

## **RESENHA DO DOCUMENTÁRIO "COMING OUT COLTON": PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE GÊNERO, MASCULINIDADES E ESPORTES**

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**RESUMO:** Lançada em 2021, *Coming Out Colton* é uma série documental da Netflix que acompanha a jornada de Colton Underwood ao se declarar gay, oferecendo visibilidade importante para a comunidade LGBTI+. A série explora como Underwood, um ex-atleta de um ambiente tradicionalmente masculino, confronta expectativas sociais, especialmente em relação à cisheteronormatividade no esporte. Ao compartilhar sua história, ele desafia estereótipos sobre masculinidade, promovendo empatia e compreensão das lutas enfrentadas por homens gays. O documentário serve como uma ferramenta educativa, oferecendo apoio a quem enfrenta questões de identidade e aceitação. A série enfatiza a importância de viver com autenticidade, destacando o valor da liberdade, felicidade e representação para comunidades marginalizadas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Esportes. Homossexualidade Masculina. Mídia.

### **REVIEW OF THE DOCUMENTARY "COMING OUT COLTON": PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER, MASCULINITIES, AND SPORTS**

**ABSTRACT:** Released in 2021, *Coming Out Colton* is a Netflix documentary series following Colton Underwood's journey of coming out as gay, offering important visibility for the LGBTI+ community. The series explores how Underwood, a former professional athlete from a traditionally masculine environment, confronts societal expectations, particularly around cisheteronormativity in sports. By sharing his story, he challenges stereotypes surrounding masculinity, while promoting empathy and understanding of the struggles faced by gay men. The documentary serves as an educational tool, offering support to individuals grappling with their own identity and acceptance. Ultimately, the series emphasizes the importance of living authentically, highlighting the value of freedom, happiness, and representation for marginalized communities.

**KEYWORDS:** Sports. Male Homosexuality. Media.

### **RESEÑA DEL DOCUMENTAL "COMING OUT COLTON" (2021): PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE GÉNERO, MASCULINIDADES Y DEPORTES**

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**RESUMEN:** Lanzada en 2021, *Coming Out Colton* es una serie documental de Netflix que sigue el viaje de Colton Underwood al declararse gay, brindando una importante visibilidad a la comunidad LGBTI+. La serie explora cómo Underwood, un exatleta de un entorno tradicionalmente masculino, enfrenta las expectativas sociales, especialmente en torno a la cisheteronormatividad en los deportes. Al compartir su historia, desafía los estereotipos sobre la masculinidad, promoviendo empatía y comprensión hacia las luchas de los hombres gays. El documental sirve como herramienta educativa, ofreciendo apoyo a quienes enfrentan cuestiones de identidad y aceptación. En última instancia, la serie subraya la importancia de vivir con autenticidad, resaltando el valor de la libertad, la felicidad y la representación de comunidades marginadas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Deportes. Homosexualidad Masculina. Medios de Comunicación.

### **FIRST WORDS**

Colton Underwood is a former American football player who played between 2014 and 2016. His professional career was marked by numerous contract signings and terminations, which led him to several teams and resulted in many injuries, ultimately causing his early retirement. However, Colton did not step away from entertainment and, in 2019, participated in the reality show "The Bachelor." In one of those instances, he was the lead of the show's 23rd season and was tasked with choosing a partner he believed to be the ideal woman to share his life with. This reality show reinforces norms and behaviors of cisheteronormativity, placing men in positions of power, privilege, and choice, and highlighting their achievements and romantic strategies. At the end of the program, Colton made his choice, but when the relationship did not progress as he had hoped, he began to pursue his ex-girlfriend, Cassie Randolph. This led to a restraining order and garnered press coverage portraying the former athlete as a violent, abusive, and toxic person (Factora, 2021).

Although Colton later came out as homosexual, it is possible to identify the impacts of hegemonic masculinity, as a dominant social construct, on how his behaviors and practices were shaped. His case reveals contradictions and ambiguities between sexual identity and gender performance, even when the latter deviates from

cisheteronormative standards. We can observe the reproduction of patterns of control and emotional obsession toward his ex-girlfriend, which ultimately led to a legal restraining order. This episode suggests that his subjective formation remained influenced by normative ideals of masculinity, whose effects persist even when the sexual identity later affirmed distances itself from cisheteronormativity. As Louro (2018) states, gender and sexuality are fields permeated by disputes, tensions, and contradictions. Thus, it is possible for individuals who transgress one norm to continue reproducing others, such as those of hegemonic masculinity.

The first theorization of hegemonic masculinity was proposed by Connell (1995), who defines it as the culturally dominant pattern of masculinity, associated with power, domination, and control, particularly over women and gay individuals. This form of masculinity structures social relations and imposes behavioral models that many men internalize from an early age, including possessiveness, competitiveness, and emotional restriction.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has undergone revisions over the past decades, especially in response to criticisms highlighting its limitations in representing the plurality of masculine experiences across different social, historical, and cultural contexts. In a subsequent work, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledge that the original proposal was overly centered on Western, cisheteronormative societies, neglecting the influence of markers such as race, class, sexuality, and geographic location. Moreover, intersectional studies demonstrate that masculinities do not operate in isolation, but rather in interaction with other identities and systems of inequality. Oppressions are intertwined in such a way that gender cannot be fully understood without simultaneously considering the effects of racism, classism, and homophobia. As a result, different groups of men, such as Black, poor, Indigenous, gay, trans, and peripheral men, occupy subordinate positions even within the system of masculinities, revealing internal

hierarchies within the male group itself (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Plummer, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; de Boise, 2015; Allan, 2018; Wedgwood, Connell and Wood, 2023; Lawton-Westerland, 2025).

The act of "coming out" is a personal and often difficult journey for many individuals. Colton publicly announced his sexual orientation as gay in a 2021 television appearance. This event garnered significant media attention and sparked conversations about the experiences of gay men in the sports and entertainment industries, being explored even through a documentary series, *Coming Out Colton*. Released in 2021, it is a documentary series made available and produced by Netflix's streaming platform. Starring Colton Underwood himself, the series consists of six episodes, each averaging 30 minutes, and is presented as a single season. It seeks to portray the journey of the former National Football League (NFL) player from the moment he identifies himself as a member of the LGBTI+ community, as well as the reaction and the way the people in his social circle have handled it.

The LGBTI+ acronym has become the most widely accepted formulation within the organized movement in Brazil (Quinalha, 2022). It is a symbolic outcome of political and historical negotiations aimed at representing the plurality of gender identities and sexual orientations. The acronym includes lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans people, and intersex individuals, and through the "+" symbol, it embraces other expressions and experiences that challenge normative frameworks. The "+" specifically reflects the community's open, fluid, and ever-evolving nature, highlighting its resistance to rigid classifications and binary standards upheld by cisheteronormativity. The selection and use of terms within the acronym are not neutral; they carry disputes over recognition and belonging, shaped by specific sociocultural contexts and the audiences they seek to address. As Quinalha (2022) reminds us, the history of the LGBTI+ movement is marked by gaps, erasures, and silences, there is no single, definitive narrative, but rather multiple points of departure that reflect the diversity of lived experiences. Recognizing the

memory and history of this struggle translates into political action in the present. It means acknowledging that achievements are not guaranteed and that democracy is strengthened through the appreciation of difference.

In this context, Underwood's coming out represented a significant moment in the journey towards greater visibility and acceptance for the LGBTI+ community. By sharing his story, he not only demonstrated the courage and bravery it takes for someone to come out, but he also helped to increase understanding and empathy for the experiences of gay men. This text aims to analyze the series, identifying its main messages and the narratives conveyed to the audience, in relation to discourses on gender and masculinities in sports, particularly.

It is important to recognize that *Coming Out Colton* has been the subject of critical scrutiny in the media (Cuby, 2021), primarily due to its focus on a very specific coming out narrative, that of a white, cisgender, athletic man from an upper-middle-class background who aligns with conventional beauty standards. These attributes afford Colton a range of privileges that facilitate a safer and more socially accepted expression of his sexuality, particularly when contrasted with the lived experiences of other gay individuals whose identities intersect with race, class, body size, ability, and gender nonconformity. As a result, the series risks reinforcing a normative model of what it means to “come out” as a gay man, sidelining the narratives of LGBTI+ individuals who do not share these markers of privilege, such as Black and Indigenous people, trans and nonbinary individuals, fat people, people with disabilities, and those from working-class or impoverished communities, whose stories remain largely absent from mainstream media. Despite these limitations, the decision to analyze the series is grounded in its wide cultural reach, its resonance within media discourse, and, most importantly, its capacity to illuminate the evolving landscape of sporting masculinities in the United States (U.S.) in light of the growing (though still selective) visibility of LGBTI+ identities.

## **Methodological procedures**

To achieve our aim, we have structured this text as a review, characterized as qualitative (Flick, 2018), using Screen Ethnography (Rial, 1995) as a data analysis tool. A qualitative study is understood as one that takes place at the subjective and relational level of social reality, involving history, the universe, meanings, reasons, beliefs, values, and attitudes of subjects. According to Flick (2018), this approach, called qualitative research, involves certain aspects that approach reality from their objectified phenomena. Qualitative research contemplates an approach based on the interpretation of the world, implying that its researchers study things in their natural settings, seeking to understand phenomena in terms of the meanings that people assign to them.

Screen ethnography is understood as a methodology that employs ethnographic analysis strategies through the use of film analysis tools. It involves an extended period of engagement with the film, the recording of potential analytical points in field notebooks, and the selection of specific scenes for detailed study, all essential procedures in the production of screen ethnography (Rial, 1995). This approach makes use of moving images, such as those in film and television, as “screens” for ethnographic inquiry and serves as a valuable methodological resource for articulating studies on gender and sexuality.

The choice of this methodological approach is motivated by its potential to examine moving images as an object of study, facilitating a connection between screen and education. This ethnographic journey involved closely examining the screen from various perspectives over an extended period. Thus, the adopted discourse strategy in the object and its potential for presentation can be perceived and constitute what is considered reality.

Based on the precepts presented by Rial (1995), there is a pressing need to address spaces beyond ethnographic film in visual anthropology, including the production and analysis of other audiovisual materials. In

line with the expectations for the development of this research, as established by Rial (1995), several procedures were adopted for its execution. Initially, specific reports were selected for analysis, followed by the following steps: 1 - an extended period of engagement with the screen; 2 - systematic and varied observation (viewing the film in different ways – uninterrupted, with pauses for notes and additional viewings); 3 - Recording in a field notebook (including descriptions of television scenes and pertinent questions for further analysis and discussion). Subsequently, scenes were selected and transcribed for convenience, presented in chapters that were analyzed both individually and interconnectedly.

We developed our analysis with the understanding that *Coming Out Colton* undeniably offers a partial and normative representation of sexual diversity in sports. However, it is precisely this partiality that makes the series a productive site for critical reflection on how dominant narratives of sexuality and masculinity are constructed, sustained, and contested within Western contexts, particularly in the realm of sports.

To that end, we drew upon theoretical frameworks that engage with the central themes of the series, considering its origin, language, and the sociocultural context of the U.S. We prioritized discussions on whiteness, masculinity, and homosexuality, while acknowledging that these arrangements reflect a logic specific to American society and the media industry in which the series is embedded. This delimitation, in turn, imposed certain limitations on the analysis we present below.

Although the series presents a highly visible moment of “coming out” within the context of U.S. celebrity culture, it centers a specific type of subject: a white, cisgender, athletic man who is socially validated within conventional beauty standards. This narrative reflects and reinforces the privileging of certain coming out experiences, those aligned with normative ideals of masculinity and appearance, while marginalizing or silencing experiences that fall outside this norm, particularly those of racialized LGBTI+ people, trans and nonbinary individuals, and people

from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. In this sense, the documentary provides a limited lens through which to understand the multiplicity of LGBTI+ experiences in sport and society.

Several scholars have already noted that much of the theoretical literature on masculinities has not sufficiently addressed the intersections of race, class, gender identity, and the persistence of violence, particularly against trans people and other historically marginalized groups (Plummer, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; de Boise, 2015; Allan, 2018; Lawton-Westerland, 2025). These critiques are valid and necessary, and we do not suggest that masculinity studies offer a universal or exhaustive lens.

Nevertheless, our decision to mobilize these frameworks is justified by the specific social and cultural context of the U.S., the setting in which the documentary unfolds and where much of this theory was originally developed. This focus allows us to better understand the symbolic and institutional terrain that enabled a figure like Colton Underwood to publicly disclose his sexuality, as well as the limits still imposed by hegemonic sports institutions, which now accommodate certain forms of gay masculinity, but only within narrow, normative, and socially assimilable boundaries.

Therefore, while we recognize the limitations of both the documentary and the theoretical framework employed, we believe the analysis presented here offers relevant contributions. It situates *Coming Out Colton* within broader transformations of Western masculinities, particularly in the sports arena, and highlights the urgent need for future research that incorporates intersectional perspectives and centers less normative and less visible queer and trans masculine experiences.

## **LOOKING INTO THE EPISODES**

In the first episode titled "Family," Colton discusses with his closest family members about this stage of his personal life. At certain points in his speech, he uses the term "coming out" to these individuals. According

to Anderson (2011), this term refers to the acknowledgment of belonging to a non-normative orientation, of becoming visible in a group that is often silenced. The term "coming out" imposes on homosexuals the expectation of continually disclosing their sexuality at various stages of their lives, a burden not typically experienced by cisheterosexual people.

During the conversation with his mother, the predominant feeling that permeates the relationship is one of guilt. The mother feels responsible for not having recognized this aspect of her child and for not having provided enough safety and comfort for this conversation to happen earlier. According to Salerno, Gattamorta and Williams (2022), the family's reaction to this new identification significantly influences how individuals undergoing this process will feel and behave after such a dialogue. The authors also suggest that this feeling of guilt, often expressed by parents, stems from insecurity about how their children will be accepted and how they will cope with prejudice. There is also a questioning of whether this condition reflects a parental biological or upbringing error, and why they did not identify their child's homosexuality earlier.

Other highlights of this episode include reflections on the social pressures that male athletes face due to hegemonic patterns of masculinity, discussed in a conversation with his friend Gus Kenworthy, a former athlete and Olympic medalist who also identifies as homosexual. As previously discussed by Connell (1995), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) and Wedgwood, Connell and Wood (2023), the aspects of hegemonic masculinity are manifested in the culturally dominant form of masculinity within a given context, regarded as the ideal and most desirable in a particular society. This ideal masculinity typically emphasizes traits such as strength, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and resistance to openly expressing emotions.

Sports have long been seen as a bastion of traditional masculinity, where physical strength, athleticism, and competitiveness are highly valued. In this context, traditional notions of masculinity, such as

toughness, aggression, and a lack of emotional expressiveness, are often reinforced and perpetuated. However, this narrow definition of masculinity can have negative consequences for athletes and sports participants. For example, it can create an environment that is hostile to individuals who do not conform to these norms, including those who are gay or perceived as such. It can also foster a culture of toxic masculinity, where athletes engage in harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, aggression, and risk-taking.

According to Kidd (2013), sport is configured as a male-dominated space, characterized by the legitimization of traits such as courage, virility, aggressiveness, and cisheterosexuality. Furthermore, the author argues that any deviation from these norms by men may be frowned upon and seen as a form of exclusion.

Another highlight is the conversation the protagonist has with his best friend from school, which illustrates the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality and its role within a broader system of cisheteronormativity. The concept of cisheteronormativity emerges from the articulation of three fundamental theoretical frameworks: heteronormativity, as formulated by Michael Warner (1991); compulsory heterosexuality, proposed by Adrienne Rich (1999); and the notions of cisgender identity/cissexuality, developed by Volkmar Sigusch (1991).

Warner (1991) understands heteronormativity as a cultural and political regime that naturalizes heterosexuality as the universal and obligatory standard for desire, sexual practice, and social organization. Within this system, only heterosexual relationships, particularly those that are monogamous and situated within the marital model, are considered legitimate, respectable, and morally acceptable. It is a logic that regulates bodies and affections, symbolically and materially excluding dissident sexual identities.

Rich (1999), in turn, argues that compulsory heterosexuality is a form of social organization that imposes heterosexuality as a mandatory norm, especially for women. This imposition is not merely cultural but

also structural and violent, reinforced by legal, social, and economic practices that deny the legitimacy of other affective-sexual existences, particularly those of lesbians. In this sense, heterosexuality functions as a political device of patriarchy, reinforcing male dominance and erasing other forms of desire and relationality.

In the same analytical field, cisgender identity refers to the presumption that all people should identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. This assumption renders trans, non-binary, and intersex experiences invisible or invalid. This understanding aligns with the concept of cissexuality, coined by Volkmar Sigusch (1991), which describes the experience of those who identify with their assigned sex at birth as if it were a universal norm. Cissexuality, therefore, establishes the “cis body” as a biologically and socially acceptable standard, reinforcing cis privilege as an often invisible but powerful marker.

Based on these frameworks, cisheteronormativity can be defined as a normative system that combines compulsory heterosexuality with compulsory cisgender identity, promoting the naturalization of individuals who are simultaneously heterosexual and cisgender – that is, people whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth and whose desire is directed toward the opposite sex. This regime constructs an ideal subject: the cisgender, heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive man or woman, recognized as legitimate and fully entitled to citizenship.

In this way, cisheteronormativity functions as a technology of power, regulating both bodies and affections, determining who is socially and politically recognized as a subject. It acts as an ideological filter that marginalizes, silences, and pathologizes experiences that fall outside this model—particularly those of LGBTI+ individuals who are also shaped by intersecting markers of difference such as race, class, disability, age, and gender nonconformity.

The second episode, titled "Football," begins with the conversation Colton considered the most daunting he would have with his father. According to Dunne (2010), it is commonly reported that the most

challenging conversations occur precisely with the father figure. This is primarily due to the societal expectation that fathers ensure the upbringing of their sons to "be a man." This expectation stems from reflections on patriarchal societies, where power relations are hierarchical and subjective within family dynamics (Bulmer, 2013). As he interacts with his former coach, Colton displays emotions like those experienced in the previous conversation.

At this point in the episode, the protagonist states that, because he was gay, he hated school and did not feel comfortable in the locker room environment. In the realm of sports, the men's locker room is characterized as a space for preparation and focus, whether for bathing and dressing or for aligning tactical ideas with the team, thereby fostering an environment conducive to social interaction and camaraderie among its users (Anderson, 2005). According to Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2013), the locker room represents a collective space of heightened intimacy, where bodies are on display and personal matters are often shared. This environment fosters significant levels of intimacy, which, in the social imaginary, reinforces the notion of a homogeneous group where everyone shares the same tastes, goals, and desires.

The locker room has long been seen as a bastion of traditional masculinity, where toughness, athleticism, and a strict adherence to gender norms are highly valued. In this environment, displays of emotion or sensitivity are often discouraged, and individuals who do not conform to these norms can be subject to ridicule or exclusion. This toxic culture of masculinity can also extend to include homophobia, where individuals who are perceived as gay or perceived as not fitting traditional gender norms may face discrimination and harassment. This type of behavior is not only harmful to those targeted, but it also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces negative attitudes towards the LGBTI+ community.

When issues of sexuality arise in this context, there emerges a sense of "breaking" locker room codes. Therefore, when men express

pleasure and desire for another man, this environment can foster hostility and discomfort. The group's tendency is not only to perpetuate, condemn, and often ridicule such expressions, but also to alter attitudes and behaviors that were previously considered normal (Chow, 2021).

The effects of homophobia in locker rooms can be far-reaching and long-lasting, with individuals who experience discrimination often feeling isolated and unsupported. This can also contribute to a culture of silence, where individuals may feel unable to come out or be their true selves, for fear of rejection or discrimination.

Camargo (2014) problematizes the architectural design of locker room spaces, emphasizing their division based on the binary order of sexes, which establishes concepts of isolation between cisgender men and cisgender women. Consequently, both bathrooms and locker rooms create territories of masculinity and femininity that are directly relational, divergent, and complementary. The male space is often perceived as more open to displays of modesty and the expression of male desires and appetites, while the female space tends to be more reserved for intimate care, with lower exposure and a focus on cultivating feminizing aspects.

According to the author, locker rooms and bathrooms are structures constructed through cisheteronormative frameworks that highlight bodies for the gaze of others through borderline representations. These spaces are configured as private and personal, yet they are also public and shared, constituting moments of exposure that challenge notions of secrecy. However, Anderson (2005) suggests that this social imaginary often remains confined to the realm of ideas, rarely materializing in actual behavior, thus intersecting fantasies of observation and desire with actions and behaviors.

As a proposed intervention for this issue, Griffin (2011) suggests that locker rooms and bathrooms should be designed differently from the conventional models currently in place. The goal would be to cater to the needs and comfort of all athletes. Such accommodations would include private areas for changing clothes, bathing, grooming, relaxation, and

other necessities, thereby alleviating concerns about body exposure and avoiding mandatory erotic or sexual objectification.

According to the author, the solution does not lie in creating a third gender-specific dressing room, but rather in adapting the existing cisheteronormative and sexist architectural norms of locker rooms. The goal is to demystify these paradigms and symbolically and practically support the redefinition of these spaces to accommodate all individuals.

Efforts are being made to challenge and change this culture, through education, outreach, and advocacy. Organizations such as Athlete Ally and You Can Play are working to create inclusive and supportive environments for all athletes, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In conversations with other NFL athletes who have publicly declared their sexuality, it has been revealed that the pressure to keep their identity a secret was immense. Some athletes experienced deep depression and even exhibited suicidal behaviors, often without receiving support from their families.

The episode concludes with the protagonist returning to his school environment. He reflects that it was during his school years that he learned he wouldn't be accepted if he openly embraced his sexuality. He attributes this to name-calling and jokes, particularly in locker rooms, and advocates for schools to foster welcoming environments free from stereotypes and prejudices.

The episode "Friends," the third of the season, also begins with a conversation between the protagonist and his former coach. The coach expresses continued admiration for the athlete but also indicates disagreement with Colton's sexual orientation, dismissing Colton's concerns about homophobic actions as misguided. The athlete emphasizes the weight of certain attitudes and truths when expressed by authority figures such as teachers, coaches, and mentors in places where identities and individuals are shaped.

According to Pearse and Connell (2016), schools and other social environments exert disciplinary power through individuals in hierarchical positions who aim to normalize bodies and sanction any deviation from the norm. Consequently, discourses that reinforce prejudices and exclude marginalized identities are common. It would be valuable for these individuals to use their social influence to promote greater acceptance of differences and serve as role models in welcoming young people and students who are navigating self-discovery and may feel frightened, insecure, or discouraged. This approach contrasts with perpetuating these environments as places of oppression (Wilchins, 2019).

In his quest to connect with the LGBTI+ community, Colton undergoes two experiences: first, he attends a coming out party, and second, he visits a same-sex couple. Through these experiences, Colton comes to realize that sexuality does not necessarily correlate with personal preferences. He learns that not all gay men fit the stereotype portrayed in media and social views—that of being effeminate, promiscuous, and uncommitted. This realization challenges his previous perceptions of the LGBTI+ community.

According to Lauretis (1991), in the mid-1970s, the North American LGBTI+ movement embraced a discourse that categorized gays and lesbians based on behavior, encouraging adherence to societal norms of femininity and masculinity. However, this assimilationist approach faltered with the onset of the aids epidemic, leading to a rejection of norms and discourses that sought to control and standardize identities. Instead, there emerged a movement asserting the right to express one's true self, personality, and identity in ways that felt authentic (Bayer, 1985).

Salvati *et al.* (2019) suggest that individuals who defy traditional gender boundaries by identifying as gay, lesbian, and/or trans in mainstream media contribute to a social imaginary that dictates one

must conform to specific behaviors and expressions to belong to the LGBTI+ community. This notion aligns with the idea expressed by Colton.

The theme of the fourth episode is "Church," where acceptance by the religious community holds significant importance for the protagonist. During an informal basketball game, he confides in his friends about his sexual orientation, sparking numerous discussions about what the church might or might not accept. The former athlete grapples with concerns about being seen as a sinner by God and fears that fellow Christians may reject him because of this. This dilemma raises questions about whether he must distance himself from his religion to live authentically.

The protagonist's first encounter of opposition is with the pastor, who does not offer support and asserts that divine intervention is needed to align Colton's life with Biblical teachings. The religious leader views Colton's experience as sinful and advises against accepting or embracing it, instead urging him to suppress his desires and forsake his happiness. The former athlete's reaction to these statements is marked by physical discomfort, including fear, insecurity, vulnerability, and uncertainty.

According to Lomash, Brown and Paz Galupo (2018), religious organizations often perpetuate a discourse that labels homosexuality as a sin, framing it as a mistake, punishment, or divine debt. This rhetoric serves as a strategy to discipline and conform bodies to societal norms. McRay and Ruff (2021) further argue that current condemnations within certain Christian denominations stem from selective interpretations of biblical passages, reflecting human biases. They point out inconsistencies, such as overlooking prohibitions against working on Saturdays or the historical endorsement of slavery, which are still perpetuated by religious leaders.

In a conversation with a homosexual friend who remained on his Christian journey, Colton begins to grasp the distinction between serving God and belonging to a specific church. He also learns about other Christian denominations that do not view homosexuality as a sin.

In episode five, titled "The Public," the focus is on the public reaction as the former athlete chooses to grant an interview on "Good Morning America." The decision to appear on this program was influenced by its extensive reach and large North American audience. Established since 1975, the program's impact extends beyond its immediate viewership to include social media engagement and digital platform views.

Simultaneously with the airing of the interview, numerous individuals took to social networks to comment on the case. While many expressed support for the former athlete, others speculated that his revelation was an attempt to mitigate issues related to his previous relationship with his ex-girlfriend. Through this experience, Colton begins to realize that he cannot always please everyone and that he will encounter disappointment at times. Ultimately, he comes to prioritize being at peace with his own truth.

According to Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (2019), social acceptance represents the final and often most challenging stage for gay men in their journey towards recognition. This stage involves navigating nuanced opinions, reactions, and ways of coping within broader social spheres. The process begins with self-acceptance, where individuals come to terms with their sexual orientation. It continues with family acceptance, where the support—or lack thereof—from immediate family members plays a crucial role. Finally, social acceptance encompasses the broader acceptance within various social groups such as work, religious communities, neighborhoods, and among the public, including in the professional realm for public figures like former athletes.

Following the interview, Colton, his father, and Gus celebrate at a gay bar known for its historical and cultural significance to the LGBTI+ community. The bar's owner recounts that in 1969, homosexuality was illegal, and the bar was subjected to a police raid. This led to resistance and a three-day protest against the violence, marking a pivotal moment in LGBTI+ history. Regarding legal rights, Gus highlights a significant

development in 2021 when protections against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation were enacted, a fundamental labor law that had not been respected in 28 U.S. states prior to this.

The last episode, titled "The Past & the Future," begins with the aftermath of Colton's interview, where public perception links his personal revelation with issues involving Cassie. Disturbed by the fallout, Colton's father and Gus decide it's time to leave the hotel and return to normal life. A week later, still reeling from the situation, Colton seeks guidance from the welcoming church. During their conversation, the reverend advises Colton that he cannot undo his past actions but must instead learn to confront and accept their consequences.

In their final conversation, Colton meets with a fellow reality participant who accepts him for who he is but condemns his past mistakes. The episode culminates with a party hosted by Colton, attended by all who supported him throughout his journey. The event fosters a sense of unity, brotherhood, and celebration, leaving him feeling more at ease and happier than before.

## **LAST WORDS**

The season is compelling as it prominently features a character recognized within a strictly defined male ecosystem and explores how his social circle reacts when he challenges one of its fundamental characteristics: the cisheteronormativity.

The series effectively navigates through different social niches, presenting diverse perspectives on how agents and institutions of power historically define and enforce societal norms. It illustrates their reactions when confronted with individuals who challenge these norms. Besides, it's valuable as it facilitates exchange, observation, and education about the lived reality of a television star, serving as a guide and support for others navigating their own journeys of acceptance and identity. Its central message underscores the importance of courageously

expressing one's truth, emphasizing that despite the challenges, the pursuit of happiness and freedom is paramount.

Moreover, Underwood's public announcement challenged societal norms and stereotypes, particularly within the context of professional sports, regarding masculinity. His coming out had a significant impact on both the LGBTI+ community and broader society, emphasizing the critical role of representation and visibility in advancing the rights and recognition of marginalized groups. In conclusion, Colton Underwood's coming out had a profound impact on the LGBTI+ community and broader society. Through his story shared via television and series, he significantly contributed to advancing visibility, acceptance, and understanding for LGBTI+ individuals.

However, it is important to highlight a relevant limitation of this study, which concerns the scope adopted both by the documentary *Coming Out Colton* and by the theoretical framework employed. The series' narrative is centered on the experience of a white, cisgender, athletic man who conforms to normative beauty standards, which ultimately restricts the representation of the plurality of LGBTI+ experiences in sport and society. While this focus contributes meaningfully to the debate, it may also reinforce the invisibility of the coming out processes of racialized individuals, trans and non-binary people, and those from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite these limitations, the theoretical approach is justified by the specific sociocultural context of the U.S., where the documentary is set, as it allows for an understanding of the tensions and possibilities surrounding the visibility of certain subaltern masculinities in sports. This underscores the need for future research that expands the intersectional lens and incorporates less normative and more marginalized experiences.

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