
2022

NCAA COACHES' PERCEPTIONS OF TRANSGENDER ATHLETE SPORT PARTICIPATION - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**CENTER FOR SPORT
PSYCHOLOGY & ATHLETE
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Released: November 2022

OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY

Background: Coaches hold particular responsibility in developing sport environments and team cultures and have critical and often personal relationships with athletes; therefore, coaches have a direct role in athlete wellbeing and personal development. The NCAA has provided an avenue for transgender athletes to compete in collegiate sports according to the athletes' gender identity through the Transgender Student-Athlete Participation Policy. Nevertheless, it is unclear how supportive, welcoming, and safe these sport environments are for transgender athletes, and specifically, how coaches' views and attitudes may be impacting transgender athletes.

Current Study: The current study addresses the following research questions:

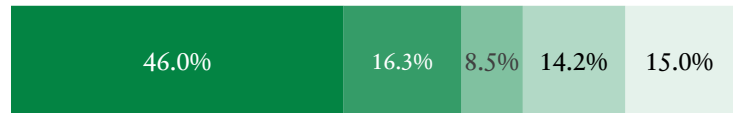
- What is the prevalence rate for coaches who believe that transgender athletes should be allowed to participate in sports in accordance with the athletes' gender identity? What are coaches' reasoning for holding their beliefs?
- What is the relationship between (a) coaches' knowledge about LGBT individuals generally and (b) their personal experiences with LGBT individuals and athletes and their beliefs regarding transgender athletes participating in sports in accordance with their gender identity and their intentions in coaching transgender athletes?
- What are the relationships between coaches' demographic factors (e.g., gender, race, political affiliation) and coaching factors (e.g., sport type, coaching role) to their perceptions and intentions regarding transgender athlete participation in sport?

Methods: Data collection occurred from March to June 2022. NCAA coaches (30,210) were invited to participate in the study via email four times. The email addresses were obtained through universities' athletic department websites. Coaches completed the survey via Qualtrics.

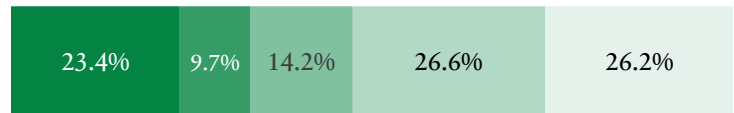
Sample: The sample included over 1500 head and assistant coaches from all three NCAA divisions from across the United States. Participants coached all sports, and male, female, and male and female teams. Most coaches were White, Non-Hispanic, heterosexual, men, and Christian. The sample represented coaches with various political affiliations (e.g., Democrat, Republican, and Independent). For further information on demographics, see full report released December 2022 ([click here](#)).

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Transgender female athletes should be allowed to participate in collegiate women's sports.



Transgender male athletes should be allowed to participate in collegiate men's sports.



1 ■ Strongly Disagree 3 ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree 5 ■ Strongly Agree

1. **Attitudes Towards Participation.** Most coaches (52.7%) indicated that transgender men should be allowed to compete in collegiate men's sports, whereas fewer coaches (19.2%) believed that transgender women should be allowed to compete in collegiate women's sports.
2. **Perceptions of Physical Advantage.** Most coaches (66.5%) believed that transgender women who follow the NCAA Policy on Transgender Student Athlete Participation hold an unfair physical advantage whereas few coaches (11%) believed that transgender men hold an unfair physical advantage. Some coaches (13%) identified not knowing enough about the policy.
3. **Exposure to LGBT.** Personally knowing LGBT individuals was related to more supportive views of transgender women competing in collegiate women's sports.
4. **Knowledge.** Demonstrating knowledge about gender identity (e.g., sex and gender do not have the same meaning) was related to more supportive views of transgender women competing in collegiate women's sports.
5. **Coach Intentions.**
 - a) Most coaches reported that if an athlete they coached told them they were transgender, they would welcome the transgender athlete's participation on their team (56.2%) and would work to create a welcoming and supportive environment for the athlete (78.9%).
 - b) Coaches who indicated intentions to welcome and support transgender athletes on their team were more likely to indicate positive attitudes towards transgender women competing in collegiate women's sports.
 - c) Of all variables (i.e., coach factors, demographic factors, knowledge about gender identity, exposure to LGBT individuals), coaches' intention to welcome transgender athletes' participation on their team accounted for the most (46.3%) variance in perception of whether transgender women should be allowed to compete in collegiate women's sports.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

After identifying their beliefs regarding transgender athlete participation in collegiate sports, coaches were asked to explain their reasoning for their beliefs through the following open-ended question.

“We would greatly appreciate you describing **the reasoning for your beliefs** regarding the participation of transgender female and male athletes in sports. In answering this open--ended question, please tell us about the **WHY/HOW** you have the beliefs you do.”

One thousand three hundred and fifty-nine coaches provided usable responses with an average word count of 58 per response. The research team completed a thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016), which resulted in seven themes and 18 subthemes. For additional details and sample responses, see full report, released December 2022 ([click here](#)).

Theme 1. Sport is competitive and must be fair.

- a. Transgender women have an unfair athletic advantage.
- b. Rules are essential for competitive fairness.
- c. Need to create new competitive categories.

Theme 2. (Cis)Women’s sports must be protected.

- a. Inclusion undermines Title IX.
- b. Inclusion is disruptive for sport environments.

Theme 3. Sport’s role in society.

- a. A vehicle for health and development.
- b. A vessel for inclusivity.

Theme 4. Our purpose as coaches.

- a. Support and advocate for athletes.
- b. Be allies to transgender athletes.

Theme 5. Transgender identity is invalid.

- a. Being transgender violates biology.
- b. Being transgender goes against God.
- c. Being transgender is a mental illness.

Theme 6. Transgender rights are human rights.

- a. Inclusion is the basis of human rights.
- b. Transgender men are men; transgender women are women.
- c. Transgender athletes have the human right to play sports.

Theme 7. I am not sure what I believe.

- a. Insufficiently educated.
- b. Need more research.
- c. Conflicting values.

CONSIDERATIONS – TRANSGENDER ATHLETE INCLUSION TRAININGS FOR COACHES

To prepare coaches to effectively work with transgender athletes, trainings should:

- Provide information on gender identity (e.g., differences between gender identity and sex assigned at birth).
- Provide information on the NCAA Policy on Transgender Student Athlete Participation and what informed the policy.
- Highlight the lack of evidence for transgender women having a physical advantage in sport competition (see CCES, 2022).
- Include transgender athletes' lived experiences in sport and society.
- Foster exploration of conflicting values related to the inclusion of transgender athletes in collegiate sports.
- Highlight beliefs regarding the value of inclusivity, the humanity of transgender athletes, the health and developmental benefits of sport participation, and the responsibility of coaches to support their athletes.
- Incorporate discussions on how to create welcoming and supportive environments for transgender athletes.