



# LGTBIQA+, mental health and the sporting context: a systematic review

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## Abstract

The majority of people who identify as lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, intersex, queer and asexual experience some form of discrimination in the sporting environment, which increases the risk of developing mental health illnesses. The aim of this review is to provide an updated overview of the existence of LGTBIQA+ mental health conditions in the context of sport. As a search strategy, five databases were systematically searched for articles from 1996 to 2019: Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Sociological Abstracts and Eric. In the review, articles relating the three areas of study: factors associated with mental health, people belonging to sexual and gender minority groups, and the sporting context, were selected. Reviews and research in English and Spanish were included. The results were captured in a data collection table. A total of 2,081 records were retrieved in the first searches, of which 26 met the inclusion criteria. The articles were classified into three fields, according to the focus of the study: 1) experience and discrimination in sport, 2) prevention and inclusion, 3) perceptions and associations of gender, identity and sexual orientation in sport. Finally, in conclusion, a high prevalence of mental health problems in LGTBIQA+ people was identified as a result of experiences in hostile and LGTBIphobic environments within the sport context.

**Keywords:** discrimination, gender identity, LGTBIphobia, mental health, sexual orientation, sport.

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## Introduction

Almost 40% of the population belonging to a sexual minority group have experienced discrimination or bullying because of their sexuality (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Bullying is a social phenomenon defined by repeated negative actions based on an imbalance of power between equals, whereby the more powerful individual attacks or bullies the less powerful individual with the intention of harming or offending them (Olweus, 1996). Thus, LGTBiphobia is discrimination based on an individual's real or perceived sexual orientation, with the intention of denigrating and devaluing (Baiocco et al., 2018). This discrimination causes social stress, especially among people belonging to stigmatised social groups. Continued discrimination requires adaptation through coping mechanisms that cause emotional repercussions and can cause mental health problems (Symons et al., 2017).

In the context of sport, discrimination against LGTBI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender, intersex) people is intensified, as sport has historically been a space of male domination, reserved for hegemonic masculinity (heterosexuals, with high physical development and little emotional affectivity). This domain explains the low participation of women and the rejection of homosexuality. Despite social change in contemporary societies, sport remains one of the most androcentric and hostile environments with regard to the presence of people from sexual minorities (Moscoso and Piedra, 2019). As a consequence, they often avoid the sporting context: out of 93,079 LGBT adults (over 18 years old) from 28 countries, almost half (42%) confessed that they avoid sports clubs out of fear of being assaulted, threatened or bullied because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2013).

When we focus on adults belonging to a sexual minority group, LGTBiphobia in the sporting context is a frequent social phenomenon, which causes discomfort for the people who are faced with it (Baiocco et al. 2018). In terms of recreational sport, trans-gender people prefer individual sports and activities to team sports and mainly jog, walk and practice hypertrophy training (López-Cañada et al., 2020).

In the professional context, according to Lee and Cunningham (2016), both coaches and athletes can face discrimination if they identify as LGBT or do not behave according to gender mandates. These prejudices can affect their attitudes and be relevant in the professional environment. According to Pronger (1999), competitive sport, as an immensely popular cultural practice and

spectacle, plays an important role in the reproduction of gender stereotypes implicit in our patriarchal system, which is why it generates LGTBiphobic situations.

According to DeFoor et al. (2018), in the case of adolescents, behaviours specific to the sporting context often also cause harm, as this is the period of change during which identity and personality are defined, it is a time of instability and emotional vulnerability. Currently, there are still barriers to young people belonging to a sexual minority group's participation in sport, that prevent them from enriching themselves with the psychosocial benefits of participating in sport with other young people in the same way as their heterosexual peers (Doull et al. 2018).

According to Anders and DeVita's (2019) study, in physical education sessions, LGTBIQ+ student-athletes are twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to be bullied, ignored or deliberately excluded from team sport activities. This makes LGTBIQ people two to three times more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression and almost 14% will attempt self-harm or suicide (Turk, 2018).

Although scientific literature exists in relation to the mental illnesses that sexual minorities may suffer as a result of bullying and discriminatory experiences in the sporting context, no systematic review has yet been conducted that examines and links the three areas (mental health, the LGBTIQA+ community and the sporting context). Thus, the aim of this systematic review is to provide an updated overview of the existence of mental health conditions among LGBTIQA+ people in the context of sport. This was done by: a) finding out the percentage of articles related to mental health, people belonging to sexual minorities and the sporting context since the first publications on this topic in 1996, up until 2019; b) classifying the articles according to the author, the year of publication, the characteristics of the participants, the methodology used and the factors associated with mental health status; c) identifying the thematic areas to which the articles refer and classifying them according to these.

## Methodology

This systematic review has identified, selected and critically appraised relevant information from the included studies. In order to maintain methodological rigour, the items defined by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement have been applied. This constitutes a minimum set of evidence-based elements for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA, 2021).

## Search strategy

Five databases were consulted: Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Sociological Abstracts and Eric. Publications from 1996 to 2019 were systematically searched, using combinations of the terms: LGBTI, LGBT, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, trans-gender, intersex, asexual, sport, athlete, wellness, mental health, disorder, bullying; Anglo-

Saxon terms were used. Accepted keywords were detected in the Web of Science and Scopus databases and search history and search combination were used. In the Sociological Abstracts and Eric databases, the filter *sports* was used to determine the search items. The relationship between research terms, databases and articles found, discarded and selected is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

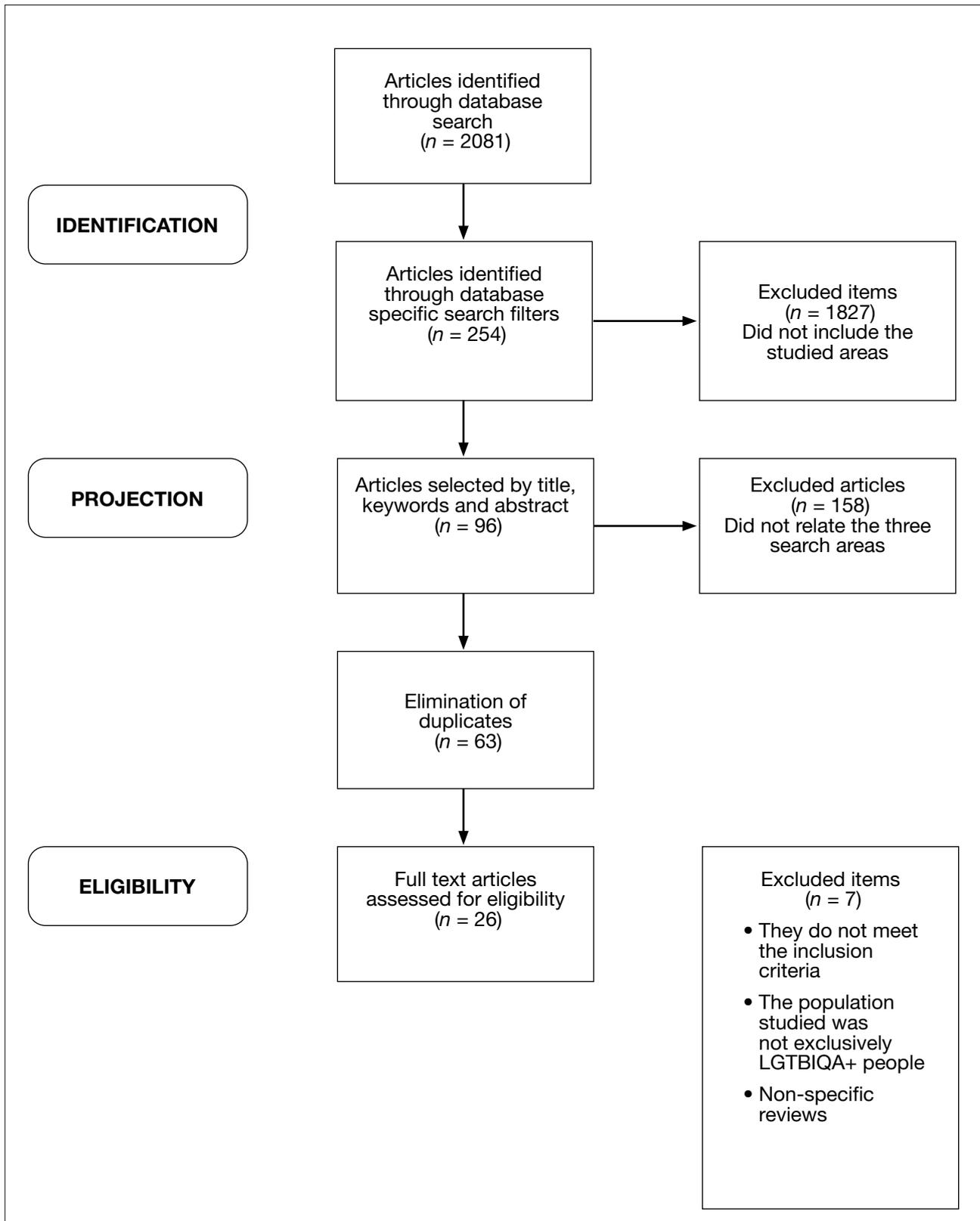
Database search strategies.

The research terms are reproduced verbatim as used in the database

Database	Research terms	Articles identified by database-specific search filters	Discarded articles	Selected articles
Eric	(Queer) AND (sport) AND ((mental health OR wellbeing OR bullying))	2	2	0
PubMed	LGTB OR (gay OR lesbian OR bisexual OR intersexual OR transsexual OR asexual OR queer) AND (athlete OR sport) AND (mental Health OR wellbeing)	129	124	5
Scopus	(LGTBI OR lesbian OR gay OR transsexual OR transgender OR bisexual OR intersexual) AND (sport OR athlete) AND (disorder OR wellbeing OR bullying)	26	18	8
Sociological Abstracts	S1. (lesbian OR gay OR transsexual OR bisexual OR intersexual) AND (sport OR athlete) AND ((mental health) OR (well-being))	26	32	1
	S2. transsexual AND sport AND bullying	3		
	S3. transgender AND sport AND bullying	4		
Web of Science CORE Collection	S1. (LGBTI OR lesbian OR gay OR transsexual OR transgender OR bisexual OR intersexual) AND (sport OR athlete) AND (mental health OR wellbeing)	50	52	12
	S2. (LGBTI OR lesbian OR gay OR transsexual OR transgender OR bisexual OR intersexual) AND (sport OR athlete) AND (bullying)	14		

Three stages (identification, screening and eligibility) were defined in the article selection process in order to identify

the articles to be included in the review. Figure 1 shows the summary of the stages and the results of the research strategy.



**Figure 1**  
Stages and results of the search strategy using the PRISMA statement's own flow chart.

**Table 2***Inclusion criteria for the literature searched.*

Category	Criteria
Thematic area	1- Mental health, wellbeing, factors associated with mental health 2- LGTBIQA+ persons, sexual minorities 3- Sport, athletes, sporting context
Study population	Lesbian, gay, transsexual, trans-gender, bisexual, intersex, queer and asexual people People involved in sport who belong to sexual minority groups LGTBIQA+ students and/or adolescents Professional athletes from sexual minority groups Coaches from sexual minority groups Gender non-conforming people
Language	English and Spanish
Date of publication	Not an exclusion criterion (1996-2019)
Source type	Academic articles and theses
Publication criteria	Review articles and research

### Eligibility criteria

To begin with, three areas of study were defined: factors related to mental health, sexual and gender minorities and the sporting context. Articles analysing one of these three areas were exported to the Mendeley bibliographic reference manager and duplicates were removed. From these, articles relating these three areas were selected and included in the review. Reviews and research written in English or Spanish with publication status: online publication, were included. Newspaper and magazine articles were excluded. In addition, articles that did not

exclusively study LGTBIQA+ people were excluded. Date of publication was not an exclusion criterion. Table 2 shows the inclusion criteria used in the review.

### Data collection

A data collection table was created to record authorship, titles, type of source and publication, study objective, fields, participants, method, intervention descriptions, factors associated with mental state and results. The most significant data was selected and reflected in Table 3 summary, presented in the results section.

**Table 3**  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Anders and DeVita (2019)	Academic article Research (case study)	<i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education</i> JCI <sup>1</sup> : 1.12	Perception and association of gender and sport (education)	DeVita, a gender non-conforming (GNC) student in high school	Qualitative. From the <b>analysis</b> of Butler's work on gender and <b>interviews</b> with a classical ballet coach and a football coach, the case of DeVita is analysed: a gender non-conforming student. The article examines how the student expresses their identity, expression, sexual orientation and masculinity.	Anxiety and discomfort
Atteberry-Ash et al. (2018)	Academic article Research	<i>Sexuality Research and Social Policy</i> JIF <sup>2</sup> : 3.618 JCI: 2.05	Perception and association of gender and sport (education)	Students aged 17-29, 51.7 % male, 95.9 % undergraduates (approx. 40,000 students)	Quantitative. <b>Cross-sectional study:</b> The data for this article was drawn from a study examining the experiences and perceptions of LGBT issues among students engaged in after-school sports programmes ( <i>N</i> = 2495)	Discrimination
Baiocco et al. (2018)	Academic article Research	<i>Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health</i> SJR <sup>3</sup> : 0.894	Experience and discrimination in sport (adults)	88 gay men and 120 heterosexual adult men between 18 and 36 years of age	Quantitative. <b>Questionnaire:</b> examines how often gay people have experienced bullying at school compared to their heterosexual peers in the context of sport in Italy.	Bullying and psychosocial problems
Block (2014)	Academic Article Review	<i>Quest</i> JIF: 2.910 JCI: 1.46	Experience and discrimination in sport (education)	LGBTQ students in the subject of physical education	Qualitative. Analyses the needs of LGBTQ youth in physical education sessions, relating them to Kleinman's phenomenological goals of physical education.	Psychosocial and medical problems
DeFoor et al. (2018)	Academic article Narrative review	<i>Sports Medicine - Open</i> JIF:11.136 JCI: 2.09	Prevention and inclusion (education)	LGB student-athletes	Qualitative. <b>Analysis:</b> 1- Vulnerability of the school environment 2- Non-inclusive heteronormative environment 3- Bullying and discrimination at home 4- Male and female athlete stereotypes 5- Prevalence of mental health problems and substance use 6- Making sport safer for future LGB generations	Welfare, bullying and discrimination

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

**Table 3** (Continued)  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Devis-Devis et al. (2018)	Academic article Research	<i>Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy</i> JIF: 5.830 JCI: 3.06	Experience and discrimination in sport (education)	Trans adults aged 23-62 years (5 trans women, 4 trans men) 9 in total	Qualitative. <b>Semi-structured interview:</b> about experiences in the heteronormative context of secondary school during physical education sessions (the questions are classified into four sections) 1- Difficulty in achieving desired gender 2- Preferences, dislikes and opportunities 3- Coping with transgression 4- Intimacy struggles	Violence and bullying
Doull et al. (2018)	Academic article Research (temporal study)	<i>Journal of Sport and Health Science</i> JIF: 7.179 JIC:1.73	Experience and discrimination in sport (students)	Data pooled at the population level for British Columbia, Canada (N = 99373). Sexual minority (LGB) and heterosexual youth. (48,410 men and 50,963 women)	Quantitative. Current portrait of sexual minorities' (LGB) sport participation, compared to heterosexuals. Pooled population-level data was used to examine trends and disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth. <b>logistic regression models</b> by ages were used to examine changes in participation over time and disparities in participation (1998-2013). The data presented is from four years (1998, 2003, 2008, 2013)	LGTBIphobic climate and frequency of participation in sport.
Greenspan et al. (2017)	Academic article Systematic review	<i>Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling</i> SJR: 0.560	Experience and discrimination in sport (student athletes)	LGBTQ student athletes	Qualitative. <b>Systematic content analysis</b> of nine flagship journals published between 1975 and 2015 to be evaluated: 1- LGBTQ and mental health studies 2- School counselling 3- Counsellor education 4- School psychology 5- Counselling psychology 6- Sport psychology 7-Physical education	Mental health and discrimination
Greenspan et al. (2019a)	Academic article Research	<i>Journal of LGBT Youth</i> SJR: 0.583	Experience and discrimination in sport (education)	58 LGBTQ+ youth participants (respond to the survey) 13 participants (focus groups or interviews)	Qualitative and quantitative (mixed). <b>Survey and interview:</b> 1- What are the alliances and relationships of LGBTQ+ youth? 2- What are the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth and allies at school, with coaches or physical education teachers	Insecurity, discomfort and bullying in class

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

**Table 3** (Continued)  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Greenspan et al. (2019b)	Academic article Research (case study)	<i>Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation</i> JIF: 1.711 JCI: 0.67	Prevention and inclusion (education)	LGBTQ youth	Qualitative. <b>Review:</b> examines the empirical underpinnings of the SAFE (School Athletics for Everyone) model for preventing discrimination against LGTBQ youth, provides a successful example case, and disseminates relevant resources for practitioners	Stigma, discomfort and insecurity
Halbrook (2017)	Doctoral thesis Research		Perception and association of gender and sport (education)	10 LGTBI secondary school coaches (6 men and 6 women). Age from 31 to 68 years. Identify as heterosexual ( $n = 9$ ) and gay ( $n = 1$ )	Qualitative. <b>Semi-structured interview:</b> The interviews were based on concrete examples and the experiences of the coaches while working with LGB athletes	Hostility and discrimination
Hargie et al. (2017)	Academic article Research	<i>International Review for the Sociology of Sport</i> JIF: 3.780 JCI: 1.40	Experience and discrimination in sport (adults)	10 self-identified transgender people, of whom 6 are women and 4 are men, aged between 25 and 62	Qualitative. <b>Interview:</b> 1- The changing room environment 2- The impact of sporting experiences at school 3- Fear in public spaces and the practice of sport and physical activity 4- Lack of perception of the health and wellbeing benefits of practising sport	Social stress, discomfort and anxiety
Krane (1996)	Academic article Narrative review	<i>Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology</i> SJR: 0.908	Experience and discrimination in sport (professionals)	Lesbian athletes	Qualitative. <b>Analysis:</b> The context of lesbians in sport	Low self-esteem, low confidence, low satisfaction
Krane and Barber (2005)	Academic article Research	<i>Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport</i> SJR: 0.793	Experience and discrimination in sport (professionals)	13 lesbian school coaches	Qualitative. <b>Semi-structured interview:</b> investigating the experiences of lesbian coaches at school level	Discomfort

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

**Table 3** (Continued)  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Lee and Cunningham (2016)	Academic article Research	<i>Journal of Sport Psychology in Action</i> JCI: 0.60	Perception and association of gender and sport (adults)	Students 150 students (52 women, 98 men) enrolled at a large public university in southwestern United States	Quantitative. <b>Questionnaire:</b> The responses were focused on examining associations between sexual prejudice, sexism, gender, and identification with men's figure skating and American football. Participation was voluntary and the questionnaire took 10 minutes to complete. All responses were kept anonymous	LGTBIphobia, aggression, violence
Mattey et al. (2014)	Academic article Research (case study)	<i>Journal of Sport Psychology in Action</i> JCI: 0.60	Prevention and inclusion (adolescents)	Male and female volleyball players at state level. Under 15 / Under 17 / Under 19-23. Each age was separated by gender	Qualitative. <b>Anti-vilification programs in adolescent sport:</b> programs to combat violence in adolescent sports. Bullying prevention workshop. These were age-appropriate to take into account differences in cognitive and emotional development. The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness about LGTBI-phobic bullying. 1.5 hours	Bullying
Morris and Van Raalte (2016)	Academic article Narrative review	<i>Journal of Sport Psychology in Action</i> JCI: 0.60	Prevention and inclusion (adults)	Trans-gender and gender non-conforming people (TGNC)	Qualitative. <b>Analysis:</b> how to create sports spaces where trans-gender and gender non-conforming people can feel safe. Examining good practices related to TGNC persons	Anguish, mockery, violence and discrimination
Moscoso and Piedra (2019)	Academic article Literature review	<i>Revista Española de Sociología</i> JCI: 0.27	Experience and discrimination in sport (adults)	LGTBI population and sport	Qualitative. <b>Analysis:</b> the relationship between the LGTB population and sport. 1- History of sport and sexual minorities 2- Legislation, campaigns and policy initiatives on sexual diversity and sport 3- Overview of research	Discrimination and rejection

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

**Table 3** (Continued)  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Pérez-Samaniego et al. (2019)	Academic article Review article (metasynthesis)	<i>Sport Management Review</i> JIF: 6.577 JCI: 1.43	Experience and discrimination in sport (adults)	Trans-gender people	Qualitative. <b>Metasynthesis:</b> 604 documents related to these issues were identified, from which 12 qualitative studies were selected. The key issues were divided into four cross-cutting themes: 1- Language 2- Installations and spaces 3- Trans-gender people's strategies on gender 4- Abjection	Feelings of exclusion
Petty and Trussel (2018)	Academic article Research (interpretative retrospective)	<i>Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health</i> JIF: 6.736 JCI: 1.44	Experience and discrimination in sport (education)	9 LGBT participants, 3 gay, 5 lesbian and 1 who identifies as trans-gender and gay. From 18 to 25 years old	Qualitative. <b>Intensive interview</b> about the experiences of identifying as LGBT in secondary school 1- Evocative research framework 2- Stories: as a form of knowledge and representation	Frustration, confusion and bullying
Phipps (2019)	Academic article Research	<i>International Review for the Sociology of Sport</i> JIF: 3.780 JCI: 1.40	Experience and discrimination in sport (education)	9 trans-gender students	Qualitative. Data from one student who identifies as trans* was extracted from a wider study of LGBT+ people in UK university sport	Bullying
Plymire and Forman (2001)	Academic article Research	<i>NWSA Journal</i>	Perception and association of gender and sport (professional sport)	NBA women's basketball fans, 44 surveyed	Qualitative. Examined how women's basketball fans approach the issue of lesbians in sport based on one post: "Is Cheryl Miller a lesbian?" 77 posts were collected between 21 April and 2 June 1997	Hiding sexual identity
Pronger (1999)	Academic Article Review	<i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i> SJR: 0.828	Experience and discrimination in sport (professionals)	Lesbian, gay and queer athletes	Qualitative. <b>Analysis:</b> of the theoretical framework on the sporting context that emerges from the interaction between elements of postmodern gay and queer theories	LGTBIphobia and stress

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

**Table 3** (Continued)  
Summary of selected articles.

Author (year)	Type of source and publication	Journal and journal quality index	Field	Participants	Description of the research methodology	Factors associated with mental state
Sartore and Cunningham (2009)	Academic article Research	<i>Sex Roles</i> JIF: 4.154 JCI: 1.54	Perception and association of gender and sport (education)	Study 1: Current athletes in the United States of America ( $N = 229$ ). Study 2: North American parents ( $N = 76$ ).	Qualitative and quantitative (mixed). <b>Questionnaire, study 1:</b> questions about their participation in a sport coached by a gay man or lesbian, respectively. <b>Study 2</b> participants were asked whether they would allow their sons and daughters to be coached by a gay or lesbian coach. Going deeper into the topic, the open-ended question	Discrimination and stigma
Symons et al. (2017)	Academic article Research	<i>Annals of Leisure Research</i> SJR: 0.520	Experience and discrimination in sport (adults)	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gender, over 18 years old. 294 completed questionnaires. Of the 294 participants, 52 % ( $n = 153$ ) were men and 48 % ( $n = 141$ ) were women	Qualitative and quantitative (mixed). To examine the impact on sexism and homophobic discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual people in sporting settings. <b>Questionnaire with open-ended questions:</b> 1- Homophobia 2- Experiences of violence 3- Sexism 4- Other discrimination. It was asked under each category whether that category heading had been experienced and how often, and they were invited to give an example	Sadness, anger, anguish and shame. Negative engagement with sport
Turk (2018)	Doctoral thesis (case study)		Experience and discrimination in sport (students)	The research sample included 35 professional student-athlete participants who identify as sexual minorities in the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Division I.	Qualitative. <b>Multiple data collection</b> demographic survey, interviews, focus groups, document review	LGTBIphobia languages of exclusion

Note. <sup>1</sup> Journal Citation Reports. <sup>2</sup> Journal Impact Factor. <sup>3</sup> SCImago Journal Rank.

## Results

Initial database searches generated a total of 2,081 records, of which 26 studies met the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the review. All studies were published between 1996 and 2019: 50% were published between 2018 and 2019; 23% between 2016 and 2017; 8% in 2014 and 2015, and the remaining 19% between 1996 and 2013. Therefore, an increasing trend can be observed since 2016, with the peak of publications in 2018, with seven publications. The vast majority of the articles included in the systematic review, 25, are written in English, and only one article in Spanish. In terms of method, 73% of the articles used a qualitative methodology, 15% used a quantitative methodology and 12% used a mixed methodology. With reference to the type of publication, 69% (18 studies) generated primary data with original research (case studies, temporal studies, interpretative and retrospective studies). Three articles analysed population-scale samples larger than 10,000 participants; three had samples of more than 200 participants; one article had a sample between 100 and 200; three had samples between 50 and 100; three had samples between 10 and 20; three of less than 10; and one article did not specify the number of study participants. Eight articles generated secondary data from review articles (narrative reviews and systematic reviews). Looking at the type of sample, 64% of the studies focus on sexual minorities as a group (16 articles), 20% on trans-gender people (five articles), 12% on lesbians (three articles), 4% on gays (one article) and the remaining 4% on queer people (one article).

The articles were classified into three fields, depending on the focus of the study: 1- experience and discrimination in sport, 2- prevention and inclusion 3- perceptions and associations of gender, identity and sexual orientation in sport.

### Experience and discrimination in sport

Of the articles analysed, 16 belong to the category of experience and discrimination in sport. These investigate LGTBIphobic attitudes towards sexual and gender minority groups within the sporting environment and the mental health issues that this environment creates for them (Baiocco et al., 2018; Block, 2014; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Doull et al., 2018; Greenspan et al., 2017; Hargie et al., 2017; Greenspan et al., 2019a; Krane, 1996; Krane and Barber, 2005; Moscoso and Piedra, 2019; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Petty and Trussell, 2018; Phipps, 2019; Pronger, 1999; Symons et al., 2017; Turk, 2018).

Half of the articles focused on adolescents. They described the sporting context as an LGTBI-phobic, unsafe

environment, with instances of bullying, discrimination and intimidation. These circumstances increased the likelihood of mental health disturbances such as stress and depression (Block, 2014; Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Doull et al., 2018; Greenspan et al., 2017, Greenspan et al., 2019a; Petty and Trussell, 2018; Phipps, 2019; Turk, 2018). The characteristics of the sporting environment and instances of bullying based on the use of exclusive language led to a decrease in sporting participation from LGTBIQ youth (Petty and Trussell, 2018; Turk, 2018). According to Turk, M. (2018), there is a lack of inclusion strategies on the part of coaches when it comes to making training sessions more dynamic.

The experiences of LGTBIQ+ people within the educational environment were described in five articles. These make explicit the difficulties, confusion and frustration of young people who admitted their sexuality or gender as people from a sexual and gender minority group (Petty and Tussel, 2018). In the school environment, young people also experience bullying, insecurity and discomfort in physical education classes. One article mentioned that LGTBIQ+ students preferred to engage in physical activity outside the school context (Greenspan et al., 2019a). There is also evidence of a lack of inclusive stimulation in physical education classes from teachers (Block, 2014; Devís-Devís et al., 2018). Within the educational setting, two studies examined trans-gender people. These described the problem of the binary context in physical education classes and reflected the importance of the role of physical education teachers. Finally, one of the common findings of the two studies was the barrier that locker rooms represented for trans students (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Phipps, 2019).

On three occasions, the articles focused on professionals. In general, they agreed on two premises: LGTBIphobia as part of the sports culture, and that LGTBIQ professionals suffered bullying, abuse and stress in their work environment. Two of these articles referred to professional athletes (Krane, 1996; Pronger, 1999) and one referred to lesbian coaches (Krane and Barber, 2005).

Pronger (1999) concluded that LGTBIphobic sport environments and continually stressful situations could be the reason for eventually giving up sport. He also mentioned that more masculine competitive sports such as boxing, football, American football and hockey were more LGTBIphobic spaces. Krane's 1996 study focused on the mental health consequences of hostile and exclusionary environments for lesbian professional sportswomen, such as low self-esteem, low confidence, low perceived satisfaction and high stress levels. Only one study examined a sample of lesbian coaches and concluded

that each woman struggled to negotiate her lesbian identity in that environment, such that, in many cases, although the coaches were passionate about their profession, they were forced to behave in ways that conflicted with their personal values (Krane and Barber, 2005).

A total of five articles focused on sexual and gender minority group members over the age of 18. All studies agreed on the fact that sport was far from being universal, open and accessible to all people. They also described sport as dominated by heteronormativity, social control, power relations and discrimination against any sexual orientation that does not conform to the established norms of sport (Baiocco et al., 2018; Hargie et al., 2017; Moscoso and Piedra, 2019; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019; Symons et al., 2017). LGTBIphobia, discriminatory language and negative engagement with sport were also common findings. The articles described the sense of fear and insecurity and the bullying faced by LGBTI people in sport.

One of the articles focused on gay people and compared them to their heterosexual counterparts. It mentioned that gay people more frequently dropped out of sports because of fear of bullying. On the other hand, they also had stronger family pressure to participate in sports considered more masculine (Baiocco et al., 2018). Other studies, two in particular, looked at trans-gender people and concluded that they experienced stress, discomfort, anxiety and mental health problems, and also emphasised the issue of changing rooms as a barrier to playing sport (Hargie et al., 2017; Pérez-Samaniego et al., 2019).

### Prevention and inclusion

As a result of the classification of the studies, four were included in the prevention and inclusion category. All had in common the analysis of the key points of the sporting context to generate safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTIQ people (DeFoor et al., 2018; Greenspan et al., 2019b; Matthey et al., 2014; Morris and Van Raalte, 2016).

Of these, three articles focused on the educational context with regards to adolescents (DeFoor et al., 2018; Greenspan et al., 2019b; Matthey et al., 2014) and one analysed the anti-vilification program, a programme to combat violence in sports for adolescents. It consisted of a workshop to prevent bullying in the sports context. The objectives of the programme were to raise student awareness of LGTBIphobic bullying through positive experiences in sport for all participants, to increase knowledge of the consequences of discrimination, and to help the athlete and coaching communities create safe and bullying-free environments (Matthey et al., 2014).

One of the articles described the importance of the role of sports medicine professionals in preventive and

routine health care research (DeFoor et al., 2018). Another described the SAFE (School Athletics for Everyone) model by looking at environments for creating safe spaces in the sport context. This model enabled support for PE teachers to gain a broader understanding of the situations experienced by LGBTQ young people in sport settings, as well as offering mentoring support that enabled the development of practitioners in order to promote more positive and inclusive practices (Greenspan, et al., 2019b).

The last article in this category looked at trans-gender people. This article examined best practices related to the creation of safe spaces for these groups. Preventing discrimination involves raising awareness, creating safe spaces and highlighting the experiences of TGNC (transgender and gender-nonconforming) people (Morris and Van Raalte, 2016).

### Perceptions of and associations with gender, identity and sexual orientation in sport

Finally, six articles were classified in the category of perceptions and associations of gender, identity and sexual orientation in sport. These examined the views of people in the sporting environment on sexual and gender minority groups (Anders and DeVita, 2019; Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018; Halbrook, 2017; Lee and Cunningham, 2016; Plymire and Forman, 2001; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009).

Four of the articles examined views on LGTBIQ+ people in education (Anders and DeVita, 2019; Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018; Halbrook, 2017; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009).

Two articles analysed coaches' perceptions of LGTBIQ+ athletes. In general, coaches considered sport to be devoid of sexuality, although they often described situations in which derogatory comments and jokes were made towards LGTBIQ+ athletes. In these situations, coaches downplayed the consequences, often justifying the comments as innocent banter (Anders and DeVita, 2019; Halbrook, 2017).

The perceptions of heterosexual students were analysed in an article examining views on support for guidelines protecting LGBT athletes in intercollegiate clubs. In a sample of approximately 40,000 students, 35% neither agreed nor disagreed with the guidelines, with a significant difference between male and female respondents in relation to mean LGBT support scores, with more support from female respondents (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018).

One article examined athletes' and parents' perceptions of female coaches who identify as lesbian. It was concluded that athletes' perceptions were strongly associated with

unwillingness to participate in a team coached by a lesbian woman, and that parents' perceptions were significantly related to unwillingness to allow a lesbian woman to coach children (Sartore and Cunningham, 2009). And one article focused on defining adults' sexual biases by identifying their opinions in the analysis of two sports: men's figure skating and American football. A structural equation model was established showing that gender bias has a positive association with gender role identification in football and a negative association with gender role identification in men's figure skating (Lee and Cunningham, 2016).

Finally, the last article in this category examined the responses of a group of fans about the sexual identity of professional sportswomen; in this case, about basketball player Cheryl Miller. Responses analysed ranged from LGTBiphobic to supportive comments (Plymire and Forman, 2001).

## Discussion

There are currently few published samples linking the LGTBQA+ community, mental health illnesses and the sporting context, as only 26 articles met the inclusion criteria. However, there is a growing interest in this topic, as there has been an increasing trend in publications over the last three years.

Although social change has taken place in advanced societies, sport remains one of the most accentuated pillars of androcentric domination. It determines sport institutions structurally and symbolically (Moscoso and Piedra, 2019). Therefore, the sporting context results from the perceptions and negative associations of the population and, more importantly, of people who are in contact with sport, such as coaches, physical education teachers, athletes and professional sport enthusiasts. Often, this environment is unwilling to be inclusive, and LGTBiphobic situations are perpetuated as a result. The current sporting environment is far from being accessible and universal for all people (Baiocco et al., 2018). In general, there is a lack of awareness, knowledge and empathy among the population towards sexual and gender minority groups. It should be noted that women are more aware than men (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2018). More masculinised competitive sport environments are more exclusive and more LGTBiphobic situations occur, compared to other sports without these connotations (Pronger, 1999). These environments cause people belonging to a sexual and gender minority group to drop out of sport more frequently (Doull et al., 2018).

Most studies analyse LGTBQA+ people's experiences of discrimination. The sports environment is described

as a space of discrimination, bullying, intimidation, stigmatisation, with the use of exclusive language towards LGTBQA+ people. Discrimination towards trans people can be more aggressive, sometimes involving episodes of violence (Devís-Devís et al., 2018). The described context causes mental health conditions for LGTBQA+ people, such as anxiety, discomfort, stress, frustration, fear, low self-esteem, low levels of confidence, low satisfaction, sadness and depression. In order to change this trend, plans for prevention and changing attitudes towards people from a sexual and gender minority group in sporting contexts are needed. These programmes have to be based on education, awareness-raising and sensitisation of the environment. In the current literature, there are few studies on prevention programmes and reviews of good inclusive practices that provide tools for the environment and the people involved to neutralise the situation described above towards LGTBiphobic attitudes.

The review adopted broad search criteria to include all evidence in the areas studied, accepted research and reviews. Sample characteristics were not an inclusion criterion; however, a lack of research on LGTBQA+, mental health and the sporting environment was identified.

If we focus on the object of the sample, we can perceive a lack of concrete and specific articles that analyse the mental health status of gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersexual, asexual or queer people individually, not as a group, since each social group is affected by its own realities and characteristics. Of the 26 articles included in the review, none mention asexual people and none describe the situations of bisexual and intersex people individually. On the other hand, there is still no agreement on which acronyms are used to define sexual minorities, as each author uses different acronyms to describe and define the group (LGTBIQ+, LGTB, LGTBI, etc.). In this systematic review we have chosen to use the acronym LGTBQA+ (lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual, intersex, queer and asexual, and the +, which is used to include other people who do not consider themselves cisgender or any of the other above designations), in order not to exclude any sexual and gender minority groups.

There is also a lack of articles analysing the reality of professional athletes, adolescents or people who practice federated or non-federated sport. Their situation in clubs, the perceptions of fans and the experiences of people in different sport contexts, in a gymnasium, non-professional leagues, etc., as each context has its own and often different reality.

It can be perceived that one of the limitations of the review has been the lack of specification of the study areas, as well as not limiting the age of the participants, the type of mental illness or the type of publication.

However, the aim of this approach is to understand and expose the situation of the LGTBQA+ collective in the sporting context from a broad perspective.

## Conclusions

In sport contexts, LGTBphobic attitudes still exist, defined by situations of discrimination, bullying and stigmatisation. The results of the systematic review confirm the high prevalence of mental health problems such as stress, distress, sadness, upset, low self-esteem or depression in people belonging to a sexual and gender minority group. The analysis of the alteration of the mental health of LGTBQA+ groups in sporting contexts is an emerging field of research interest. Although there are still few studies on this subject, most of them have been published in recent years, indicating an upward trend in publications in the areas studied. This review establishes the need for more research on the discriminatory experiences of sexual minorities in sport, with more specificity to the sporting context and type of sexual and gender identity. More studies on prevention programmes and reviews of inclusive good practice are also needed in order to challenge gender roles in sport settings, providing tools to both those affected and those around them. This information can help develop support and interventions aimed at increasing the well-being of people at risk of LGTBphobic discrimination.

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