ORIGINAL ARTICLE

When Prejudice Is Low, Religion Makes the Difference: Patterns of Exclusivity Toward Trans Men and Women in Intercollegiate Sport

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Trans athletes in the United States are experiencing systemic and social exclusion from sport, including the introduction of legislation that restricts the participation of trans people in sport. Although legislators have sought to exclude trans athletes from sport, the attitudes of cisgender athletes toward trans athlete inclusion are much more varied. Psychologists and other advocates for trans equity may benefit from better understanding specific psychosocial variables that are associated with prejudice against the participation of trans people in sport. The present study examined the roles of prejudice and religiosi-

ty on exclusionary attitudes in a sample of 248 past and current intercollegiate athletes. Participants reported demographic information, attitudes and beliefs, and responded to vignettes related to trans athlete inclusion. Two PROCESS Model 4 analyses were conducted with religiosity as a mediator of the association between prejudice and exclusionary attitudes toward trans men and trans women, respectively. Results indicated that overall attitudes towards transgender individuals predicted support of inclusion in sport for both transgender men and women, however religiosity significantly mediated attitudes towards transgender men in sport. Implications for advocacy among psychologists and other health service professionals are discussed.

KEYWORDS trans; transgender; intercollegiate; sport; exclusion
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Politicians across the United States continue to introduce and pass legislation restricting the participation of trans people in intercollegiate sport. Most recently at the time of writing, Texas passed a law prohibiting trans women from competing in collegiate sport, joining 17 other states in restricting sport participation for trans athletes (Martinez 2023). Counter to current evidence and scholarship, legislators and lobbyists argue that banning trans people from participating on teams that align with their gender identities ensures greater equality and fairness in sport (Burke 2022; Phipps 2021). However, the attitudes and beliefs of athletes themselves is rather mixed with inconsistent patterns of support (Goldbach et al. 2024). Given that athletes are the very class of people purportedly protected by laws that ban trans people from sport, it is important for psychologists and other professionals who advocate for LGBTQ+ equity to consider how athletes actually think about and respond to the inclusion of trans athletes.

Furthermore, the inclusion/exclusion debate has a direct impact on trans athletes themselves. Discriminatory legislation has been associated with poorer mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ populations, including increased rates of depression and suicide (Paceley et al. 2021). Likewise, when athletic activities are made accessible to LGBTQ+ populations, they serve as a protective factor associated with increased self-esteem of transgender athletes (Clark and Kosciw 2022). Given the potential protective factors that accepting athletic communities provide, it is imperative to advocate for athlete inclusion.

The Role of Prejudice

Gender identity and inclusion in sport have been controversial topics in sport ethics and beyond (Gleaves and Lehrbach 2016). It is beyond the scope of this brief article to completely summarize the history of gender-based exclusion in sport, but it is important to note that historical discrimination has resulted in the proposal and/or passage of hundreds of bills targeting transgender individuals (American Civil Liberties Union 2023). Currently, at least thirty of these proposed bills (e.g., H.R.734 - Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023, H.B.11 - Student Eligibility in Interscholastic Activities, H.B. 631 Fairness in Women's Sport Act) prohibit transgender athletes from competing in ath-

letics or require transgender athletes to compete consistent with their sex assigned at birth, rather than their gender identity (Sharrow 2021). The sport landscape is changing rapidly under the Trump administration and a recent executive order (No. 14201, 2025) will likely supersede state level efforts for the foreseeable future.

Institutions of sport in the United States, such as the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), further contribute to prejudice towards trans athletes. Despite a long-standing policy that allowed athletes to participate on teams that aligned with their affirmed gender, in 2022, the NCAA changed their transgender athlete participation policy such that participation in NCAA competition is to be determined by the governing body of each sport (Buzuvis 2022). Sport as an institution is heavily gendered and impacted by cisgenderism; when this is considered in conjunction with evidence pointing towards increased transprejudice in gender-segregated contexts (Buck and Obzud 2018), this precedent of segregation and cisgenderism in sport may partially explain the current sociopolitical climate towards trans athletes.

Even amongst scholars, there is disagreement as to the advantage held by transgender athletes, specifically transgender women. Some researchers conclude that trans women have an advantage over cisgender women due to relatively high testosterone levels and prior male physiology (Anderson et al. 2019). Others conclude that transitioning could confer an advantage or disadvantage (Torres et al. 2022). Meanwhile, a growing list of sport associations and leagues themselves (such as the International Rugby League and the International Swimming Federation) have been passing policies that restrict the participation of trans people in sport (Brassil and Longman 2021; Futterman 2022). Current laws and policies limit trans athletes' inclusion in sport based on factors such as age, hormones, geographical location, sport, and gender identity (Erikainen, et al. 2021; Phipps 2021; Morris and Van Raalte 2016). Still, the laws and policies instituted by governing bodies do not reflect the more nuanced psychosocial concerns forwarded by athletes themselves (Goldbach et al. 2024; Teetzel, 2017). More information is needed about the conditions under which cis athletes are more or less likely to support access to support for their trans teammates (Phipps 2021).

Religiosity in Focus

Many sociocultural factors have been explored regarding their influence on transprejudice, including a combination of demographics, beliefs, and values (Willoughby et al. 2010) that involve gender, political views, and religiosity (Campbell et al. 2019). Religious belief is gaining traction in sport research, especially as it relates to social attitudes and public opinions. Researchers have identified key associations between religious belief and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, self-identifying as religious and higher report of religious fundamentalism have been associated with higher levels of transprejudice and negative attitudes towards transgender people (Campbell et al. 2019).

Religious belief and sport regularly intersect given that many athletes credit their successes to a higher power and/or foreground beliefs on and off the field (Beyer and Hannah 2000; Czech and Bullet 2007). Research on religious belief among athletes has become an area of focus, perhaps in part due to distinct stressors that come with sport participation, and data indicate that holding a religious identity may carry some individual benefits. For example, recent research indicated potential positive impacts when

an athlete's religious beliefs are incorporated in their treatment plans when coping with adversity in sport, such as injury (Wiese-Bjornstal et al. 2022). To this end, religiosity has been positively related to psychological profiles in sport, including psychological skills, mental preparation, and motivation, (Ridnour and Hammermeister 2008) as well as enhanced performance and enjoyment of sport (Noh and Shahdan 2020). In sum, religiosity can substantially influence athletes' personal experiences of sport, but it may also shape team dynamics. The broader impacts of religiosity and sport warrants further exploration, especially in the area of athlete inclusion. Given the potential for religiosity to influence attitudes within in sport and towards trans people more broadly, the present study seeks to incorporate this variable in the context of trans athlete inclusion.

Inclusion/Exclusion

It is important to note the distinct patterns in acceptance, or non-acceptance, of transgender athlete participation in sport. According to a 2021 nationwide Gallup poll (McCarthy 2021), 34% of US adults believe that transgender athletes should be able to play on teams that match their gender identity; likewise, 63% of self-identified liberals reported being supportive of allowing athletes to play on teams according to their gender identity, while only 34% of moderates and 12% of conservatives share this view. Additional literature suggests that transgender men have received higher rates of acceptance when competing in sport than transgender women (Tanimoto and Miwa 2021), which may be in part due to the perception that they do not hold an unfair athletic advantage. Beyond these barriers, factors impacting inclusion and exclusion include sociocultural perspectives and attitudes towards transgender inclusion in sport, such as sport-specific attitudes on transgender athletes.

Generally, attitudes towards transgender athletes are less favorable among men, those who hold strong traditional gender role beliefs, those who have minimal interpersonal contact with transgender people, and those who identify strongly as a sports fan (Flores et al. 2020). However, differences between cis women and cis men and their attitudes toward trans athletes have not been found in all studies (e.g., Merrill and Anderson 2024). The culture of sport appears to be a difficult environment for transgender populations, given the observed prejudice. However, it is still unclear how athletes themselves feel about the inclusion of transgender athletes in sport. It is notable that a lack of contact with sexual and/or gender minorities has been associated with negative or less favorable attitudes towards trans athletes (Flores et al. 2020; Merrill and Anderson 2024), as this suggests that misinformation or misunderstanding of these populations may play an important role in attitude formation.

Objectives of the Present Study

Much of the research regarding transgender inclusion in sport provides insight regarding public opinion and attitudes that people hold toward the inclusion of transgender athletes and competition (Flores et al. 2020). By focusing on what factors impact current athlete attitudes toward the inclusion of transgender athletes, researchers may gain insight surrounding the likely factors that shape the attitudes and beliefs toward trans athletes and participation in sport. The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of attitudes towards transgender people and religiosity on cisgender athletes' attitudes towards transgender athlete inclusion. To this end, the present study seeks

to better understand the current athletic climate, providing insight for athletic policy, and understanding barriers to athlete inclusion. Consistent with previous literature, we hypothesized that attitudes toward trans men and trans women would be different, in a sample of intercollegiate athletes. More specifically, we anticipated that trans women would receive less support from athletes compared to trans men. We further hypothesized that religiosity would play a mediating role in the association between prejudice and exclusionary attitudes among collegiate athletes toward both trans men and trans women, such that increased religiosity would mediate a positive association between general prejudice towards trans people and sport-specific exclusionary attitudes.

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional, survey-based study of attitudes of collegiate athletes toward transgender athlete participation in sport. Data were collected from September 2020 to April 2021. Institutional Review Board approval was granted by Oklahoma State University and the University at Buffalo prior to the conduct of the study. This manuscript presents novel secondary data analyses performed on a dataset for which some basic descriptive statistics have been presented elsewhere (Goldbach et al. 2024).

Participants

The sample consisted of a total of 248 athletes located in the United States, including past ($n = 15$, 6%) and current ($n = 233$, 94%) intercollegiate athletes located in the United States who were 18 years old or older ($M = 21.15$, $SD = 4.83$). Participants predominantly played team sports ($n = 164$, 66%) and most were affiliated with NCAA Division I ($n = 129$, 52%) or Division II ($n = 53$, 21.4%) teams. Most participants identified as white ($n = 196$, 79%) and as women ($n = 170$, 68.5%). Respondents who reported identifying as gender diverse (e.g., trans, nonbinary, and so on) were not included in the present study. For additional demographics, see Table 1.

Procedure

The survey was administered using Qualtrics survey software. Survey advertisements with a link to the study were distributed on sport psychology listservs, social media platforms, through athletic directors at institutions throughout the United States, and directly to student athletes using university emails provided following Institutional Review Board approval. Participants who accessed the survey were screened for eligibility and then presented with the informed consent form and demographic questionnaire, including information about their participation in collegiate athletics. Eligible participants who consented then responded to vignettes created for the study related to various scenarios with a trans man and trans woman athlete (e.g., plays a contact sport or noncontact sport, wins or loses by a large margin, has or has not received hormone therapy). Next, participants completed the Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (TABS; Kanamori et al., 2017) to assess general attitudes and beliefs towards transgender people and a few additional items created for the present study surveying attitudes towards transgender people specifically within the context of sport. The TABS and the additional items assessing sport-specific attitudes were

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 248)

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Man	78	31.5
Woman	170	68.5
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	214	86.3
Lesbian	9	3.6
Gay	2	0.8
Bisexual	13	5.2
Queer	4	1.6
Asexual	1	0.4
Pansexual	2	0.8
Self-identify	3	0.12
Race and ethnicity		
White	196	79.0
Hispanic/Latin	7	2.8
Black/African American	12	4.8
Asian/Asian American	4	1.6
Native American/Indigenous	2	0.8
Multiracial	2	0.8
Self-identified race/ethnicity	25	10.2
Intercollegiate athlete status		
Past	15	6.0
Current	233	94.0
Athletic affiliation		
NCAA Division I	129	52.0
NCAA Division II	53	21.4
NCAA Division III	21	8.5
NAIA	5	2.0
NJCAA	10	4.0
Club	30	12.1
Sport team type		
Team-based sport	164	66.1
Individual-based sport	84	33.9
Religious tradition		
Christian denominations	160	64.5
Jewish	1	0.5
Muslim	1	0.5
Spiritual or agnostic	17	6.8
Atheist or nonreligious	42	16.9
No response	17	6.8
Other	10	4.0

counterbalanced to minimize order effects, but only data collected using the TABS are presented in the present study. After completing the survey, participants were directed to a separate survey where they were able to enter their email address in a drawing for one of ten $20 gift cards. Participant emails were not linked to their responses to the main survey.

Materials

Study participants completed a series of scales and items that are detailed in (Goldbach et al. 2022). For the present study, the researchers analyzed responses to (a) demographic items, (b) general attitudes toward transgender people, (c) a religious importance item, and (c) inclusive/exclusive reactions to transgender athlete participation vignettes.

Demographics

Participants were presented with common demographic questions that collected information such as age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity. Participants were able to endorse multiple races, sexual orientations, and gender identities (see Table 1). Participants also provided information about their experience in sport such the type of collegiate sport they were affiliated with and the gender composition of their team(s).

General Attitudes toward Transgender People

The Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (TABS) was used to assess general attitudes toward transgender people (Kanamori et al. 2017). The TABS is a 29-item scale with three factors: interpersonal comfort, human value, and sex and gender beliefs. A sample item includes, "Transgender individuals should be treated with the same dignity and respect as any other person." Item responses are recorded on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher summary scores indicate more positive attitudes toward transgender people. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency in the present sample ($\alpha = 0.96$).

Religious Importance

A single item was used to measure the significance/degree of importance participants placed on religion (see Zwingmann et al. 2011). The item, "How important is your religion and/or spirituality in your day-to-day life?" was scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very important*). Higher numbers indicated higher levels of religious importance. There are a wide range of scales and approaches to measuring the nuance of individual religiosity; we elected to use self-rated impor-

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Primary Variables

Variables	*n*	*M*	*SD*	α
TABS	248	150.34	34.99	.96
Reaction to James	248	3.30	1.42	.96
Reaction to Emma	248	2.67	1.44	.96
Religious Importance	248	2.92	1.42	—

tance of religion because this variable has emerged as a simple, cross-nationally stable measure, invariant of related indicators (Remizova et al. 2022).

Reactions

A series of synthesized vignettes were used to gauge reactions to the involvement of a transgender man (James) and a transgender woman (Emma) in various intercollegiate sports. Half of the 14 vignettes focused on James and the other half focused on Emma. Vignettes were paired so that participants were asked to consider their level of sport-specific support for a transgender woman and a transgender man in the given scenario. After they were presented with a vignette, participants were asked to indicate their reaction on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 5 (*strongly support*). The seven scenarios covered: (a) non-contact sports, (b) contact sports, (c) James/Emma winning by a large margin, (d) James/Emma losing by a large margin, (e) affirming hormone therapy for 2 years prior, (f) plans to start affirming hormone therapy within six months, and (g) no plans to start affirming hormone therapy. Participants also provided information about which scenarios were most concerning for them, but those data were not used in the present study. Responses across all James and all Emma vignettes were summed to produce a reaction score for transgender men and transgender women. Higher summary scores indicated higher levels of support for James and Emma. The vignette-based scale indicated high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.97$). For additional information about the vignettes can be found in Goldbach and colleagues (2024).

Analytic Plan

A pwr package was used in R to calculate the minimum sample size for the study with four predictors/covariates, a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), $p < 0.05$, and 0.80 power, and determined that we needed at least 90 participants for a fully powered study. The sample from the published, descriptive study included 270 participants (Goldbach et al. 2024). Cases were deleted listwise for participants who skipped survey items used to measure the primary variables. The resulting sample contained 248 participants.

IBM SPSS 28 was used for all analyses. Descriptive statistics were run for demographic variables used in this study (Table 1), descriptive statistics were generated for all primary variables (Table 2), and correlations between primary variables were computed (Table 3). Underlying assumptions for regression-based mediation (Hayes 2018) were established in SPSS. Q-Q plots indicated normal distribution of primary

Table 3. Intercorrelations Between Primary Variables with 95% Confidence Intervals

Variables	1	2	3
1. TABS	—		
2. Reaction to James	.72*** [.65, .77]	—	
3. Reaction to Emma	.66*** [58, .73]	.80*** [.75, .84]	—
4. Religious Importance	−.50*** [−.59, −.40]	−.45*** [−.54, −.34]	−.36*** [−.46, −.25]

Note. ***$p < .001$

Table 4. Gender Differences Between Primary Variables

	Men		Women		*t*(246)	*p*	Cohen's *d*	[95% CI]
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*				
TABS	137.77	33.03	156.11	34.43	−3.95	<.001	−.54	[−.81, −.27]
Reaction to James	3.07	1.37	3.40	1.44	−1.72	.04	−.24	[−.50, .03]
Reaction to Emma	2.15	1.19	2.91	1.50	−4.27	<.001	−.58	[−.86, −.31]
Religious Importance	2.85	1.37	2.96	1.45	−.58	.28	−.08	[−.35, .19]

Note. [95% CI] is the 95 percent confidence interval for Cohen's *d*.

variables. PROCESS Model 4 was run to test the mediation hypothesis. Age, personal relationship/contact with a trans person, and educational level have all been associated with attitudes toward trans people (see Norton & Herek, 2013; Tadlock et al., 2017) and were, therefore, included as covariates in our model. Given our significant findings related to gender differences (Table 4) and significant findings elsewhere related to the contact hypothesis (Tadlock et al. 2017), we also controlled for participation in co-ed athletics.

RESULTS

Vignette reaction scores for Emma and James were used as proxy measures for attitudes towards transgender women athletes and transgender men athletes, respectively. In a comparison of athlete vignette reactions towards James, a transgender man, and Emma, a transgender woman, results showed that athletes were significantly more supportive of James, $t(247) = 10.84$, $p < .001$, $d = .69$. This suggests that in this sample of cisgender athletes, attitudes towards transgender men in sport were significantly more favorable than attitudes towards transgender women in sport. As described in Table 3, correlations revealed a significant, positive relationship between general attitudes towards transgender people and reactions towards James and reactions towards Emma. Further, there were significant, negative correlations between religious importance and general attitudes towards transgender people, reactions to James, and reactions to Emma. Gender differences (see Table 4) for primary variables revealed that women endorsed significantly more positive general attitudes and support for trans athletes compared to men in this sample. However, no significant gender differences were found in religiosity or support for James.

Support for Transgender Women

Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Model 4 was conducted to evaluate the influence of religiosity on support for Emma as a proxy for transgender women in sport. Age, having a personal relationship with a transgender person, self-reported co-ed athletic experience, and education level were included as covariates in the model. Consistent with our hypotheses, the mediation model revealed a significant direct effect of attitudes towards transgender people on support for transgender women in sport, $c' = 0.03$, $t(241) = 10.45$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.03]. The *f*-square value was .03 indicating a small effect size. However, religious importance did not significantly mediate the relationship between attitudes towards transgender people and support of transgender women in sport, *b*

= .0007, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.003]. These results suggest that attitudes towards transgender women in sport were best predicted by overall attitudes towards transgender people, regardless of importance of religiosity.

Support for Transgender Men

A second mediation model was used to evaluate the influence of religiosity on support for James as a proxy for transgender men in sport. The same covariates were included. Similar to the mediation model for transgender women in sport, there was a significant direct effect between attitudes towards transgender people and support for transgender men in sport, $c' = 0.03$, $t(241) = 11.68$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.03]. The *f*-square value was .04 indicating a small effect size. Further, this model revealed significant indirect effects, suggesting that the relationship between attitudes towards transgender people and support for transgender men in sport was mediated by religious importance, $b = 0.0024$, 95% CI [0.0003, 0.0051]. These results suggest that religiosity significantly, partially mediated the relationship between overall attitudes towards transgender people and attitudes towards transgender men in sport, such that higher levels of religiosity predict lower support of transgender men in sport.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to fill the gap in knowledge surrounding intercollegiate athletes' attitudes toward the inclusion of trans people in sport. Specifically, the present study examines the potential role of religiosity in attitudes toward intercollegiate trans athletes across sport scenarios (e.g., team, individual, contact, non-contact). Results indicate that participants are overall more supportive of including trans men in sport than they are of including trans women. Findings also suggest that religiosity was a factor in intercollegiate athlete attitudes toward trans men, but not toward trans women.

General Attitudes

Consistent with past domestic and international research (Merrill and Anderson 2024; Tanimoto and Miwa 2021), participants indicated more supportive attitudes toward James (a trans man athlete) than toward Emma (a trans woman athlete). However, effect sizes related to the various gender difference calculations indicated that the magnitude of difference between men and women depended on the target of those attitudes. The largest or moderate effect sizes were observed when differences (a) in general attitudes toward trans people and (b) in attitudes toward Emma specifically were computed.

In any case, the overall trend in greater acceptance towards trans men in sport may be explained by a perceived athletic advantage of trans women (e.g., perceived advantage of increased testosterone in individuals assigned male at birth). These findings may also be influenced by factors related to medical transition. For example, Merrill and Anderson (2024) found that trans athletes' hormone status was not a significant predictor of acceptance, but Tanimoto and Miwa (2021) found that trans athletes who had undergone hormone replacement therapy were perceived as more acceptable.

This indicates a need to understand the nuanced influences of acceptance to-

wards trans men and trans women; the findings of the present study introduce religiosity as one potential influence. Given that discrimination is linked to sport performance and mental health for trans athletes (Phipps 2021), an awareness of the differential way that trans men and trans women are treated in sport may guide the allocation of resources and the creation of interventions for both populations. First, more research is needed that focuses on the unique experiences of trans men and trans women in sport. Additionally, care for trans woman athletes should consider the unique and intense forms of discrimination faced by trans women and should be designed to mitigate the associated risk, distress, and lack of community support.

The Role of Religiosity

The fact that religiosity was a mediator of attitudes toward tans man athletes, but not toward trans woman athletes is consistent with other research on the role of religiosity in attitudes toward trans people among voters (Knutson et al. 2021). Admittedly, the effect of religiosity was small, but our findings add to a growing, important line of inquiry and may inform the design and conduct of future studies. They are also bolstered by religiosity research elsewhere that, for example, indicates that religiosity may be a deciding factor about the inclusion of transgender people in sport (Arnold et al. 2024). In other words, although attitudes towards trans man athletes may broadly be more ambivalent than attitudes towards trans women in sport, religiosity may be an influential factor in the formation of attitudes relating to the inclusion of trans men in sport.

Religion can be a prominent social identity and may have a lasting impact on moral foundations, even if one no longer identifies as religious (Van Tongeren et al. 2021). Given the permeating nature of religiosity, it may be more salient in the context of sport-specific attitudes when general attitudes are more ambivalent. This phenomenon is important for advocates, clinicians, and sport medicine providers (psychologists, physicians, physical therapists) to know as they allocate resources, interventions, and format advocacy initiatives to increase inclusion of trans athletes. Understanding the individual and cultural influences on the formation of attitudes towards transgender athletes can support advocates, clinicians, and sport medicine professionals in conceptualizing sport climates. Understanding sources of opposition and barriers to inclusion may enhance effective intervention and advocacy efforts for proponents of trans athlete inclusion. Intercollegiate athletes may be more open to learning and changing their perspectives when they are more ambivalent, and that ambivalence may be an entry point to inspiring broader change and acceptance.

Strengths and Limitations

This study features several strengths such as the substantial sample size and the use of vignettes to gauge participant attitudes. The inclusion of trans men is also a strength given that trans men are generally overlooked in sport research. However, the study is also limited by dynamics that impact cross-sectional, correlational, survey-based research. The fact that most of the sample identified as white and as women should be factored into any attempts to generalize the study results and the small sub-samples of people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, and people with other intersecting identities limited opportunities to control for sub-populations and/or conduct between groups analy-

ses. Relatedly, the present study represents only collegiate athletes who predominantly identified their religious affiliation as Christian. Collegiate athletes may differ from other subpopulations, such as high school or professional athletes. Moreover, the lack of representation from diverse religious affiliations limits the generalizability of these findings. In the future, researchers may benefit from collecting samples of people with multiple marginalized identities and/or measuring additional variables such as sexism or homophobia. Likewise, while religiosity was a significant mediator of acceptance for trans men, it should be noted that religiosity is likely confounded by variables not measured in the present study, such as social dominance orientation, political orientation, and gender role beliefs (Eliason et al. 2017; Oxendine 2018).

Furthermore, there has been robust discussion about the appropriateness of running mediation analyses with cross-sectional psychological data (e.g., Fiedler et al. 2018). In an effort to account for concerns expressed by researchers, we (a) conceptualize religiosity as a state measured at one point in time, (b) indicate that we are examining the influence rather than the effect of religiosity in our model, (c) use a regression-based approach to mediation, and (d) base our model design on the growing body of research on religiosity. As indicated in our introduction, current evidence indicates that religiosity exerts a novel influence on people's attitudes toward trans people and is likely to function as an intervening variable that explains how attitudes translate into support (mediation) rather than as a factor that directly alters the association between attitudes and support (moderation). It is possible that participating in team sports could shape athletes' attitudes toward trans teammates but given the variation in team sizes and the fact that almost twice as many respondents reported participating in team sports than individual sports, we were unable to test for any influence of team sport participation that might have been present in our sample. Researchers may benefit from examining between sport differences in the future. Our results add to a growing body of research on religiosity and transphobia and mirror patterns found elsewhere and should be interpreted within that broader context.

Implications for Research and Practice

Many studies exploring transgender athlete participation have been conducted outside of the United States (Jones et al. 2017; Knox et al. 2019; Phipps 2021). There is a need for more studies like this one that explore factors that impact the attitudes of transgender inclusivity in context, such as in rural areas. Cross-cultural studies are also needed to identify the nuanced impact of laws, bans, and criteria towards eligibility for transgender athlete sport participation at a global level.

The present study may provide insight to several individuals including athletes, coaches, sport psychologists, legislators, and policymakers. As athletic organizations move toward creating accepting environments for transgender athletes, sport psychologists and coaches can better understand what factors may need to be addressed within a team or individual athletes as they relate to attitudes toward transgender athletes. Moreover, legislators and policy makers may benefit from the results of this study by gaining more insight into athlete attitudes towards transgender athletes, allowing them to create policies that are both representative and more empirically supported. These findings may also support the work of ally groups formed by sport psychologists and others that advocate for the inclusion of transgender athletes and help

create LGBTQ+ inclusive spaces in sport.

It is becoming increasingly important to understand variables that impact inclusion and/or exclusion of trans athletes as pressures on those athletes grow in public discourse and stress. This study adds to the current conversation indicating that trans women are less likely than trans men to receive support regarding inclusion in sport. Moreover, these findings point to the important role of religiosity in the development of attitudes towards trans athletes, particularly for trans men when general prejudice is low. Additionally, the findings of the present study begin to address the limited focus on trans men in sport. Just as religiosity may play a role in attitudes, other factors, such as sociocultural identities and influences from governing bodies and institutions of sport (e.g., NCAA, International Olympics Committee), may be identified in beliefs amongst collegiate athletes. The results of this study represent a call for a further depth of research on athlete attitudes on inclusion and support of trans athletes in intercollegiate spaces. Professionals, peers, and researchers may use our findings to continue implementing advocacy and movements towards equity for trans individuals in collegiate sport as insight is gained from collegiate athletes themselves.

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