

Academic Integrity

Submitting your work either electronically or in hard copy is regarded by your programme as confirmation that you have read, understood and agreed with the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#), the [Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](#), and the [Generative AI: student guidance](#) on using AI tools with integrity and for effective learning.

You must complete all sections of this coversheet.

Declaration by Students

By submitting this work, I confirm that I have not commissioned this work from a third-party, and it represents a genuine demonstration of my own skills and subject knowledge and is written using my own words. This coursework does not use text from work I, OR ANY OTHER STUDENT/RESEARCHER, has already submitted for formative or summative assessment in another module, another course, PUBLICATION OR SOURCE anywhere in the world. I understand that plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating and the inappropriate use of AI, which includes copying and pasting directly from Generative AI tools into submitted work, are serious assessment offences, an allegation of which may lead to action being taken under the [College’s Misconduct Regulations](#).

I understand that King’s requires students to acknowledge appropriate use of AI tools in assessments, using this cover sheet. If you are in doubt about how AI may be used during your studies, please check with your module and/or programme lead.

Please note, that for this assessment, it is not allowed to use AI tools to write, rewrite, rephrase and/or paraphrase your submitted work as it should be written using your own words.

Generative AI Declaration

Each statement below (1 through 3e) represents an appropriate use of generative AI. We ask you to tick these statements because it will help us improve our teaching and guidance if we know when and how students use these tools.

Please place an X in to the right of each statement below which applies regarding your use of AI in this assessment.

Generative AI Declaration Table		
1	Generative AI not used at all for this assessment.	
2	Generative AI used for checking spelling and grammar (but I confirm that the work submitted represents a genuine demonstration of my own skills and subject knowledge).	x
3	Generative AI used to support learning (you may select multiple options if relevant):	
3a	Generate ideas and/or structure suggestions.	x
3b	Assist with understanding concepts/summarising sources to aid understanding.	
3c	Provide feedback on ideas to help improve learning/understanding.	
3d	Generative illustrative images (references for these should be provided with your main reference list)	x
3e	Generate some other aspect of the assessment which fits within appropriate use.	

Generative AI Used

If you have used any generative AI tools, please name them here and give very brief details on how it was used here:

- ChatGPT used to structure points
- Gemini used for spelling, grammar, and comprehensibility checks
- Dall.E used to generate image

Transgender Athletes’ Lived Experiences:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Introduction

Transgender athletes face unique challenges in competitive sports, where policies, societal attitudes, and regulations often reinforce exclusionary practices. Research shows transgender athletes encounter significant mental health stressors, including anxiety, depression, and identity-related distress (Chan et al., 2024). However, much literature relies on quantitative data, overlooking lived experiences and psychological realities. This study explores how transgender athletes navigate identity, discrimination, and mental health struggles through a qualitative lens.

Current sports policies, like the International Olympic Committee’s eligibility criteria, often frame transgender participation within a biomedical paradigm focusing on hormone levels and physical advantages (Reis et al., 2021). This approach fails to account for the psychosocial and emotional costs of exclusion, particularly for athletes whose identities are publicly scrutinized. Studies highlight that transgender athletes experiencing institutional exclusion are at higher risk for mental health difficulties, including self-harm and suicidality (Semonche et al., 2023). Furthermore, societal biases within sports contribute to discrimination, bullying, and ostracization (Davidson & Adams, 2020). While quantitative studies demonstrate these disparities, they lack the depth of personal narratives needed to drive policy reform and social change.

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to provide a rich, first-person exploration of how transgender athletes make sense of their experiences. Through semi-structured interviews, this research aims to uncover the internal meaning-making processes that shape identity, resilience, and mental health in competitive sports. By amplifying transgender athletes' voices, this study will contribute to policy discussions, advocacy, and mental health interventions for a more inclusive sporting environment.

Aims

This study's primary goal is to explore transgender athletes' lived experiences navigating mental health challenges and discrimination. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Examine how transgender athletes experience and manage mental health struggles related to sports participation.
- Understand the role of institutional policies and societal attitudes in shaping their sense of inclusion or exclusion.
- Identify potential support mechanisms and interventions that enhance psychological resilience and well-being within sports.

Research Questions

- 1.What are the primary mental health challenges transgender athletes face in competitive sports?
2. What coping mechanisms and strategies do transgender athletes use to manage discrimination and exclusion?
3. How do institutional policies and societal attitudes impact transgender athletes’ sense of identity, belonging, and mental well-being?

Methodology

Design
This study employs a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is uniquely suited to exploring personal meaning-making processes and is relevant for examining identity, resilience, and mental health in marginalized populations (Smith et al., 2022).

Participants
A sample of 10-15 transgender athletes aged 18-35 will be recruited from various competition levels, including amateur, collegiate, and professional sports. Participants must self-identify as transgender or non-binary and have experience in organized sports. Exclusion criteria include individuals who have never participated in competitive sports or who cannot provide informed consent.

Materials/Measures

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share experiences in an open, narrative format. The interview guide will be informed by existing

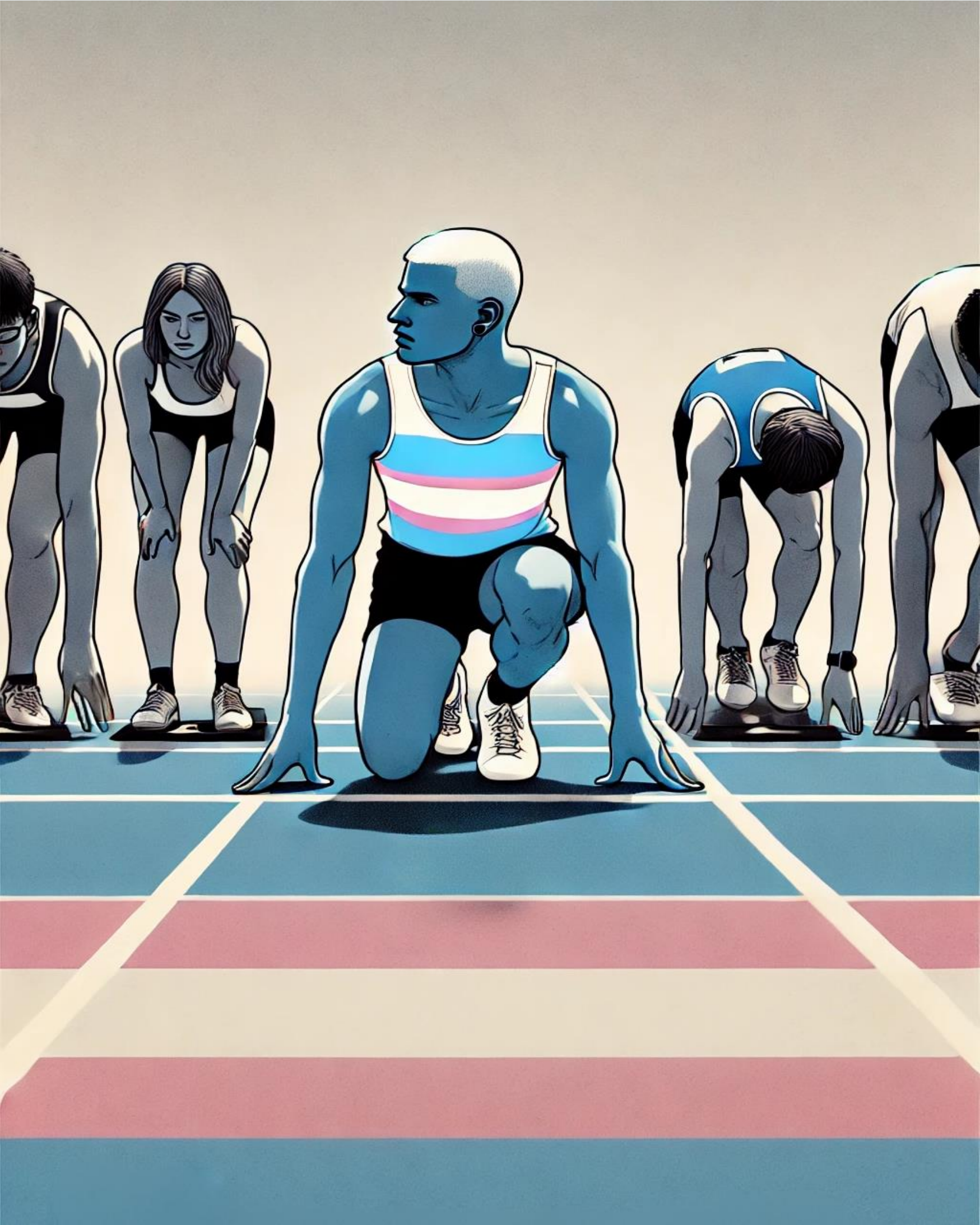
research on transgender athletes and mental health, ensuring questions are relevant and ethically sensitive. Psychological well-being checklists will monitor potential distress and provide supportive intervention if needed.

Procedure

Recruitment will be through LGBTQ+ sports organizations and advocacy groups. Interviews will be virtual or in-person, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis will follow IPA’s six-step approach..

Ethical Considerations

- Given the sensitive research topic, ethical safeguards will be implemented.
- Informed consent will be obtained, with detailed information on study objectives, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights (British Psychological Society, 2021).
 - Confidentiality and data security measures will be upheld, with identifying information removed and securely stored in compliance with GDPR (Wiles, 2022).
 - Mental health referrals will be available for participants experiencing emotional distress, ensuring access to appropriate LGBTQ+ mental health services (Turban et al., 2020).
 - Researcher bias will be mitigated through reflexivity journaling and external peer review.
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*The Starting Line Isn’t the Same for Everyone.
Transgender Athletes: Competing Against More Than Just Time.*

Planned Analyses

The data will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a six-stage process. First, all interviews will be transcribed verbatim, and researchers will immerse themselves in these transcripts to gain a deep understanding of each participant’s narrative. Second, key statements and phrases related to the research questions will be identified and coded. Third, these codes will be grouped into emergent themes reflecting shared experiences and patterns. Fourth, these themes will be refined and focused in relation to the specific research questions. Fifth, the refined themes will be synthesized into a comprehensive and interpretive narrative, exploring the meaning participants ascribe to their experiences. Finally, participants will review the researchers' interpretations to ensure accuracy and validate the findings.

Potential Outcomes and Research Impact

This research aims to achieve several key outcomes. The study will contribute to theory by providing rich, qualitative insights into the lived experiences of transgender athletes, filling a gap in the current literature. Practically, the findings will inform policy recommendations for creating more inclusive and equitable sporting environments. The research will also provide valuable information for mental health professionals working with transgender athletes, enabling them to develop more effective support frameworks. Finally, this study has the potential to contribute to public discourse and promote greater understanding and acceptance of transgender athletes within the sporting community and beyond.

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Picture Reference: *The Starting Line Isn’t the Same for Everyone*, generated with Dall.E (10 February 2025)

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Justification and Reflection



Justification for chosen methodological & analytical approach

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was selected because it provides a rich, in-depth exploration of lived experiences, making it the most appropriate methodology for understanding the subjective psychological impact of sports participation on transgender athletes (Smith et al., 2022). Unlike Thematic Analysis (TA), which primarily identifies patterns across participants, IPA prioritizes the individual's meaning-making process, allowing for a nuanced exploration of identity, discrimination, and resilience (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA is particularly effective for research involving marginalized populations, as it allows for a deep engagement with participants' lived realities, acknowledging their unique contexts, struggles, and coping mechanisms (Willig, 2021). This is essential when studying transgender athletes, who often experience intersectional oppression, which affects their mental health, sports participation, and identity negotiation (Turban et al., 2020).

Comparison to Alternative Qualitative Methods

Thematic Analysis (TA): While effective for identifying recurring themes, TA does not emphasize individual sense-making or psychological depth, which is essential for this research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA lacks the idiographic commitment that allows IPA to focus on each participant's unique psychological experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

Discourse Analysis (DA): This approach focuses on language and social constructs rather than individual psychological experiences, making it less suited to examining the emotional and cognitive struggles of transgender athletes (Gee, 2014). DA may be more useful for analysing media narratives or policy documents, rather than personal lived experiences (Willig, 2021).

IPA: Prioritizes both psychological and social factors, allowing participants to describe their lived realities while also acknowledging systemic influences. It also enables a deep examination of the ways in which experiences shape identity and mental health outcomes, making it particularly relevant to transgender athletes (Reid et al., 2018).

Using semi-structured interviews, this study captures deeply personal narratives that reflect the nuanced, identity-related challenges transgender athletes face (Turban et al., 2020). IPA's focus on idiographic analysis ensures that each participant's unique journey is honoured, while also allowing for the development of broader psychosocial insights (Smith et al., 2022).

Reflection – Positionality & Reflexivity Statement

As a researcher, I recognize my positionality as an outsider to the transgender athlete experience. While I aim to amplify their voices, I acknowledge that my interpretations are influenced by my academic background, cultural perspectives, and societal biases (Muhammad et al., 2015). This recognition is crucial for ensuring ethical rigor and minimizing researcher bias in data collection and interpretation (Finlay, 2021).

To uphold ethical integrity and authenticity:

Reflexivity Journaling: I will maintain a continuous self-reflection process through journaling, helping to track my biases, assumptions, and interpretations (Finlay, 2021).

Member Checking: Participants will be asked to review summaries of their interviews to ensure that findings accurately reflect their perspectives, preventing misinterpretation (Birt et al., 2016).

Collaborative Engagement: Instead of imposing external interpretations, I will adopt a collaborative research approach, allowing participants to have greater agency over their narratives (Reid et al., 2018).

Intersectional Awareness: Recognizing that transgender athletes' experiences are shaped by factors like race, socioeconomic status, and access to resources, I will incorporate intersectional considerations in my analysis (Crenshaw, 1989).

By maintaining self-awareness and a commitment to ethical research practices, this study seeks to minimize researcher bias while fostering an ethical and transparent analytical process (Willig, 2021).

Anticipated Questions and Prepared Answers

1. How does your study ensure rigor and credibility in qualitative research?
To ensure rigor, I have adopted member checking, where participants review their responses to validate interpretations, ensuring accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). I also maintain a reflexivity journal to document how my positionality may shape data interpretation (Finlay, 2021). Additionally, triangulation through peer debriefing and external audit of coding enhances credibility, reducing researcher bias (Smith et al., 2022). The use of thick descriptions in IPA ensures that findings are richly detailed, contextually relevant, and transferable to similar research contexts (Reid et al., 2018).

2. How do you address potential ethical concerns in discussing sensitive topics with transgender athletes?
Given the sensitive nature of discrimination and mental health challenges, informed consent procedures will be rigorous, ensuring participants fully understand the study's scope and their right to withdraw at any time (BPS, 2021). I have also integrated mental health safeguards, such as immediate referrals to LGBTQ+ mental health professionals if needed (Turban et al., 2020). Additionally, confidentiality and anonymization protocols will be strictly followed to protect identities (Wiles, 2022). Participants will have agency over their narratives, ensuring they do not feel coerced or pressured to disclose personal information (Reid et al., 2018).

3. What is the practical impact of your findings for policymakers and sports organizations?
This research will provide qualitative evidence on the mental health struggles and resilience strategies of transgender athletes, offering insights that can inform sports policymakers (Anderson & Travers, 2022). The findings will be shared with sports federations and advocacy groups to advocate for inclusive sports policies and mental health interventions. Additionally, educational programs for coaches and sports personnel can be developed based on the study's findings to foster more supportive environments (Reis et al., 2021). By presenting first-person narratives, this study provides a compelling case for institutional reform, promoting the mental well-being and fair treatment of transgender athletes in competitive sports (Smith et al., 2022).

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