meeting specific societal standards of gender expression (masculinity, femininity, and androgyny) influenced eating disorder symptomology (Cusack, Iampieri, & Galupo, 2022).

Several participants that identified as Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) also commented on how experiences of racism, heterosexism, and cissexism influenced their experiences within physical activity contexts. Sports, PE, and exercise within Canada were typically regarded by participants as contexts governed by western ideals that inherently encouraged white participation while dissuading BIPOC participation. For most BIPOC participants, their multiple identities were inexplicably intertwined and collectively influenced how they perceived and engaged in physical activity contexts. Within study 1, Roxanne, a 27-year-old black lesbian ciswoman, described how she felt in locker rooms by explaining, “for me, my body image, my LGBTQ+ identity, and my blackness are themselves connected. I’m a black fat gay girl—my experiences and feelings about my body are going to reflect that.” Similarly, findings from a series of six focus groups with black women (N = 26) exploring how race and gender interface with and inform body image found that experiences of Blackness and womanhood could not be separated, as well as how race and gender simultaneously and uniquely influenced body image among participants (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014). In study 2, a 21-year-old

East Asian gay cisman and track and field athlete also explained how difficult it was to navigate his intersectional identity within sport, “I always had a strained relationship with my teammates. We were often friends, but I felt like a I had to put on a character to fit in with most of them. I had to downplay my ‘gayness’ and ‘Chinese-ness.’” Despite participants describing how intertwined experiences of racism, heterosexism, and cissexism are within physical activity contexts, I have been unable to find any studies in sport, PE, or exercise that specifically and explicitly attend to these intersections. Similar to my own body of work, previous research on LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity have briefly attended to the intersectional identities of their participants while commonly not having enough BIPOC participants to thoroughly explore these intersections (e.g., Landi, 2019; Pariera, Brody, & Scott, 2021). Subsequently, more research is required to fully explore how intersections of racism, heterosexism, and cissexism influence LGBTQ+-BIPOC experiences within and across physical activity contexts to better understand how to support meaningful participation.

Across studies, a few participants identified as Indigenous, however the scope of my doctoral research did not include an exploration of how colonialism and racism influence LGBTQ+ experiences within Canadian physical activity contexts. A systematic review and synthesis of qualitative studies exploring how traditional physical activities impact the holistic health and wellness of Indigenous youth from North American and Oceania identified nine studies (Akbar, Zuk, & Tsuji, 2020). Overall findings from these nine studies described countless emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual benefits to traditional physical activity, as well as how Indigenous youth experiences were affected by familial and communal relationships and socio-political systemic factors, such as assimilation into mainstream culture (Akbar et al., 2020). Although mainstream sport and physical activity participation have been associated with positive

Indigenous youth development (for review see Bruner et al., 2016), more traditional physical activities rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing may provide insight into how physical activity contexts can be transformed away from their original foundations of cis-heteronormativity.

Throughout my doctoral work, several participants experiencing disability emphasized that the unique intersections between ableism, heterosexism, and cissexism significantly impacted their perceptions of, experiences, and (dis)engagement in physical activity. For example, in study 1, Vance, a 25-year-old white heterosexual transman with a mobility impairment, explained how "locker rooms are incredibly uncomfortable, dysphoria-inducing, unsafe, actively hostile, and dangerous as a transman. They're often piss-poorly designed or sometimes nonexistent for someone with a physical disability. Either way, I'm screwed." Additionally, in an online survey exploring how LGBTQ+-specific psychological stressors relate to motivation to engage in physical activity, 210 participants (28.6%) identified as living with a physical disability that hindered their physical activity participation (Herrick et al., 2021). However, due to feasibility and methodological limitations, I was unable to thoroughly explore the nuanced and complicated ways in which ableism is related to heterosexism and cissexism within physical activity. McRuer's *Crip Theory* helps to frame this complex relationship, wherein compulsory cis-heterosexuality is contingent on and reinforced by compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa. Historically tied to the rise of industrial capitalism, cis-heterosexual and able-bodied compulsions created the unattainable, unspoken 'ideal' of an able-bodied cis-heterosexual worker and nuclear family (McRuer, 2006). Becoming naturalized over time, compulsory able-bodiedness works to produce disability much like how compulsory heterosexuality produces queerness (McRuer, 2006; Martino, 2017) where deviations from an assumed 'normal' produces deviance. The majority of research focused on intersections between

disability and queerness have explored processes of self-identification and disclosure, specifically how people create, navigate, and share intersectional identities (e.g., Mauldin, 2018; Miller, 2015; Miller, et al., 2019). Recent work by team at the Re•Vision Centre, a media lab comprised of video-making and editing equipment with the purpose statement 'storytelling for social change,' demonstrates how the creation, navigation, and negotiation of intersectional identities are embodied and also expressed as embodied understandings (Changfoot et al., 2021; Rice et al., 2020; Rice, et al., 2021). Regardless of the context, when working with intersectional identities such as experiencing disability *and* LGBTQ+, it is imperative to acknowledge complex self-identification processes and senses of embodiment. The potential physical and mental benefits associated with physical activity have been well-established among people that experience physical, developmental, behavioural, and sensory impairments as evidenced by countless literature reviews (Ash, et al., 2017; Bartlo & Klein, 2011; Castro, et al., 2018; Lotan, et al., 2006; Pitchford, et al., 2018; Saebu, 2010; Thomson et al., 2020). Physical activity contexts present a double-edged sword where compulsory able-bodiedness can be reified through its glorification (e.g., the Olympics) or challenged through displays of physicality that stand in contrast to common (mis)conceptions of 'normality' (e.g., the Paralympics). Similarly, the cis-heterosexual assumptions that govern physical activity can also be reinforced (e.g., exhibitions of cis-heterosexuality in paired figure skating) or confronted (e.g., the ostensible queerness of roller derby). Despite the transformative potential, experiences with physical activity that fall at the intersection between ableism, cissexism, and heterosexism have yet to be thoroughly explored. Subsequently, my post-doctoral work at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Dr. Erica Bennett and Dr. Andrea Bundon will be focused on exploring how

adults who self-identify as experiencing disability and LGBTQ+ perceive and experience physical activity contexts and practices.

Future Directions

Although my doctoral research has added considerable nuance and depth to how LGBTQ+ experiences within and across physical activity contexts are understood, my work has also identified several directions for future research as well as future activism. Despite the variety of research questions guiding my studies, a common finding was the prevalence of LGBTQ+ minority stressors experienced within physical activity contexts. My previous work has demonstrated that proximal LGBTQ+ stressors are negatively related to need satisfaction in physical activity contexts (Herrick et al., 2021), however more research is required to explore how specific LGBTQ+ stressors in sport, PE, and exercise relate to each of the basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Overall, my doctoral findings emphasize how critical feelings of relatedness are to LGBTQ+ participation in physical activity. Subsequently, relatedness support for LGBTQ+ PE students, athletes, and adults should be thoroughly explored and used in tandem with approaches that work to combat commonly-held LGBTQ+-prejudices and reduce LGBTQ+ minority stressors within physical activity contexts. My collective doctoral findings also echo the conclusions of a systematic review of interventions designed to reduce LGBTQ+ minority stress, namely that future efforts need to be made to reduce the frequency and severity of stressors faced by LGBTQ+ communities as well as bolster LGBTQ+ coping resources (Chaudoir, Wang, & Pachankis, 2017). In other words, future interventions designed to reduce LGBTQ+ stressors in physical activity contexts should also be designed to bolster LGBTQ+ resilience(s). However, before such interventions can be designed, there is still a great deal of research required to fully understand how LGBTQ+ resilience(s)

influence physical activity experiences. Findings from Chapter Six, provide initial evidence that aspects of self-compassion may be crucial for LGBTQ+ individual resilience within physical activity. Future research should analyse this relationship further by exploring how self-compassion may potentially buffer the effects of LGBTQ+ minority stressors within physical activity contexts.

Despite the formative nature and significance of LGBTQ+ youth experiences, there has been little research with LGBTQ+ youth in the realms of sport or PE. To understand how to address subtle and overt influences of cis-heteronormativity within sport and PE, research methodologies should facilitate empowerment-based frameworks that emphasize LGBTQ+ youths' capacity to actively shape their environments. Participatory action research is an empowerment-based research approach that has the potential to embolden LGBTQ+ youth voices in shaping the services that are supposedly designed to support them (Wagaman, 2015; Wernick, Woodford, & Kulick, 2014). For example, photovoice is a promising collaborative method for empowering adolescent participants to engage in critical dialogue and self-directed social change (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012; Strack et al., 2004; Wang, 2006; Wilson et al., 2007). Youth photovoice projects provide participants with opportunities to cultivate their personal and social identities by developing their understanding of themselves and their communities (Strack et al., 2004; Wang, 2006). Photovoice has also been used in Ireland to guide adolescent female participants (N = 41) in constructive conversations with PE curricula designers to help address participant-identified barriers to PE engagement (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Findings from this study suggest that local innovation and the tailoring of PE curricular experiences with students can allow for the creation of PE courses that reflect the students' needs and community contexts while simultaneously satisfying formal curricular

requirements (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Photovoice and other participatory-creative methodologies may be particularly attuned to simultaneously working with and empowering LGBTQ+ youth within sport and PE (e.g., Holtby et al., 2015; Porta, Corliss, et al., 2017; Wagaman et al., 2018). Additionally, some LGBTQ+ inclusive workshops and informational resources exist for teachers and coaches (e.g., Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2019; GLSEN, 2016; LGBT SportSafe, 2019); however, attention should also be directed towards training and empowering youth to speak up against LGBTQ+ prejudices in sport and PE contexts, especially in locker and changing rooms. Future research and activism projects should also be dedicated to debunking prevalent gender-based sport stereotypes which are often used to justify homophobic and transphobic practices across physical activity contexts.

Limitations

The limitations associated with each study have been described in detail in their respective chapters. Throughout my doctoral research, I relied heavily on convenience and snow-ball recruitment methods as well as cross-sectional samples of self-identified LGBTQ+ adults. Across studies, the mean age of the participants was relatively young, therefore, despite the great variability of experiences expressed, findings may represent a specific generation. Future research should purposefully recruit LGBTQ+ participants from different generations to explore the non-linear progression towards LGBTQ+ inclusion in physical activity contexts over time. Although my doctoral research was guided by intersectionality, my studies focused on influences of heterosexism and cissexim within physical activity. Future research should specifically attend to how other systems of power (e.g., sizeism, racism, ableism, etc,) interact with heterosexism and cissexism to influence LGBTQ+ experiences within physical activity contexts.

Conclusions

Previous experiences with physical activity seem to significantly influence current perceptions of, attitudes towards, and (dis)engagement in physical activity among LGBTQ+ adults. Specifically, negative LGBTQ+ adolescent experiences within sport and PE were pervasive across studies and seemed to support aversion towards physical activity in adulthood, whereas positive LGBTQ+ adolescent experiences within sport and PE, despite being rarer, seemed to encourage regular physical activity participation throughout adulthood. Subsequently, efforts are needed to improve overall LGBTQ+ youth experiences across physical activity contexts as well as foster healing from previous, negative experiences among LGBTQ+ adults to encourage regular physical activity participation.

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