

PROMOTING LGBTQ+ STUDENT-ATHLETE WELL-BEING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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BACKGROUND

Collegiate sports can foster body dissatisfaction and in turn, may contribute to disordered eating and impact mental well-being. Marked health disparities have been identified among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ+) populations, including a greater prevalence of eating and mental health disorders. At the intersection of these identities, LGBTQ+ student-athletes may incur elevated risks for negative health outcomes. However, there is limited data investigating health and nutrition concerns in this population.

OBJECTIVES

This project sought to assess the needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ athletes at the University of Washington (UW), understand successes and barriers they have experienced in healthcare settings, and identify how providers at UW can support their well-being. In addition to a literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former LGBTQ+ student-athletes of UW in order to bring visibility to their experiences.



METHODS

Literature review:

- Created a strategy for reviewing peer-reviewed and grey literature
- Health and nutrition needs of student-athletes and LGBTQ+ populations
- Healthcare competency for LGBTQ+ populations and provider perceptions

Semi-structured interviews:

- Generated an interview guide
- Conducted with current and former LGBTQ+ student-athletes at UW
- Discussed identity, well-being, and experiences in healthcare settings at the UW and beyond

Analysis:

- Recommendations were informed based on the findings from the literature review and themes from the interviews
- The needs and assets of the site were considered to ensure the recommendations would be appropriate and feasible

FINDINGS

- Eating and mental health disorders are prevalent in collegiate athlete and LGBTQ+ populations
- With the infrastructure of interdisciplinary care teams currently in place at UW, there is space for additional learning opportunities to improve health outcomes for LGBTQ+ student-athletes
- Students revealed positive experiences with UW Sports Medicine staff
- Students identified ways in which the climate of UW athletics has negatively impacted their mental well-being

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM INTERVIEWS

- "Being a college athlete means you are under a microscope and at times I felt I had to hide my sexual identity to outsiders because of the platform I was on."
- "My last year at UW I experienced severe depression which partly came from accepting and realizing my sexual identity."
- "There are times I find myself finding comfort in food when experiencing my phases of down times."
- "There was casual homophobia on my team. I did not experience homophobic comments directly and I would brush them off. Comments such as, 'that's so gay' are still common in sports culture at the UW."
- "Providers at UW Medicine asked for my pronouns, which was great."

UW SPORTS MEDICINE INTERDISCIPLINARY CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

- Registered Dietitians
- Athletic Trainers
- Clinical Psychologists
- Medical Doctors

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion within the UW Athletics community were twofold:

- 1) Internally:** Establish an interdisciplinary LGBTQ+ inclusion committee, involving staff and students, focused on advancing LGBTQ+ health and inclusion initiatives within the UW Athletics community.
- 2) Externally:** Form partnerships with local organizations to conduct recurring educational trainings for staff, coaches, students, and other members of the UW Athletics community.
 - University of Washington Q Center
 - Gay City
 - Seattle Counseling Services
 - Ingersoll Gender Center

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