

“The Respect Initiative:” Assessing the Climate for LGBT Athletes at Lafayette College

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*A summary of the aims of the research and applicable previous work

Athletes who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) face a more negative social and work/play environment than do their heterosexual peers (NCAA, 2012; Oswalt & Vargas, 2013; Rankin & Merson, 2012; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001; Worthen, 2014). National surveys (NCAA, 2012; Rankin & Merson, 2012) have found that LGBT student-athletes perceive their athletic environment as less accepting, less respectful, and more discriminatory than do other athletes. These perceptions increase the student-athletes’ feelings of stress and alienation and are associated with lower levels of academic success. Research suggests that gender may affect climate for LGBT athletes, with male coaches expressing more anti-gay attitudes than female coaches, and male LGBT athletes experiencing more negativity compared to their female peers (Oswalt & Vargas, 2013; Worthen, 2014).

Lafayette College’s Department of Athletics (DA) is committed to having a respectful and positive environment for all student athletes, regardless of sexual or gender orientation. Given the national data regarding the negative climate for LGBT student-athletes as well as the 2012 Lafayette Campus Climate study (Rankin & Associates, 2012) that found that LGBT students at Lafayette viewed the campus as less welcoming than did heterosexual students, the DA desires to assess the climate for LGBT student athletes on campus. Thus the current study is aimed at assessing the climate for LGBT students in the Department of Athletics at Lafayette College by surveying all student-athletes, coaches, and other employees of the division. Indeed, the NCAA in their 2012 report recommends that each campus assess the local environment for LGBT student athletes as a first step to improving the campus climate. The goal of the survey is to assess the climate and use that information to inform possible policy changes in the athletics department.

- A summary of the research design

Two surveys (one for coaches/employees; one for student-athletes) will be distributed via Qualtrics to all varsity athletes and athletic division employees at Lafayette College to assess the perceived climate in the athletics program for LGBT individuals. Surveys will be completed anonymously and results reported only in summary form.

- A summary of the participant recruitment plan, including copies of any advertisements and/or recruitment e-mails

An email will be sent out by the Director and Senior Associate Director of the athletics department to all varsity athletes ($N = 524$; 300 men, 224 women), coaches ($N = 65$; 46 men, 19 women), and staff ($N = 39$; 22 men, 17 women) requesting participation.

(See Appendix A for the first email.) The email will contain a link to the appropriate survey in Qualtrics. The first email to the student-athletes will be followed by one from the students' coach to further encourage participation. (See Appendix A for the coach's email.)

- Informed consent documents

The informed consent document will be the first screen in the survey. Clicking through to the survey itself will serve as an indication of consent. (See Appendix B for the informed consent document.)

- All materials and procedures

Two surveys, one for student-athletes, one for coaches/staff, were constructed based on previous research (NCAA, 2012; Rankin & Merson, 2012) and reviewed by the senior administrators of the Department of Athletics and the Faculty Athletics Representative. The student survey asks 10 questions about the perceived climate in the DA/team for LGBT athletes, most requiring yes/no responses or 1-5 ratings. One question asks for the student's own sexual identity. There also is an opportunity for open-ended responses. The coach/staff survey is similarly constructed and asks seven questions about the perceived climate as well as two more open-ended ones. (See Appendix C for the surveys.)

The emails will be sent to all participants by the Senior Associate Director of Athletics on April 13, 2015, followed by an email from coaches to their student-athletes one day later. Students will have a week in which to take the survey, and will receive a Qualtrics reminder two days before the survey closes (April 20).

- Debriefing documents and procedures

All participants will read a debriefing statement as their last page of the survey (see Appendix D.) Further information about the results of the survey will be available from the Athletics Directors.

- A summary of the data management plan

The results of the two Qualtrics survey initially will only be available to the Senior Associate Director of Athletics and only in anonymous form. Data will be reported in terms of frequencies of responses to each question answered by student-athletes and by coaches/staff. Open-ended responses will be transcribed directly and main themes summarized by two separate coders.

Professor Basow will further examine the data files as to differences in responses between certain subgroups: 1) coaches and athletes; 2) men and women athletes; 3) heterosexual athletes and non-exclusively heterosexual athletes (chi square analyses).

The data will be maintained on a secure server only available to the researchers with a password. Results will be reported in summary form only.

References

- NCAA. (2012). *Champions of respect: Inclusion of LGBTQ student-athletes and staff in NCAA programs*. Retrieval from <http://www.ncaapublications.com/p-4305-champions-of-respect-inclusion-of-lgbtq-student-athletes-and-staff-in-ncaa-programs.aspx>
- Oswalt, S. B., & Vargas, T. M. (2013). How safe is the playing field? Collegiate coaches' attitudes towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. *Sports in Society*, 16, 120-132.
- Rankin, S. & Associates. (2012). *Lafayette College climate assessment project final report*. Retrieval from <http://campusclimate.lafayette.edu/>
- Rankin, S., & Merson, D. (2012). *2012 LGBTQ national college athlete report*. Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride. Retrieval from www.campuspride.org.
- Wolf-Wendel, L. E., Toma, J. D., & Morpew, C. C. (2001). How much difference is too much difference? Perceptions of gay men and lesbians in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42, 465-479.
- Worthen, M. G. F. (2014). Blaming the jocks and the Greeks: Exploring collegiate athletes' and fraternity/sorority members' attitudes towards LGBT individuals. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55, 168-195.

Appendix A

First Email

Dear Student-Athlete/Coach/Staff Person,

Lafayette College's Department of Athletics is committed to providing a diverse learning environment with equitable opportunity for student-athletes and staff without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability or place of origin. In the NCAA report [Champions of Respect](#), the NCAA recommends that each campus assess the local environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student athletes as a first step to improving the athletic climate related to these issues. To that end, we have developed a short survey (see link below) that will help us meet that goal.

Your participation and honest feedback are very important to us. Completing the survey should take no more than 10 minutes, and the results are completely anonymous and confidential. Please take the survey now, or at least at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your help with this important project.

Coach's Email to Student Athletes

Dear Student-Athlete,

You recently received an email from the Kaity McKittrick, Senior Associate Director of Athletics, asking you to fill out a brief survey assessing the environment for LGBT student athletes. I am writing to urge you to participate in this important project.

I also want to assure you that I will not see your responses, which will only be reported in summary form.

Thank you for your assistance.

Appendix B

Informed Consent

The purpose of this study is to examine the climate in the athletics department for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student athletes.

I understand that in this study my participation will consist of answering questions anonymously in an on-line Qualtrics survey.

Participation will take about 10 minutes.

My name will not be associated with the results and my responses will be held in confidence. All results will be reported on an aggregate/summary basis.

My participation is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw at any time.

I understand that possible risks of the study are feeling slightly uncomfortable answering questions about sexual orientation.

I understand that possible benefits of this study are the opportunity to contribute to improving the climate in the athletics division for LGBT student-athletes.

I understand that I am free to ask questions about this research at any time. I can contact the research supervisor, Dr. Susan Basow, at basows@lafayette.edu.

By clicking through to the beginning of the survey, I am giving my informed consent.

Appendix C

Athletes Survey

Gender_____ Year (optional)_____Team (optional)_____

Please help us by taking a few minutes to complete this **anonymous** survey. We hope to use it to better understand the atmosphere for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) individuals in the Athletics Department. We would appreciate your honest thoughts and opinions.

Please indicate the choice that best represents your views.

1. Do you know any LGBT athletes on your team?

Yes No

2. a) If you were LGBT, would you feel comfortable coming out to your team?

Yes No

If no, why? _____

- b) If you were LGBT, would you feel comfortable coming out to your coaches?

Yes No

If no, why? _____

3. How often do you hear negative comments about LGBT people from teammates? If any, please give examples.

- a. Never
- b. Few times a semester
- c. Few times a month
- d. Few times a week
- e. Almost daily

Examples:_____

4. How often do you hear negative comments about LGBT people from coaches?
If any, please give examples.

- a. Never
- b. Few times a semester
- c. Few times a month
- d. Few times a week
- e. Almost daily

Examples: _____

5. How accepting do you think your coach or coaching staff would be to a LGBT athlete? Rate on a scale from 1-5.

Extremely Unaccepting	Somewhat Unaccepting	Neutral	Somewhat Accepting	Extremely Accepting
1	2	3	4	5

6. If you were openly LGBT, do you feel there would be repercussions, from coaches, for playing time, leadership roles, etc.?

Yes No

If yes, what kinds? _____

7. How welcoming would your team be to an openly LGBT recruit? Rate on a scale from 1-5.

Extremely Unwelcoming	Somewhat Unwelcoming	Neutral	Somewhat Welcoming	Extremely Welcoming
1	2	3	4	5

8. How welcoming would your team be to a member of your team coming out midway through the season? Rate on a scale from 1-5.

Extremely Unwelcoming	Somewhat Unwelcoming	Neutral	Somewhat Welcoming	Extremely Welcoming
1	2	3	4	5

9. Are you interested in learning to be an ally to LGBT athletes (i.e., helping to support them)?

Yes No

10. How would you identify your sexual orientation (circle one category)?

- a. Exclusively lesbian/gay
- b. Predominately lesbian/gay
- c. Bisexual
- d. Predominately heterosexual
- e. Exclusively heterosexual

11. Please feel free to add any additional comments, thoughts, or questions in the space below.

Thank you for your time!

Coaches Survey

Gender_____

Team (optional)_____

Please help us by taking a few minutes to complete this **anonymous** survey. We hope to use it to better understand the atmosphere for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) individuals in the Athletics Department. We would appreciate your honest thoughts and opinions.

Please select the choice that best represents your views.

1. Do you know any LGBT athletes on your team?

Yes

No

2. How often do you hear negative comments about LGBT people from other coaches? If any, please give examples.

- a. Never
- b. Few times a term
- c. Few times a month
- d. Few times a week
- e. Almost daily

Examples:_____

3. How often do you hear negative comments about LGBT people from players? If any, please give examples.

- a. Never
- b. Few times a term
- c. Few times a month
- d. Few times a week
- e. Almost daily

Examples:_____

4. Have you directly addressed sexual orientation with your team?

Yes

No

If yes, in what capacity? _____

If no: a. Do you think it should be? Yes No

b. Would you want to? Yes No

5. How accepting do you think your team would be to a LGBT athlete? Rate on a scale from 1-5.

Extremely Unaccepting	Somewhat Unaccepting	Neutral	Somewhat Accepting	Extremely Accepting
1	2	3	4	5

6. Would you feel comfortable recruiting a LGBT athlete? Rate on a scale from 1-5.

Extremely Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Neutral	Somewhat Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable
1	2	3	4	5

7. Are you interested in learning to be an ally to LGBT athletes (i.e., helping to support them)?

Yes No

8. What aspects of creating a comfortable environment for LGBT athletes do you feel you can control?

9. Please feel free to add any additional comments, thoughts, or questions in the space below.

Thank you for your time!

Appendix D

Debriefing

National surveys find the LGBT student-athletes perceive their athletic environment as less accepting, less respectful, and more discriminatory than do other athletes. These perceptions increase the student-athletes' feelings of stress and alienation and are associated with lower levels of academic success.

Your participation in this study will help us assess the local climate for LGBT student-athletes as a first step in our "Respect Initiative," a program aimed at improving the experience of LGBT student-athletes. Thank you again for your help in this project.

If you would like to talk with someone about any of the issues raised in this survey, please contact:

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