THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY PEOPLE IN EVERYDAY SPORT AND PHYSICAL EXERCISE IN THE UK

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ABSTRACT

Participation in sport has the potential to improve the physical, mental and psychological health and well-being, yet there is evidence that transgender including non-binary people are less likely to engage in sport, with significant differences in participation rates compared to the cisgender population. Research has shown that some transgender and non-binary people have concerns about being challenged about their gender identity in sports settings and worry about being fully welcomed or accepted. Often very little attention is paid to the lived experiences of transgender and non-binary people in sport, or how barriers to participation might be reduced.

Drawing on 18 semi-structured interviews with people whose gender identity was self-defined, this thesis engages with trans feminist theory and adopts a social constructionist/interpretivist paradigm. It offers an original contribution to knowledge regarding how gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity can often impact on people's inclusion in everyday sport and physical exercise, due to the ways in which they are frequently organised along binary lines.

The findings of this study identify the ways in which gender identity matters in sporting settings, and the ways in which this often intersected with the spaces people exercised in, the types of sport they did, and the communities they exercised alongside. Key themes discussed include the significance of passing, how people experienced competitive advantage and the joy of sport.

The significance of this thesis is that it informs our theoretical understanding of the barriers which may exist for transgender and non-binary people in sport by introducing a focus on people's lived experiences previously lacking. It informs our empirical understanding of the ways in which these barriers might be reduced if inclusion is to be improved for transgender and non-binary people and makes recommendations for future research.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: ***Abby Barras***

Dated: ***1st October 2021***

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The musician and writer Kristin Hersh once said “before you can make good music, you just have to shut up. Then the music can say what it has to say.” As a researcher, I agree. Making good research means knowing when to shut up and listen. Thank you to everyone who has helped me to listen.

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PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Writing this PhD has inspired the publication of three pieces of work. This has been an invaluable process in helping me to articulate my research in a different format as well as circulating it to wider audience, and one which I very much enjoyed. I have published both as a single-author and together with my supervisors, so feel very fortunate to have developed my writing technique in an internet publication, a journal article and a book chapter. I have also had the opportunity to present at conferences, helping to disseminate my work to a wider audience and gain invaluable feedback.

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Barras, A. (forthcoming). 'Yay. You look like a cis person, well done.' Understanding the politics of passing for trans including non-binary people in physical activity in the UK. *The Routledge Handbook of Gender Politics in Sport and Physical Activity.* Edited by Rachael Bullingham and Győző Molnár. London: Routledge.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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GLOSSARY

Although some of the key terms listed will be discussed in greater detail within this thesis, this glossary appears here to provide an initial overview of what they mean. It is important to note that all terms in the glossary originate from sources written by trans and non-binary authors.

Binder

A binder is a compression undergarment that looks like a vest and is usually made of durable nylon and spandex. Wearing a binder ('binding') flattens the breasts to the body, creating a flatter silhouette, helping to curb gender dysphoria. It can help with 'passing' since the appearance of breasts often increases the chance of strangers using female pronouns.

Bottom Surgery

The common term for genital surgery. This can be vaginoplasty, where a vagina is surgically created; metoidioplasty where clitoral growth from hormone therapy is used to shape a penis; or phalloplasty, the type of surgery where a penis is surgically constructed from another part of a person's body.

Cis(gender)

People who are not transgender, whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth. Often shortened to 'cis.'

Cisnormative/cisnormativity

The assumption that all, or almost all individuals are cisgender.

Cissexism

Prejudice or discrimination against trans people.

Gender Dysphoria

A medical term for the experience of discomfort or distress in a person's body, due to having a gender identity that does not align with their gender assigned at birth. Not to be confused with body dysmorphia, a mental health condition where people perceive flaws in their appearance.

Genderqueer

An older version of non-binary.

Intersex

People who are born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the 'standard' definitions for female or male. Intersex people are sometimes included under the trans umbrella, though some argue they differ with regards to their physical sex, not their gender.

LGBTQ+

This thesis uses the abbreviation LGBTQ+ to encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (or queer) and intersex identities.

Non-Binary

People who do not identify within the male/female binary, and instead may identify as being neither woman or man, a little of both, or as being gender-fluid (i.e., moving between different genders over the course of their lives).

Packer

A packer is the term for any object used to create a bulge in a person's underwear or trousers, to create the illusion of a penis. Accordingly, 'to pack' is the act of using a packer.

Passing

A person being read by strangers as their preferred gender.

Testosterone or 'T'

Testosterone, or 'T' as it is often called, is a hormone usually prescribed either as a gel or an injection. Testosterone can bring about dramatic changes to a person's body, including increased hair growth, deepening of the voice, easier muscle building and changes in fat distribution.

Top Surgery

The common term used to describe the removal of breasts and/or fatty tissue to create a more masculine physique.

Trans feminine

The term used to describe someone whose gender presentation is feminine looking.

Trans(gender)

People whose gender identity does not align with their assigned sex at birth. The term transgender is typically used as an umbrella term to describe all people who defy 'straight' mainstream notions regarding gender. The trans umbrella may include (but is not necessarily limited to) people who are transsexual, crossdressers, drag artists, androgynous, two-spirit, genderqueer, agender, feminine men and/or masculine women. Often shortened to 'trans.'

Transition

The steps a person may take to align their gender identity with their gender presentation. Transition can be social (such as using a new name), medical (such as taking hormones) or surgical (such as having top surgery). There is no 'right' way to transition, and everyone is different.

Transsexual

An older version of transgender. Many trans people find this definition objectifying as it places undue focus on body parts rather than the whole person but is still respected as a term of self-identification.

Trans man

A person who has socially (and sometimes surgically/medically) transitioned from female to male.

Trans masculine

The term used to describe someone whose gender presentation is masculine looking.

Transmisogyny

The way in which cissexism and misogyny intersect in the lives of trans women and others on the trans/feminine spectrum.

Trans woman

A person who has socially (and sometimes surgically/medically) transitioned from male to female.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On the 9th October 2020, *The Guardian* (UK) newspaper reported that the world governing body for the sport of rugby union, World Rugby, had decided to ban transgender women (women assigned male at birth) from the elite women's game for the foreseeable future. The report was developed by a World Rugby working group 'following research into available scientific literature, which detailed an extensive consultation where the working group heard from independent experts in the field of performance, physiology, medicine, risk, law and socio-ethics' (Ingle, 2020, n.p.). This report

> Aims to facilitate the participation of transgender players in rugby where it is possible to do so safely and fairly. Rugby is a sport that involves frequent physical confrontation and collision and so physiological attributes such as size, strength, power and speed are important contributors to safety/welfare and performance.
>
> (World Rugby Transgender Guide, 2020, p. 2)

The report also included guidelines for non-binary players, whose inclusion was determined by 'whether or not they had experienced the biological effects of testosterone during puberty or adolescence' (World Rugby Transgender Guide, 2020, p. 25). Players who had experienced these effects were not permitted to play. Transgender men (men assigned female at birth) 'may play men's rugby having provided confirmation of physical ability, and [transgender men] may not play women's rugby after the process of sex reassignment has begun, if this reassignment includes supplementation with testosterone' (World Rugby Transgender Guide, 2020, p. 5).

Several years before, in 2015, the International Olympic Committee (2015) updated its policy for the inclusion of transgender athletes in sport, confirming such advantages were negated when transgender women lowered their testosterone levels to 5 n/mol for at least 12 months. This policy was applied across almost every sport, but World Rugby argue their new research indicated transgender women retain physical advantages over cisgender women (women whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth) even after they take medication to lower their testosterone.

These advantages, argue World Rugby, are significant enough to justify the banning of transgender women playing at elite level.

In summary, the report from World Rugby says that 'the current evidence strongly suggests that the reduction of testosterone levels in trans women is insufficient in removing biological advantages created during puberty and adolescence' (World Rugby Transgender Guide, 2020, p. 34). This report positions transgender women and some non-binary people as a threat to their teammates' safety and fairness, but transgender men do not pose the same risk. The report does not preclude national unions from flexibility in their application of the guidelines at the community level of the game, and the report said 'World Rugby is currently exploring the possibility of an "open category" in which any player can play, regardless of gender' (World Rugby Transgender Guide, 2020, p. 7).

Ingle (2020, n.p.) wrote the ban was criticised by many academics from a range of fields including sport, public health and sociology, and campaigners questioned the science behind the proposal, warning it will discriminate against transgender people in sport. A letter sent to World Rugby after the announcement which was co-signed by eighty-four leading academics who opposed the ban said more research was needed because

> Developing appropriate guidelines requires ongoing work with transgender athletes and community representatives, and engagement with rigorous, peer-reviewed evidence. There is no peer-reviewed, scientific evidence to justify a ban which would only be harmful to trans and gender diverse people.
>
> (Ingle, 2020, n.p.)

An opportunity for a change of approach which the report from World Rugby (2020) did not consider is offered here in the academics' response to the report. Namely, the possibility for new ways of thinking about fairness and safety and not only about the question of transgender women possibly possessing a competitive advantage when they take part in contact sport. What this report also highlights are the ways in which sport is a highly gendered activity. Rugby carries with it normative understandings of masculinity and is traditionally deemed a male sport. As a contact sport it is reliant on physical strength on speed and reinforces essentialist ideas about men's bodies only

ever being stronger and faster than women's, and by extension, a danger should they be participating in sport together. By focusing on only this, the World Rugby report has overlooked finding new ways to include transgender people in sport and access to healthful activities might be considered. As Nancy Kelley, chief executive of LGBTQ+ rights charity Stonewall said, 'the world continues to evolve, and it is vital that policies expand rather than restrict any sport's potential to grow and benefit all our communities' (Ingle, 2020, n.p.).

This thesis will use the term 'trans' to include all individuals whose gender identity sits under the transgender and non-binary umbrella. It acknowledges that this shorthand is not a catch-all for all gender diverse identities, and that terms may be used interchangeably by people. Some people may identify as transgender and non-binary, for example, and non-binary is an identity in its own right.

Conversations about transgender people (shortened to trans hereafter) and their visibility in the public eye and popular culture continue to be frequent occurrences in the media. Many of these conversations reflect how trans people are becoming more accepted and welcomed in society. In December 2020 the actor Elliot Page, who starred in *Juno* and *The Umbrella Academy* raised further awareness about trans rights and visibility when he came out as trans and non-binary on his social media pages. On his first day in office on 20th January 2021, US President Joe Biden signed an executive order expanding protections for transgender students. Later that month he repealed the ban on trans members of the military and threatened sanctions against countries that suppress trans rights, and appointed Dr Rachel Levine as assistant health secretary, the first openly trans woman to hold this post (Ennis, 2021, n.p.).

Such efforts to improve trans rights inevitably sparked a conservative backlash in the US, most especially on the much-discussed notion that embracing trans rights threatens women's sports. In a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference on 28th February 2021, former US President Donald Trump told the audience that "Joe Biden and the Democrats are pushing policies that would even destroy women's sports" (Ennis, 2021, n.p.). Trump went on to mock trans athletes calling them "biological males" and saying, "I think it's crazy what is happening, we must protect the integrity of women's sports" (Ennis, 2021, n.p). The discriminatory language used

here by Trump reflects similar flashpoints in the UK regarding the inclusion of trans people in sport, most frequently concerning trans women. These discussions have contained considerable opposition from the gender critical feminist movement (Phipps, 2019). Commonly referred to as TERFS (trans exclusionary radical feminists), gender critical feminists see the term TERF as a slur, arguing it has been used in an overly broad and insulting fashion, and alongside violent anti-trans rhetoric (Heuchan, 2017). A key component of gender critical feminism is the denial of trans women's identity as women and the exclusion of trans women in cisgender women's spaces, such as changing rooms or toilets (Hines and Santos, 2018). Cisgender is the term for people whose gender and assigned sex align (shortened to cis hereafter).

On the 23rd May 2019, *London Evening Standard* (Richardson, 2019, n.p.) reported that The City of London Corporation, which manages Hampstead Heath and its three ponds, had announced it had adopted a new gender identity policy to make sure services in the area 'are fully compliant with the UK Equality Act (2010), and do not discriminate against trans people' (Richardson, 2019, n.p.). Trans women have been legally allowed to use the women-only pond since the introduction of this act, which prohibits unlawful discrimination on the grounds of a person's trans status. The UK Equality Act (2010) already protects trans people from being discriminated against when accessing services, and trans people's right to use single-sex spaces, regardless of whether they have legal gender recognition, has been the law for nearly a decade.

This announcement about the use of this single-sex space led to campaigners such as *Fair Play for Women* and *Woman's Place UK* to speak out against the inclusion of trans women to swim in the women-only pond. They conducted 'Man Friday' events, where cis women dressed up as men and used the women's pond, to demonstrate their view that such a policy is open to abuse. Amy Desir from *ReSisters United UK*, who participated in these events, claimed the policy 'disproportionately discriminates against young women, and under the policy any man can self-identify and declare themselves a woman. It's disgusting' (Desir, 2019). Scottish entrepreneur Duncan Bannatyne (2019) tweeted he was considering asking trans members to show a gender recognition certificate before they can use their preferred changing room in his chain of health clubs (Parsons, 2020). Duncan Bannatyne's health club was not the

only club to attempt this implementation. In March 2019 David Lloyd sports clubs had also requested its trans members show such a certificate when accessing changing rooms (Alibhai, 2019).

UK Government guidance states service providers can only ask for a gender recognition certification in 'very few circumstances and it should never be asked for as proof of gender' (UK Government Equalities Office, 2019, p.9). As trans campaigner Christine Burns (2021) tweeted, asking for a certificate defeats the whole point of those laws such as the UK Equality Act (2010) which protect trans people's privacy. A few days after making the announcement, David Lloyd's chief executive appeared to backtrack in a statement to the newspaper *PinkNews*, saying the company did 'not have a practice of asking people for a gender recognition certificate' (Braidwood, 2019, n.p.). Rather, then, these reactions from those who wished to keep trans women away from sport on the basis of fairness and safety, as was the position of the World Ruby report, are made in defence of protecting cis women-only spaces. Such a defence carries the gendered assumption that such spaces are deemed necessary in allowing cis women to feel protected from harm, harassment and abuse when participating in physical exercise.

Media coverage around the eligibility of trans people competing in sport and at elite level has been growing for some time, especially in the UK. Many of these discussions – most notably championed by former tennis player Martina Navratilova (Navratilova, 2019; Gilligan, 2019) and Olympic swimmer Sharron Davies (2019) on Twitter, have included accusations about competitive advantage, unfair physiology and accusations of the erasure of cis women's rights in sport. These discussions about the inclusion of trans people in elite level sport are rippling out into wider dialogs about inclusivity and equality for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise (Barras, 2019a, n.p). Because these discussions about elite sport are often hostile, they are having a negative effect on trans people's experiences of participation in everyday sport and physical exercise. This can mean that whilst these debates have a central focus on safety and fairness for cis people in sport, the implications of these debates for trans people mean they often experience barriers to participation, because these debates neglect to consider how important taking part in sport is for trans people, and how it can help to combat feelings of gender dysphoria (Barras, 2019a, n.p.). Ongoing

discussions in popular culture and social media reflect how the inclusion of trans people in sport remains topical.

Sport and physical exercise have the potential to enrich the lives of many people, but for some trans people such activities can often present numerous barriers and challenges to their participation, not least because of examples shown with Hampstead Heath and at Duncan Bannatyne. This is a concern, as the value of engaging in everyday sport and physical exercise and the associated health and well-being benefits these can bring is a commonly accepted view. Individuals are encouraged by a variety of public incentives and campaigns (NHS England: Live Well, 2019; Public Health England: Everybody Active, 2014), whose message about being physically active is clearly linked to not only our individual physical, mental and psychological health, but also to making a 'step change to reduce the burden of preventable death, disease and disability, supporting people and their communities to achieve their potential' (Public Health England: Everybody Active, 2014, p.4). At the time of writing, this is even more relevant with the on-going lockdown restrictions in the UK due to Covid, and the necessity of daily exercise for mental and physical health (Centre for Social Justice, 2020).

Participating in physical exercise then can be viewed as a matter of both public and personal responsibility. In addition, participation in sport has been cited as leading to improved physical and mental health (Sherry, 2010). This is of particular importance for some marginalised groups, such as trans people, where there is evidence they are more likely to have poor mental health or experience mental distress and can find it hard to ask for or access the necessary help they need. Sometimes this is in part due to societal pressures, worries about acceptance among family and friends and fitting in (*Gendered Intelligence*, 2021).

The Trans Mental Health Study (McNeil, Bailey and Ellis, 2012), which was conducted to explore the mental health and well-being of trans people in the UK, was the first survey to focus solely on trans people's mental health and well-being. Key findings from this survey reported that rates of current and previously diagnosed mental ill health were high amongst many participants. Depression was the most prevalent issue with 88% of participants feeling they were either currently experiencing depression or

had in the past. Stress was the next most prevalent issue at 80%, followed by anxiety at 75%. A large-scale quantitative survey conducted by ScottishTrans (2016) called 'Beyond the Binary' and analysed by Valentine (2016) reported relatively high levels of mental health difficulties among non-binary people. Both surveys identified misgendering, being outed, harassment, issues at work relating to gender identity and accessing health services (including gender clinics), as contributing to mental health issues such as depression, stress and anxiety. Each survey also revealed the difficulty of engaging with sport and physical exercise for people who identify as trans, leading to being excluded from the substantial positive change participation may bring to mental and physical health, as well as the feeling of community belonging, which is also often associated with participation.

This increased visibility of trans people has brought issues of gender diversity into the public arena, and 'the organisation of social movements has meant that the political demands of trans people are being voiced' (Hines, Davy, Monro, Motmans, Santos and Van Der Ros, 2018, p.38). There exists a considerable body of qualitative and quantitative research in the social sciences about trans people and their history - though there is less about non-binary people in sport, though the research field is growing (Erikainen, Vincent and Hopkins, 2020; Spandler, Erikainen, Hopkins, Caudwell, Newman and Whitehouse 2020). Much of this literature is linked to gender identity and the physical body within medical and legal contexts (Davy, 2011; Ekins and King, 2006; Pearce, 2018; Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

A high proportion of this literature examines how trans people have been represented within medical and legal discourses, most usually in relation to the right to access surgery, hormones and self-identification, which in turn has led to increased advocacy for equality, equity and civility in their daily lives (Burns, 2018). Under the current UK Gender Recognition Act (2004), trans people who desire medical intervention are still required to submit to a series of intrusive and often upsetting medical assessments, together with interviews with psychiatrists in order to 'prove' their gender identity and obtain a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. It is a lengthy process and does not allow individuals to determine their own personal identity, and non-binary people have no legal recognition at all under this current act. On receipt of a Gender Recognition

Certificate, an individual may then have their preferred gender marked on their birth certificate, are then legally recognised as their preferred gender, but must remain living as this gender until death.

The LGBTQ+ UK charity Stonewall have been actively campaigning for reforms to the act, and currently, trans people are 'forced to endure a highly medicalised, bureaucratic and demeaning process to acquire gender recognition' (De Santos, 2019, n.p.).Transgender charities, including Press for Change (*Press for Change,* 2021*)* and the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (*GIRES*, 2021), continue to lobby for a more streamlined approach to this system, aiming to de-medicalise the process for legally changing gender, and be more welcoming for many other trans people.

The current UK Equality Act (2010) states if a person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex, they are protected from discrimination under this act. Gender reassignment is one of nine protected characteristics listed in the UK Equality Act (2010), and although they are legally protected from discrimination which can happen as a direct result of their gender identity, trans people continue to have frequent and negative interactions with police by way of brutality, unwarranted stops, and detainments on the basis of gender identity (Amnesty International, 2019; Serpe and Nadal, 2019). This means trans people, like other minority groups, are less likely to officially report crimes or incidents of gender discrimination.

Medical and legal establishments have long found it difficult to conceptualise gender identity as separate from sexual orientation or accommodate bodies which are situated outside of binary thinking (Burns, 2018; Halberstam, 2017; Wanta and Unger, 2017). As such, much of the language and cultural definitions and/or assumptions pertaining to trans people continue to remain informed and guided by outdated medical and legal studies and terms (Richards, Pierre-Bouman and Barker, 2018). This is problematic, as these assumptions are often situated within binary parameters, from which trans people are expected to choose from with no freedom to legally self-identify. Despite increased legal rights such as legal protection from discrimination under the UK Equality Act (2010) and the UK Gender Recognition Act (2004), trans people are still

stigmatised in many areas of society both in the UK and globally, often due to their experiences as being positioned as 'non-normative and consequentially conceptualised relative to the celebrated (cisgender) norm' (Galupo, 2017, p.1), with a pressure to conform to gender normative stereotypes in order to avoid discrimination.

The pressure to conform to gender normative stereotypes feeds into historical trans narratives which saw a scientific attempt to categorise gender along binary lines, ignoring trans people's lived experiences (Barker and Scheele, 2020). The ongoing antagonism around trans people in sport bears all the hallmarks of a moral panic. Barker (2017, n.p.) writes

> Trans people are blamed for a number of – often contradictory – harms. In 2017, these included corrupting children, changing the English language and threatening free speech, violence against women and seeking to both dismantle and reinforce problematic gender norms.

The framing of trans people as deviant sexual predators who should not be allowed to use cis people's changing rooms and bathrooms bears a striking resemblance to previous moral panics, most notably the one against gay men in the 1980s. Like trans people now, gay men then were branded as paedophiles. Any mention of homosexuality was deemed to risk "turning children gay" in the same way that there is now concern that young people will be "turned trans" if they learn about gender diversity (Barker, 2017, n.p.).

The focus on biological and medical aspects of trans identities can be linked to the discussions in sports regarding the inclusion of trans people, most often with a focus on the physical body and the ways in which their bodies are assumed to define gender. Medical advancements about transitioning from one gender to another have made possible questions about the inclusion (or not) of trans women in elite sport and have arguably focussed the attention on transition, whilst leaving non-binary athletes relatively invisible, though the field is slowly growing (Erikainen, Vincent and Hopkins, 2020; Spandler et al., 2020).

One of these remaining discussions is the way in which some trans people often have lower participation rates than cis people in everyday sport and physical exercise, and

why this might be. Survey evidence suggests an ongoing problem with transphobia in sport in the UK (Attebbery-Ash, Woodford and Center, 2018; Pride Sports, 2016). Trans people are less likely to engage in sport, and there is a significant difference in participation rates compared to the cis population (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman and Haycraft, 2017a). In addition, the highly gendered organisation of sport continues to create barriers to participation for trans people. This is partly because participating in sport and exercise can be regarded as particularly challenging for trans people (Elling-Machartzki, 2017) with a lack of safe and comfortable spaces, changing rooms, transphobia and bullying cited as key issues leading to lower inclusion rates (Caudwell, 2014; Hargie, Mitchell and Somerville, 2015; Morris and Van Raalte, 2016; Perez-Samaniego, Fuentes-Miguel, Pereira-Garcia and Devis-Devis, 2016; Phipps, 2019). In addition, a lack of visible role models and positive representation on and off the field are cited as barriers to participation by those people consulted (Erikainen et al., 2020; Pride Sports, 2016). All these key issues reflect there is a need to conduct research which directly asks trans people what barriers to participation they may be facing in sport.

1.1 Overview of Thesis and Theoretical Framework

This thesis has four principal lines of inquiry. Firstly, it asks what the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK are. Secondly, it asks how these experiences have impacted on people's participation, either negatively and/or positively. Thirdly, it asks how these experiences can help to inform recommendations to perhaps reduce barriers to participation and improve inclusivity in everyday sport and physical exercise for the wider trans community. Lastly, it asks how these experiences may or may not challenge hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity prevalent in sport, and how queer and trans feminist theory can offer an examination of these concepts.

This thesis adopts a social constructionist/interpretive paradigm. These epistemological and ontological perspectives are appropriate for this study as they take a critical stance towards the 'taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves' (Burr, 2015, p.3), and challenges what may be accepted as 'knowledge.' This research is conducted with an understanding of the basic principles which underpin a social constructionist approach: that is, based on the assumption

that social reality is not singular or objective but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts. For the purposes of this research, those human experiences and narratives of trans people within the context of sport are the central focus.

Social constructionism has shaped the approach of this study by working as ‘a process and a product of collective meaning-making and ongoing negotiation through complex interactions among multiple social actors in a particular social setting’ (Zhao, 2020, p.98). This is because social constructionism emphasises the socially created nature of gender and sport. For this study, one way of understanding social constructionism is as a process in which people’s experience of reality is determined by the meanings they attach to that reality. The other way of seeing social constructionism is as a social product, one that is constructed as an outcome of interactions between complex and diverse forces. Through the lens of social constructionism, the present study understands both sport and gender as socially constructed concepts (Burr, 2015). This allows the lived experiences of participants to be foregrounded.

The institution of heterosexuality is linked to the gender binary in sport. As Butler (1990) argued, sex, gender and sexuality are performative acts which individuals constantly display through their clothing choices, mannerisms and behaviours. This means identities are fluid and ever changing. Although individuals can choose how they want to act, behave, and identify through their performative acts, they may feel compelled to repeat performances of the heterosexual matrix of woman-feminine-heterosexual or man-masculine-heterosexual. These repeated performances lead to the taken for granted assumption that the binary concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality are stable. As discussed later in this chapter, trans feminist theory offers an opportunity to interrogate this notion of stability by disrupting dominant discourses in sport as well as the repeated performances of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

This study draws on trans feminist theory to better understand the lived experiences of participants, though it also acknowledges queer theory’s long-established relationship with sports sociology and gender studies and the contribution it has made to the field of LGBTQ+ studies. As discussed further in chapter two, the application of

a trans feminist perspective in this study advances existing knowledge of what is already understood about participation in everyday sport and physical exercise for trans people. In this way a deeper consideration of how gender identity can directly impact on a person's inclusion in sport is offered. Trans feminist theory offers a challenge to the dominance of men in sport, known as hegemonic masculinity, and the privileging of bodies which conform to socially acceptable versions of what men and women should look like, known as gender normativity. These concepts are discussed in more detail in chapters two and three.

There is a growing field of research within the social sciences and sports sociology which considers how inclusivity for trans people can be improved in sport, although a limited amount which directly asks this group about their lived experiences of participating in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK (Barras, Frith, Jarvis and Lucena, 2021). Much of this earlier existing research has historically focused on elite level participation and questions of competitive advantage. This existing research also focuses disproportionately on trans women, and whether they possess such an advantage. Yet despite the growing visibility of trans people in the public eye, popular culture and their increased legal recognition (UK Equality Act, 2010; UK Gender Recognition Act, 2004), the inclusion of trans people in sport remains topical, as shown in the media examples given earlier. In addition, many of the views about the inclusion of trans people in sport are not from the perspective of this group, but from those who contest their inclusion. As Hines (2019, p.5) writes, 'hostility to the self-determinism of gender identity appears to strengthen as trans people gain increased citizenship rights,' as witnessed with the protests at Hampstead Heath ponds and the changes to World Rugby's policy on inclusion for trans women.

Consequently, this study offers an original contribution to research in this area, which fits into this growing field of literature and research within sociology, gender studies, and trans feminist theoretical studies and sports sociology, and asks how participation might be improved for this group of people. The thesis has two research aims: to challenge existing notions of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport, and to make possible recommendations and suggestions for increasing inclusivity in

everyday sport and physical exercise for trans people. It uses trans feminist theory to do this.

1.2 Definitions of Commonly used Terms

The focus of this research is to ask what the lived experiences of trans people are in everyday sport and physical exercise, in order to identify potential barriers to participation and improve inclusion. Before moving on to discussing the relevant literature for this study, it is necessary to offer some definitions of the commonly used terms in this study. Whilst some of these were mentioned in the glossary it is important to define them in more detail here, as they are integral to the lived experiences of the participants.

1.2.1 Transgender

The term ‘transgender’ (and the frequently abbreviated ‘trans’ which this study uses) is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity or presentation does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. It can refer to people who identify as trans men (people who were assigned female at birth but identify as men), trans women (people who were assigned male at birth but identify as women), or those who identify as non-binary (those who do not identify solely as either male or female), though it is important to recognise non-binary is a valid gender identity in its own right. The term trans covers a variety of experiences, expressions and identities including gender queer, gender fluid and gender non-conforming, though it is not limited to these descriptions and an individual may use terms inter-changeably. For example, a person may identity as gender-queer but not necessarily as trans (Richards, Pierre-Bouman and Barker, 2017). As Tannehill (2018, p.13) writes

> The term transgender describes individuals whose inherent sense of their own gender doesn’t match the sex they were assigned at birth. Many transgender individuals have experienced some degree of gender dysphoria, which is an intense and persistent sense or distress or discomfort with their birth sex. The word ‘transgender’ is an adjective umbrella term that covers a wide spectrum of people.

Defining any word, not least one which pertains to an individual's gender identity is complex. Serano (2002, n.p) wrote there is no perfect way to define transgender, because there is

> No cut and dried glossary to explain the multitudes of transgender identities, bodies, or life experiences which exist in a perpetual state of debate or dispute, with individual trans people espousing differing word preferences and alternative definitions. In response to the societal stigma that permeates everything associated with trans people (including the words used to describe us), we are constantly inventing new untainted terms and/or reclaiming, redefining, or eliminating older ones.

Lastly, how this relates to or has an impact on trans people's lives and experiences is 'not uniform or universal' (Browne, Nash and Hines, 2010, p. 573).

1.2.2 Non-binary

Non-binary identities can be described as 'people who aren't fully boys or girls' (Fisher and Fisher, 2018, p.11). The term can be understood as accommodating people who identify as having a gender which is in-between the usual fixed binaries of man and woman, or as fluctuating between these two. It also includes people who feel they have no gender, either permanently or some of the time (Hines and Santos, 2018; Richards, Pierre-Bouman and Barker, 2018). Twist, Vincent, Barker and Gupta (2020, p.19) write

> 'Non-binary' is an umbrella term for anyone who doesn't currently identify with the binary notion of being exclusively male or female. 'Non-binary' can include those who conceptualise gender as a spectrum, rather than two discrete categories.

This study uses the term 'trans' to include non-binary people but wishes to acknowledge individuals may identify as one or the other, or both, and respects they are separate from each other. One exception is in chapters four, five and six, where an individual has confirmed their chosen gender identity. This research maintains the position the last word on an individual's sex/gender is always self-defined (Anderson and Travers, 2017).

1.2.3 'Everyday Sport' and 'Physical Exercise'

It is important to define the terms used in this study, 'everyday sport' and 'physical exercise' for two reasons. Firstly, the original objective of this research was to talk to individuals who were participating in sport, which was neither elite nor professional, though may still be competitive. This is because while trans people's participation and eligibility to compete in professional sports has received some research attention internationally, especially in the US and Canada (Aura, 2007; Ballantyne, Kayser and Grootegoed 2012; Buzuvis, 2012a; Cavanagah and Sykes, 2006; Donnellan, 2008; Gooren and Bunck, 2004; Reeser, 2005; Semerjian and Cohen, 2006; Sykes, 2006; Teetzel, 2006), there is less qualitative and quantitative research concerning more amateur sport. Secondly, discussions concerning elite participation only affect a few individuals: there are many more individuals participating in everyday sport and physical exercise. As Barras (2019a) notes, hostility directed at elite athletes in the media has a very real impact for inclusion for those individuals participating in everyday sport and physical exercise.

In this study, the term 'everyday sport' has been utilised as a catch-all term to define sport which is amateur, and not elite. It can be understood as the sport individuals engage with in their everyday lives and is often a highly patterned and structured set of activities. Craig and Beedie (2008, p.13) argued, 'sport does not exist other than through its active production and reproduction through people's everyday actions.' It might include for example, regular weekly attendance at a water polo club, or playing tennis with your friends every Saturday. Jennifer, Manning, Keiper and Olrich (2016, p.5) offer this definition of sport

> Sport must include play (voluntary, intrinsically motivated activity), be organised (governed by rules), include competition (outcome of a winner and loser), be comprised of skill (not chance), include physical skills (skilful and strategic use of one's body), have a broad following (beyond a local fad), and have achieved institutional stability where social institutions have rules which regulate it, stabilizing it as an important social practice.

By building on this definition this research also understands sport to be 'a usually competitive physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aims to

use, maintain or improve physical ability and skills while providing entertainment to participants, and in some cases, spectators' (Allender, Cowburn and Foster, 2006, p. 827). This is a suitable definition for this research.

Using the term 'physical exercise' rather than 'physical activity' is another important distinction in this research. The World Health Organisation (2019) describes physical exercise as being

> A subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposeful in the sense that the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the objective. This is as opposed to physical activity which includes exercise as well as other activities which involve bodily movement and are done as part of playing, working, active transportation, domestic chores and recreational activities.

Whilst the use of the term 'everyday sport' offers a kind of catch-all for the inclusion of more 'traditional' types of activities such as running, cycling, swimming or playing tennis, the use of 'physical exercise' can be extended to include more diverse activities such as yoga, roller derby or circus gymnastics, which is helpful for this study as it allows for a more diverse collection of experiences. When encouraging people to increase their activity levels for health benefits, there are a number of Public Health UK and NHS guidelines including '*Health Matters: getting every adult active everyday*' (2014) and *'Live Well'* (2018) which recommend adults in England engage with physical activity in a number of different ways, including 'swapping a long bus or car journey for walking part of the way or carrying heavy shopping.' To clarify, this type of activity is not the focus of this research, rather, it is specifically focused on the type of everyday sport and physical exercise people might do in their everyday lives, such as running, five-a-side football, roller derby or swimming. The rationale for the focus on everyday sport and physical exercise is because it is an under researched area, which carries with it the potential for creating new knowledge about trans people's lived experiences of their participation. There is also an established link between lower competitive/recreational sport participation, self-esteem and reduced levels of stress (Jewett, Kerr and Tamminen, 2019).

1.2.4 Barrier

Debates about inclusivity in sport are often framed in terms of removing barriers in both research and policies (Jones et al., 2017a; Pride Sports, 2016). In the context of sport, Crawford and Godbey (1987, p.120), defined barrier as being 'any factor which intervenes between the preference for an activity and participation in it.'

For the purposes of this study, this definition is acceptable, though it is not without some tension. According to Jones et al. (2017a) one of the main barriers trans women face are restrictions from sports organisations, often on the premise of assumed competitive advantage and fairness. As a result, sports organisations often only accommodate those individuals who conform to the gender binary, which arguably in turn 'enforce social constructions of gender, effectively excluding many transgender participants from sport' (Phipps, 2019, p. 4).

This research engages with the term barrier more broadly, using it as a way to easily capture what was at the heart of the research aims: what might be stopping trans people from participating in everyday sport and physical exercise? This allows the possibility of exploring any barriers which might exist both on and off the pitch, such as the gendered structure of changing rooms and toilets, sex-segrated teams, other users of the space and teammates, as well as individual gender identity. These can be understood in sport performance as social barriers, 'a situation of self-evaluation and the evaluation by others, regulated and influenced by emotional and cognitive factors' (Hook, Valentiner and Connelly, 2013, p. 203).

However, my feelings about the word barrier as a word to elicit the information I was looking for has changed over the course of the study, and at times I have found the word to feel restrictive and insensitive. This growing reluctance at times to use the word stems from the feeling it makes what is a complex and nuanced topic – a person's gender identity being the reason they cannot participate in sport - appear easy to resolve. I did not want to reduce a person's lived experience down to one material barrier to resolve; rather, I had hoped to better understand how a person's wider lived experience might both encounter and overcome different kinds of barriers. In this way identifying barriers could be done in multiple ways.

Whilst this study carries throughout it the theme of barriers as this formed part of the original research question during interviews, it is important to note people's perceptions of what barriers were and if they could be challenged often differed depending on three key categories: their own body; the spaces they were exercising in and the other users of that space, and their wider community. For this reason, as well as it forming the original research question, it remains an appropriate word in the context of the research.

1.2.5 Transitioning

Fisher and Fisher (2018, p.9) write, 'there isn't a single definitive answer to the question of what it is to be trans, because there is no one way to be trans.' It is also important to acknowledge there is no one homogenous shared 'trans experience', and an individual's decision, like their gender identity to transition, is personal to them.

However, in the context of this study, transitioning, whether an individual has or has not, was frequently cited as being significant for a person when discussing their experiences of participation in sport, so a definition is important here. Transition is described by Stonewall (2019, n.p.) as being

> The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Exactly what this transition involves can be as individual as the person themselves. An individual might decide to transition socially (changing one's gender presentation by wearing make-up or different clothing), legally (applying to receive a Gender Recognition Certificate, which is the document issued in the UK which shows a person has satisfied the criteria for legal recognition in the acquired gender), or medically (taking hormones or undergoing gender reassignment surgery), or all three, or none at all, and a person may often feel differently about these things at different points in their life (Pearce, Steinberg and Moon, 2019). It is also important to note Sandy Stone, a trans author and activist, questioned a society that requires trans people to medically

transition in order to be accepted (Olufemi, 2020). Trans people's experiences of transitioning are not shared, some individuals wish to conform to an essentialist view of gender. Others 'do not challenge the gender binary but rather attempt to alter their assigned location within it' (Travers, 2006, p. 434). Others, those Travers calls 'gender transformers,' 'offer a more radical stance by rejecting the binary, either entirely or in favor of a continuum' (Travers, 2006 p. 434). As Caudwell (2014, p. 401) noted

> This ontological model of transgender relies on neat binary opposites: conformers and transformers. It lacks the incompleteness that often accompanies people's lived experiences of gender.

1.2.6 Gender Presentation/Gender Identity

Gender presentation can be understood as how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, often within the context of societal expectations of that gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans, or wish to undergo any kind of medical, legal or social transition. Trans people have and continue to be subjected to 'a regularity apparatus in order to be recognised' (Riggs, 2014, p. 164), and the normative binary framework prevalent in sport and in wider society can be regarded as particularly challenging for trans people (Elling-Machartzki, 2017).

1.3 Mapping the Thesis Structure

Chapter one began with a broad overview of trans people's growing visibility and rights in medical, legal and socio-cultural contexts. This overview helped to lay the foundation for understanding how participation in sport for trans people has been shaped by these contexts, and what this means for improving participation. This is not least because of the health benefits associated with exercise and the positive impact on mental health, but also because of the continued antagonism towards trans people when their inclusion in sport is discussed, particularly in the UK media. This chapter also provided clarification of key definitions and terms and identified the principle aims of the research.

Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature relating to trans people and their participation in sport. It begins with an overview of the sociology of sport and its relevance to this study, shifting to discussions concerning gender, sport and the body, and how trans athletes have been researched. It then considers the key concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity and identifies the key theoretical debates central to this thesis.

Chapter three defends an overview of the methodology and methods used to collect the data for this study. The chapter starts by outlining the key epistemological and ontological approaches framing the thesis as a whole. Next it discusses the benefits and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research. Details of the participants and the interview process are included, and this is followed by an account of the research process and the researcher's personal narrative. The chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations taken and limitations of the research design.

Chapters four, five and six discuss the themes which were identified in the data and the implications for research in sports sociology and trans feminist theory. Chapter four discusses the theme of the sporting body; chapter five discusses the theme of sporting spaces, and chapter six discusses the theme of sporting communities. These chapters interpret and analyse the findings and discuss the key themes and contributions to theoretical debates. The thesis concludes with chapter seven, which summarises the findings of this thesis, identifies key contributions to the field and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter one identified inclusion for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise continues to be a topic which both generates discussion in academia and the media and warrants further analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to critically examine the relevant academic literature relevant to this thesis and identifies key theoretical debates central to understanding the history of trans people's participation in everyday sport and physical exercise. Related literature can also be found in chapters four, five and six of this thesis where it is discussed in connection to the interpretation of the findings.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the sociology of sport, outlining how the manufactured organisation of sport in the modern industrialised West has laid the foundation for the exclusion of those individuals who do not fit the idealised image of the preferred athlete. The chapter then moves to a more specific and detailed examination of gender, sport and body, before progressing to examine how participation for trans people in sport has been researched and what might currently be known (or not known) about trans people's participation in sport. Lastly, it discusses how the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity can be interrogated using trans feminist theory, to better understand the lived experiences of trans people in sport.

2.1 The Sociology of Sport

Sport is a central feature in many societies around the globe. The sociology of sport studies the relationship between sport and society by examining how culture influences sports, and how sport in turn often influences culture (Craig and Beedie, 2008; Giulianotti, 2016). The relationship between sports and the media, politics, economics, religion, race, gender, age, sexuality and disability has been widely researched within the sociology of sport, often with the intent to identify and challenge the ways in which sport can both reduce and reinforce social inequality for marginalised groups (Cahn, 2015; Magrath, 2017; Ratna and Samie, 2017).

There is much research in the field of sports sociology which examines the historical origins of sport and the way in which it is organised in the modern industrialised West

(Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel, 1999; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002; Tomlinson, 2007). Much of this research has provided explanations as to why modern sport became so dominated by men, often confining all other groups to subordinate roles and positions. Giulianotti (2016, p. 96) writes

> Modern sport has always been a crucial cultural domain for the construction and reproduction of dominant, heterosexual masculine identities. Sports institutions at elite and grassroots level still harbour formal and informal restrictions on the full participation of women and minorities.

The following section presents an overview of the way in which sport has been organised, which is necessary for our understanding of how participation for these minority groups has subsequently been marginalised. Discussing the ways in which the sociology of sport has studied social inequalities and lower inclusion rates for some groups begins with considering the ways in which organised sport in the modern industrialised West was created. This creation can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which saw the design of sport being drawn up by and for white middle-class men. This design was intended to perpetuate the notion of men's 'natural' superiority over women, as well as over race and class-subordinated groups of other men throughout the British Empire and her colonies (Ehrenberg, 2006).

Much of this design originated within elite male public schools in Victorian Britain where the ideals of 'sportsmanship, strength and endurance' (McDevitt, 2004, p.9) were highly valued (Hargreaves, 2000). The pupils in these schools came from the upper middle classes and were expected to become the next generation of political, military and industry leaders, whose objective was to educate others at home or abroad about the civilizing properties of sport. These civilizing properties, which can be understood as embedding (British) rules of fairness were considered to help preserve the social and moral order amongst those who were not members of the British upper middle classes (Hargreaves, 2000). This public-school athleticism (Mangan, 2001) reinforced traditional ideals of manhood and character, differentiating participants from the masses, resulting in the creation of the amateur-professional distinction which then dominated British and colonial sports for over a century (Mangan, 2001). Anderson and Travers (2017, p. 651) write

> Modern sport thus emerged in Europe and its colonies in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a male-supremacist 'civilizing' project that represented a backlash against the increasing power of middle-and upper-class white women, designed to emphasise sex difference, to socialise men into orthodox [hegemonic] masculinity, and enforce heterosexuality.

According to Giulianotti (2016), sport was also founded on the belief of sexual dimorphism and dichotomous gender differences, creating segregated competitions. To elaborate, within sport the body is a central focus, with gendered structures (such as separate male and female sport teams) and normative gendered ideologies (such as socialisation of males and females into different sports) apparent, creating a highly gendered space. A common characteristic in the history of the sociology of sport is the marginalisation of women's experiences and inclusion in sport. These characteristics reflect what Hargreaves and Anderson (2014, p.47) call 'the neglect of gender', and the ways in which sports history and sociology privilege male dominance in academic discourse.

2.1.1 The Relationship between Gender and Sport

In contrast to men's athleticism, Victorian notions of women's femininity, fragility and passivity meant many women were mostly consigned to procreation and child-rearing responsibilities, with little energy left over for other pursuits such as sport (Scraton and Flintoff, 2002). The increasing influence and popularity of medical leaders and physical educators who believed vigorous exercise carried dangers for women, resulted in either the taming down or phasing out of women's professional and recreational sports altogether, reinforcing the message that sport was the preserve of men (Scraton and Flintoff, 2002).

However, there was a shift in the interwar years (1918 – 1939), which saw a gradual change in women and girls' participation in sport, with some schools beginning to offer Physical Education (PE) for girls in the curriculum, and club-based sport for those middle-class women with more available leisure time became fashionable (Osborne and Skillen, 2014). However, these changes were less about improving women's fitness specifically than about a drive by the British government to improve the nation's

fitness overall and produce the next generation of soldiers (Osborne and Skillen, 2014).

Sporting recreation in the UK from this time onwards was considered a beneficial activity for everyone, much like it is today, for its ability to improve the health of all social classes, though the focus was still on men's participation (Scraton and Flintoff, 2002). Women's participation was merely symbolic, with little intention to imitate men or encroach on their territory (Hargreaves, 2000). It was less a question of the social inclusion of women in sport, rather, it was because sport was seen as belonging to the realm of masculinity, a space women were not permitted to enter (Osborne and Skillen, 2014). Such exclusions fuelled gender-based discrimination in school-based Physical Education and in recreational and competitive sport, sporting organisations and sports coverage. Early feminist studies (Krane, 2001; Messner, 1992; Theberge, 1997), identified this restricted access to sport was easily maintained due to the caregiving responsibilities shouldered mostly by women at this time, who had less free time than men to persue leisure activities. Thus, gendered differences in the home are reflected outside of it by the lack of women historically participating in sport, and the hidden from history trope is a familiar one within feminist observations on sport, whereby women's experiences have been largely ignored or marginalised (Hargreaves, 2000; Scraton and Flintoff, 2002).

The fight for women to gain equality in sport at national levels and in professional leagues in terms of better visibility, pay and training, remains ongoing at the time of writing. These inequalities are also reflected off the field, with fewer female than male sports commentators, pundits, coaches and managers in high-earning roles. Sport continues to be dominated by men, financially and globally, with lower representation and opportunities available to women. The 2012 London Olympics were the first to have women competing in every sport the men competed in, and many of the old divisions, such as along gender lines, continued to see women treated as inferior to men, in terms of visibility, coverage and sponsorship. Whilst the 2012 London Olympics were seen as 'the women's games' (Mansfield, Caudwell, Wheaton and Watson, 2017), female athletes continued to face barriers and constraints to participation, including the initial refusal to allow Saudi women to attend, opposition to women's boxing and the suggested policy requiring competing female boxers to wear

skirts/skorts, rather than the type of shorts their male counterparts were allowed to wear (Mansfield et al., 2017).

These examples are based on documented cases of gender discrimination and inequality in much of sport, often beginning at a young age, even before school. In the UK, young girls are not given the same encouragement or career opportunities as boys to become professional sports people from an early age, with girls often receiving less support to play sports (Pieper, 2016; Shaw and Frisby, 2006; Tibballs, 2013). This inequality follows into adulthood and professional sports, and on average, male premier league footballers in the UK receive £21.5 million more in prize money than their female equivalents. Disparities in salaries and lucrative product endorsement deals between male and female footballers and other professional athletes are considered an acceptable disparity (Sporting Intelligence, 2019), justified by the lower viewing figures generally recorded for women's sports. Whilst the UK audience for the Women's World Cup more than doubled from 5.1 million in 2011 to 12.4 million in 2015, the men's competition attracted almost four times as many viewers, with 41.7 million people watching (Macowgan, 2015). As BBC Women's 2018 Footballer of the Year Lucy Bronze said, "the men's games are at a height we can't match, but we can try" (Bronze, 2018). Whilst it can be shown there has been some shrinking of the gender pay gap in some sport, with some female professional footballers securing contracts, the male players still receive higher salaries. The gender pay gap in football is worse than in other employment sectors, such as politics or medicine (Kelner, 2017).

In this way, 'so-called "men's work" traditionally involves higher pay and greater cultural prestige than supposed "women's work"' (Channon, 2014, p. 588). As admirable as Lucy Bronze's commitment is to match the men's games, arguably what is really needed is a systematic approach to improve inclusion for women and girls in sport from a young age, one which is rewarded as richly as the men's, both financially and vocationally. Phipps (2019) makes an important connection in her research which looks at trans students' experiences of participation in university sports' Phipps (2019, p. 2) highlights the links between sports participation and mental health and employment prospects.

> A recent employability report indicates those who participate in university sport, either as participants, coaches or volunteers, are

> likely to earn more and have fewer periods of unemployment after graduating compared to their counterparts who do not participate.

For those individuals whose participation in sport (at least at university level) may be restricted due to their gender identity, this has the potential to affect their employability as well as impact on their physical and mental health over the life course (Barber and Krane, 2007; Griffiths, Bullough, Shiblis and Wilson, 2017).

2.1.2 Feminist Approaches to Gender and Sport

Progressive policy interventions for increasing participation rates in sport for women and girls have been successful, though not without criticism (Mansfield et al., 2017). The most well-known of these policies is the US initiative, Title IX, a federal civil rights law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, which bans discrimination on the basis of sex within federally funded schools, including universities. Since its inception over 45 years ago, the impact of Title IX on women's sports cannot be overstated: the numbers of girls playing high school sports has grown considerably from fewer than 300,000 in 1974 to more than 3.1 million in 2012 (US Department of Education, 2014). The UK situated *This Girl Can* campaign (2015), which was developed by Sport England in 2021, was established to address the issue that more men play sport than women over the life course, and women's participation is more likely to decline with age due to care-giving commitments elsewhere. The focus of this campaign is to narrow the participation gap, whilst encouraging women to seek out alternative and creative methods of exercising and has a commitment to showcasing non-normative bodies and promoting diversity, such as wheelchair users and Muslim participants.

For this reason, the *This Girl Can* campaign (2015) was considered ground-breaking, fresh and disruptive, and it proved successful in encouraging women and young girls to become more involved in physical exercise, no matter the activity. Since its implementation, 2.9 million women aged 14 - 60 have been more active (e.g. tried a new type of exercise or increased the amount of time spent exercising) as a result of seeing the campaign. Visibility and representation in sport have a measurable impact. However, both these campaigns have faced criticism, because whilst they can be

applauded for their attempts to improve participation rates and visibility for women and girls in sport, they are still focused on bodies not vocation, often wrapped up in the commodification of women sports, and how women look. Nike, a long-time sponsor of Title IX, has been particularly pervasive in increasing its sales by selling empowerment and health to the growing female market (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018).

Feminist scholars have contributed widely to the field of gender studies and the sociology of sport across a wide range of topics, including those previously mentioned (Cregan, 2006; Fink, 2008). Scholars have also engaged widely with discourses concerning the body and sport, most notably in terms of conceptualising and understanding gender in sociological terms, and in the politics of the body (Cooky, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2017; Roy and Caudwell, 2014; Throsby, 2013, 2015; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018). This feminist work has been instrumental in bringing to the foreground the multitude of issues many female athletes have faced when engaging with sport, particularly at elite level. It has also successfully called wider attention to gender inequity within sports, identifying how the sector remains dominated by men, with women continuing to face marginalisation and sexualisation of their sporting performance and leadership skills.

Feminist approaches to sport have also worked towards ensuring formerly excluded or marginalised groups of women are not just included, but welcomed and celebrated into sport, recognising that separate promotions such as *This Girl Can* (2015) and Title IX (2021) are necessary. These promotions are crucial for the development of the plurality of women's voices and perspectives, in helping to foster the rights and well-being of all women participating at all levels (Throsby, 2015). Mansfield et al., (2017, p.7) write

> Developments such as poststructuralism and representing the ‘Other’ (Aitchison, 2000), resistance (Shaw, 2001), diversity (Allison, 2000), confronting whiteness (Watson and Scraton, 2001), and intersectionality (McDonald, 2009; Watson and Scraton, 2013) were placed firmly, as feminist concerns, on the leisure studies agenda. It is clear that during the last three decades feminist leisure studies have developed as a substantive and robust framework for informed critical analyses.

Utilising a feminist perspective in sport began to emerge in the early 1980’s, when feminist challenges to traditional sports studies examined how gender and power

interrelate. These feminist perspectives included sports and oppression (Bryson, 1983), empowerment (Theberge, 1997), and the philosophical questioning of traditional epistemology (Coakley, 2017). Deeper critical analysis of sport by feminists has led to the development and application of now familiar concepts in sport studies such as hegemonic femininity (Krane, 2001) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). These concepts were developed to help highlight idealised gender stereotypes of both masculinity and feminity as ubiquitous within sport, and are the product of a patriarchal society which continues to value male physicality and dominance and perpetuates the subordination and exclusion of anyone viewed as 'other' (Phipps, 2019).

These idealised gender sterotypes often manifest in sport's frequent association with the corporeal differences between men and women: the image of 'large armoured men' versus 'thin women in short skirts' (Tagg, 2018, p. 410). Yi-Hsiu and Chen-Yueh (2014) argued not only that sports tends to masculinize women, for example the ways in which powerful athletes such as Serena Williams are deemed 'too aggressive', but that gender stereotypes influence sport participation. For example, the sexualised clothing and appearance of female gymnasts versus the hyper-muscular appearance of their male counterparts. This can affect individuals' decisions about whether to participate in gender 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' sports which also sees sports participation is further influenced by

> Whether the activity characteristics are considered socially acceptable for one's gender [with] women expected to display feminine behaviours while also participating in masculine activities often facing a conflicting set of roles.
>
> Yi-Hsiu and Chen-Yueh (2014, p.5)

Emphasising gender stereotypes within sport further essentialises the outwardly physical characteristics between men and women via these corporal differences. For any individual sitting outside of these gender normative stereotypes, including trans people, these can reinforce barriers which reduce inclusion (Tagg, 2012).

This research has been crucial in providing a strong foundation for scholars to analyse in detail particular areas in sport, including gender and the body (Bandya, Gorib and

Jinxiac, 2012; Caudwell, 2003; Cregan, 2006; Throsby, 2013); social justice (Long, Fletcher and Watson, 2017); gender and sexuality (Caudwell, 2006; Jarvis, 2014) and gender and race (Carrington, 1998, 2010). Most significantly for this research, they have looked towards new theoretical approaches including trans feminist theory, which contributes fresh knowledge and perspectives to the 'development, diversification and rigour of feminist approaches to gendered issues, theories and concepts in sport' (Mansfield et al., 2017, p. 7). In turn, these approaches have helped to open up discussions regarding inclusion in sport for trans people (Buzuvis, 2012a; Caudwell, 2014, 2020; Klein and Krane, 2018, 2019; Travers and Deri, 2011).

2.1.3 Inequality and Sport

Vociferous opposition in sport to certain players has not been limited to women, and other marginilised groups have also experienced discrimination, including those athletes who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual (Griffin, 1998). Homophobia and heteronormativity are central to the culture of sport, and the damaging impact this continues to have on LGBTQ+ athletes has been widely discussed (Anderson, 2016; Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; Griffin, 1998; Lenskyj, 1986), and homophobia in UK sport is still largely common (Magrath, 2017). With few heterosexual allies and the very real loss of income and endorsement if they are openly gay, many LGBTQ+ athletes and coaches have long felt compelled to keep their sexuality private, understanding how in an overwhelmingly heteronormative world, hiding their sexual orientation is often necessary for acceptance by teammates, spectators and sponsors (Griffin and Ouellett, 2003; Kauer and Rauscher, 2019; Symons, 2011). Historically, leading sporting organisations including the Women's Tennis Association and the Ladies Professional Golf Association have gone to great lengths to silence lesbian players out of fear of the social stigma associated with lesbians which would dampen or destroy support for women's sports (Griffin and Ouellett, 2003).

The institution of heterosexuality is linked to the gender binary in sport. As Butler (1990) argued, sex, gender and sexuality are performative acts which individuals constantly display through their clothing choices, mannerisms and behaviours. This means identities are fluid and everchanging. Although individuals can choose how they want to act, behave, and identify through their performative acts, they may feel

compelled to repeat performances of the heterosexual matrix of woman-feminine-heterosexual or man-masculine-heterosexual. These repeated performances lead to the taken for granted assumption that the binary concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality are stable. As discussed later in this chapter, trans feminist theory offers an opportunity to interrogate this notion of stability by disrupting dominant discourses in sport as well as the repeated performances of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

The acceptance of those who sit outside of normative depictions in sport is not limited to LGBTQ+ athletes, nor to women, and the failure of sport to accommodate everyone includes those individuals from impoverished and working class backgrounds, and many who identify as a person of colour (Abdel-Shehid and Kalman-Lamb, 2017). Sport was constructed in the image not just of masculinity, but of white masculinity (Carrington, 1998; 2010), and dominant images of Black male athleticism have historically stereotyped Black individuals as savage, aggressive and hypersexual (Ferber, 2007; Malcom, 2008). Although it can be argued the success of Black male athletes might help to undermine racism, 'sport represents an arena where Black men have historically been allowed to succeed on the field but never to hold positions of power and control, such as coaches or owners' (Ferber, 2007, p. 20).

Similarly, Black female athletes including Serena Williams have also been subject to damaging intersections between race and gender and continue to be embodied as hypersexual and denied the right to control their own bodies (Ratna and Samie, 2018). Successful Black athletes' bodies are often viewed as potentially threatening to the notion of White male superiority, in whose imagination both Black men and women have been reduced to their physical bodies (Magrath, 2017; Walker and Melton, 2015). Initiatives similar to tacking inequalities and discrimination in sport for women, such as *This Girl Can* (UK, 2015) and Title IX (US, 2021) have been developed. These include Stonewall's Rainbow Laces campaign for LGBTQ+ athletes (2021), and the anti-racist UK initiative *Kick it Out* (2021). Even so, the need for such initiatives signify how inequality for those athletes who do not conform to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2004), or gender normative ideals are positioned as 'other' in sport and frequently receive less visibility.

By drawing our attention to how those bodies positioned as non-normative within sport are frequently treated unequally by those in positions of power, the sociology of sport

and in particular feminist thinkers in this field, offers a critical site for understanding the ways in which dominant societal beliefs about bodies and the ways in which they are portrayed impact on an individual's lived experience. This is turn leads to powerful insights into the exclusion of those bodies which sit outside of the heterosexual matrix, reflected in the underrepresentation of women and gay athletes, together with the prevailing social influences which impact negatively on other individuals such as age, class, race or ability (Wellard, 2016). This means concerns about inequality in sport remain at the forefront of sociological discussions in both academic discourses and in the media (Capuzza and Spencer, 2015; Patel, 2021). The role of sports sociology, then, goes a long way in foregrounding how gender and sexuality connect to issues about how bodies are perceived in sport, and what barriers they face to inclusion. Some of these barriers to inclusion can be conceptualised as examples of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity, which the following section explores.

2.2 Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender Normativity in this Study

Sport has long claimed political neutrality and has either denied or ignored the influence and power it has in marginalising certain athletes, particularly (but not exclusively) women and LGBTQ+ athletes. Two of the ways in which sport works against greater inclusion for these groups is through the utilisation of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity, both of which permeate sports culture (Jarvie, Thornton and Mackie, 2017; Giulianotti, 2016).

Despite gradual gains by women in both professional and amateur sport globally, it is still largely organised both by and for men, particularly within the most popular sports, for example football, rugby, cricket and tennis, where masculinity is linked to 'socially sanctioned aggression and physical power' (Grindtstaff and West, 2011, p. 865). Channon (2014, p.589) wrote

> Throughout much of the sociological literature on sport, physical education, and related activities, the presence of traditional, sexist ways of doing gender have been frequently and consistently highlighted, leading some scholars to conclude that gender divisions and men's superiority are more naturalized in sport than perhaps any other institution.

These gender divisions can be seen in the ways in which some sports deemed 'feminine' such as gymnastics or ice skating are viewed as predominantly women's sports and are consequently viewed as less legitimate than men's sports and seen as socially unacceptable for (heterosexual) men to play (Messner, 2002). As previously noted, in the modern industrialised West, sport remains one of the most masculine (and sex-segregated) of social institutions. The institution of sport was originally designed along gender segregated lines as an intention to distance men and boys from both femininity and homosexuality (Mangan, 2001; McDevitt, 2004).

In English's 2017 paper on hegemonic masculinity and reconceptualising competition in sport, she recaps on a 2013 broadcast with San Francisco radio personality Damon Bruce, in which Bruce supported Miami Dolphin football player Richie Incognito's locker room bullying of fellow player Johnathan Martin. Incognito's bullying was not the problem, Bruce explained, it was because sports have become 'feminized' and 'a lot of sports has lost its way and part of the reason is that women have been giving the directions' (English, 2017, p.183). Essentially, Bruce blamed the inclusion of women and their opinions on sport for ruining what he felt to be the masculine nature of sport. Bruce went on to say 'sports are set to the dial of men. Doesn't mean men only. But that's the setting. And I'm not going to allow it to be changed' (English, 2017, p.183).

This example offers a snapshot of hegemonic masculinity in action. Hegemonic masculinity as a concept was devised by Raewyn Connell (1987) and is 'the dominant ideal form of masculinity which all boys and men organise themselves in relation to' (Barker and Scheele, 2020, p.50). Hegemonic masculinity positions the ideal man (in predominantly Western cultures), as being 'young, married, white, urban, heterosexual…with a recent record in sports' (Goffman, 1979, n.p.). Returning to the decision by World Rugby on the inclusion of trans people in rugby, there is a similar display of hegemonic masculinity at work in their policy, what Phipps (2019, p. 11) calls

> A paternalistic gender-based classification, whereby particular characteristics – such as women being small and men being big – are ascribed to each sex (when in reality not all people of that sex share those traits), perpetuating gender stereotypes. In other words, gender

> binaries may reflect hegemonic ideas about men's physical superiority over women, which is usually unquestionably accepted.

Sport, and the spaces it occupies, has traditionally been dominated by men, using hegemonic masculinity to cement its domination. This dominance is limited not only to the playing of sport itself, but also extends to gendered discrepancies in media coverage, salaries and sponsorship, and a higher representation of men off the pitch, such as coaches, pundits and managers (Jarvis, 2014). Bruce's comment that 'sports are set to the dial of men' (English, 2017, p.183), typifies how those athletes who do not fit within this narrow domain of what qualifies as being the 'right' kind of man, may frequently find themselves at best marginalised and at worst bullied, as Johnathan Martin did. Consequently, in sport, hegemonic masculinity has a strong connection not only with the types of bodies it values, but within those powerful institutions responsible for organising sport, such as the Football Association and the International Olympic Committee.

For those men who participate in the most popular and most visible sports programs, sporting ability offers great currency, both economically and culturally, and is reflected at local, regional, national, international and supranational levels (Tomlinson, 2006, 2007). This display of physical ability is powerful, dynamic and applauded (Connell, 1987), and its androcentric origins are often unquestioned, even when they are criticised. Modern sport has become one of the most mediatised, consumed and naturalising institutions for celebrating hegemonic masculinity and offers little oppportunity for change (Symons, 2011). Its power is expressed so frequently and effectively by dominant groups both men and women accept this dominance with little questioning. The power and pageantry of masculinity in sports coverage can be highly visible (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Robinett, 2017), where masculinity is produced and reproduced, sustained and maintained via the under representation, trivilisation and sexualisation of women and other minority groups such as Black, disabled and LGBTQ+ athletes (Buzuvis, 2012; Carrington, 2010). In this way, men are framed not only as separate but as superior to these minority groups (English, 2017). This superiority can be largely be attributed to hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is a socially constructed privileged form of masculinity. Whilst not necessarily the most common form, it is often the most revered form of masculinity held up as a cultural idea which all boys and men organise themselves in relation to (Connell, 1987). It is 'part of a hierarchical system in which this form of masculinity is privileged over other forms of masculinity and all forms of femininity' (Krane, 2019, p. 243). It includes having physical strength, being brave, stoic, independent, competitive and athletic (Connell, 1987). Such bodily displays in sport signal to the opponent or spectator a particular version of masculinity based on aggressiveness, competitiveness, power and assertiveness, derived from socio-cultural processes which have constructed what a sporting body should 'look like' and 'act like'. In this case, bodily practices present maleness as a performance as understood in terms of being diametrically opposed to female (Wellard, 2006). These attributes form barriers for those who do not possess them, namely women, gay men and feminine men, and frequently perpetuate homophobic, sexist, aggressive and overly competitive attitudes. Cohn and Zeichner (2006) have identified key four dimensions to hegemonic masculinity: competitiveness and dominance; emotional inexpressiveness (although anger is permitted); gender role stress (the strain of maintaining the act of masculinity); and homophobia and misogyny. In short, hegemonic masculinity is grounded in white, heterosexual, middle-class values and is a resilient system, often toxic and exclusionary, and teaches men a certain type of masculinity is the most valued in society (Jewkes, Morrell, Hearn, Lundqvist, Blackbeard, Lindegger and Filosofiska, 2015; Ravenhill and de Visser, 2017).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was formulated over three decades ago by Raewyn Connell (1987) and further examined by Connell and others (Anderson, 2016; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), and continues to influnce thinking about men, gender and social hierarchy. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the concept of hegemonic masculinity emerged 'partly in reaction to sex role theory, criticised for being static, inattentive to power differences among and between genders, and incapable of accounting for resistance and social change' (quoted in Grindtstaff and West, 2011, p. 860). Hegemonic masculinity sits at the top of other hierarchies, including complicit masculinities, subordinate masculinities and marginalised masculinities. Ravenhill and de Visser (2017) argue those men who accept their position in relation to hegemonic masculinity, and keep to the norms of

that position, will meet social expectations of manhood. Conversely, those men who seek to maintain hegemonic masculinity's standards, but find themselves unable, may feel unworthy, incomplete and inferior (Barker and Scheele, 2020).

A number of scholars have presented a challenge to hegemonic masculinity, arguing it is a a contested concept (Anderson, 2012; Anderson and McCormack, 2018). Anderson (2014) explored how jocks in the US and the UK have redefined heterosexuality, using the term 'inclusive masculinity' to desctibe how social and sporting spaces have changed to such an extent that (some) men no longer need to behave in hypermasculine ways to be accepted, and that homophobia/homohysteria is on the decline. Inclusive masculinity, like hegemonc masculinity, partially frames gender in terms of power relations, but suggests 'a shift towards a more egalitarian concept of masculinity and a less rigidly vertical notion of hierarchy' (de Bois, Örebro and Musikhögskolan 2015, p.322). Earlier criticisms of Connell's work (Donaldson, 1993) raised the question about who actually gets to represent sporting hegemonic masculinity, and Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) own rethinking of the concept suggests that hegemonic masculinity needs to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy. Simon (2010) argued that women's agency is often missing in Connell's research, creating a homosocial focus. Inclusive masculinity suggests a shift away from hegemonic masculinity dominating sport, which in turn undermines 'old values of homophobia and misogyny' (Barker and Scheele, 2020, p. 64). However, as Barker and Scheele (2020, p.64) further argue

> Other intersections like class and geographical location impact whether inclusive masculinities are available to boys and men across different contexts. Most inclusive masculinities also don't necessarily challenge gendered power dynamics and inequalities which disadvantage women.

Whilst future research could look towards other interpretations of masculinity in relation to trans people's inclusion in sport, this study uses hegemonic masculinity, whilst also acknowledging the criticisms it has faced.

There are strong similarities between the societal expectations made by hegemonic masculinity within sport and gender normativity. Gender normativity is the idea of the existence of fixed gender roles which align with, and do not change, an individual's

assigned birth sex and can be used to describe institutions, policies and beliefs which reinforce the rigid categories of male and female (Ehrenberg, 2006). Gender normativity is also the term used to describe the standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time (Ehrenberg, 2006; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). Gender normativity can relate to bodies, spaces and policies, conferring gendered assumptions about how men and women should look and act, and these assumptions are usually internalised early in life, thus establishing a life cycle of gender normative socialisation and sterotyping (Barker and Scheele, 2020). This can be seen, for example, in the way girls rather than boys are encouraged to take up dance, and boys are actively encouraged to play contact team sports, such as football or rugby (Barber and Krane, 2007). This often means adhering to or reinforcing 'ideal' standards and stereotypes of masculinity or femininity, such as 'girly girls' or 'manly men.'

Within this research, gender normativity is used to describe the strict enforcement of the cis male/female binary, and how it functions not just in relation to sporting bodies, but also to sporting spaces and communities, all of which help to reinforce the rigid categories of male and female. Celebrating gender normativity in sport continues to centre those who possess gender normative looking bodies (Wellard, 2016) and legitimises the scrutiny and policing of bodies not captured by binary thinking, such as trans athletes. Such scrutiny and policing is often justified under the pretense of ensuring a level playing field and eliminating a perceived unfair competitive advantage (Buzuvis, 2011). Gender normativity reinforces rigid binary categories of male and female in institutions, valuing those whose bodies reflect these idealised categories (Wellard, 2016). By valuing these gender normative categories and physical ideals above any other in society, those who fit into those categories become normalised and rewarded.

Gender normativity and gender binaries permeate sports cultures. This culture ensures prejudices remain against individuals who do not fit the rules of gender normativity, or choose not to, attesting to the normative narrative that only the 'right' kind of athelete 'deserves' to win. In other words, those whose physical appearance is gender normative, with no deviation from the idealised sporting body (Cornelius,

2019). For those individuals whose gender expression is not consistent with the cultural expectations of their sex, such as feminine males or masculine females, are often treated with suspicion. Like hegemonic masculinity gender normativity frequently privileges bodies which are white and western. Caster Semenya, the South African double Olympic champion has faced questions due to her 'suspicious' masculine perceived appearance about her eligibility to compete, and whether her appearance was an indication of her levels of the hormone testosterone being unfairly high. Semenya has been embroiled in a struggle with the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) since winning world 800m gold in 2009, after they revealed she had been the subject of a gender verification process that year and subsequently was declared ineligible to compete for eleven months.

A decade of rule changes and appeals followed, and in 2019 Semenya lost her appeal to Switzerland's Federal Supreme Court against the restriction of testosterone levels in female runners. Semenya is not allowed to compete in events between 400m and a mile without taking testosterone-reducing drugs, following a 2019 rule change by governing body World Athletics. In a statement following the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling Semenya was asked whether she would consider such a medical intervention. Semenya said

> Hell, no…I know that the IAAF's regulations have always targeted me specifically…for a decade the IAAF has tried to slow me down, but this has actually made me stronger…no man can tell me what to do (Dator 2019, n.p.).

In those sports settings where the cultural norms of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity continue to be restrictive and challenging for some participants, such as Caster Semenya, promoting a predominantly binary agenda upon those who do not conform to this rigid binary, the impact and consequences can be significant. As Cornelius wrote in *The Conversation* (2019, n.p.), 'my view is that some women are being singled out because they are different. If Semenya looked different, if she was a blonde bombshell or if she didn't win, we wouldn't be having this debate today.' Like many other individuals who do not conform to gender normative representations, Semenya was involved in a fight against 'a rigid and violent system of sexual essentialism that renders many bodies and lives incomprehensible, forcing conformity and/or expulsion of those deemed unruly' (Olufemi, 2019, p. 51).

Hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity are also then epistemologically significant to this study, through their connection to social constructionism and to gender performativity (Butler,1990, 2004). If both hegemonic and gender normativity value certain traits, values and ideologies, as well as embodied practices, which Connell (2005, p. 72) termed 'ongoing gender projects', then both can become unstable. Grindtstaff and West (2011, p. 863) said

> Hegemonic masculinity can vary across time and place, and it encompasses multiple intersecting dimensions: hegemonic masculinity is at once cultural representation, everyday practice, and institutional structure. This flexibility makes hegemonic masculinity potentially powerful analytically but also vulnerable to confusion, ambiguity, and inconsistencies in application.

Butler's critique of the sex/gender model has helped with analysing not only the socially constructed basis of gender, but that of sex itself. Butler (1990, p. 6), wrote

> The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.

It is important to remember Western conceptions of gender are not and have never been, universal, and gender 'has no single story' (Olufemi, 2020, p. 54). Anatomical sex (female or male) is conventionally considered to be the cause of a person's gender (femininity or masculinity), according to the cultural norms associated with gender. Challenging these ideas of a stable and coherent gender identity are being carried out not just by trans and non-binary people, or intersex people, but by any person who chooses not to conform to a conventional gender presentation, and this includes cis men and women.

Even by following those roles ascribed by hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity, a person is still performing a role that does not in fact exist, because in essence, there is no original template for 'female' or 'male: the original itself is derived. Butler (1990) argued it is performing these gender acts, which include for example

clothing, language and mannerisms, are the things which determine a person's sense of self-identity and can reinforce social norms. Butler argued it is the constant repetition of this kind of performance which moulds gender identity, so the actors themselves come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (Hines, 2019). Therefore, gender identity is not a part of a person's essence, but the repeated production and performance of actions and behaviours. Combined with the taboos imposed by society - the heterosexual matrix – these actions and behaviours manifest as either an essentially masculine or feminine gender identity.

These gender identities are most often framed as gender normative, and placed within a particular social hierarchy, such as hegemonic masculinity. In this way expressions of masculinity and femininity in sport are guided by notions of both gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity with certain identities constructed as natural in contrast to transgressive ones, such as trans people. As previously argued, those individuals who step outside of these identities are susceptible to gender violence, both personal and institutional, reinforced by the presence of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity within sport (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2018).

This section has identified that hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity are significant in this study due to their permeation in sporting culture, the damage this does to athletes considered as 'other' and their shared epistemology. In this way both concepts have the potential to form barriers to inclusion for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise. As discussed previously, actual participation for many marginalised groups including women and LGBTQ+ athletes in sport has constituted 'a form of corporeal transgression, in terms of putting their bodies in places where only white, male, able-bodied athletes were authorised or 'normally' expected to be present' Giulianotti (2016, p. 121).

This corporeal transgression is experienced particularly by trans people. Chapter one argued there is currently a great deal of manufactured antagonism from the gender critical feminist movement in the UK towards trans people's inclusion in sport. Whilst neither hegemonic masculinity nor gender normativity should be intended as a catch all or prime cause for trans people's lower participation levels in sport, these concepts can also identify potential alliances with other communities, especially those who believe their own participation is being erased. This is because hegemonic masculinity

and gender normativity are harmful to many women and girls, as they work together to undervalue their presence in sport. The existence of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in the wider social institutions and practices, including the media and advertising, religion and education, are particularly influential in how their cultural ideals exert institutional power (English, 2017; Sullivan, 2011).

Historically, hegemonic masculinity has helped to sustain and maintain heteronormative mainstream sport climates and cultures, which are strengthened and reinforced by gender normativity (Aitchison, 2007). Gender normativity in sport often leaves no room for those people who do not conform to these mainstream categories, as gender normativity is a largely accepted part of culture generally, making it difficult to disrupt. For trans people, gender normativity can be experienced as a daily oppression, and, within the context of sport, gender normative practices continue to centre those who possess the 'right' body, legitimising the scrutiny and policing of bodies not captured by binary thinking, normally under the pretense of ensuring a level playing field and eliminating the assumption of an unfair competitive advantage (Buzuvis, 2011).

Both hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity often subjects (other) athletes to discrimination and emotional harm, by placing them in positions of lower power, or even powerlessness (Gleaves and Lehrbach, 2016). As this study is concerned with those athletes considered 'other' in everyday sport and physical exercise, the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity form harmful barriers to their participation is examined in order to identify ways in which they can be challenged. The following section looks at the relevant literature regarding the participation of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK, and how their presence raises both easily solvable yet sometimes difficult narratives which can challenge and subvert hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport.

2.3 Trans People in Sport

There exists within the social sciences a broad range of both qualitative and quantitative research about trans people's participation in sport, though earlier research features little if any examples of non-binary people. Much of this research has a focus on the hypothetical trans athlete competing at elite level (Aura, 2007;

Buzuvis, 2011, 2012a; Cavanagh and Sykes, 2006; Donnellan, 2008; Gooren and Bunck, 2004; Kayse and Grootegoed, 2011; Reeser, 2005; Semerjian and Cohen, 2006; Sullivan, 2011; Teetzel, 2006). Despite these papers being largely supportive of inclusion for trans people in sport in principle from a social justice perspective, their emphasis centres on the eligibility of trans athletes to compete because they may possess an unfair competitive advantage due to immutable physiology (for trans women) and the taking of testosterone (for trans men).

This body of research has contributed to the tone of much of the research which subsequently followed, being the perpetual scrutiny of the trans body within these discussions. Another predominate feature in these papers is the ways in which they foreground the variety of barriers and challenges faced by trans athletes in their pursuit of participation in sport (Lucas-Carr and Krane, 2011).

Cavanagh and Sykes (2006, p.77) said

> Transsexuals and intersexed athletes—the groups most often subject to discrimination and disqualification—have always confounded a static and unchanging two sex model based on biology, and so their gendered subjectivities were erased (Namaste, 2000) and/or largely ignored in competitive sport prior to the 21st century.

In January 2015 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued new guidelines allowing trans athletes to compete in the Olympics and other international events without undergoing gender reassignment surgery. Under the previous IOC guidelines, published in 2004 and known as the Stockholm Consensus (International Olympic Committee, 2004), athletes who transitioned from male to female or vice versa were required to have gender reassignment surgery followed by at least two years of hormone therapy in order to be eligible to compete. Under the updated 2015 guidelines, this surgery was no longer required, with trans male athletes eligible to take part in men’s competitions without restriction. Meanwhile, trans women athletes needed to demonstrate their testosterone level has been below a certain cut-off point for at least one year before their first competition. The declaration of identifying as either male or female cannot be changed, for sporting purposes, for a minimum of four years.

What the updated 2015 guidelines drew attention to for the first time in the history of the Olympics was that gender verification testing was no longer a requirement for proving an athlete was eligible to compete as their preferred gender identity. This is a significant development, because gender verification (formerly known as sex verification, which involved a visual examination of an athlete's naked body) has a long and complex history within the IOC, because the rationale for gender verification has always been justified as a legitimate means and measure for qualification, essentially to identify any male athlete who may be identifying as a woman in order to win. As noted earlier for Caster Semenya, the decision by the IOC to drop gender verification testing had no impact on the IAAF's conduct. Because Caster Semenya's was perceived as 'suspicious' (meaning 'male') by the IAAF, they felt such vigorous policing of Semenya's gender was justified in the spirit of fairness in sport and identifying any competitive advantage. Semenya was clearly presenting a challenge to the IAAF's self-concept of what counts as gender normativity when faced with an individual who challenged white, western ideals of gender normativity.

A common agreement amongst these early papers is that, when considering the presence of competitive advantage in trans athletes, the results were arbitrary, rendering competition in sport intrinsically a matter of how nature endows individuals in the first instance. The difficulty of establishing fair and equitable policies for all athletes is explored in other research (Ballantyne et al., 2012; Gooren and Bunck, 2004; Patel, 2021; Reeser, 2005), and supports Teetzel's (2006) endocrinological position that trans women athletes are unlikely to possess any identifiable competitive advantages over their fellow competitors. Rather, participation in sport is a human right, and as Ballantyne et al., (2012, p. 616) write, 'societal appreciation of sex and gender issues in highly competitive sport requires further discussion, and the authenticity of an adult individual's sex and gender identity should not be questioned.' Gleaves and Lehrbach (2016, p. 315) write

> The move away from using reproductive organs or chromosomes to test was linked to scientific evidence which show that 'nature' is a lot messier than we think. There is no neat and clear distinction between 'male' and 'female' – and no way of 'measuring' or 'testing' sex based on reproductive organs or chromosomes alone. There are much greater variations of sex chromosomes than simply XX and XY, and chromosomes themselves also do not have a direct impact on the

> body's physical characteristics - they only do when combined with certain hormones.

The IOC's (2016) updated policy on the regulations for trans athletes to compete in the Olympics triggered a fresh wave of public interest, particularly in the media which had a strong focus on trans women athletes. This media interest has shown little sign of slowing down and has in fact increased over the last six years (de la Cretaz, 2021). In the UK, opposition to trans women being included in sport is especially antagonistic from the gender critical feminism movement, who claim the retention of testosterone-producing genitalia (even if hormones have been taken to suppress their testosterone below 10 nanomoles) still confers a competitive edge over cis women athletes (*Fair Play for Women*, 2021, n.p.).

Reasons for this opposition from the gender critical feminist movement include claims the integrity of women and girls' sport will be compromised, with unscrupulous individuals identifying as female simply to win an event, and that the strides women have made in sport will be erased. High profile former athletes including Martina Navratilova and Sharron Davies have publicly called trans women 'cheats' and argue they should not be allowed to compete until clearer regulations are in place (Barras, 2019; Gilligan, 2019). More recent articles (Love, 2017; Patel, 2021; Phipps, 2019) argue the importance of sport as both a human right and the necessity of a healthy lifestyle for trans people generally. This is because the health of trans people is a major equity issue worldwide, with trans people experiencing poorer health outcomes than cis people (Marino, 2012; Martinez-San and Tobias, 2016).

Although there have been individual cases of trans women athletes fighting for the right to compete as their identified gender, notably Renée Richards, Fallon Fox and Veronica Ivy, trans women athletes competing openly at an elite level is still uncommon. Even so, the gender critical feminist position seen in the media frequently fails to take into consideration trans people's lived experiences of participation in sport. Instead, what is overlooked are the effects of a lifetime of hormone injections, the direct health implications of possible surgery, and other treatments and side-effects of transition, none of which 'can be trivialised as being a price people would willingly pay in an attempt to gain a competitive advantage in sports' (McArdle, 2008, p. 53).

Without evidence that there is a certain level of testosterone which provides a competitive advantage, excluding an individual based on speculation, especially one which requires surgical intervention, is discriminatory. In May 2016, the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports (2016), which manages the country's antidoping program and recommends ethics standards, issued trans-related guidelines for all Canadian sports organisations. The statement says policies which regulate eligibility, like those related to hormones, should be backed by defensible science. The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports said there is 'simply not the evidence to suggest whether, or to what degree, hormone levels consistently confer competitive advantage' (Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports, 2016, n.p.). At the time of writing Dr Gemma Witcomb at Loughborough University and Professor Yannis Pitsiladis at the University of Brighton were conducting separate longitudinal studies which consider what physiological legacy the post-transitioned body possesses in sport, and if there is a definitive answer on competitive advantage, with the aim of determining the fairest way of integrating trans athletes into elite sport.

Although this thesis is concerned with the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, and is written from a sociological perspective and not an endocrinological one, it is not immune to how 'the inclusion of non-conforming individuals such as intersex and transgender athletes, has triggered a global debate mostly framed around science and athletic advantage' (Patel, 2021, p.1). Whilst this chapter has previously considered the relevant literature around trans people's participation in elite sport, this has been in order to inform the broader context of their lived experiences in everyday sport and physical exercise, in turn helping to identify the research gap. The integrity of any research should reflect its willingness to engage with broader literature, and due to the continued public interest in this topic – and at times its controversial nature - it is important to offer a perspective on what this literature discusses.

The growing public interest in this research topic means that the academic literature in this area is rapidly expanding, and there has been a recent flurry of publications from the scientific and sports medicine community. One of the arguments for the exclusion of trans women from elite female sport is that individuals assigned male at

birth benefit from the androgenising effects of male puberty (Hilton and Lundberg, 2021). Such arguments are in the main concerned with the inclusion (and exclusion) of trans women in elite sport and the subject of competitive advantage, fairness and safety. As these themes are later discussed in chapter four, it is important for this research to give some consideration to the position which some of the more recent literature might bring to the broader sociological discussions within this thesis.

Hamilton, Lima, Barrett et al.'s (2021a) paper on integrating trans women and female athletes with differences of sex development (DSD) into elite competition is one of these few recent studies which addresses the question of trans women athletes (and those cis women with DSD) possessing an unfair competitive advantage over other cis women athletes in sport. The authors' position is scientifically informed and they use the International Federation of Sports Medicine (FIMS) consensus on 'integrating DSD women and transwomen athletes into elite female sport based on identifying, selecting, and critically appraising the very limited relevant primary research' (Hamilton et al., 2021a, p. 3). Hamilton et al.'s paper outlines how the current levels of testosterone considered acceptable for trans women and female elite athletes with DSD is a justifiable threshold based on the best available scientific evidence, which has been the approach adopted by the International Olympic Committee and The International Federation of Sports Medicine and is used to assess the eligibility of trans women in elite competition.

As Hamilton et al. (2021a) note, the use of serum testosterone concentrations to regulate the inclusion of such athletes into the elite female category 'is currently the objective biomarker that is supported by most available scientific literature, but it has limitations due to the lack of sports performance data before, during or after testosterone suppression' (2021, p.1). Nonetheless, the paper acknowledges that serum testosterone concentrations being considered as the primary biomarker to regulate the inclusion of athletes into the female category 'has limitations due to the lack of sports performance data before, during or after testosterone suppression.' The authors note that these limitations need clarification before unreservedly adopting testosterone concentration, or any biomarkers, to define "athletic gender", and that the 'eligibility of each athlete to a sport-specific policy needs to be based on peer-reviewed scientific evidence made available to policymakers from all scientific communities'

(Hamilton et al., 2021a, p. 1). The paper's three key findings are that the current testosterone concentration limits are a justifiable threshold based on the best available scientific evidence; that there is a distinct lack of sports performance data to inform and update sports policy for DSD women and transwomen athletes, and recommends that the fair integration or exclusion of transwomen and DSD women athletes 'needs to be based on peer-reviewed experimental sporting performance evidence when such evidence becomes available' (Hamilton et al., 2021, p.1). In summary, this paper is clear that whatever the solution, there is an urgent need for a well-coordinated multidisciplinary international research program, backed by appropriate research grant funding and athlete participation, to generate the evidence to inform future objective policy decisions. Comparing the physiology and athletic ability of trans women who take hormones to cis men, and the lack of longitudinal studies makes this discussion problematic. This is because they are not an accurate representation of the trans athletes who are competing at elite level.

Hilton and Lundberg's 2020 paper on trans women in the female category of sport, offers an alternative perspective on testosterone suppression and performance advantage. They argue that the muscle mass and strength 'conferred by male puberty and thus enjoyed by most transgender women is only minimally reduced when testosterone is suppressed as per current sporting guidelines for transgender athletes' (Hilton and Lundberg, 2020, p.199). The authors findings are not drawn from any direct sport-specific studies of transgender athletes, but with cisgender athletes, and they propose that 12 months of testosterone suppression is insufficient to mitigate their concerns about safety, arguing that the inclusion of trans women in the female category of sports would compromise 'the objective of fair and safe competition' (Hilton and Lundberg, 2020, p.199). The authors concluded that the data they have used (with cis gender athletes) with which to formulate their argument, 'overwhelmingly confirms that testosterone driven puberty…underpins sporting advantages that are so large no female could reasonably hope to succeed without sex segregation in most sporting competitions (Hilton and Lundberg, 2020, p.204), and frame their argument around concerns of safety and fairness.

As both this chapter and chapter one has previously highlighted, what constitutes fairness in sport is difficult to establish, and the issue of safety has become

synonymous with trans women playing alongside or against cis women. in the discussions concerning inclusion for trans women, frequently set in opposition to cis women and their safety. The World Rugby report (2020) positions trans women and some non-binary people as a threat to their teammates' safety, but it is important to note that in the UK there are 37,000 registered cis women playing rugby, and only two registered trans women (figures from England Rugby). There have been no documented cases of cis players receiving injuries from trans players, and whilst 'safety in sport is of great importance and exclusion based on safety is a justifiable cause, exclusion needs to be evidenced-based and include some consideration of transwomen athletic performance metrics' (Hamilton et al., 2021a, p. 10). This thesis acknowledges that there are both contact sports (such as rugby) and non-contact sports (such as archery), which might need different consideration from each other due to the interaction of the players (Hamilton, Guppy, Barrett, Seal and Pitsiladis, 2021b). However, to centre any ban on a single arbitrary marker such as male puberty, as World Rugby have done, fails to consider that there remains no clear evidence that trans women who have gone through male puberty possess an automatic advantage (Karkazis, 2019).

Collating data with which to construct an argument which advocates for the questioning of trans women in sport data does need to be relevant and include trans athletes. From a trans feminist perspective, to not consider the lived experience of the trans athletes this research considers, it decentres their agency and fails to attend to their reality. By only considering cis men and women in their paper, Hilton and Lundberg (2021) can only infer what it might mean to include trans women in sport. This inference is 'perpetuated by the cisgender population and their incessant need to gender every person they see as either female or male' (Serrano, 2007, p. 177). Discussions about inclusion need to take into consideration trans people's lived experiences and how these relate to their engagement with participating in sport, which is what a trans feminist theoretical perspective advocates for. This is especially important when sport remains full of major barriers for many athletes, not just trans athletes, particularly those athletes faced with a system which is structured with a continued reliance on gender binaries (Phipps, 2019). From a trans feminist

perspective, research which considers trans bodies should at the very least see those bodies centred epistemologically in the work *(*Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010, p.56).

Harper, O'Donnell, Sorouri et al. (2021) have also contributed to the growing field of research which examines how hormone transition in trans women changes body composition, muscle strength and haemoglobin and the implications this might have for participation in elite sport. The authors systematically reviewed the literature from 24 studies and concluded that overall, the findings demonstrated a reduction in these parameters, but that 'the time course of these reductions was not consistent across the parameters assessed' (Harper et al., 2021, p.6). The authors also concluded that 'these findings suggest that [muscle] strength may be well preserved in transwomen during the first 3 years of hormone therapy (Harper et al., 2021, p.1). However, as with Hilton and Lundberg's (2020) and Hamilton et al.'s (2021a) papers, Harper et al.'s findings do not draw on data from any sports-specific studies with trans athletes. By not drawing on data from trans athletes, Harper et al.'s (2021) findings cannot tell the whole story of what it means to be an elite trans woman athlete competing at elite level against cis women athletes. Harper et al.'s (2021) paper acknowledges that the performance-related differences between trans women who have received gender affirming hormone treatment and cis women are less clear. They conclude that 'to date, there have been no prospective studies investigating the changes in athletic performance in transgender athletes after hormonal transition' (Harper et al, 2021, p. 1). In addition, 'the levels of physical activity of the trans women compared with cis women in the study were not reported' (Harper et al., 2021. p. 7).

Whilst Harper et al.'s paper (2021) acknowledges this absence of engaging with trans women athletes in their research as a major limitation, it does look to a recent study by Roberts, Smalley and Ahrendt (2020) which did recruit trans people, though again, not elite athletes. This study was an examination of the effect of gender affirming hormones on athletic performance in trans women and trans men, in which the authors 'reviewed fitness test results and medical records of 29 transmen and 46 transwomen who started gender affirming hormones while in the United States Air Force. This was a retrospective review of medical records and fitness tests results from 222 self-identified military personnel who filed a request to begin gender transition or continue testosterone or oestrogen while serving in the United States Air Force. The rationale for this research and this study group was because whilst these individuals are not

elite athletes, enlisted servicemembers engage in regular group exercise and are expected to meet a high level of fitness for which they are regularly tested. The authors concluded 'that more than 12 months of testosterone suppression may be needed to ensure that transgender women do not have an unfair competitive advantage when participating in elite level athletic competition' (Roberts, Smalley and Ahrendt, 2020, p.6).

Like the four previous papers cited here (Hamilton et al., 2021a, 2021b; Harper et al., 2021; Hilton and Lundberg, 2021;) these findings have implications for sporting organisations and legislators. It is important to remember that in all cases, whilst the data is meaningful, the effects of hormone therapy on all the parameters considered and indeed the athletic performance of trans people who engage in training and competition, remain unknown. As Hilton and Lundberg (2021, p. 211) note, 'there is certainly a need for more focused research on this topic, including more comprehensive performance tests in transgender women athletes and studies on training capacity of transgender women undergoing hormone therapy.'

As this chapter has highlighted, fairness is essential to sport at every level, but the weaponization of the term "fairness" has often been used to preserve sports for those already privileged to enjoy them (Donnelly and Kidd, 2020). Before returning to the sociological perspective of this thesis it is worth considering Mumford's (2021) more philosophical approach on the matter of competitive advantage. Mumford notes how sport is segregated by gender in order to address the assumption that in almost all cases men will outperform women. This is because of the concern that

> Whether some entrants properly count as women can be understood in this context. If a particular athlete is not 'really' or 'fully' a woman, then they might benefit from an unfair advantage' Mumford (2021, p.123).

Mumford offers the view that whether it is natural or inevitable that men outperform women should be questioned, because 'overall men's sport has had a huge head start over women' (Mumford, 2021, p.124). This head start includes, as this chapter has

already highlighted, financial investment, more encouragement to boys to participate from a young age, more media focus on men's sports than women's, more inclusion at both grassroots and elite level and higher salaries. To reiterate, the fact that there is no equivalent *This Girl Can* or Title IX initiatives for men underpins the perpetual inequalities between men's and women's sports. These inequalities are not, and never have been, the fault of trans women's inclusion in sport, but instead are symptomatic of a patriarchal power structure.

Mumford uses world champion cyclist Veronica Ivy as an example of the ways in which as a trans woman, concerns about her physical stature (like Caster Semenya) are a clear and visible representation of her possessing a competitive advantage 'even though there is no demonstration that anything about her bodily characteristics advantages her performance' (Mumford, 2021, p.129). That is, being tall, as Veronica Ivy is, is not considered an advantage in cycling, and so perhaps 'the biggest risk a transgender athlete runs is being too successful, in that success is the point at which one's eligibility is most likely to be called into question. The perceived violation is again where gender norms are subverted' (Mumford, 2021, p. 129). As Mumford argues, the public rationale for excluding trans women from sport is so that cis women can be guaranteed both a safe and fair sporting chance, itself a rationale which is 'a manifestation of patriarchal power…its power rests in the premise that women's sport is meant to be weaker than men's' (Mumford, 2021, p. 129).

As previously noted in this thesis, this gender binary has often meant that 'sports have reflected social inequalities, particularly in relation to gender where women have throughout history been viewed as subordinate to men' (Cleland, Cashmore and Dixon, 2021. p.1), and Patel (2021) argues that this gender segregation only reinforces the belief that all men have significant physiological advantages over all women. This has resulted in what she terms a regulatory riddle. That is, how to 'determine sex for the purpose of sport and include individuals who do not meet the strict criteria to be eligible to compete in the binary female category, whilst at the same time protecting the rights of athletes and ensuring non-discrimination in sport' (Patel, 2021, p.3). Whether or not to include or exclude athletes based on these physiological advantages (whether they exist or not) is justified by enforcing this biological division, which only goes to further disadvantage those female athletes whose exceptional sporting ability is deemed suspicious, and thus too masculine and consequently too good. As this

thesis has already identified, this been the case with Caster Semenya, and in July 2021, two cis women sprinters from Namibia, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi, were banned from running in the Olympic 400-meter dash because they have a natural high testosterone level. These examples all reflect, as Hamad wrote in 2019 'how easy it is to undermine women, in particularly racialized women, by shifting the goalposts and requirements for entry into womanhood' (Hamad, 2019, n.p.).

Engaging with science and the need for more research in this area is not an unreasonable endeavour but conflating this engagement under a hypothetical concern for safety to cis women athletes is problematic. It must be evidence based, rather than centred around hypothetical scenarios, such as the World Rugby report. What also needs to be carefully monitored is using science as an infallible tool with which to exclude trans people from sport, when what is still lacking in this field is a measured and reliable amount of sports performance data to inform and update sports policies for trans women (and DSD) athletes. This is because 'the fair integration or exclusion of transwomen and DSD women athletes needs to be based on peer-reviewed experimental sporting performance evidence when such evidence becomes available' (Hamilton et al., 2021a, p. 1). As highlighted earlier in this chapter, what constitutes fairness in sport glosses over the many other socio-economic factors 'that advantage some athletes over others and some teams and countries over others (Donnelly and Kidd, 2020). Patel's 2021 paper examines the regulatory gaps in the protection of athletes' gender rights in sport, observing that there is significantly less discussion in the context of human rights and law when trans athletes are concerned. Patel (2021, p. 1) writes

> The regulation of human rights in sport is increasingly being scrutinised and at the same time, the societal parameters of sex and gender identity are shifting. Together, these current developments present a regulatory riddle when determining how to balance the interests of sport with the protection of non-conforming athletes' rights, who may not strictly fit into the binary categories of sport.

This thesis acknowledges that it possible to advocate for the right of trans women to compete in sports, and for cis women to have the right to compete in a protected category. It is therefore crucial that policies and regulations which determine the

inclusion (or exclusion) of trans athletes 'should be free of any social and/or religious prejudice, bias, or discrimination and should be based on the best available scientific evidence from the best available scientific practice and the decisions made will also require a firm political resolve to fairly integrate transwomen and DSD women athletes into elite female sport' (Hamilton et al., 2021a, p.11). These papers have highlighted that the current physiological data are insufficient to adequately inform policy and result from both a distinct lack of research funding and a limited number of elite athletes available to participate in this research area. As noted earlier in this chapter, trans feminism is instrumental in questioning the emphasis on 'anatomy as a criterion for social organisation' (Enke, 2012, p.14). This criterion is rooted in the androcentric privileging of sport, hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity, and a reluctance to accommodate bodies which are situated outside of binary thinking (Hines and Santos, 2018). In other words, it is impossible 'to divide understandings of biology from the social context (sport) in which this knowledge was produced, interpreted, labelled and practically applied' (Krane, 2019, p. 203). A trans feminist perspective questions the reinforcement of these understandings and acknowledges that trans athletes face discrimination when gender normative stereotypes and assumptions are upheld. In addition, trans feminism looks to actively push back against this reluctance and advocates for a rethinking of more inclusive ways and approaches when both conducting research and considering trans people's inclusion in sport.

As Donnelly and Kidd (2020, n.p.) write, 'while there is a significant difference between the best performances by men as a group and women as a group in the measurable sports, those averages do not mean that every male competitor enjoys such advantage.' Abilities and performances overlap tremendously and are influenced by social and cultural factors in addition to physical characteristics. Trans women in elite level sport are still exceedingly rare 'and the available indirect evidence is the only existing avenue of evaluation presenting itself to IFs until such direct evidence becomes available (Hamilton et al., 2021b, p.9). As chapter four will discuss, women's sports are in a position to be inclusive. In this way, the inclusion of trans women in sport could be considered to be not a threat to cis women, but to patriarchal norms of gender (Mumford, 2021).

Visibly absent from discussions regarding competitive advantage and inclusion in sport, in the media and from the gender critical feminist movement, are trans men, though the field continues to grow in academic work (Caudwell, 2014; Elling-Machartzki, 2015; Farber, 2017; Phipps, 2019). This failure to acknowledge their presence in sport renders them invisible and implies they are insignificant, and this lack of consideration dismisses the reality of their successes, of which there are many examples, including Chris Mosier, a US elite level triathlete, and professional boxer Patricio Manuel. Mosier made Team USA in 2015 and was placed third in his age group in sprint triathlon at the Draft Legal Triathlon World Championship Qualifier race in 2016. In the same year, Mosier earned All-American honors in duathlon and in 2019 he made his sixth Team USA appearance. In 2020 Mosier became the first openly trans male athlete to ever compete in an Olympic trial alongside cis men; however, he was unable to finish the race due to injury. Manuel is the first trans male boxer in the history of the United States to have a professional fight, and in December 2018 Manuel defeated Mexican super-featherweight Hugo Aguilarand in California. It could be argued these successes undermine an assumption that women are inherently weaker than men, and trans men can never be as good as cis men in sport, when the achievements of professionals such as Mosier and Manuel offer clear examples of them performing better (Barras, 2019b). Both examples also highlight the instability and complexity of hegemonic masculinity in sport, which is clearly challenged by the inclusion of these individuals and calls into question the conflation of competitive advantage with male physiology.

Competitive advantage, then, is only partially based on physicality, with other factors just as likely to create an uneven field for competition. Reeser (2005) wrote environmental, cultural and socio-economic factors also make a difference to performance. All athletes bring their own advantages and privileges to the field, whether this is the athlete who is financially comfortable enough to prioritise training over working, or the athlete who modifies their body through laser eye surgery or better nutrition (Reeser, 2005). Often these privileges are accepted as ‘natural’, much like the male physique being perceived to have the best ‘natural’ advantage in sport, thanks to the value hegemonic masculinity places on the male athlete. Being born male is not synonymous with possessing an innate competitive advantage in sport when considering fairness and equity, and there is a backdrop of varying and diverse

differences among all competitive athletes (Cornelius, 2019; Reeser, 2005). Olympic athletes are themselves exceptional individuals, who transcend everyday conceptions of gender and exhibit physiques which cannot be easily seen as 'natural' (Reeser, 2005).

The myth of the level playing field and 'fairness' in sport receives much attention in the literature (Buzuvis, 2011; Travers and Deri, 2011). The notion of 'fairness' is one of the most common questions raised in regard to the inclusion of trans athletes in sport in research. According to Sheridan (2003, p. 163), fair play is 'generally understood to be important in sport and in life yet it is not clear what precisely it refers to, why it is valued, what ethical principles, if any, it is grounded upon and what kinds of good it involves.' As such the notion of 'fair play' is a fundamentally complex issue in sport (Sheridan, 2003), and there is no universally agreed upon definition which can place all humans into the traditional binary to guarantee this interpretation of fairness. As such, the question of competitive advantage continues to be a controversial topic (Hamilton et al., 2021a; Harper et al., 2021; Hilton and Lundberg, 2020; Patel, 2021). Nonetheless, quantitative, scientific data remain the gold standard by which fairness and athletic performance is measured and judged, derived from 'socio-cultural processes that have constructed what a sporting body should 'look like' and 'act like' (Wellard, 2016, p. 3). Inclusion for trans people and others who do not meet gender normative representations remain perpetually suspended somewhere in the middle of discussions about competitive advantage and 'fairness'.

A number of important small-scale qualitative studies have made progress in moving along discussions about competitive advantage and fairness when considering participation in sport and exercise for trans people (Caudwell, 2014, 2020; Elling-Machartk, 2014; Farber, 2017; Gleaves and Lehrbach, 2016; Hargie, Mitchell and Somerville, 2017; Jones et al., 2017a, 2017b; 2018; Lucas-Carr and Krane, 2012; Morris and Van Raalte, 2016; Tagg, 2012, 2018; Travers and Deri, 2011). Situated mainly in queer/feminist theory, these studies have been preoccupied with how trans individuals experience and express their gender identities in specific sporting contexts such as lesbian softball leagues, netball, swimming school and university sport, physical activity at different stages of transition, encounters with obstacles to participation in sport and physical activity, and the impact these obstacles have.

Most importantly, the content of this literature offers a more nuanced perspective of what inclusion in sport for trans people means for them personally, rather than what is assumed about their participation, helping to move the discussion away from the focus on earlier research, which focused on the question of trans women retaining any competitive advantage at elite level. For example, in their research on trans players in men's netball in New Zealand, Tagg (2012) rather than debating 'the ideological constructions surrounding the discussions of fairness of trans athletes' entrance to women's sport (Tagg, 2012, p.3), instead brought attention to the idea that trans athletes do not constitute a uniform group, and that inclusion in (women's) netball relies on passing as a cis woman, with no room for disrupting the gender segregated nature of netball.

Tagg engaged personally with participants in order to best understand their own lived experiences of playing netball, an approach used by other studies which wish to capture more personal themes. Understanding these emerging issues surrounding trans people's participation in sport more broadly have helped to establish a similar focus for this thesis, which is concerned less with scientific 'facts' about competitive advantage and testosterone. Rather, this research is interested in how ordinary (trans) people make sense of these discussions and how they shape their own lived experiences of participation in sport.

This research is fundamental for examining themes around stigma and discrimination, and how these may create health inequalities and barriers and reduced participation for trans people. Within this research, the importance of best practice, social justice and the centring of the personal accounts and lived experiences of trans people in sport are becoming more prevalent, with the aim of providing practical and helpful suggestions for creating inclusive environments across sport, on and off the field.

In addition to this research, examining policy documents in relation to trans people's experiences in sport is a useful exercise, as it can often offer a snapshot of more localised barriers, actions, voices and experiences for comparison, most often at amateur level (Come out to Play, 2010; Leap Sports, 2020; Out for Sport, 2011; Pride Sport England, 2016). These documents frequently prioritise localised needs and specific target groups, often in marginalised communities, and can offer good recommendations for improving inclusivity for trans people, in response to a real need

for change, and as identified by those working in the sports industry. However, these documents often subsume trans people's issues and experiences within a single LGBTQ+ collective. As Caudwell (2014, p.398) wrote, 'it cannot be taken for granted that a coherent LGBTQ+ collective exists, and that 'transgender' is not a fixed, definable and agreed upon category.' Lucas-Carr and Krane (2011) and Love (2017) also call into question the issue of grouping trans athletes together with others under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. They argue whilst there are some common experiences among LGBTQ+ individuals, such as discrimination and stereotyping, issues surrounding gender identity differ from those related to sexual orientation, such as transitioning and hormone usage. Because of this, within a shared sporting environment, such things need a more sensitive approach if barriers are to be reduced. This research is important then, for the way in which it places the voices and lived experiences of trans people centrally when addressing these gaps.

Sport is frequently used as a vehicle for positive change (Symons, 2011), and further research recognises the importance of privileging and documenting trans people's lived experiences and emphasises how such narratives raise significant questions in relation to their lived experiences in sport and physical exercise. Much of the existing research has made recommendations for ways in which local level LGBTQ+ and mainstream sports clubs can become more inclusive for trans members. However, certain spaces, even when labelled as LGBTQ+ friendly, are often still sites for the marginalisation of trans individuals in sporting contexts, creating barriers (Phipps, 2019). This has been explored for example in Phipps's 2019 research on the barriers trans people face to participation in university sport, and in Caudwell's 2014 paper examining the gendered subjectivities of two young trans men and their inclusion in sport. Both concluded that by 'clustering together under the umbrella term LGBT [in sporting contexts]' (Caudwell, 2014, p. 401), remains problematic for trans people, whose experiences of gender are not always synonymous with the experiences of those in the LGB sporting community.

2.4 Exploring Queer and Trans Feminist Theory in this Study

This section starts by examining what role queer theory has played in sport. It then moves on to looking at what contribution queer theory has made to understanding the

experiences of trans people in sport. It then examines how trans feminism both builds on and advances queer theory's contributions, whilst acknowledging the limitations of both theories.

As previously discussed in this chapter, feminist theoretical perspectives have been instrumental in revealing how discrimination in sport for women is an ongoing concern, with particular issues often centred on inequalities in pay, gender segregation, sexism, sexualisation, essentialism and harassment, and how these feminist perspectives have also contributed to implementing positive initiatives (Deem, 1990). Feminist theoretical approaches to gender in sport, then, have been key for helping scholars to better understand the current sporting climate, and have helped raise awareness about how other minority groups in sport have been discriminated against. These discriminations can often be understood as being rooted in the ways in which hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity permeate sports culture, often at the expense of those individuals who do not meet a socially constructed criterion. Feminist theoretical perspectives have also helped to foreground, in particular, how issues about gender discrimination in sport can be extended to include trans people as well.

When discussing trans people's participation in everyday sport and physical exercise, some scholars have looked towards queer and trans feminist theory to better understand how trans people's lived experiences relate to their engagement with participating in sport, and how inclusion might be improved for this minority group (Caudwell, 2020; Elling-Machartzki, 2017; Eng, 2006; Farber, 2017). Queer theory's origins reside in post-structuralist critical theory and it is considered a hybrid of feminism and post-modern thought (Wilchins, 2004). It emerged in the late 1990's out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies and includes both queer readings of texts and the theorisation of queerness itself. Queer theory builds upon feminist challenges to the idea that gender is part of the essential self, and upon gay/lesbian studies' close examination of the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2005).

In research deemed queer, the methods and methodology used 'often lets us speak to or interact with people, usually based on sexual/gender identities and within anti-normative frameworks' (Browne and Nash, 2010, p.1). Slagle (2008, p.129) wrote

> The tenets of queer theory provide scholars with a model to interrogate how sexuality and other differences play a fundamental role in rhetorical practice. Focusing on differences rather than similarities, queer critics seek to dismantle hierarchies by blurring the definitions of specific identity categories.

Queer theory can be understood, then, as both theory and radical political action, and despite the impossibility of defining it, it can be summarised as a theory which explores the oppressive power of dominant norms, particularly those relating to sexuality and gender, and the difficulties faced by those who cannot, or do not wish to assimilate to these norms (Barker and Scheele, 2016; Wilchins, 2004). In analysing the power of what Butler (1990) terms the heterosexual matrix, queer theory contributes to a politics and ethics of difference, avoiding the construction of grand theories which would otherwise 'make the mistake of collapsing gender and sexual identities into a single set of experiences or one analytical framework' (Giulianotti, 2016, p. 109).

Epistemologically, queer theory sees truth as being relative, focusing on the ways in which sexuality and gender are linked to social, political, economic and social forces (Waldron, 2019). Because queer theory views individual identities as fluid or unstable, this allows it to question and critique the assumed stability of the heterosexual matrix of sex, gender and sexuality (Butler 2004; Wilchins, 2004). Queer theory looks to disrupt this matrix by arguing sex, gender, and sexuality are performative acts which individuals display through their clothing choices, mannerisms, and behaviours (Butler, 2004), meaning identities are fluid, unstable and constantly changing.

Sitting at one of the cornerstones of queer theory, alongside Foucault and others, is Judith Butler's work on gender performativity (1990, 2004), which is of particular significance to this study. A central concept of gender performativity is that person's gender is constructed through their own repetitive performance of gender. This is related to the idea that discourse creates subject positions for each person to occupy 'linguistic structures construct the self' (Butler, 1990, p.308). The structure or discourse of gender, as Butler argued it, is bodily and nonverbal. Butler's theory does not accept stable and coherent gender identity, rather, gender is

> … a stylized repetition of acts… which are internally discontinuous… [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. To say that gender is performative is to argue that gender is "real" only to the extent that it is performed. (Butler, 1990, p.312).

Butler (1990) argued performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularised and constrained repetition of norms. This iterability implies 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but 'a ritualised production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death' (Butler, 1990, p. 95). This performance for many individuals, including some of the participants in this research, can be understood as passing.

Being read, or 'passing' as one's preferred gender can bring with it what is referred to in the trans community as 'passing privilege'. Passing is especially relevant in sport and sporting spaces (such as changing rooms), where intense social interactions between people often take place, becoming sites of meaning for individuals to perform and confirm their gender, often 'drawing upon dominant social understandings to define themselves and others as legitimate and intelligible, or not' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p. 749). Passing and being read as one's preferred gender requires the constant repetition of behaviours considered normative by others, further essentialising gender differences, which in turn 'support gender inequality through mechanisms of exclusion and violence toward those who transgress these norms' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p.748). Not engaging in this performativity, or failing at this performativity can often have consequences, and 'daily, people die because they challenge, subvert and threaten the visual script dictated by the gender binary' (Olufemi, 2020, p. 53). However, within the trans community passing is sometimes a contested term because it contains a contradiction and implies there is something false or surreptitious about a person being seen as their authentic self, or 'looking trans'. In her book *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity* (2006) activist Matilda Bernstein Sycamore offers a critical analysis of what passing means across a variety of identities, not just trans. Bernstein Sycamore interprets passing as the tyranny of assimilation, which she both explores and critiques

through ‘the various systems of power seen (or not seen) in the act of passing’ (2006, p.1). Bernstein Sycamore interprets passing in its broadest possible sense, ‘passing as the “right” gender, class, race, sexuality, age, ability, body type, heath status, ethnicity…in a pass/fail situation, standards may vary, but somebody always gets trampled’ (2006, p.1). Not passing or performing an identity which is non-binary is as performative as passing.

Waldron (2019, p.26) writes whilst individuals can choose how they want to behave and identify through their performative acts, ‘they may feel compelled to repeat performances of the heterosexual matrix of woman-feminine-heterosexual or man-masculine-heterosexual.’ These repeated performances in turn feed back into normalising the heterosexual matrix, and also prop up hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity, perpetuating their prevelance in sport. One role queer theory plays in these narratives, is to interrogate the notion of normalised stability, disrupting dominant discourses which are so often rewarded. In this way, queer theory has demonstrable potential for examining trans people’s participation in sport. The next section considers some of the relevant literature in these examinations.

2.4.1 Benefits and Limitations of Using Queer Theory in this Study

Queer theory has a moderately long history within the sociology of sport, helping to raise questions about the complex relationship between sexuality, gender and identity, and the ways in which it can provide scholars with new perspectives on how these relationships influence each other is one of its most useful aspects in sport and consequently in this study (Caudwell, 2006; Jarvis, 2014). Queer theory calls attention to the implicit normalcy of heteronormativity in sport, and how assumptions of heteronormativity in turn can shape our assumptions of sex, sexuality and gender (Klein, Krane and Paule-Koba, 2018). Applying a queer framework to the identity of LGBTQ+ athletes offers a way to deconstruct and understand their experiences, ‘debunking the assumed naturalness or normalness of the sex, gender, and sexuality binaries that the institution of sport works so hard to enforce’ (Klein et al., 2018, p. 55).

The application of a queer theoretical lens helps to illuminate the importance of the body in sport (Cahn, 2015). Richardson and Locks wrote (2014, p. IX) wrote ‘the body is the site for the articulation of all our identifications…the body is the vehicle for our

expression in the world.' In this way queer theory has been instrumental in developing a deeper understanding of how the biological body has been utilised to promote and privilege not just heteronormativity in sport, but hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity. This is because queer theory detaches gender from sex, examining the ways in which gender is a social construct, rather, masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed (Butler, 1990; Seidman, 1997; Sullivan, 2003). Significantly for this study and its participants, queer theory 'refuses the notion of sexual identity, and therefore expands well beyond issues facing lesbians and gay men in sport' (Sykes, 2006, p.14).

A number of scholars have used queer theory to better understand trans people's lived experiences of participation in sport, in an attempt to both challenge and move beyond traditional sex-gender distinctions found in sporting institutions (Query and Krane, 2017). Much of this research has been key to understanding how sexuality is not the only way to disrupt the heterosexual matrix, or to challenge hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport, and the experiences of trans people can offer new ways of thinking about how sport is gender segregated (Gleeves and Lehrbach, 2016; Waldron, 2019). In particular this literature considers the ways in which trans people subvert, even unknowingly, normative conventions which link sexed bodies, gender roles and identity, and has contributed to 'the broadening and alternative definitions of physicality that are not simply based on traditional ideals about femininity and masculinity' (Malcolm, 2008, p.116). Queer theory assists in this literature with questioning (though not always actively deconstructing) the gender segregated organisation of sport and contributes much to our understanding of the role of sport in normalising and maintaining the two-sex system. This is especially relevant in the ways in which sporting institutions can be understood as sites of tension with regard to the inclusion of trans athletes (Travers, 2014).

This literature, and its queer theoretical approach, has much to offer critical discussions regarding trans people in sport. This is because their presence in sport, for some people, threatens the gender binary, and the gender binary supports the homosexual/heterosexual divide. This is potentially threatening to some individuals who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Hines, 2019). In addition, this work is valuable and argues whilst some sporting settings promote inclusivity for trans people in sport,

they still often remain within the framework of the gender binary, and the application of a queer perspective does not necessarily make a sporting environment more inclusive. This criticism of the way in which queer theory has historically overlooked trans experiences is also argued by Browne, Nash and Hines (2010, p. 4), who raised concerns how 'in its celebration of trans as a 'symbol' of transgression, queer theory has had a tendency to gloss over the complexities of trans experiences and identification – which may, or, indeed, may not, 'queer' the categories of gender and sexuality.' For many trans people, a queer understanding of gender is disempowering, conflicting with the 'substantial comfort offered in occupying defined gender categories, including gender expression expectations' (Waldron, 2019, p.29). This view is shared by Phipps' in her 2019 study of trans university students' inclusion in sport. Phipps (2019, p.12) writes

> Some trans people understand and accept biologically determined notions of sex and gender. Their identities are firmly embedded within binary categories; however, some theories used to study gender identity (such as queer theory) may fail to accommodate this by rejecting fixed notions of gender entirely, while celebrating complete ambiguity.

However, although I can identify with the critical approach taken in these papers, I feel utilising queer theory to better understand the experiences of trans people in sport does not draw enough attention to the rich variety and diversity of the people it focuses on. This is a point raised by Elling-Machartzki (2017) in their empirical research paper in which they discuss the body-self narratives of trans people participating in sport and physical activity. Elling-Machartzki argues queer theory neglects the lived experiences of trans people, and the lives, bodies and experiences of trans people are often eclipsed, reducing them to 'useful cases to illustrate a particular position'. This is, arguably, a critique levelled more at queer theory, rather than at the specific research cited above. Waldron (2019, p. 28) said

> For many transgender people, queer theory opened up a space where gender is not fixed, measurable, solid or unchanging. The understanding of gender as assigned as a social construct, empowered and validated many transgender lives. However, for some

> trans people queer theories of gender impeded on their lived experience and realties.

Prosser (1998, p. 6) argued some authors 'take up the transgendered subject as the key queer trope by which theorists have challenged sex, gender, and sexuality binaries particularly through Butlerian notions of performativity.' While queer notions of performativity have been highly influential and conceptually original, as previously noted, trans feminist academics and activists argue that as a largely academic concept, 'there is a lack of ability for queer theory to actually make a difference and no potential for collective action and empowerment' (Martin, 2019, p 54).

Hines (2006, p. 54) argued the limitations of queer theoretical approaches to research on trans people and issues also fail to account for 'the conflicting and competing claims around gendered authenticity', which is an important observation for this study, especially in relation to the opposition from the gender critical feminist movement, as discussed in chapter one. When considering the contested nature of queer theory, it is hard to clearly articulate what it means to 'queer' sport. As Waldron (2019) observes, those who participate in sport occupy its traditional confines, yet successfully queering sport relies on what Waldron refers to as a foundational awareness of two concepts. Waldron (2019, p.30), writes

> First, queering sport requires us to take action and to actively engage in disrupting and interrupting traditional heteronormative sport practices. Second, queering sport means a constant interrogation of the institution of sport. Remaining within the confines of white, masculine, heteronormative traditional sport, will result in continued marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals.

More importantly and in line with the integrity of this study, trans academics and activists have argued there is a strong ethical case for not using queer theory but rather drawing on trans scholarship to help illuminate the lived experience of trans people (Pearce, Steinberg and Moon, 2019; Vincent, 2018). Queer theory can also be a radical and difficult concept for many in the LGBTQ+ community to relate to in their own lives. Trans feminist theory brings to the forefront trans people's experiences and makes room for what has been diminished and marginalised and asks for these experiences and narratives to be placed centrally. Dworkin and Wachs (2009, p. 103)

recommended those working in the field of sports sociology, 'should adopt a more robust queer sensibility if they are to avoid contributing to the drive toward normalisation and instead effectively interrogate its premises and assumptions.' This is especially important when sport remains full of major barriers for many athletes, particularly those athletes faced with a system which is structured with a continued reliance on gender binaries (Phipps, 2019).

Whilst sharing extensive common ground with trans feminism, queer theory sometimes fails to acknowledge that same-object choice is not the only way to differ from gender normative and hegemonic masculine cultural norms (Richardson, 2010). Trans feminism asks more questions about the organisation of sport and the gender segregated categories of men and women. Through this method of organisation, the full range of human reality is

> (…) Framed within the limits of heteronormativity, establishing two distinct, complementary and hierarchical models of intelligible gender: man/masculine/heterosexual and woman/female/heterosexual. Beyond the margins of this hegemony we find the unintelligible realities, which include intersex (which exceed the sexual binary) and trans, which threaten the coherence between the corporeal body and experienced gender.
> (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p. 747)

Working together with trans feminism, queer theory can extend theoretical and empirical research in sport and gender studies, 'informing practice in the changing landscape of sport, and offer tools to disrupt the sex, gender, and sexual binaries' (Kaurer and Rauscher, 2019, p.51). This research then, whilst acknowledging the important work queer theory has done in the field of sports sociology and gender studies, understands these criticisms of queer theory, and advocates for also engaging with a trans feminist theoretical lens to better illuminate the lived experiences of trans people in sport. This is because, as Krane (2019, p. 50) writes

> Trans feminism leads to questioning the emphasis on anatomy as a criterion for social organisation. Rather, I recognise and appreciate the complexity of sex and gender and of lived experience with sex and gender. By including a trans feminist stance, one honours sex and gender variation and privileges self-identity.

2.4.2 Benefits and Limitations of Using Trans Feminist Theory in this Study

Although Butler's work is understood to be a cornerstone of what came to be known as queer theory, she was not alone in moving the discussion away from traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity to include a broad spectrum of gender identities. Many trans feminist academics and writers have also shown how perceptions of gender are socially moulded, rather than biologically situated (Bornstein, 1994; Koyamo, 2001; Pearce et al., 2019; Serano, 2013; Stone, 1992; Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

The term 'trans feminism' was coined by US activists Emi Koyama and Diana Courant around 1992 (Bettcher, 2017). Trans feminism usually denotes a third wave feminist sensibility 'that focuses on the personal empowerment of women and girls, embraced in an expansive way that includes trans women and girls' (Bettcher, 2017, p.11). US activist and trans feminist scholar Julia Serano (2013) described the origins of trans feminism as being closely linked with other forms of feminist sub movements, 'specifically, sex-positive feminisms, postmodern/post structural feminism, queer theory, and intersectionality' (Serano, 2013, p. 44). Serano advises against division between feminists and trans feminists, advocating instead for a coalition between feminists and trans feminists/activists which will combat both transphobia and misogyny, arguing whilst all women are different, their experiences overlap. For Serano (2013), trans feminism is undeniably feminist, in which the way it 'weaves together critiques of male privilege, traditional sexism, heterosexism, monosexism, masculine-centrism, and other forms of sexism, while acknowledging the influence of racism, classism, and other forms of marginalisation' (Yost and Smith, 2014, p. 148). Martinez-San Miguel and Tobias (2016, p. 5) write trans feminism is 'trans-specific in a way that nothing else is. It expands, complicates and enriches, and is embedded in activism too.'

Trans feminism's origins are rooted in trans studies, which emerged as a specific discipline in the late 1990's, in response to critiques from both inside and outside the academy of the ways in which trans issues were both represented and subsumed within gender and LGB studies (Stryker, Currah and Moore, 2008). Trans studies share its roots with queer theory, and Stryker et al., (2008, p. 212) noted

> If queer theory was born of the union of sexuality studies and feminism, transgender studies can be considered queer theory's evil twin: it has the same parentage but wilfully disrupts the privileged family narratives that favor sexual identity labels (like gay, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual) over the gender categories (like man and woman) that enable desire to take shape and find its aim.

Scholars in trans studies argue what positions it as a unique discipline, and not just an extension of queer theory 'is the way trans bodies are centred epistemologically in the discipline' *(*Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010, p.56). Because of this epistemological centring trans studies enriches debates with queer studies, in the way in which it has introduced new language (such as the term cis), varied gender expressions and the importance of gender self-identification. These additions 'have totally revitalised the debates about the cultural, social, and political constructions of gender in past and contemporary historical debates' (Miguel and Tobias, 2016, p.5). Trans feminist theorists have also best articulated the specific kinds of violence faced by trans women, including 'transmisogyny.' Coined in 2007 by Serano in her book *Whipping Girl*, this term refers to the unique intersection of transphobia and misogyny. Transmisogyny describes 'the intensification of misogyny that trans women experience because their femininity is viewed as fraudulent, inherently passive and existing solely in service of men and masculinity' (Olufemi, 2020, p. 63).

This expanded gender lexicon has enabled trans studies to develop in such a way as to bring inside the academy trans feminism, which like queer theory has many of its roots in activism. From both trans studies and queer theory, trans feminism evolved, established as an academic area of inquiry, 'often seen as having developed from queer and postmodern theory and LGBTQ+ studies, that can be used to further interrogate the very concepts of sex, gender and identity' (Yost and Smith, 2014, p.148).

The publication of Stone's 1991 paper 'The Empire Strikes Back' in response to Raymond's (1979) anti-trans book *The Transsexual Empire* on trans women is widely acknowledged as the start of what became known as the first articulation of trans feminism. Together with Bornstein's book, *Gender Outlaw* (1994), these works formed the first key pieces exploring trans feminist ideas and issues. In 2001 Koyama's 'The Transfeminist Manifesto' offered further response on the feminist critique that trans

women are unable to escape the male privilege they have been raised with, and as such, (gender critical) feminists have argued trans perspectives cannot be aligned with feminist goals (Yost and Smith, 2014). In her work Koyama argues there is a larger context of privilege and oppression to consider, and wrote there are 'multiple types of privilege and oppression, and that all feminists must take accountability for their forms of privilege while also feeling justified in speaking from their experiences with oppression' (Koyama, 2001, p.1). Koyama wrote

> Trans feminism is primarily a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond. It is also open to other queers, intersex people, trans men, non-trans women, non-trans men and others who are sympathetic toward needs of trans women and consider their alliance with trans women to be essential for their own liberation.

Koyama acknowledges the possibility that, whilst some trans women may have experienced male privilege, they face other forms of societal oppression, most notably around race and social class, though disability, sexuality and weight are also considered. For Koyama, the integral core of trans feminism is that it is based in both scholarship and activism, to better examine more closely the intersections of feminism and trans feminism (Yost and Smith, 2014). As Halberstam (2017) says, separate paths exist for many levels of the population to reach the same destination of equality, and just like cis feminists, trans feminists fight for the right to have their genders, names and pronouns treated with respect, and to be safe within spaces which can be openly hostile towards them (Heyes, 2003). In addition, trans feminists seek to enrich and deepen feminism by drawing on their own lived experiences about gender, sexuality and power (Hines, 2019).

Trans feminism can be seen to be working with some elements of feminist theory to further challenge assumptions about the gender binary, about what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman', and fights against larger structures of power, such as medical and prison systems, which are often accused of denying or ignoring the lived experiences of trans people and withhold life-affirming resources from them (Holm, 2015). Most significantly in relation to this research which is examining the barriers faced by trans people in sport, 'trans feminism is grounded in the critique of binary sex and gender and especially questions the emphasis on anatomy as a criterion for social

organisation' (Enke, 2012, p.14). It is this grounding which sets trans feminism slightly apart from queer theory, and why it is the most appropriate theoretical approach in this study.

Even so, exploring the diversity of trans subjectivities and different lived experiences is not just about accommodating bodies which are situated outside of binary thinking (Hines, 2010). In addition, trans feminism looks to actively push back against 'the essentialist ideas of both academic and non-academic understandings of sex and gender' (Yost and Smith, 2014). A number of post-modern feminists, most notably those engaged in Black feminist thought (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 1987), have argued exactly this, that second-wave feminism is essentialist in its claim that women's experiences are universal, 'highlighting the problematic universalising of social positions within relations of power and ignoring intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 4).

Other feminist scholars (Green, 2006; Haggerty and McGarry, 2007; Heyes, 2003) have identified the necessity of focusing on a variety of lived experiences – as trans feminism does - rather than using the monolithic category of 'women' to promote one principal claim of shared experience. This has allowed a counterhegemonic discourse to flourish, and argues for a less repressive society, one which offers a more complete and empirically preferable account of all women's experiences and which encourages all women to come together to work for specific political goals (Hill-Collins, 1990; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). For example, Koyama's manifesto also argued feminists should recognise that the body-image and gender dysphoria some trans women (and men) struggle with should be considered as much as a feminist issue as the unrealistic beauty standards experienced by cis women.

It is important to reiterate sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups of society (Bandya et al., 2012). The prevalence of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport shows whilst much of the literature reviewed here is supportive in its advocating for LGBTQ+ athletes, sport remains one of the most segregated aspects of society, and those who experience gender incongruity will often face significant barriers when attempting to participate in sport and physical activity (Morris and Van Raalte, 2016). The participation rates in sport and physical exercise for trans people

are cited as being lower than for cis people (Jones et al., 2017b, 2017c, 2018), resulting in less opportunities to enjoy the associated health and well-being benefits exercise may bring. In addition, the way in which trans bodies have become politicised within media discussions surrounding their inclusion at elite level, often with hostility, can mean those participating in everyday sport and physical exercise often encounter similar opposition to inclusion (Barras et al., 2021).

Farber (2017) says trans identities remain marginalised even within more recent contributions from queer studies of sport. This is because these contributions often fail to place the voices and lived experiences of trans people centrally, nor do they capture 'the day to day reality of trans lives, nor do they make contributions that have the potential to improve trans people's lives' (Yost and Smith, 2014, p.151). This means trans feminist theory has the potential to offer a stronger epistemological foundation on which to expand these narratives, which will better help to understand trans people's lived experiences, working towards greater inclusion for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise.

Trans feminism's roots can be traced back to a combination of feminism, trans studies and queer theory, helping to disrupt what Klein, Paule-Kobaa and Krane (2019, p. 627) term 'the automatic assumptions surrounding sex and gender, which opens up the possibilities of additional and new ways of conceptualizing them.' When considering trans people's participation in sport, Whaley and Krane (2011, p. 204) argued there has been 'a hierarchical privileging of the positivist paradigm in sport and exercise psychology, and would benefit from other perspectives, such as trans feminism.'

Whilst there are very few authors who have specifically adopted a trans feminist perspective in sport, those who have (or have alluded to it), claim it has the potential to provide a unique and original perspective and a valuable foundation when considering the socially constructed categories of the two sex system in sport (Caudwell, 2020; Enke, 2012; Klein, Paule-Koba and Krane, 2018; Phipps, 2019; Query and Krane, 2018; Travers, 2006, 2014; Travers and Deri, 2010; Waldron, 2019). A trans feminist perspective brings three key aspects to discourses in this area: the belief individuals should be addressed in accordance with their preferred language and/or identity; inserting the voice of the athletes themselves by looking beyond the common or popularised narratives in sport; and respecting the way in which an

individual may ‘transgress conventional or binary boundaries of sex and/or gender in sport and face a demand to conform with a binary sex for sport competition’ (Krane, 2019, p. 214). In short, employing a trans feminist perspective allows researchers to place their primary focus on the importance of the lived experiences of those who do not fit within the sex and gender binaries, whilst recognising the complexity of sex and gender in sporting contexts (Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010; Query and Krane, 2017).

These three aspects are important components of trans feminism in the way they all work together to both understand and support trans people’s participation in sport. According to Enke (2012), trans feminism is grounded in a critique of binary sex and gender in which only two sexes (male and female) and two genders (masculine and feminine) are acknowledged. Enke (2012) also said ‘trans-literacy remains low’ when it comes to research involving trans people, so as such, a trans feminist perspective in this research goes some way to mitigate this. Caudwell (2020, p.3) writes, ‘for trans feminists, it is the confines and coercive nature of the sex-gender binary structure, especially in physical activity and sport, which is problematic and in need of change.’

Klein, Paule-Kobaa and Krane’s 2018 paper presents a case study of a trans male college athlete as he transitions from the women’s to the men’s team, framing their study through a trans feminist lens. The authors took this approach, which employed a narrative method, because ‘little is known about what happens physically, mentally and emotionally during trans athletes’ athletic transition’ (2018, p. 555), and there is a shortage of information in this area. As such, Klein, Paule-Kobaa and Krane’s paper aims to fill this gap. They write (2018, p. 628)

> A trans feminist perspective privileges self-determined sex and gender, and recognizes social constraints sometimes limiting trans self-expression. Accordingly, we resist language and approaches that medically pathologize trans bodies or that lead to surveillance of trans bodies often subsumed within policies guiding sport participation for transgender athletes. Through the lens of transfeminism, we question the conventional or binary boundaries of sex and/or gender that impact participation in sport.

By exploring the transition of a trans athlete using a trans feminist lens as outlined above, a deeper questioning of the frequent assumptions made about trans people’s

inclusion in sport is offered. Some of these assumptions include the reliance on regulations which focus on how to fit trans athletes into the female or male sport categories, immutable physiology which confers an assumed competitive advantage, and the act of transition and its impact on the sporting body. Trans feminism welcomes a deeper interrogation of the challenges these conventional barriers present to some trans athletes, by placing trans people's voices at the centre of any research.

Krane (2015), when broadly discussing gender nonconformity, sex variation, and sport, applies what she terms 'a critical trans feminist perspective to explore the interplay among sex, gender, and fair play, as well as present a critical approach to inclusion in sport' (2015, p.49). Krane does this through examining policies which claim to be inclusive of gender nonconforming and sex variant athletes, highlighting how 'these policies reproduce common stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding sex, gender, athletic bodies, and sport' (Krane, 2015, p. 49). This paper draws heavily on Scott-Dixon (2009) and Enke (2012), whose 'conceptualizations of trans feminism are a multidisciplinary blend of feminism and transgender studies' (Krane, 2015, p.50). Krane concludes what is needed when considering participation for trans athletes, is an ethics of inclusion. Returning back to some of the key aspects of a trans feminist perspective - trans athletes have to meet a rigid criteria with little understanding for what this means for an individual's self-defined gender identity – such an ethics of inclusion, or 'compassionate inclusion' (Krane, 2019, pp. 58), prioritises lived experience over binary assumptions and gender normativity, assumptions which can have damaging outcomes. This also leads to smaller participation rates for trans people over cis people, who often prefer not to access sport and physical exercise (Caudwell, 2014, 2020).

A trans feminist perspective can advance our understanding of trans people who push conventional boundaries of sex and gender categorizations in sport, and who often face sex and gender policing due to sport adhering to binary sex categorisation of participants, recognising only that there is boys'/men's sport, and girls'/women's sport (Lucas-Carr and Krane, 2011). Krane (2019) says a trans feminist approach has an emphasis on respect, dignity and inclusion, welcoming all athletes across the spectrum of diversity, reframing discussions about advantage and fairness to those who celebrate compassion and prioritise experience. Krane (2019, p. 60) writes

> What a trans feminist perspective teaches us is the need to consider the broad social and cultural issues surrounding policy and decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion…at the centre of this debate should be the well-being of all athletes…it can also lead us towards privileging inclusion without imposing narrow Western, heteronormative expectations on elite athletes.

To conclude, a trans feminist perspective encourages looking beyond the common or popularised sporting narratives, privileging the voices of the athletes themselves. Ahmed (2016) sees trans feminism - as Caudwell (2020, p.4) does - 'as theory, politics and activism…trans feminism has potential for trans allies to contest the normative sex-gender system and concomitant transphobia.'

2.5 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has identified that if inclusion for trans people in sport is to be improved and barriers reduced, more in-depth qualitative research is needed. Whilst there are a number of barriers to inclusion identified in the existing research, hearing from trans people themselves about the barriers which may be getting in the way of participation would help to identify how they might be reduced.

To summarise, this chapter has helped to establish what the roots of this research are, and my own position within it, which is in the sociology of sport. The literature review has both established the academic context of this research, and my own theoretical position within. This chapter has reflected on queer theory's important perspective in the research, given its valuable legacy in the sociology of sport and the themes of sexuality of gender diversity. This chapter has concluded that trans feminism has a more relevant place than queer theory in the research, and this is the position I will be taking in this research. Examining the literature has helped me to identify a series of gaps in the knowledge surrounding the lived experiences of rans and non-binary people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK, which has subsequently taken me to identifying the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of trans and non-binary people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK?
2. How have these experiences impacted on their participation, either negatively and/or positively?
3. How do these lived experiences challenge (or do not challenge) gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport, and what can a trans feminist and queer theoretical lens bring?
4. How can these lived experiences help to inform recommendations in reducing barriers to future participation and improve inclusivity in everyday sport and physical exercise for the wider trans community?

The following chapter presents the methods and methodology used to conduct this research, and the justification for doing so. In order to achieve this, the following research questions and aims are proposed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and methods employed to explore the lived experiences of trans and non-binary people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK. It begins with examining the methodological considerations which are key to this study. This is followed by my personal narrative and research journey. The personal narrative is situated in this chapter as it is central to my identity as an outsider researcher, as well as helping me to examine the tensions I have experienced in this study. Next it considers the strengths and weaknesses of adopting either a quantitative or qualitative approach to research, and lastly it discusses the methods employed to gather and analyse the data in order to answer the research questions and achieve the research aims.

The original aims of this study were to identify what possible barriers trans people face to participation in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK, and what recommendations might be made to improve inclusivity. The research draws on trans feminism as a means to examine the prevalence of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport.

3.1 Choosing an Appropriate Research Design

Attending to the lived experiences of trans people in sport is the central focus of this study, because whilst there exists qualitative research which focuses on participation for trans athletes at elite level, there is less qualitative research which directly addresses trans people's participation in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK. When considering inclusivity for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, their experiences are often subsumed under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (Caudwell, 2014; Martin and Meezan, 2003; Morris and Van Raalte, 2016). Subsuming what can be often be quite different and specific needs can lead to the misinterpretation of trans people's experiences, often resulting in their needs frequently being decentred in research which supposedly centres on them (Namaste, 2001).

The current milieu, dominated by discussions about the legitimacy of trans people and their participation in sport, as well as in many other areas of social and cultural life, requires a particular approach when determining which research design is suitable to reflect the importance of centring their lived experiences (Martin and Meezan, 2003; McCoyd and Shdaimah, 2016). This is partly due to some trans communities feeling a sense of research participation fatigue (Tagonist, 2010), and my own wish to be sensitive and sympathetic to this possibility as a researcher, as well as fully addressing the identified research question(s) and aims.

When conducting research which examines people's lived experiences, a qualitative approach can often elicit rich and revealing data. In addition, there is also a long-established affinity between research in the field of sports sociology and gender studies and qualitative approaches (Smith and Sparkes, 2019).

3.1.1 Epistemological and Ontological Positioning

This section discusses the epistemological and ontological positions this study takes to best support the research design, as well as outline my own positionality. This study adopts a social constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist ontology. Not only do these approaches work together to do justice to the lived experiences of the participants, but they also help to interpret the data in an appropriate manner, offering a foundation from which to critique gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport. These approaches also fit with the qualitative research design of this study, as both help to make sense of the data, and the ways in which aspects of the data might relate to the aims of the research.

Justification for a social constructionist epistemology in this study

This research follows a social constructionist epistemology. Epistemology, or the study of knowledge, is 'a way of understanding and explaining how I know what I know' (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Social constructionism can be understood as the belief those things viewed as 'natural' or 'normal' in society, such as understandings of gender, race, class, and disability, are socially constructed, and consequently are not an accurate reflection of people's lived realities or experiences. Social constructionism offers an opportunity to take a critical stance towards the 'taken-for-granted ways of

understanding the world, including ourselves' (Burr, 2005, p. 3), and society (and consequently our understanding of it) is not objective. Rather, it is a social and collective process formed through the individual interactions of people (Berg, 2004; Flick, 2018; Mason, 2018), with all forms of knowledge being historically and culturally specific.

Social constructionism attempts to make sense of the social world by viewing knowledge as socially constructed (Burr, 2005). A social constructionist view sees humans as actively constructing their social world through their interactions and shared assumptions, suggesting human understandings of knowledge are created jointly, rather than stemming from a single external truth (Magnusson and Marecek, 2015).

This research takes the view social phenomena are in a constant state of flux because they are reliant on social interactions as they take place, such as between participants and those people they encounter when involved in sport and exercise (Beckman, 2014; Walliman, 2016). Gender identity is also important when considering the purpose of social constructionism, because as Gherovici (2017, p. 98) writes

> Trans people's experiences may force us not just to re-evaluate our notions of gender, but also to reconsider how we think about other forms of difference as it unravels identity as a construction.

This study is important in the way it creates new knowledge in this area, aiming to address the lack of participation in everyday sport and physical exercise for trans people. Because the literature has identified trans people are less likely to engage with sport than cis people are, it is important to engage with a theory which can best interpret what those reasons might be, and in turn, offer recommendations to reduce them. The value of social constructionism in this research is that it allows the researcher to examine the experiences of participants in sport and their interactions with others, which in turn helps to build knowledge about what barriers they may be facing (Berger, 2015). The advantage of a social constructionist perspective in this research is that 'many things we take for granted and believe are objective reality are actually socially constructed, and thus, can change as society changes' (Andrews, 2011, p.1). As this research is concerned with the ways in which sport is organised and how gender intersects with it, being able to create knowledge which in turn can

develop change and improves inclusion for trans people is ideally suited to a social constructionist approach.

Justification for an interpretivist ontology in this study

Ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1998) and 'raises basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 103). This research follows an interpretivist ontology, a paradigm which focuses primarily on recognising and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions (Levers, 2013). In this way it complements a social constructionist epistemology, because as well as its focus on human experience and actions, interpretivist research 'is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). Interpretivism recognises the embedded nature of the researcher, and the unique personal theoretical stances upon which each person bases their actions.

The significance of an interpretivist ontological position in this research is the ways in which it helps to shape those understandings are mediated by people's own historical and cultural milieu. As this research is concerned with the unique and personal lived experiences of trans people's participation in sport, this allows for the position that 'objective reality can never be captured. I only know it through representations' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Interpretivism shapes this study because it helps to capture diverse experiences and recognises that these reflect people's unique and individual gender and sporting biographies. Levers (2013, p.3) said

> For interpretivists, reality is fluid, multiple, and dependent on the meanings given to objects and events, which in turn are influenced by, if not function as, our interpretations. Therefore, we cannot know reality for real, only how it is experienced and made meaningful.

For this study, which is concerned primarily with lived experience, an interpretivist ontology is advantageous in the ways it allows the researcher to draw attention to these lived experiences and appreciate them as reality.

Using trans feminist theory

In harmony with a social constructionist/interpretivist approach, this research draws on trans feminist theory to further illuminate the lived experiences of the participants. This is because trans feminism is committed to placing the lived experiences of trans people centrally in the research and is concerned with examining the ways in which gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity are embedded within sport.

Personal reflexivity is also central in this chapter. This is in part due to my status as an outsider researcher in this research; as someone who is not trans, I wanted to keep in the mind the question of who speaks for whom in research (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010), and the ways in which trans communities have expressed concern about research fatigue (Vincent, 2018), harnessing these theories together goes some way to subvert the commonality of cisgender dominance and allows for greater reflexivity. These perspectives also help in the way the data are treated in this research, in that they give access to some kind of reality, a situated or located truth about the lived experiences of participants and the activities they are engaged in. For example, they offer an insight into how the phenomena of sport and gender are being constantly constructed and reconstructed via these lived experiences.

As discussed in chapter two, drawing on trans feminist theory allows a deeper interrogation of how both gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity remain so dominant in sports settings, by recognizing that cisnormativity and cisgender privilege dominate the social structures of gender and sport. My own cis identity means that personal reflexivity is both important and necessary when reflecting on my own research journey and personal narrative, and the decisions I made when considering the research design. As this thesis takes a social constructionist/interpretivist approach, being attentive to my own reflexivity is fundamental. The following section looks into my own lived experiences and research journey and positionality, and how these impacted the design of my study.

3.2 The Importance of the Researcher's Personal Narrative

Heyes (2013) wrote effective alliances can be forged in feminist spaces, and as a trans-inclusive feminist, it was important for me to state my position as a trans-ally within my own research, within my personal narrative. With this position arguably

comes tension, most often because the lives and rights of trans people (arguably more often for trans women) continue to be ‘colonized as a feminist theoretical testing ground’ (Heyes, 2013, p.1098). As previously noted, many trans people have expressed dealing with research fatigue (Vincent, 2018), and discussions in and outside of the academy regarding trans people’s inclusion in sport continue to be debated amongst the gender critical feminist movement. The tension arises here because the role of the researcher ‘must be seen as central to the research process and revealing the personal in research then becomes a part of explaining the bases for knowledge (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, p.9). Whilst I position myself as trans-inclusive and a trans-ally, I am aware of the tensions which exist in my research, between being a visible trans-ally, and my commitment to producing robust, scientific research. Many trans people, especially trans women, continue to experience ‘sustained antagonism from sections of feminism’ (Hines and Santos, 2018, p. 52), so choosing an appropriate research approach was crucial in addressing this topic with sensitivity.

These were real concerns for me as a researcher and the choices I made about my deciding which methods to use in my study. The choices scholars make in their research about their ontological and epistemological positioning, methodological perspectives and their research methods, are bound up with the ‘interpersonal, political and institutional contexts in which researchers are embedded’ (Mauthner and Doucet 2003, p.421). That is, one’s personal and professional roots play a key role in shaping these decisions. Berger (2015, p.220) writes

> Researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal.

I felt self-conscious writing my personal narrative, mostly in relation to my outsider status as a cis person researching trans people (Horsburgh, 2003; Pillow, 2003; Vincent, 2018). Many researchers are often drawn to researching something which is directly related to their own life experience (Berger, 2015). What drew me to this research was slightly different and originates from an academic interest sparked

during my master's degree, not from a shared gender identity. I was concerned initially I would not be able to fully understand the experiences of the participants because of this, and only those who share their participant's gender identity can legitimately represent the experience(s) of that community. To confirm, I am a complete outsider, occupying what is acknowledged as a privileged position: white, cis, straight, able-bodied, university educated and middle class (though I did grow up in a deprived area in an economically disadvantaged household). These factors made me feel awkward about my research, that I was asking trans people to share their very personal stories with me so I could write a doctoral thesis. Whilst Kucklick (1980, p.375) wrote 'it does not necessarily follow that researchers should be prevented or excluded from attempting to understand participants' experiences, unless it could be shown that in doing, they would cause harm,' I still felt awkward about my outsider status. This awkward feeling gave me the opportunity to examine my own positionality. In addition, my outsider status offered me the chance to 'discover tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across (my) own social group or culture' (Crean, 2018, p.2). This has meant rather than feel awkward about my outsider status, I have attempted to utilise its usefulness as 'a framework for understanding the research relationship' (Botterill, 2015, p.1).

As researcher positionality and reflexivity fundamentally impact on all aspects of how (and why) social science researchers do research (Berg, 2004; Bryman, 2008), I understand why sharing the 'nitty gritty' of my personal and professional credentials offers the reader a chance to better understand how I came to do this research, and why I am so passionate about it. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) term this a symbolic dialogue, one which emphasises the importance of reader engagement with the author. It is necessary then to articulate my role in my research processes and methods, to establish both reader confidence in my project, and to better understand why I made certain methodological choices.

3.2.1 My Personal Narrative

I was born in Weymouth, Dorset, and grew up on the Island of Portland in a family which at the time was considered unconventional and mildly radical. We were vegetarians and my parents were left wing, political and passionate about many

causes, particularly the campaign for nuclear disarmament and the miners' strike. I remember being aware of social injustices and inequality from a young age, more so than my school friends. I was the only child in my family to pass the 11+ and attend the local grammar school in Weymouth, and whilst I was happy there, it took me a long time to settle. After college I studied for a degree in Classics at Royal Holloway College, part of the University of London, but was homesick and bullied. I only just scraped through and could not wait to leave.

I came late then to post-graduate education, in 2014, when I was 41. I was working at the University of Brighton as a senior administrator, and after having my son in 2010 returned part-time. I was struggling very hard with motherhood at that point and would continue to do so for several more years. The impact of having a child on my life and the unrelenting demands I experienced were, I felt, unfairly assigned to me, and I often felt angry and trapped. I have always been a keen swimmer and enjoy the freedom it offers me, but motherhood compromised my time in ways I had not anticipated.

My connection to swimming is a long established one and of huge significance to me. I am by no means a good or competitive swimmer; I have no childhood stories of swim teams and winning medals. Rather, I have loved swimming for as long as I can remember, and as an adult I swim often, mostly outside. The island I grew up on in Dorset was connected to the mainland by one road, with no swimming pool, only the sea to swim in: there was literally nothing else to do but swim. As a result, I am lucky to have many happy childhood memories of swimming in the sea, often with my mother, herself still a keen and enthusiastic swimmer. I am a qualified swimming teacher (though no longer teach), and a love of the water is something I now share with my son.

In September 2014, my son started school, and I started a part-time MA in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex, kindly funded by a staff fee waiver from the University of Brighton. I decided to study because I felt I lacked something of my own in my life outside of work and motherhood. In addition, my father had died unexpectedly the year before and I was in desperate need of a distraction. My whole universe shifted during my first module, Feminism, the Law and Society, and I do not say that lightly. I felt like I had found a home, one which offered me non-judgemental explanations as to why I had been feeling so overwhelmed by motherhood. It gave me

a renewed belief system, it re-politicised me and reconnected me to feminism. I found the topics which I could most relate to were those around bodies: pregnant bodies, bodies that move, health, fitness and sport. The concept that a body could be deemed deviant and the policing of gendered bodies intrigued me. Every essay I wrote centred on the body (pregnancy and alcohol, breastfeeding, fitness, disability), with my final dissertation topic exploring the International Olympic Committee's (2015) updated policy on the criteria for allowing trans athletes to compete at elite level. I was fascinated by the opposing arguments in academia and the media and wanted to explore these discussions more fully.

This led me to examining an online thread on the parenting website Mumsnet, a thread which had been posted in reaction to the International Olympic Committee's (2015) updated policy. The posters on this thread used gender essentialism to support their position, that male physiology is immutable, and by extension all trans women have an innate competitive advantage, and their inclusion in sport must be unfair. This thread, and the ways it drew on gender essentialism and the common sense position (Hill Collins, 1990) sparked within me an overwhelming curiosity about the intersections of gender and sport in a way I had not considered before: biology really is not destiny, and there is no such thing as a level playing field in sport. Like many people, I had always viewed sport as a natural phenomenon, not as something socially constructed, with a reason for being designed in the way it had, historically by men, and for men. Significantly, it established my commitment as a trans-inclusive feminist both academically, and politically. For the first time since my son was born, I felt like I had achieved something just for me, and it was a much-needed boost to my confidence. In addition, I had argued for the rights of trans people to participate in sport from what is still considered to be a controversial and emotive standpoint. I often reflect that, without writing that dissertation, I could have found myself on the other side of the discussion, feeling as I had been, oppressed and trapped by motherhood, and by extension, by being a woman. In October 2016 after I graduated with a distinction, I applied to do a PhD and was accepted to the University of Brighton to start the following year. Then something happened which has been causing me genuine discomfort and anxiety in my research ever since.

In the winter of 2016, almost a whole year before I was due to start my PhD, I attended an event with one of my supervisors, Dr Nigel Jarvis. The event, open to the public,

was called ‘Complicity and Trans Politics: The Politics of Representation’, and was organised by the University of Brighton, and held at the University’s Edward Street building in central Brighton. The talk focused on representations of trans characters in fiction, and how these representations still upheld negative and stereotypical depictions of trans people, and why such constructions are harmful, even when presented as fictitious.

At the end of the talk, the audience were invited to ask the author questions. Sat a few spaces along on the same row as myself and my supervisor, someone raised their hand. ‘I’m sick of this,’ they said, ‘cis people wanting to research us all the time. I work for a charity, and every week I get an email from some student wanting to examine trans people and do their dissertation topic on us. Trans lives and trans experiences aren’t up for debate, and certainly not by cis people.’

I froze. My supervisor and I exchanged looks. This person was talking about me, I thought. I was (and still am) – a cis-het student conducting research about trans people’s lived experiences. In my naivety I assumed surely all trans people must think this about cis people. Never had I felt more aware of my own privilege and outsider status. I felt guilty, ashamed, embarrassed, then worried I would only ever be perceived as an outsider and no one would want to talk to me, which I then felt guiltier about, for only thinking of myself and my PhD. I changed from someone who felt good enough to do a PhD on this topic, because I had a master’s degree, and was *obviously* a trans-inclusive feminist, to someone at best unqualified, and at worst, unwelcome and unwanted. My confidence plummeted.

My supervisor and I discussed this afterwards. He reassured me this was an extremely common feeling researchers have, and they all worry about misrepresenting or misinterpreting the communities they are researching. Yet my discomfort remains, and it can at times hinder my ability to position myself within my research as someone who is qualified. On reflection it has certainly coloured my research approach, including how I interacted with participants during the interview process. As Berger (2015, p.220) writes

> The world view and background of the researcher affects the way in which they construct the world, uses language, poses questions, and chooses the lens for filtering the information gathered from

> participants and make meaning of it, and thus may shape the findings and conclusions of the study.

This is apparent to me when I listen back to my interviews. I am a talkative interviewer, but there are measured hesitations whilst I carefully chose my words during my interviews. On reflection I had consciously tried to stay gender neutral in my language, not just out of respect and concern of mis-gendering someone, but I was worried any reference to a gendered aspect of my life could be upsetting for the participant. This manifested itself by my rarely referring to my identity as a mother, though perhaps this says more about my own feelings around motherhood. Yet many trans people are parents, including some whom I interviewed. I approached data collection with an unconscious plan to be invisible, to better hear the participants' voices. My motivation for conducting this research was the lack of qualitative studies which directly asked trans people about their lived experiences of participating in sport, and I remain committed to illuminating those stories. My experience at the Edward Street event had cast a long shadow, and there is no easy solution to the discomfort which remains within me. Rather, as I continued along my research journey, I have tried to be vigilant about my own reflexivity (Beckman, 2014). This vigilance includes the importance of reflexivity in this research. Retrospectively, I did feel welcomed and accepted by the people I interviewed.

3.2.2 Reflexivity and being an Outsider Researcher

Researchers are advised that interactions between us (as researchers), and the participant affect the data. Whether one is an insider or an outsider researcher, neutrality is an impossible claim to make in the research one does. As Ryan-Flood and Gill (2010, p. 2) wrote, 'the myth of the objective, neutral observer who leaves the field without influencing the data, untouched by the research process, has been soundly critiqued by feminist social scientists.' It is not unusual for a researcher to seek common ground or empathy with those they talk to. As a trans-inclusive feminist doing research with trans people, I was mindful of these criticisms by other feminists, and did not want to subject participants to what Vincent (2018, p.102) calls 'a troubled history of ethically and methodologically flawed research practices.' That is, I was caught between my detached outsider status, and my wanting to be supportive of my

participant's lived experiences as a trans-ally. I was also mindful of not categorising all lived experiences as homogenous. Yost and Smith (2014, p.153) suggested those who are interested in studying trans people are urged to 'avoid generalisations, and acknowledge the multiplicity of identities held by all people rather than reducing individuals to just their trans or cis status, and engage in reflexive practices throughout their work with trans people.'

Reflexivity is particularly important for me as an act of self-appraisal, helping me to address my concerns as an outsider researcher. Whilst I was self-conscious of my identity as an outsider researcher, I was dually mindful of the possible power imbalance between myself and the participants (as a perceived 'academic'), and the negative effects power can have in researcher–researched relationships (Pillow, 2003). It has been necessary then to reflect on my own positionality to better appreciate the impact and influence it has on my choices as a researcher. Equally important is acknowledging my discomfort with being an outsider researcher and how crucial it is to produce research, which is representative of the participants, and is both non-exploitative and compassionate. Berger (2015, p.219) argues reflexivity is a major strategy for quality control in qualitative research and understanding how it may be impacted by the characteristics and experiences of the researcher is 'of paramount importance.' Within qualitative research, reflexivity can enhance the rigor of the study and has been increasingly recognised as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge (Gergen, 2007; Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016). The presence and necessity of reflexivity in qualitative research is 'a prime measure to secure credibility, trustworthiness, and non-exploitative research by self-scrutinization of the lens through which the researcher views the phenomenon studied' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2018, p.29).

Another of my supervisors, Dr Hannah Frith, advised me to be comfortable with being uncomfortable with my outsider status, which is valuable advice. Afterall, 'being trans' does not automatically qualify an individual to be an epistemological insider or better qualified researcher (Botterill, 2015; Gair, 2007), much like how my identity as a mother did not guarantee I would have exactly the same shared experiences as other mothers. Botterill (2015) acknowledges that by virtue of being a researcher, one is very rarely a complete insider anywhere. There is no monolithic experience of gender,

or sport, or motherhood. Rather, the views, ideas, experiences and needs of trans people are both different and similar to one another's, as well as to those who identify as cis. Most importantly, these views are 'valid in their own right' (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992, p.8). Vincent (2018, p.105) writes

> While criticisms have been made of how trans lives have been mostly investigated, and correspondingly constructed, by cisgender people, this does not mean that cis researchers are not capable of excellent trans research with emancipatory potential.

I take some comfort from Vincent's words, and with the benefit of hindsight, reassure myself in all the eighteen interviews I conducted, no one questioned my credibility to conduct the research or accused me of having a dubious agenda. As a trans-inclusive feminist, I feel I must justify taking from participants some very personal and at times private information, which in turn commits me searching for truths and an understanding of these experiences. My role as a researcher is also to make sense of them whilst not advancing their political interests (Creswell and Poth, 2017). The primary purpose of this thesis is to fill the knowledge gap and offer theoretical and empirical contributions to knowledge about the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise. In this way deciding what research design to adopt needed much serious consideration. The next section debates the benefits and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research approaches, concluding with the justification for the research design selected.

3.3 Debates about Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

All research methods are techniques for gathering data and are generally dichotomised into being either quantitative or qualitative (Berg, 2004). In turn, researchers must ask themselves what kind of research design is appropriate for answering their research question and achieving the aims of the research (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016). Which research approach then is best employed to ask trans people about their lived experiences in everyday sport and physical exercise? As identified in chapter two, trans people continue to face greater barriers to participation in everyday sport and physical exercise than cis people (Jones et al., 2017a), and there is also a lack of in-depth qualitative research which directly asks trans people what these barriers might be and how they might be reduced if inclusivity is to be improved. The

following section looks at the advantages and limitations of quantitative and qualitative research in order to ascertain the most appropriate choice of design for this study.

3.3.1 Quantitative Research: Benefits and Limitations

Quantitative research aims to gather and measure data using numbers, and most often uses a deductive approach to test theories (Bryman, 2008; Creswell and Poth, 2017). Epistemologically, quantitative research is most often based on a positivist approach inherent in the natural sciences, and ontologically regards social reality as objective fact (Walliman, 2016). The data it generates are often shallow but broad, valuing detachment and impartiality (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Quantitative research methods usually favour that which can be measured in the collection and analysis of data.

This is not to dismiss the important part quantitative research plays in gender studies. Identifying gendered issues using quantitative methods such as producing computer-generated surveys have been used by feminist researchers, and in research which effects social change (King and Horrocks, 2019; Metso and Le Feuvre, 2006). Within the field of sports sociology and trans people's experiences of participating in sport, a number of scholars (Gooren and Bunck, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2021a, 2021b; Jones et al., 2017a) have employed quantitative methods to explore the relationship between gender identity and physical activity, to great effect. For example, Jones et al., (2017a) compared levels of physical activity between cis and trans people and found self-identified trans participants reported engaging in less physical activity than cis participants. This was an important finding to generate further discussion, and their study concluded 'social support and self-perception were found to mediate the relationship between gender identity and physical activity' (Jones et al., 2017a, p. 709). Similarly, Klein et al. (2018, p. 4) presented a case study of a male trans athlete, which documented 'the complexity of navigating athletic and life goals during transition.'

These examples of research demonstrate the potential quantitative research has in identifying the needs of trans people in sport, and in this way quantitative methods can be used to challenge substantive gender-biased claims in social science. They do, however, still draw on qualitative methods to elicit deeper understandings about the

quantitative data gathered, engaging with participants to bring the data to life. Much of this research is also only concerned with athletes performing at a high level, and as Jones et al. (2017a, p. 703) acknowledge about their own study, 'more quantitative research needs to be conducted to increase the applicability and generalisability of these research findings so conclusions about transgender people and sport can be drawn.'

These limitations about applicability underpin what Flick (2014, p.14) observes about quantitative research often having 'standardised and generalised results [which] are rarely used in everyday life, and such findings can be too far removed from day to day questions and problems.' Quantitative research can often ignore the subjective views not only of the participant but of the researcher, and risks being viewed as unambiguous and impersonal. Quantitative research also places less emphasis on the reflexivity of the researcher, an extremely valuable and necessary tool when working with marginalised communities (Vincent, 2018), a tool whose crucial importance this study has previously highlighted. Flick (2014, p.15) wrote that what makes qualitative research different to quantitative, is that which guides it, 'the appropriate methods and theories, perspectives and diversity of the participant, reflexivity of the researcher and the sheer variety of approaches and methods which make it different to quantitative research.' Whilst earlier feminist scholars such as Oakley (1976) have argued quantitative research is traditionally androcentric, Metso and Le Feuvre (2006) claimed both qualitative and quantitative methods have their benefits, and 'no single research method can provide a complete understanding of any social phenomena; each one has its limits and can only draw a part of the picture' (Metso and Le Feuvre, 2006, p.29).

It is also worth considering this observation from Knight, Kokanovic, Ridge et al., (2018, p.409), who write

> Although qualitative research has made huge strides within sport and exercise sciences, quantitative research still largely dominates within the field. Quantitative research is often optimised as the 'gold-standard', and qualitative research viewed as 'soft' or 'unscientific.'

Whilst there has then been, as Knight notes, a recent and rapid growth of qualitative research in the field (Smith and Sparkes, 2019), the majority of sports science and exercise research adopts a quantitative research approach. There is a justification, then, to build on the emerging qualitative research which is examining trans people's participation and inclusion in sport, in order to construct new knowledge and information about this topic.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research: Benefits and Limitations

Qualitative data are generally expressed in words rather than numbers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), often using an interpretivist approach to generate theories (Bryman, 2008; Gilbert, 2016). All qualitative research is frequently based in conversation, such as interviews, focus groups or ethnography, whose purpose is to look for latent meanings and patterns, by generating thick, rich data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Kuklick, 1980). Mason (2018: ix) describes it as

> A plethora of inventive and emphatic research approaches to getting to grips with the qualities of things and of life in all their richness and vibrancy.

Qualitative research methods and the way in which they nourish conversations (and subsequent data), offer scholars a set of interpretive, material practices which enable them and those reading their research to make the world visible. This allows for validity and trustworthiness in this research, by both foregrounding participant's experiences, and by the primary commitment to the scientific rigour of the research (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton and Ormston, 2014). In order to enhance the quality and trustworthiness of the data my three supervisors read six of my transcripts and checked through my coding. The traceability of my findings at the initial coding process can be demonstrated in Image A (p. 301) and Table 2 (p.292). This table and image reflect my thinking processes when it came to coding and organising the data (Matz, 2019).

Most significantly, these practices can also help scholars to attempt to make sense of the meanings people bring to the phenomena around them. Qualitative research, Berg (2004, p.3) wrote 'refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics,

metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things', and most often describes scenes or gathers data through interviews or document analysis.

Qualitative research defies easy definitions and it is often assumed, because of this, it has no structure, data cannot be accurately measured, pinned down and counted (Ritchie et al., 2003). Arguably, this could be viewed as one of its limitations. Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p.6) said

> The open-ended nature of the qualitative research project leads to a perpetual resistance against attempts to impose a single, umbrella-like paradigm over the entire project. It has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own, nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own.

Qualitative methods are not without their limitations. Positivists have argued qualitative data collection can often be an emotional and labour-intensive process for both participant and the researcher and has been criticised for its potential lack of validity and credibility (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Metso and Le Feuvre, 2004; Walliman, 2016). It may also be limited in its participant recruitment, overly subjective and lacking scientific rigour. Further criticisms include its susceptibility to researcher bias, the difficulty in reproducibility and a tendency to generate large amounts of detailed information about a small number of settings (Knight et al., 2018, p.19).

Adopting a qualitative methodology then, can be viewed as complex for the reasons outlined above. Yet, there still exist in qualitative research structured observations of social behaviour and a systematic method of exploring, analysing and conceptualizing social life, which remains sensitive to the participants (Creswell and Poth, 2017). This means using a qualitative methodology can sometimes be hard, arguably another limitation, even if it appears to be the most logical methodology to employ for researchers wishing to explore such phenomena.

Qualitative research works well alongside a social constructionist/interpretivist approach, as it is a situated activity which locates the observer in the world (Bryman, 2008; Creswell and Poth 2017), and has a long-standing history of contributing to an understanding of social structures, individuals and cultures (Ritchie et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers are required to be active in their data analysis and

interpretation, and as Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) frequently advise, themes do not simply emerge from the data. Rather, researchers are required to commit to the task of data analysis and interpretation, making meaning and sense of the stories, and constructing new knowledge about an experience or social phenomena, with a view to ameliorating inequalities.

Feminist research and qualitative research methods are often aligned, and historically some feminist researchers 'tended to argue that qualitative approaches were especially suited to feminist goals' (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992). Vincent (2018, p.112), writes that within qualitative research with trans people, 'listening is the most powerful tool of the emancipatory researcher.' Returning to the significance of reflexivity in qualitative research when working with trans people, Vincent (2018, p.113) summarises the importance of the researcher 'knowing your history, being transparent, studying language carefully, considering feminist methodological contributions, addressing intersectionality and being respectful of spaces.' Qualitative research also offers an opportunity to reflect on people's past and current experiences, including key life junctures, such as school, puberty and work. This is important within the intersections of sport and trans studies, where access to participation is often unequal due to the privileging of gender normative assumptions and hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou, 2001). Qualitative approaches are particularly crucial in researching marginal social groups where there is little existing knowledge, or when knowledge needs to be reconsidered (Perry, 1998).

Whilst there have then been huge strides made with qualitative research approaches, the majority of sports sociology and exercise research adopts a quantitative research approach (Smith and Sparkes, 2019). There is a justification, then, to build on the emerging qualitative research which is examining trans people's participation and inclusion in sport, in order to construct new knowledge and information about this topic. As previously noted, all qualitative research is based in conversation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), whose purpose is to look for meanings and patterns, by generating thick, rich data, using qualitative methods. It would be much harder to gather the stories of individuals using quantitative methods, precisely because qualitative methods allow more subjectivity and a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participant (Opedenakker, 2006). Most importantly, as a research method,

which is crucial for this study, qualitative research values participant experience and researcher reflexivity. In this way, the benefit of qualitative research is the way in which it captures ‘the complexity, mess and contradiction that characterises the real world’ (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.10).

These methods, and the way in which they nourish conversations (and subsequent data), offers scholars a set of interpretive, material practices which enable them and those reading their research to make the world visible. This allows for trustworthiness in this research, by both foregrounding participant’s experiences, and by the primary commitment to the scientific rigour of the research (Ritchie et al., 2014). Most significantly, these practices can also help scholars to attempt to make sense of the meanings people bring to the phenomena around them. Qualitative research is, then, a situated activity which locates the observer in the world (Bryman, 2008; Creswell and Poth 2017), and has a long-standing history of contributing to an understanding of social structures, individuals and cultures (Ritchie et al., 2014).

This section has illustrated both qualitative and quantitative research approaches seek to ask questions about the social world, and in practice the distinction between qualitative and quantitative is not absolute (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016). Not one research approach is more respected, challenging (or exciting) than the other, and both present their own benefits and limitations. However, I argue it would be much harder to gather the stories of individuals using quantitative methods, precisely because qualitative methods allow more subjectivity and a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participant (Opedenakker, 2006) and encourages reflexivity.

Mason (2018, p.x) says qualitative research requires, ‘the humility to recognise that we need to listen attentively, gently and on all channels, if we are to understand the rich and vibrant world of which we are part.’ Returning to the motivations of this research study, the necessity of researcher reflexivity and the placing of participant’s lived experiences centrally, results in the conclusion that a qualitative research design is the most appropriate for this study.

3.4 Methods

The previous section outlines the benefits and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, concluding clearly a qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach for this study. The following section presents the rationale for the methods used.

3.4.1 Rationale for Choosing Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews

When considering the qualitative research design there were a number of data gathering techniques to consider. For example, focus groups, ethnography, surveys or asking participants to keep a diary. Because there is a lack of qualitative research which asks trans people personally (and often intimately) about their lived experiences, one-to-one interviews were deemed to be the most appropriate. The comfort of the participants, as well as not wanting to trigger research fatigue was paramount in this research, and one-to-one interviews allow for this in a way that a larger group or different data gathering method might not.

Blaikie (2009, p.15) wrote 'to listen to people is to empower them, but if you want to go hear it, you have to go hear it, in their space, or in a safe space.' Empowering participants and facilitating agency was a key part of this research, notably as members of the trans community have spoken about experiencing research fatigue (Vincent, 2018). As the participants would be sharing and reflecting on personal and at times potentially difficult stories, face to face interviews allowed the opportunity to 'better break down power differences and empower the research participants who no longer feel like the 'other' or subject of study' (Crean, 2018, p.10).

Although none of the participants identified as cis, there were a number of other shared intersections, including race and age, which also served as an opportunity to mitigate the power imbalances I had been concerned about since that night at Edward Street. Interviewing participants individually gave them the opportunity to freely discuss their lived experiences of participation in sport, and also allowed space for some divergence by the interviewer if necessary (Wisker, 2008). It also enabled the conversation to flow across a wide range of topics, allowing participants to talk about their experiences of

participation in everyday sport and physical exercise at key junctures such as at school, puberty or work, in the past, present or imagined future (Opedenakker, 2006).

3.4.2 Telephone Interviews

In addition to face-to-face interviews, telephone and Skype interviews were also offered, to allow for a wider geographical sample. Like face-to-face interviews, qualitative telephone data have been judged to be rich, vivid, detailed and of a high quality (Kavanaugh and Ayres, 1998; Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Telephone interviews are recognized as a versatile data gathering technique, the benefits of which may include anonymity and privacy, convenience and decreased social pressure (Novick, 2007; Opedenakker, 2006). This is an important consideration when wishing to conduct research with individuals who may feel more comfortable with this option (perhaps due to their gender identity or transition stage), as well as allowing the researcher to take notes unobtrusively. From a personal perspective, as a researcher who had a young child at the time, offering telephone interviews also provided me with an opportunity to conduct these at times I would not normally be available, such as at the weekend or after my son had gone to bed. This was advantageous for participants, too, as it took into consideration their own schedules, as well as allowing for a wider geographical reach. A total of twelve telephone interviews and six in-person interviews took place and ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours, with the average length being one hour.

Telephone interviews also brought about the opportunity to discuss a little researched topic, that of the inability for participant and researcher to see each other. When interviewing trans people, a sense of disorientation can be triggered, which comes from not knowing what a person looks like, in turn revealing our own binary way of thinking. It is assumed telephone interviews are disembodied acts, but they are not (Novick, 2008). Being a cis woman, I was wary of positioning my own gender normative body as a site for comparison with others, something which happens subconsciously when we conduct an interview in person as we often rely on another person’s body language to guide the conversation. In the current climate of such hostility to trans people in the UK press and social media, telephone interviews also

offered another means to talk to someone who may be feeling unsafe and unsure of my motivations.

It was during transcription and the listening process when I began to notice my own sense of embodied disorientation, triggered from not knowing what a participant looked like, and from my own anxiety around my role as an outsider researcher. I would often stutter whilst searching for the right words, because I did not want to offend, misgender or use the wrong pronouns. In a face-to-face interview, this embodied disorientation may have been alleviated. My research is about gender and sport and, as such, I knew I might need to ask some very personal questions about a person's body. My inhibition often manifested itself in my inability to ask these questions or linger over asking deeper ones.

It was not so much the details of another's body which inhibited me, rather it was the inability to offer comfort and find a way to ask more without upsetting them. Although one participant encouraged me to 'ask me anything and I'll tell you if it's not ok', I still worried about taking advantage of their sensitive biographical disclosures. Harris (2015) writes the interview process can be said to occur 'in the intermundane space between bodies, where energies circulate, and boundary distinctions are unclear.' I felt those boundaries very clearly via my embodied disorientation with some participants, but less so with those with whom I shared a sporting connection, such as swimming. A shared identity somehow allowed me to feel better qualified to ask them to expand upon their own embodied journey. Making a connection via a personal disclosure established what Harris (2015) terms a somatic mode of attention, or a connection our bodies shared, rather than our minds. As a cis woman I would have felt disingenuous to assume my gender journey was the same as someone who is trans (though of course why could they not be in some cases?), but as a swimmer, I felt able to better connect with a person's sporting experience.

What this offers the research is additional considerations about my own embodied reflexivity. Harris (2015) writes 'the researcher's body in qualitative research is often absented, an absence that can render deceptively tidy research accounts.' I approached telephone interviews thinking they would be tidy because of the absence of both my body and the participant's; rather, they were beautifully untidy, rich and

emotional. This deepened my understanding of the experiences of trans people in sport whilst being mindful of not co-opting trans people's experiences to create homogenous research, nor sidestepping the very real material challenges and discriminations trans people face.

Conducting telephone interviews also created a new way of reflecting on my own embodiment and researcher positionality, and the opportunity it offered to participants to speak freely and openly about their bodies and experiences cannot be disregarded. Whilst not being able to see a person's physical appearance was disorientating for me, participants may have experienced increased feelings of ease and agency and empowerment. Empowering participants and facilitating agency is a key part of this research and beginning the process of un-labelling of bodies through telephone interviews perhaps helped to break down gender normative assumptions and not treat participants as if they are the 'other' in sports spaces and settings. Even so, as an outsider researcher and trans-inclusive feminist, I was mindful of forging what Heyes (2003) refers to as an effective alliance with participants and allowing the interview approach to be respondent led (Blaikie, 2009).

3.4.3 Limitations of Face-to-Face Interviews

One limitation of conducting face-to-face interviews is the cost (which is also a factor with telephone interviews), these being mainly travel and refreshments, as these are met out of the researcher's own budget. In addition, transcription time can be very lengthy, but as each interview has the possibility of being unique, this can be viewed as something to be valued. There is also the possibility of only collecting a small sample size, but as Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) argue, the more information the sample holds (which is relevant to the actual study) the lower amount of participants needed. The quality of the dialogue is therefore important, and face-to-face interviews have the potential to gather rich and detailed data. This was because they involved only the researcher and the participants, as opposed to a focus group or an ethnographical study. It was important participants felt able to talk freely and confidentially about their potentially sensitive experiences, and this would be more likely to happen with a face-to-face, one-to-one interview. As such face-to-face interviews were preferred for this study, facilitating openness and allowing for the presence of visual and non-verbal clues (McCoyd and Shdaimah, 2007). They also

allow for better researcher control over the data produced, which increases the chances of generating useful data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Lastly, they also less prone to the possibility of data loss and distortion than other forms of interview methods (Novick, 2007).

To conclude, face to face interviews were deemed to be the most feasible and practical as opposed to, for example, a focus group, a survey or an ethnographic study, for answering the research questions and achieving the aims.

3.4.4 Using a Semi-Structured Interview Approach

As a trans-inclusive feminist there is the risk of interviewer bias or asking leading questions, so using a respondent led approach and semi-structured questions offered a chance to mitigate this risk. Face to face, semi-structured interviews facilitated the chance for the effective alliance cited by Heyes (2003), and the researcher's attention can be focused on the participant, allowing them to listen fully, be attentive to body language and maintain eye contact (when available). Most importantly, it enabled the researcher to respond to the participant's need for a break or ask them to explain an answer more fully, and to take their time.

A semi-structured interview approach also provided the opportunity for more flexibility, to perhaps answer their research questions in no particular order, which in turn can lead to asking more differentiated questions based on the responses given (Wisker, 2008). This meant participants could take their time and not feel rushed and express themselves more fully, more so than with a structured interview approach. Establishing trust and empathy as an outsider researcher was an important part of my own personal ethics as a researcher, so a more intimate environment allowed for this, more so than perhaps a group setting such as a focus group or ethnographic study. This also enabled me as an interviewer to perhaps feel more confident about returning to a question which may need further clarification.

3.4.5 Participant Criteria

Prior to recruitment, it was necessary to consider who the participants would be, and possible reasons for excluding any specific aspect of their suitability for interview. The two most significant of these were a participant's gender identity and sporting history.

Participants needed to self-identify as transgender and/or non-binary or any other term which they felt was appropriate, such as gender non-conforming or gender queer. This allowed for the shifting gender identification some individuals may experience at different phases of their lives and/or stages of transition (Anderson and Travers, 2017; Farber, 2017; Holm, 2015; Vincent, 2018). The discourses and terminology surrounding this subject change rapidly, reflecting 'an increasingly popular mode of self-identification and locus of popular cultural preoccupation' (Pearce et al., 2019). As previously discussed in chapter two, the historical pathologising of many trans people within legal-medical discourses has made the ethics and politics of self-definition for trans people especially fraught, and thus especially important for their own agency within research (Burns, 2018; Davy, 2011).

Participants needed to be partaking in sport currently, in the past, or wished to, whether as a youth or as an adult. They needed to be aged eighteen or over, with no upper age-limit. As trans people are considered to belong to a social minority group (Flick, 2014), this research necessitated Tier 2 approval from the University of Brighton's Research Ethics Panel (granted in April 2018, see appendices). Recruiting only adults also allowed for a wider variety of experiences across the lifespan (Gair, 2012). All ethnicities and abilities were encouraged to take part, and participants needed to be UK based residents, but not necessarily British, in order to keep the size of the study manageable. Locating the recruitment in the South East (UK) allowed for practicality and time constraints due my own residence there and family commitments. Participation was voluntary.

3.4.6 Recruiting Research Participants

Seeking voluntary engagement from marginalised communities can often be viewed as an unfair request for intellectual and emotional labour (Ahmed, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Vincent, 2018), and I was mindful of not wanting to ask anything of a community resulting in this expectation. My original plan was to use only recruitment materials

which could be displayed or easily circulated, rather than expect others to engage in such labour on my behalf. Recruitment posters and flyers were designed in May 2018 which detailed the purpose and nature of the research. Both printed and digital versions were available (see p. 255).

The next stage was to approach appropriate 'informal gatekeepers' (the lead contact for a group) from South East (UK) based LGBTQ+ sports groups and trans organisations by email. Searching sports clubs using the term 'LGBTQ+' allowed a wider variety of organisations to be identified, as not all clubs use 'transgender' in their name, e.g., BLAGGS (Brighton Lesbian and Gay Sports Society). The term 'informal gatekeeper' has been used for the purposes of this research, as this term is a more accurate description of the person within an organisation who has no formal authority but who has moral suasion or influence (Flick, 2014). Whilst not asking the informal gatekeeper to provide sensitive contact information, their permission and assistance with sharing recruitment materials within their organisation was required, so their involvement was crucial.

Informal gatekeepers were asked by email if they could display posters and flyers in a suitable area in their organisation. Posters and flyers were posted and/or a digital version was emailed. Flyers were provided so participants could easily take the information away, and possibly share with other people outside of the organisation. This was felt to be an appropriate recruitment method as it allowed for a faster distribution of the recruitment information and perhaps reach participants who were less frequent visitors to the place they were displayed.

Initially twenty separate LGBTQ+ and trans-only identified sports organisations and networks in and around the South East (UK) were approached via email, either directly or through a contact form on their website, requesting help with the recruitment process. In addition, informal gatekeepers were asked if the recruitment poster could be put on their official social media platforms if they had one. Organisations preferred to circulate the digital copy to their members' list or placed it on their website or other social media, such as Twitter. Only one organisation (Youth Pride, Manchester) asked for a hard copy of the poster. An email was sent to *Gay Scene*, a local LGBTQ+ events magazine, who placed a copy of the recruitment poster in their printed and online

magazine in June 2018. Active Sussex, which does not identify specifically as an LGBTQ+ sports organisation was also approached but did not respond.

In addition to contacting these LGBTQ+ sporting groups and organisations, another opportunity was identified for recruitment, and permission requested and approved by the University of Brighton Research and Ethics Committee. This was the Annual Transgender, Non-Binary and Intersex Conference (TNBI), which ran from 12 – 13 July 2018, at the University of Brighton, and I attended this event as a PhD student/volunteer and representative for the University of Brighton's Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender (CTSG). Recruitment posters were displayed around the foyer and flyers left in public areas for people to read and take away. Working at this conference was also very helpful, as I was visibly present as a member of staff rather than just as a researcher, so occupied a more 'official' role. As a recruitment technique it was instrumental in helping me not only to distribute my call for participants in an appropriate environment, but to be a visible member of the community I was hoping to recruit from. One participant was recruited though the TNBI conference, who in turn offered to circulate the recruitment materials to colleagues in Manchester where they live, and where there is a thriving LGBTQ+ and sports community. This provided me with an opportunity to extend the geographical area and allow for more recruitment opportunities, in case the take-up in the original location was low. Through the TNBI event I met the LGBTQ+ Officer for Brighton and Hove Council, who passed my details on to the LGBTQ+ Sports Officer. We met shortly after and they also circulated the recruitment poster to mailing lists and organisations, including the Marlborough Pub in Brighton, a well-known LGBTQ+ venue.

Snowball Sampling

Social media (Twitter) proved to be the most successful recruitment tool in this research study. This was due to trans individuals, networks and organisations retweeting my recruitment poster, as well as across University of Brighton networks, including the LGBTQ+ staff network group and the Equality and Diversity network group. I had not intended to use social media or snowball sampling as a primary data collection method (as I had not wanted to 'rely' on social media to recruit for me), but as several gatekeepers had explained an absence of a real office in which to put up a

poster, they were happy to post on Twitter. This enabled me to snowball sample and retweet to other networks with credibility.

Snowball sampling can enable researchers to gain access to hard to reach individuals. It is a recruitment method which distributes recruitment materials into participants' social networks to access specific populations and is often used because the population being researched may be 'hidden', either due to low numbers of potential participants or the sensitivity of the topic (Browne and Nash, 2010). The retweets on Twitter by trans individuals, networks and organisations helped to verify my trans ally status, and I know at least one individual 'checked' my credentials with a prominent trans activist to see if I was 'genuine'. As I have no personal networks (I do not identify as LGBTQ+), this credibility was very valuable, and I am indebted to those who facilitated it.

Becoming better known in these social networks was significant because participants were able to 'check me out' before getting in touch (Browne and Nash, 2010). As it transpired, my concern as an outsider researcher did not play as significant a role as I originally thought it might; rather the topic of sport was the one people were keen to talk about. This may be because, at the time of recruitment, discussions concerning trans people's participation in sport was gaining a lot of media attention, and people wanted to share their own lived experiences. My identity as a swimmer sometimes helped me to navigate common ground and shared experiences, but I believe if prominent members of the trans community did not like or trust me, I would have had trouble recruiting participants, certainly locally. Snowball sampling was a fortunate addition to my original recruitment plan, and on reflection, data gathering was unexpectedly opportunistic, but fruitful.

3.4.7 Data Gathering: Conducting the Pilot Interview

In my personal narrative I reflected on my discomfort as an outsider researcher, and my concern I would be unable to recruit enough participants for this study due to my cis identity. One of my supervisors, Dr Nigel Jarvis, suggested an initial pilot interview with a friend from his local LGBTQ+ tennis club could be useful, to help identify any initial themes and issues. I emailed his friend and an interview was scheduled for 31st May 2018 in person at a well-known LGBTQ+ venue in Brighton.

The interview questions were guided by the general themes of sport, participation and lived experience, and related directly back to the research questions.

- Can you tell me about your experiences of participation in sport and exercise?
- How has your gender identity impacted on your experiences, either negatively or positively?
- Have you experienced any barriers to participation?
- Do you think any changes could be made to improve inclusivity for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise?

The questions asked were based around the research questions identified in chapter two but expressed more informally. This allowed the participant to reflect on the different points in their life where their participation in sport perhaps diminished or increased, rather than stick with a more 'traditional' chronology. It also allowed me as the interviewer to ask deeper questions about the direct impact their gender identity may or may not have had on their participation in everyday sport and physical exercise. Finally, by asking for a person's thoughts on how sport might become more inclusive, it demonstrated this research valued their opinions and shared with them the possibility of accomplishing the aims of the research. That is, to make recommendations for understanding the barriers facing trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, and to challenge existing notions of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity prevalent in sport.

I was incredibly nervous before and during the early stages of the interview, but the participant was warm and talkative, and once we had settled at a comfortable table with our cups of tea, I relaxed more and was able to enjoy our conversation. The pilot interview was also instrumental for me in the way it allowed me the opportunity to meet with a participant for the first time and test the equipment and venue. This allowed the possibility to check in the future for high noise levels and leaving enough time for people to talk at their own pace. One key thing I learnt was to never turn off the recording equipment until you are certain the interview is over and bringing plenty of tissues in case the participant becomes upset. This pilot interview was of enormous help to my confidence as well as a rich and fascinating interview.

3.4.8 Profile of Participants

After a participant responded to the recruitment advert, I emailed them with an initial introduction to the research, together with the Participant Information Sheet. If the participant was happy to continue with the interview, then a suitable time would be arranged to talk, either in person or over the telephone. If they wished to meet in person then a mutually agreeable location was decided, in line with the University of Brighton's ethical code of conduct for arranging interviews in public places.

Verbal data was audio-recorded to allow for accuracy when later transcribing. It also allowed for attention to be fully focused on the participant and their words, and not inhibited by note-taking or loss of eye contact if in person (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Flick, 2018). Permission to record was sought prior to the interview commencing. Interviews took place at a location in accordance to the participant's needs and comfort, in a mutually agreed quiet space, and in a community setting. Interviews took place between May 2018 and October 2018.

Participants were offered the option of being either anonymous or non-anonymous, and fifteen out of eighteen people opted for the use of their real first name to be recorded. The following table (Table 1) displays the participants and their information. This information reflects what every participant was asked: their name, pronouns, gender identity, age, ethnicity, education and the sport they played. This information was asked to gather a record of the diversity (or not) of the participants.

Table 1: Participant Information of the 18 People Interviewed

Name	Pronouns	Gender Identity	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Sport
Sarah	She/her/hers	Trans woman	67	White British	University	Tennis, darts
Judith	She/her/hers	Trans woman	47	Chinese	PhD	Climbing, hiking, kayaking, running
Charlotte	She/her/hers	Trans woman	37	White British	University	Swimming, running
Katy	She/her/hers	Trans woman	34	White British	University	Football, running
Jennifer	She/her/hers	Trans woman	50	White British	University	Climbing, kayaking, orienteering, cycling
Aimee	She/her/hers	Trans woman, female	35	White British	University	Roller derby, gym, running
Persia	She/her/hers	Trans woman	69	White British	University	Yoga, swimming
Evren	He/him/his	Trans masculine, non-binary	23	White British	College	Boxing
Craig	They/them/their	Trans masculine, non-binary	35	White British	PhD	Running, gym, cycling
Annie	She/her/hers	Transsexual, female	55	White British	University	Motor sport, yoga, swimming
Tom	They/them/their	Trans, gender queer, non-binary	26	White British	University	Water polo, swimming, football
James	He/him/his	Trans masculine, gender non-conforming	27	White British	University	Running, coaching
Miles	He/him/his	Trans male	26	White British	University	Circus, skateboarding, running, swimming
Alice	They/them/their	Trans woman	45	White British	University	Triathlons, cycling
Alix	They/them/their	Trans male	29	White British	University	Running, gym
Harry	He/him/his	Trans male	53	White Irish	University	Football
Jude	They/them/their	Non-binary	21	White British	University	Roller derby, rugby
Joe	They/them/their	Trans male	24	White British	University	Water polo, rugby

It is also important to note that this sample was made up of mostly White British people with a university education. A reflection on the whiteness (and education/middle-classness) of the sample is warranted here. This ethnic make-up of the sample is reflective of the picture in England where 15 out of the 18 participants were from). Census data from the 2011 Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that the total population of England and Wales was 56.1 million, with 48.2 million people (86.0%) from White ethnic groups, with 45.1 million of those identifying with the White British group (80.5% of the population). This research sample had 83.3% of the participants identify as White British. The ethnicity of the participants was overwhelmingly White and British, with only two non-British participants. A specific ethnicity was not a required criterion for the recruitment or the research, and participants' ages reflect a diverse range of sample. Nevertheless, it does not consider the importance of the lived experiences of participation in everyday sport and physical exercise amongst trans and non-binary people of colour. The means that the limited diversity of this sample does not widen knowledge about diverse needs and issues for trans and non-binary people of colour.

It is noted note that 17 out of 18 participants attended university, a very high proportion against the general population figure of 27.2%. According to the Office of National Statistics (2012), 27.2% of the UK population, or 12 million people in total aged 16 to 74 have a degree or equivalent or higher. Seventeen out of eighteen participants in this sample held a degree from an HE establishment, meaning that this sample was well above average in terms of the level of education reached. It is very difficult at the best of times to 'measure' social class and in this sample, I did not collect measures of income or occupation, which can be used to establish class (Great British Class Survey, 2013). Whilst this is not an exact measure of social class, some inferences can be drawn from this and it can be tentatively concluded that this sample was skewed towards more middle-class participants.

Number of Interviews

Acocella (2012) suggested the preferred number of interviews in qualitative research as being between fourteen and thirty. This figure is based on what constitutes a small

sample in qualitative research and is an adequate number in research which uses thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Research using qualitative interviews can be based on quite small samples, and a sampling of this size is an acceptable level when considering the available time and resources of the researcher (Acocella, 2012). Additionally, this sample size is also offered as an acceptable number for publishing future papers (Goss and Leinbach, 1996).

In total thirty-four individuals responded to the recruitment advert asking for further information, of which eighteen resulted in interviews. Data saturation was felt to have been reached at this point so no further recruitment was sought after the eighteenth interview. Data saturation is understood as being the point at which the researcher begins to hear the same comments repeated, signifying the end of data collection and the start of data coding and analysis (Bryman, 2008).

The reasons for those enquiries which did not materialise into interviews ranged from the participant having other committments, such as work or family, or simply not responding to a follow-up email inquiring if they would still like to participate. This response rate was felt to be a positive result.

3.4.9 Data Gathering and Transcription

All interviews were digitally audio recorded on a recording device provided by the University of Brighton and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher (Poland, 1995). I also wrote up field notes immediately after each interview, where I would record the weather, how I felt about the interview and general observations about the surroundings, such as the venue being noisy, or the length of the telephone call. It was important for me to transcribe these recordings personally, as my outsider status compelled me to be attentive to the interviews and diligent in my transcribing. As Berger (2015, p.228) writes

> Studying the unfamiliar may also be a barrier to identifying disguised and subtle expressions of themes. Each subculture develops its own language and associations. A stranger to the culture may miss clues that are clear to an ‘insider’.

During the transcription process I found returning to my field notes was a good strategy for maintaining reflexivity, creating self-supervision and an audit trail of my conduct as a researcher (Botterill, 2015). This made me especially mindful of any microaggressions I may have committed (Vincent, 2018), such as any language insensitivity or talking too much due to nerves. I found transcription to be a key phase within interpretive qualitative methodology, as it requires close attention to make sense of the data (Bird, 2005). Two complete transcripts can be found on pages 263 – 296.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to the University of Brighton's Research Ethics Policy on Research Integrity. As such it is committed to promoting and upholding high ethical standards, aiming to ensure the study was carried out in a way which respects the safety, wellbeing, rights and dignity of all the research participants involved.

However, as Thomson (2015, n.p.) writes, as well as attaining high ethical standards in research it is also equally important to reflect on any specific ethical challenges which surfaced in the research, and how they were dealt with. Thomson (2015, n.p.) writes

> Because questions of power, rights and moral principles underpin research, 'ethics' is never a matter of simply meeting institutional requirements. Yes, the form filling has to be done and it's important, but there is more than this to questions of ethics. Ethics is also *a way of doing research*, it's about the never-ending development of a research practice, underpinned by commitments to working with and through normative principles held in tension.

With this advice in mind, I would like to reflect on two issues which created a challenge in this research. The first concerns the provision of an after-care letter to participants, and the second concerns the question of participant anonymity. The first concern is discussed below.

3.5.1 After-care Information

In keeping with the University of Brighton's research ethics policy, an after-care letter (see p. 266) was included with the participant information sheet (see p. 264), to be given to participants before their interview. This was done either in-person if a face-to-

face interview was conducted or emailed/posted if a telephone interview was arranged. Whilst it was hoped this after-care information would not be needed, its inclusion was deemed fundamental in keeping with the high ethical standards of the research as participants were deemed vulnerable (this research was classified as Tier 2).

After the pilot interview, which took place in person, the next seven interviews were telephone interviews. Whilst assembling the paperwork for the eighth in-person interview, I realised I had failed to send the after-care letter to the previous participants. I immediately contacted my lead supervisor Dr Hannah Frith to explain my mistake and Dr Frith advised me the issue was about the wellbeing of the participants and my responsibility regarding this. Having looked through the original University of Brighton's ethics policy, Dr Frith did not notice anything related to reporting minor deviations from the research protocol such as this, apart from including it in the end of project report. Dr Frith's advice was to immediately contact the University of Brighton's Research Ethics Committee, and ask if having completed these interviews, and whilst none gave the researcher any cause for concern, the researcher felt retrospectively it would be important for the participant to have the after-care letter. Dr Frith advised there was not an absolutely right or wrong answer, it was a matter of judgement. As this was new ground for me, and I wanted to be thorough and attentive, I decided to contact the University of Brighton's Research Ethics Committee. I explained what had happened, apologised, and informed them I had sent the after-care letter out after the interview had taken place

The Chair of the Ethics Committee accepted my apology and decision to send out the after-care information retrospectively, as I had clearly not intentionally omitted it and it would not be considered a major breach of the original ethics application. The Chair also advised me it is good practice to include both national and local numbers within all after-care information, and this information should be updated for future after-care letters, which it was.

3.5.2 Participant Anonymity

When researchers consider the issue of the anonymity of research participants, concern most likely focuses on how it can be maintained, particularly when working

with marginalised or vulnerable participants. Given less consideration, however, is the possibility of research participants wishing to be acknowledged in published research, thus enabling them to retain ownership of their stories (Grinyer, 2001). As this was something which happened during this research study, a reflection on the complex dilemma of this is needed, as well as what the outcome of this dilemma was.

Protecting the identity of participants in research respondents is central to the design and practice of ethical research, and consequent assumptions about the desirability of anonymity are embedded in various codes of ethical conduct, including the University of Brighton's Research and Ethics Committee, and the British Sociological Association's code of ethical practice. These ethical codes of conduct emphasise the importance of respecting the anonymity and privacy of research participants, by not using their real names. The issue of anonymity has been addressed widely, with an emphasis on the importance of maintaining it for participants (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004). According to Grinyer (2001), the standard approach to presenting data is it should be done in such a way that respondents should be able to recognise themselves, while the reader should not be able to identify them. This supports what Grinyer (2001, n.p.) called 'a culturally embedded assumption that anonymity is an ethical prerequisite, particularly in areas of investigation that may be of a sensitive nature.'

Participants in all research 'have a right to expect that the information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs' (Thompson and Thompson, 2016, p.43). To ensure this happened in this research study, all participants were required to sign a participant consent form and were given a participant information sheet and an after-care letter. For this research study, two participant consent forms were designed; one anonymous, and one non-anonymous. I made the decision to offer this choice so as to address a particular issue: that the historical erasure of trans identities in research is a concern, and it was thus important participants felt able to be both present and represented in their own narratives (Holm, 2015).

When the original ethics application form was submitted to the University of Brighton's Research and Ethics Committee in March 2018, the committee approved the inclusion of this non-anonymous consent form. The committee also felt the application form was

‘a very well presented and detailed submission, particularly praising the breadth of organisations the researcher had already contacted as regards to conducting their research and the inclusion of a separate consent form for participants who choose not to remain anonymous.’

The ethics application also stated if a participant wished to waive their right to anonymity, then written consent would need to be obtained via a separate consent form following a detailed discussion of how long research can be accessible in the public field and was outlined on the participation information form as follows:

‘Your name will be anonymized in the transcription and use of data. If you prefer not to be anonymous (which means using your real, first name), please let me know and we can discuss what this involves.’

Out of eighteen participants, fifteen signed the non-anonymous consent form (five in person, ten were telephone interviews and were later received by email or by post). In June 2019, during my secondary Annual Progression Review, a mandatory procedure which all doctoral students must complete in order to progress in their studies, the panel raised serious concerns some data would not be anonymised, believing this was a basic procedure in all research, and I must address this. It was at the time of writing chapters four and five that I revisited this advice and decided on reflection that I wanted to give it deeper consideration.

Trans people’s voices are still often erased in research and in society, and I was keen to help change this, as well as recognising the safety of participants as paramount. As data collection had taken the previous year in 2019, I felt there was a chance some participants may have changed their mind about their decision. I decided to seek advice from the Chair of the Research and Ethics Committee for the School of Applied Science on November 12th, 2020, outlining the dilemma. The advice is paraphrased below:

- The committee decision stands and was given in the light of your objective to not erase trans voices and was applauded, though the APR discussion is also important.

- The decision needs to be taken in the light that you will consider public audiences sensitively and not for example broadcast participants' names in the tabloid press if they do not want.
- If your study is not officially ‘ended’ then you can go back to your participants and discuss with them if they wish to be anonymized or not in light of your latest thoughts.
- This would be part of 'ongoing consent' which is probably considered 'more ethical' in the case of sensitive research such as this is.
- You might also submit a 'change request' and arrange an online focus group to discuss the issue with participants as a collective.
- Consider the ‘audiences’ of the research: a journal article will have less readers than publishing on social media, for example.

Considering this advice, I decided to discuss the matter with my supervisors who felt it was important to clarify the issue of anonymity again with participants. I decided to contact participants by email and received several enthusiastic responses, confirming not only that they wished their own name to be used, but they felt this was essential in helping to dismantle transphobia in sport and improve inclusion for others. Three participants also wished to update their pronouns.

What these two incidents taught me is the skills necessary to become a good researcher can manifest from mistakes made. To have omitted something so fundamental as an after-care letter caused me to pause and reflect on what the impact might be for a participant, and the commitment researchers have to upholding high ethical standards really is more than just a tick-boxing exercise (Thomson, 2015, n.p.). With regards to the question of participant anonymity, I remain adamant that such a decision to empower participants with the choice of using their own name may be one of the most trans-inclusive acts performed in this research, and one which I am proud to have taken the time to revisit.

3.6 Coding, Analysing and Presenting the Data

The following section details the process by which the data was coded, analysed, and presented. The learning of qualitative research methods usually requires the use of hands-on activities, such as conducting in-person interviews or visual methods (Humbler and Radina, 2019; Morgan, 1997). In this way learning how to conduct qualitative research 'should be very much like learning a craft' (Breuer and Schreier, 2007, p. 5), and subsequently the data coding and analysis processes which follows may often feel like an intimate experience to the researcher. As Mauthner and Doucet (2003, p. 6) wrote

> Data analysis is our most vulnerable spot. It is the area of our research where we are most open to criticism. Writing about data analysis is exposing ourselves for scrutiny.

Data analysis for me most certainly felt like an intimate experience. This was in part due to the sensitive content of the interviews, but also in part to my own positionality as a cis, outsider researcher and commitment to reflexivity. In keeping with the original aims of this research, to centre the voices and narratives of trans people by listening to their lived experiences, it was crucial I was intimate with the data, and invested a lot of time reading and re-reading the transcripts and re-listening to the interviews. The method of data analysis was also important, as it was crucial to ensure the aims of the research were consistently adhered to. However, before data analysis and presentation can take place, all data needs to be coded.

3.6.1 Coding

All analysis begins with coding the data (Bryman, 2008; Flick, 1998), and coding is a process of 'identifying the data that relate to your research question' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.206). Following on from Braun and Clarke (2013), I adopted one of the two main approaches in pattern-based forms of qualitative analysis: selective coding. I made the choice to use selective coding as I had a large amount of data, so this approach meant I could better manage my data in a systematic way. Selective coding is a method which involves 'developing an inclusive corpus of items of interest across the entire data set' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.202). This method of coding enabled me to identify those items of interest in relation to my research questions and aims.

The first stage of coding was to carefully and closely read back over the transcripts, re-reading them multiple times (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was a fundamental stage of the research process, both in terms of my commitment to the research topic but to my status as an outsider researcher, and my wish to do a thorough job. This meticulous familiarisation with the transcripts also allowed me to develop my analytical skills, helping me to establish a method of easy and efficient recollection. My three supervisors also read six of my transcripts in order to ensure an additional layer of trustworthiness, integrity and validity was provided (Korstjens and Moser, 2008).

The second stage of the coding process involved identifying relevant words, phrases, sentences, sections, concepts and opinions in all 18 transcripts. This coding process was done manually, and I broadly assigned codes using different coloured highlighters. I did this by highlighting key words in different colours, looking specifically for words which were relevant for my research questions. These words included but were not limited to: transgender; non-binary; hormones; surgery; body; gender; sport; exercise; barriers; participation; experiences; impact; recommendations; hegemonic masculinity; gender normativity; inclusion and exclusion. In addition to highlighting words specific to the research, I also highlighted those words which were repeated in several places, were words which caught my interest, seemed important to the participant, or resonated with the literature review. Please see p, 269 for an example of an un-coded transcript, and p. 284 for a manually coded transcript.

The next stage, as advised by Bryman (2008), was to review the codes a second time. Revisiting my codes allowed a re-checking of the labelling I had carried out, that I had done this correctly and not used different terms to describe the same instances. I did this by transferring the extracted codes and any supporting words to a spreadsheet, which was kept to hand for frequent checking (Table 2, p.292). I did this because I had a very large volume of data and needed to able to streamline it into a manageable document which I could more easily and frequently refer to, almost like a birds-eye view. The spreadsheet of codes helped me to identify the relationships among the codes, decide which codes were the most important, bring several codes together and develop new codes by combining two or more codes. In this stage, data not relevant to the study were filtered and placed in the column marked miscellaneous where they

could be accessed whenever needed. This step was important and took several weeks.

In addition, I carefully re-examined the literature review, to establish links or connections I had perhaps overlooked. The final stage of coding involved grouping these codes into piles, so I could begin the process of thematic analysis. I did this by printing out all the key words and cutting them out. In this stage, basic themes began to emerge.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis works harmoniously with qualitative research and with my epistemological and ontological positioning. In this way using thematic analysis is an advantage for this study, as it allows both flexibility and familiarity with the data during the transcription process (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013; King and Horrocks, 2019). Thematic analysis can also generate unanticipated and unique insights, making it useful for informing recommendations for future uses of this study, such as informing policy, which was one of the aims of this research. Thematic analysis also allows for the close observation of themes around trans people's lived experiences of participation in everyday sport and physical exercise, and the broader framework of how hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity might exclude some individuals. This approach was harmonious to the research design, as a qualitative research design often requires qualitative research methods.

Data analysis is not the end point for understanding knowledge, rather, it can be seen as the starting point at which meanings can be unpicked. Using a social constructionist/interpretivist approach helps to orientate the position from which the data are analysed, allowing us to look more closely at the data, and identifying the words which interest or puzzle us and lead us to thinking more deeply about the participant's lived experiences (Bryman, 2008). These perspectives also help in the way the data is treated in this research, in that it gives access to the reality of the lived experiences of participants and the activities they are engaged in. These realities may be situated or located within how the phenomena of sport and gender are being constantly constructed and reconstructed via these lived experiences, but they still

exist as realities for participants, and are observed in the data (Craig and Beedie, 2008).

Thematic analysis sits alongside other epistemological and ontological approaches, frequently aligning with them (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013). Thematic analysis does this by allowing a deeper and more sophisticated level of critical thinking, to better understand the rules which govern society or a phenomenon (such as gender), or the norms or representations of an institution (such as sport). This in turn strengthens the rigour of this qualitative research design chosen for this study, opening up both straightforward and sophisticated discussions (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). For instance, a straightforward discussion aims to give a voice to the participants, one which can describe and summarise what barriers may be faced to participation in sport. A sophisticated discussion aims to tell a story, locating both the data and the participants in the wider social, cultural, historical, political and ideological contexts of the research. Most importantly, using thematic analysis to develop this sophisticated approach helps to better structure an argument and interpret the latent meanings in the data, which in turn helps to answer the research question and achieve the research aims (Flick, 2018).

3.6.3 Benefits and Limitations of Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is methodologically flexible as it expects the researcher to play an active role in their study, as previously noted. Arguably this same flexibility may lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Humble and Radina, 2019), because such flexibility can sometimes make it hard for novice researchers to decide what aspects of the data to focus on. From my own experience, working with a large volume of data, I did sometimes feel overwhelmed by it. To mitigate this, I kept in mind Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.86) advice that 'analysis is not a linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next, it is more a recursive process, where movement is back and forth as needed throughout the phases.' This process also permitted me to take my time with the data and be recursive, as well as being able to fully appreciate the rich detail of lived experiences I was lucky enough to have been able to hear.

3.6.4 Organising and Naming Themes

Ryan and Bernard (2003, p.275) claim themes can be 'abstract and often fuzzy constructs,' a description I related to when organising my own themes, because they often felt hard to categorise. To help with this, I focused on initially looking for themes which were 'internally coherent, consistent and distinctive' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87), in order to establish a systematic yet flexible approach. This process involved grouping codes together, often using repetition and similarities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Walliman, 2016), constantly referring to the research questions and aims and to the literature in chapter two. I created a detailed table of codes (see Table 2, p.292) and I then began to group these codes into columns which helped me to visualise the whole data set in one document. I did this by cutting out each individual code word (i.e., 'barrier', 'transition', 'sport') so I could move them around until I was happy with their location (see Image A, p. 301). As the writing process in chapters four and five developed, I often revisited this map and moved code words around to different locations.

Visualising the data this way helped me to identify multiple themes which were key to answering the research question and start to group them together under the three main themes of 'Sporting Bodies', 'Sporting Spaces' and 'Sporting Communities.' I grouped and named the main themes in this way as I wanted to be 'internally coherent, consistent and distinctive' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87), demonstrating how these themes (and their corresponding sub-themes) were very often interconnected. The three main themes are also easy for the reader to recognise, and I felt they were an accurate reflection of the phenomena participants had spoken about in their interviews.

In addition, I also made a note of which participants had mentioned which theme(s), and this enabled me to go back to the colour coded transcripts if necessary and remind myself of the wider context of the original code. Whilst this was a lengthy exercise initially, it was invaluable during the writing up stage when I frequently returned to the original transcripts and my field notes. Miscellaneous sub-themes which did not correspond to any of the three main themes were noted then disregarded. As this research adopts a social constructionist/interpretivist approach there was also an

element of these themes being selected based on what caught the researcher's attention as they were being sorted, which in turn determined the hierarchy within the presentation and analysis of the data in chapters four, five and six.

Organising the data this way and selecting which themes to explore more fully is also in keeping with an interpretivist ontology. This is because themes were not always chosen by frequency of occurrence, but also because they would better illuminate the lived experiences of the participants. The table (Table 3) below illustrates how the coded data was organised into three main themes and sub-themes.

Table 3: Themes and Sub-themes

Chapter 4: Sporting Bodies	Chapter 5: Sporting Spaces	Chapter 6: Sporting Communities
Transition	Private spaces (e.g. changing rooms)	Teammates/allies
Passing	Other people	Organisations
Competitive advantage	Public spaces (e.g. the gym)	Role models
	Staff	Recommendations
	Trans only spaces/sessions	

All three main themes and their corresponding sub-themes helped to answer the research questions, as well as make progress towards achieving the aims of the research. This was because all the themes worked together to tell a story about the data, as during coding 'equal attention was paid to individual themes and the relationship between them, helping to provide a critical analysis of the assumptions underpinning the data and the implications of the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2014, p.270).

To recap, there were eighteen participants in this study, with a range of gender identities. Participants consisted of:

- eight trans women
- four trans men
- two trans masculine/non-binary people
- one transsexual woman
- one trans/gender-queer/non-binary person
- one trans masculine/gender non-conforming person
- one non-binary person

Pronouns were varied and included

- ten people using she/her/hers
- four using he/him/his and four using they/them/their

The findings of this study are presented in three chapters. Each chapter considers the data from the interviews, offers a theoretical analysis, identifies latent meanings and links back to the literature in chapter two. The first chapter (chapter four) discusses the first main theme of 'sporting bodies'; chapter five discusses the second main theme of 'sporting spaces', and the third main theme of 'sporting communities' is discussed in chapter six.

"Sporting bodies' is about the variety of ways respondents' bodies shaped their lived experience of participating in sport. Chapter five considers the second main theme, 'sporting spaces', which relates to the private and public places the participants accessed for sport, or before sport, such as a changing room or the swimming pool, and how a person felt in these spaces. Included in this second main theme are the participants' perceptions of and relationship with those spaces, such as gym members or the staff who worked there. The third main theme, discussed in chapter six, 'sporting communities', can be understood as the people and organisations participants encountered or interacted with whilst taking part in sport, for example, their teammates or the organisation responsible for running the sport. This theme also serves to underpin the importance of friends, teammates and allies for people in the wider context of their participation in sport, and how these communities also contribute to shape people's lived experiences of their sporting bodies and the sporting spaces they occupy. Within chapters four, five and six are a number of smaller sub-themes.

This thesis will now turn to the findings generated by this research process and the analyses of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPORTING BODIES:

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Talking about bodies in the context of sport can often draw attention to the body in a very fundamental way (Bandya et al., 2012; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018). This is because sport is an embodied experience, for example how a participant's body engages with the act of exercise, and how this makes a person feel better both physically and mentally (Wellard, 2016). As the literature highlighted, much has been written about the body in sport, and the ways in which the acceptance of those bodies which sit outside of normative depictions is not limited to trans athletes. Emphasising gender stereotypes within sport further essentialises the outwardly physical characteristics between men and women via physical differences, often resulting in inequality for those athletes who do not conform to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2004). Because gender normative bodies are privileged in sport those bodies positioned as 'other' in sport frequently receive less visibility, including trans people's bodies, this can reinforce barriers which reduce inclusion (Tagg, 2012). The following section explores how discussions about the body and the ways in which people's explicit lived experiences about their body were connected to their participation in sport. It concludes with a trans feminist analysis of the data.

4.2 The Complexities of Transition, Bodily Changes and Participation in Sport

When talking about their lived experiences of participating in sport, the data revealed the most frequently mentioned topic for participants was their body, and how their gender identity was read by others in sporting spaces. That is, what it meant to be trans, and how this gender identity mattered to them and to others in sporting spaces and amongst their sporting community. This section considers how a person's gender identity influenced their engagement and experience in everyday sport and physical exercise, that is, the ways in which gender identity mattered in the continuum of sporting experiences, sometimes facilitating the opportunity to confirm a new and/or changing identity. Sykes (2006, p.22) wrote

> Identity is 'fluid', it is not 'fixed'. Also, that identity is 'partial', 'incomplete' and 'fragmented'…these descriptions may not seem real, it may not be what we 'really feel.' Yet again such notions of the self can provide rich insights into the tensions and contractions of a vast range of sports experiences.

Feelings of gender dysphoria were experienced by over half of the participants, and they described how their engagement in sport heightened these feelings about their own body. Gender identity can be linked to gender presentation for some people (Fisher and Fisher, 2018), that is, for those nine participants who identify as a woman, they wanted to physically look like a woman. For example, Janet (47, trans woman, climber, she/her/hers) said when she socialises

> I try and make sure I am wearing feminine earrings and have make up on, rather than the nude look where you look like you don't have make up on.

Janet explained this was because "so people don't get confused whether it's a he or she when they see me?" Annie (55, transsexual, motor sports, she/her/hers) said about her appearance that "I can stand out if I have to, but it's easier to blend in, and people just think I'm a tall woman." Fourteen participants spoke of how transitioning, either socially, surgically or medically, alleviated feelings of gender dysphoria and helped to feel more comfortable about themselves and their body. For example, Evren (23, trans masculine, non-binary, boxer, he/him/his) explained how they were "just waiting for surgery, basically, I'm waiting for top surgery for my life to begin." James (27, trans male, gender non-conforming, running/yoga, he/him/his) shared how he had "some issues with eating and weight during adolescence [due to gender dysphoria} …and that it was still kind of there, at the beginning of university."

For some participants, this gender dysphoria is resolved through gender transition. Transition might include a range of bodily interventions, including social and legal transition, taking hormones, and often culminating in surgery. The act of transitioning in any of these ways signifies a change in a person's body, for example, they may have surgery to remove breasts, or change their name to one which is culturally understood as being either a female or a male name, rather than a gender-neutral one. Changing pronouns is also tied to the body in the way it signals a complete shift in the language used by an individual to refer to themselves, and how they are

addressed by other people. Aimee (35, trans woman, roller derby/running, she/her/hers) said

> I like being 'she' because I'm not non-binary, sometimes as a trans woman I can feel when someone is using 'they' are kind of hedging their bets…and I would like actually them to pin their beliefs or view of me to the mast and use 'she' and 'her.'

Talking about their body in relation to transitioning was frequently a starting point in our conversations, whereby an individual would both reflect on and expand on their experiences of participating in sport. In this way participants expressed different transition journeys to one another, and transition caused both a disruption to participation, and offered a resolution and return to sport. Charlotte (37, trans woman, swimmer/runner, she/her/hers) described starting her transition

> I liked to swim, for keeping fit, but…I was growing more and more uncomfortable with my body… and then starting the transitioning, I felt really uncomfortable going swimming, so, I stopped for quite some time, and then started again probably about two years ago, when I felt more confident. I suppose I didn't really do a lot of sport between school and transition.

Charlotte's gender dysphoria is described as making her feel "uncomfortable with my body." By starting transition Charlotte felt "more "confident" with her body. Whilst the transition process was happening, Charlotte decided to stop swimming, then once her transition was finished, she re-engaged with swimming. For Charlotte, transition changed how she felt about going swimming, she no longer felt "uncomfortable with my body," now she felt "confident." These changes to Charlotte's body helped her to re-engage in swimming once her transition had reached the stage where she felt "confident" about her body.

Katy (34, trans woman, footballer, she/her/hers), spoke of her decision to transition in similar terms to Charlotte, whose own participation in sport was also temporarily disrupted due to her feelings of discomfort about her (assigned male at birth) body, and starting the transition process. Katy said

> I stopped playing men's football when I knew I was going to transition. I stopped playing men's football at the end of one season, and then I

> didn't start playing women's football for another couple of seasons, because I wasn't sure if I would be welcome, I wasn't sure if I was allowed, or I could get involved with it.

Here, Katy describes transition as a distinct event that happens over a finite period of time (in this case, measured in terms of the length of a couple of football seasons), during which she shifts from being recognised as male to being recognised as female. Her sporting identity – as a footballer – is similarly depicted in terms of a brief interruption with an apparently seamless shift from playing with men's teams to playing with women's teams (Barras et al., 2021). This sounds like a straightforward, linear, progression from past to present, male to female, male footballer to female footballer. As Katy puts it, "football wise I play competitively, and I have always played competitively, I played pre-transition, I played post-transition."

Both Charlotte and Katy were uncomfortable continuing to participate in sport until they had transitioned. Katy did not feel comfortable playing on the men's football team because she considered herself to be a (trans) woman. Once she had changed how her body looked by transitioning, she returned to play football on the woman's team, because she now presented as female. Although Katy was still unsure about being "welcome" (on the women's team), the process of transitioning meant that she was able to consider re-joining football because her sporting body and therefore her gender identity now aligned with the other players.

Gender identity is frequently linked to the body (Anderson and Travers, 2017), and much has been written about the importance of gender identity and trans authenticity in trans feminist theoretical literature (Kylan Mattias, 2015; Saeidzadeh, 2020). In addition, trans bodies remain subject to 'a politics of authenticity…and the continued influence of a medical model of 'transgender' [demands] congruity between gendered bodies and gendered identities' (Hines, 2007, p. 607). Being able to show one's true identity is intrinsic to an individual's emotional health and well-being, and for Katy and Charlotte, transition and then playing sport provided this. Lawler (2008, p. 104) wrote

> Identity is not something achieved in isolation; it is part of a social and collective endeavour, not an individual odyssey.

In other words, for Katy and Charlotte, their transitions helped to align their gender identity with their sporting one and was something which happened alongside teammates and friends. For Joe (24, trans masculine/male, non-binary, water polo/rugby, they/them/their), transitioning was also a specific goal they wanted to work towards. Joe formerly played water polo on the women's team and was desperate to return to the sport they loved, even though they knew it would not be on the same team, rather, they would have to join the men's team. Joe's experience of their body in relation to sport changed for them when, "trans feelings appeared" at university. They said

> I was captain of one of the teams at uni, it was all good. I did four years at uni, the first two years playing water polo…er, then trans feelings appeared, and everything went tits up!

Until that point, Joe had felt happy playing water polo on the women's team, as at that point they presented as female and could fit in. Joe described not feeling very aware of their own gendered body during sport, until their "trans feelings" appeared, which then made them feel hyper-aware of their body. They said

> So, it was difficult, and I became very, very aware of my own body when I was playing, and that wasn't a thing before.

Although at the time they still physically presented as female, Joe was socially identifying as male, and consequently felt their physical body did not match their desired gender identity, prompting their decision to surgically transition. Whilst it was Joe's trans identity – their "trans feelings"– which were the reason for them wanting to transition, the gender segregated structure of sport also amplified how they felt about their body, due to the clothing swimmers wear. Because the women's water polo team wear a swimming costume, and the men's team wear swimming trunks, Joe became more self-conscious of their own gendered body, and the gender segregated divisions between the teams. They said

> It was a woman's team; it as all very, very gendered. We'd train with the men sometimes, but mostly they were bigger and stronger and

> better than us, it was really divided, we were in swimming costumes and they were in trunks, so it was an obvious physical divide.

This “obvious physical divide” manifested once Joe began questioning their own gender identity. Whilst deciding to transition allowed most participants to begin feeling better about themselves generally, it could sometimes trigger issues not previously considered within the context of sport, such as with Joe’s gender dysphoria being triggered by the gendered swimming attire. The gender divide between female swimmers in swimming costumes, and male swimmers in trunks, serves as a visible marking of the gender binary. The gendered swimming costumes bring an awareness to Joe’s body during sport which was not there before. The physicality of the exercise, coupled with the sharp gender binary, means that the embodied experience of sport becomes, as Joe said, “very gendered.”

Clothing is a distinguishable marker of gender, much like a beard or breasts (Frith and Gleeson, 2004), and what a person wears when they play sport can make a big difference to managing their gender identity and can prevent others misgendering them. This can be especially important for those people who transgress the gender binary (Doan, 2011, 2015). As well as clothing, many sports facilities, especially swimming pools, are often large open spaces where bodies are more exposed, often due to less clothing being worn, or because the clothing associated with some sport is form-fitting. It is not unusual for some gyms and swimming pools to have clothes restrictions such as banning the wearing of t-shirts and other loose clothing in the water. Significant numbers of people are uncomfortable with exposing their bodies in public places, including those who experience gender dysphoria or those who may need to cover their bodies for cultural or religious reasons (Spandler et al., 2020).

This was reflected in a comment Joe makes about their body not fitting in physically when wanting to play water polo until they had transitioned. They said

> I know that I probably didn’t fit in with the women’s team because they would see me as a male, ‘cos that was how I was presenting…I want to get back into water polo [once] I had top surgery…even if I was on a rubbish team, I would still fit in…I couldn’t without top surgery…I’d be too uncomfortable in a swimming costume, and other people would think it was weird! So, it would be a problem. And I’d be uncomfortable.

Joe's experience reflects how it was sometimes difficult during their transition period, to hold onto a coherent sense of self, due to the way 'identities and identifications are the effect of socially produced embodied narratives which misrecognise, hierarchically organise and individuate bodies' (Capuzza and Spencer, 2015, p.41). Society and sport in the West have been established on a process of assignment and categorisation along gendered binary lines in order to make it intelligible to people. If there are only two categories

> It is easier for us to organise the world and attach feelings, emotions and ways of being to each one. Those feelings, emotions and ways of being are commonly referred to as 'gender'. (Olufemi, 2020, p.51)

Like Charlotte, Joe described feeling "uncomfortable" and did not feel they would be able to "fit in" until their gender presentation matched the other players. The act of transitioning is not one dimensional for people and does not immediately resolve a person's discomfort or confidence about their body. Starting the transition journey sometimes opened up other worries and concerns about barriers to inclusion. For example, Joe said

> The barriers for me, starting testosterone, was me not playing, possibly not playing water polo. It was a contradiction for me, so I was like, if, if I enjoy this, why do I need to change it?

Starting transition, at least the early stages of transition and taking hormones, meant Joe anticipated a barrier being created, because water polo teams are gender segregated, and deciding which team to play on during transition was difficult for Joe.

This experience was shared by Evren, who had started his transition and was taking testosterone and presenting as masculine. Evren also wore a binder during exercise to flatten his chest and to give the illusion of a more masculine silhouette. He said

> It's not my identity that's stopping me from participating in sports, it's my physicality. Because my identity hasn't changed since I started transition, I still feel like a non-binary, masculine centred sort of man, and when I feel like that, I have a problem participating in women's and non-binary inclusive sport, but my physicality has changed and that causes me an issue.

For Evren, transition was necessary for him to alleviate his gender dysphoria, but it also resulted in the formation of a new barrier in sport, of having to renegotiate the space he accessed whilst he transitioned because his body looked different and had changed. Katy shared similar concerns of what the outcome of transition would be for her in sport. She was worried and "wasn't sure if I would be allowed" to join the women's football team until she had completed her transition and was presenting as female. For Katy, transition was necessary, as it would allow her to play on the women's team, because her gender was now legal and because she was visibly female. Consequently, she dropped out of football (but still went running) until her transition was finished and she was able to re-join football, playing on the women's team. Miles (26, trans male, circus performer/skateboarder/climber, he/him/his) had been worried that starting transition meant giving up his sporting friendships. This was because transition would result in his body changing in ways that were noticeably different, signalling that he would not be able to play, or "hang out with" the girls he skateboarded with. He said

> I think a part of me not wanting to [transition]…not just because I was scared and didn't know who to turn to, I was worried I wouldn't be able to hang out with other girls. Um, in sports and outside of sports.

Miles's concerns about how transition would change his body which could in turn lead to his being excluded from playing sport with his (female) friends, draws our attention back to understanding the ways in which dominant societal beliefs about bodies and the ways in which they are portrayed impact on an individual's lived experience (Roy and Caudwell, 2014; Throsby, 2013, 2015; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018). Transition for Miles might lead to a disconnection for him to sport. But for Persia (69, trans woman, yoga/swimming, she/her/hers), it was completing her transition which helped her to re-connect to swimming after a long absence, which subsequently led to her loving her body. She said

> I did some solid good exercise, walking and stuff, but nothing really until I transitioned, then I started swimming…I even see it as now I can love my body.

This forms what Fiani and Han (2019, p. 188) call ‘a foundation of resilience’ upon which Persia is able to validate her gender identity when she goes swimming. Similarly, completing transition for Jennifer (50, trans woman, climbing/outdoor sports, she/her/hers) was incredibly important for her mental and psychological well-being, and allowed her to reconnect with sport. Jennifer, who participates in a wide range of outdoor activities such as climbing and cycling, is similar to both Persia and Katy in that her participation in sport was put on hold whilst she went through her transition, and she only took part in activities she could do alone. Like Katy, Jennifer did not return to cycling on the women’s team, until she had transitioned. Once she did return, she found her transition, like Persia, had enhanced her enjoyment of and participation in sport. She explained

> So, there’s been absolutely no, no hint of impact, um, on climbing etcetera as a result of my transition, or the transition process, and in fact I’d go so far to say that all activities have been a life saver when I was growing up with shame, dysphoria, and things like that…when you climb you can’t focus on anything else. It’s a great distraction activity.

For Aimee, the decision to transition triggered her beginning to engage with a new sport, roller derby. Aimee said participating in roller derby, her favourite sport, was her “reward to myself” for starting to socially transition and openly identify as female. Persia also found she had a deeper connection to sport after she had transitioned. She said

> I came through into a comfortable space with being trans, around 98, 99? And, sort of what I did then is start swimming. And I couldn’t swim very well…I had to start to learn how to swim…I got healthier and then I started doing yoga classes…these two things really happened in a big way after I’d come through the transitional period.

A person’s transition is a very individual process, and does not happen at the flick of a switch (Humphrey, 2020, n.p.) and ‘the decision of which sex characteristics count (and which do not) is very much a social matter’ (Serano, 2013, p.9). This can be seen in the ways in which some participants located their changing gender identity within a continuous set of decisions which helped them move towards achieving their preferred gender identity in sports settings. Sometimes this was an immediate decision for a person, and they would radically alter their gender presentation to align with their

gender identity. Others took their time and were reluctant to start the process of changing how they look in case it meant they had to stop playing sport with their friends. Five participants said how the mid stage part of transition could be particularly hard to navigate in relationship to passing. As Evren said, “the middle period of transitioning is really hard, unless you look normative”, and this was shown by the way some people, like Judith (47, trans woman, climber, she/her/hers), changed their gender identity and gender presentation depending on what they were doing and who they were with.

The lived experiences of transition for participants helped to reduce barriers to sport, and transition was an important factor in reducing gender dysphoria. Even so, transition was not necessarily a guarantee of passing in sporting space, and participants often had to negotiate their inclusion in sport in relation to how other people responded to them. The experiences of transition for trans people are rich and varied, and both can play a significant part of forming a person’s gender identity in relation to sport, the spaces they occupied and the people they interacted with. Transition was not always an option for every participant, and for the trans men specifically, changing the appearance of their body to reduce their gender dysphoria and to be able to participate in sport were more complex than the experiences of the nine trans women.

Questions about gendered authenticity remain central at the time of writing this research. The literature review highlighted how the practice of sex verification was still being carried out in elite sport until the 1990’s, and the impact this practice had on the policing of women’s bodies in ways not experienced by male athletes. Human biology is varied, and by understanding ‘there is nothing ‘natural’ or ‘stable’ about human biology helps us to dismantle the idea that women’s oppression is not rooted in a singular place’ (Olufemi, 2020, p.54).

The lived experiences of participants, and their own gender identities, may share the ways in which they navigated sport and sports settings, but their stories were all individual and personal. Whilst sometimes ‘gender and sex can move across a continuum and are not static, with identities being negotiated’ (Phipps, 2019, p.5), at other times, once gender had moved (perhaps post-transition), some participants happily accepted a binary model of gender both in sport, and in their day-to-day life.

As Farber (2017, p. 257) explains, ‘transition is not a linear process to reach a certain endpoint but can instead move’, as Horack (2014, p 580) wrote, ‘forward, backward, sideways, tangential.’ It is clear that trans people’s identities are complex and not homogeneous.

4.3 Passing and the Body in Sport

These narratives about transition have been shown here to connect to issues about how trans bodies are perceived in sport, and what barriers they face to inclusion (Jones et al., 2017a, 2018). In this way the data presented so far fits with the researcher’s social constructionist epistemological position, and maintains people mostly perform in ways expected of them by their particular culture, with traditional performances of gender (and sexuality) usually privileged over non-normative ones. This was reflected in the lived experiences of those participants who spoke about passing and passing privilege. Butler (1990, 2004) has argued gender is not as simple as masculinity and femininity; like sexuality, it cannot be polarised in this way. Gender is not as fixed and as unchanging as might be believed, rather gender can be fluid and covers a whole spectrum of gender identities (Lester, 2017; Roche, 2018, 2020). However, some participants whose transition followed a ‘classic trans narrative’ (Barras et al. 2021) felt their gender identity to be fixed once they had transitioned. Some participants had shifting embodied gender identities, which consequently ‘affects identity development and stimulates concealment strategies, such as passing’ (Elling-Machartzki, 2017, p. 257).

“Passing” is the commonly used term for when a trans person is correctly gendered by strangers. Goffman (1963, p,73) described passing ‘as a practice by which ‘a social identity that is deemed socially abnormal is nicely invisible and known only to the person who possesses it.’ As Nicolazzo (2016) argues, passing occurs within various communities and includes racial passing, disability passing, and gender-based passing. Bernstein Sycamore, (2006) offers a critical analysis of what passing means across a variety of identities, including race and disability, and not just trans. Bernstein Sycamore (2006) explores and critiques passing through ‘the various systems of power seen (or not seen) in the act of passing’ (2006, p.1), concluding that ‘in a pass/fail situation, standards may vary, but somebody always gets trampled’ (2006, p.1).

As discussed in chapter one, being read, or ‘passing’ as one’s preferred gender can bring with it what is referred to in the trans community as ‘passing privilege.’ Passing is linked to a person’s body in a very specific and intimate way; a body which passes (by cis normative standards) is succeeding at being read as the gender its owner feels aligned with. Failing to pass could in some situations trigger hostile confrontation from strangers in that space or situation, as well as cause a person gender dysphoria. To succeed at physically passing in sport carried with it real connotations of safety, as well as not being misgendered. In short, a person whose body passes is free to participate in sport.

Twelve participants talked about whether or not they could ‘pass’ or be ‘read’ by others as their identified gender, and how this related to their engagement in sport. For these participants, passing was essential for curbing feelings of gender dysphoria in their lives generally, but it also allowed for a more stress-free experience when participating in sport. For example, Persia spoke of how her being able to pass and be read as female offered her unlimited access to the swimming pool. She said

> I go to the pool. And I don’t go to trans swimming [classes which are for trans people only]. I don’t need to. I’m fine. I mean, I’ve got small hips and a wider top, like swimmers, women swimmers are like that…I just go the pool and swim, nobody notices.

When Persia talks about her physical appearance, she is decribing how she has a body which passes, which in turn allows her access to the swimming pool. For Persia, there is her passing as both a woman when she goes swimming, but also passing as a female swimmer. As Persia said, she has “small hips and a wider top”, all physical attributes which are commonly associated with a swimmer’s physique. There is a meaningul intersection at play in Persia’s reflection here, which further highlights the connection between a person’s physical body, their gender identity, and their sporting identity. Persia’s body passes, giving her freedom to move feely in the space, with no fear of confrontation or being misgendered. This is especially relevant in sport and sporting spaces, such as here at the swimming pool, where intense social interactions between people often take place, becoming sites of meaning for individuals to perform and confirm their gender. As discussed in chapter two, passing and being read as your preferred gender requires the constant repetition of behaviours considered normative

by others, further essentialising gender differences, which can make navigating sports spaces difficult for those who may present outside of these behaviours.

Participation in sport and physical exercise is both a personal and embodied experience, and bodies become significant in those spaces where sex, gender and the body are co-constructed. As Farber (2017, p. 255) said, 'we all become gendered subjects when we are classified as male or female through social institutions and practices,' in this instance, in sport. This is because these sporting social institutions and practices 'sustain the cultural need to maintain clear distinctions between the sexes' (Fausto-Sterling, 1993, p.24). A social constructionist lens, which takes the "doing gender" perspective, also suggests that this arrangement might be challenged, 'because just as gender is "done" through people's social performance, it can also be "undone" in a similar way' (Channon, 2014, p. 589).

Alix (29, trans masculine, personal trainer/runner, they/them/theirs) preferred being read as trans (as opposed to being read as cis), but they understood within a sporting context, it was complex, and safety was often a driver for others wishing to pass. This is because a high premium has been placed upon passing for many trans people, usually due to safety and harassment by others in sports settings and associated areas. Alix said the people on their course were

> They were all cisgendered people…whenever I meet somebody new, they just assume I'm a cisgender person, either because of the way that I look or the way that I sound. And I'm very keen for that not to the case, 'cos I don't think cis men are a particularly nice group of people, and I don't like being grouped with that group of people?

Alix's experience shows how complex and embedded in social norms the intersections of gender identity, cis normativity and passing privilege are. Whilst passing gives Alix a certain amount of privilege and they can move in sports settings reasonably unchallenged, but they would prefer not to be associated with the majority of cis men who occupy those settings. In line with this, 'gender performativity of transgender people is often aimed at 'passing' within a hegemonic binary sex/gender system' (Elling-Machartzki, 2017, p. 258). Although Alix reflected on the problematic aspects of passing, they also acknowledged its necessity in facilitating access to the gym. as Farber (2017, p. 261) argues

> They acknowledged that interacting with others is only comfortable when they are seen and treated as male. By building muscle in a traditionally male (and therefore masculine) shape, transgender men were also more likely to be read by others as male and masculine.

As chapter one highlighted, trans people have reported that participation in sport is not always a welcoming environment, most often due to the binary nature of physical activity and sport in general which can cause significant barriers to participation for trans people (Barras, 2019a). Sport is frequently segregated by gender, including women only and men only teams, changing facilities and gender-specific clothing. This organisation along binary lines, and consequently the many activities which often only accommodate those individuals who visibly conform to the gender binary, can in turn 'enforce social constructions of gender, effectively excluding many transgender participants from sport' (Phipps, 2019, p. 4). For some participants, passing became a way to navigate sport.

For Miles, passing was an important factor for him to feel confident enough to participate in sport and packing his harness and swimming trunks helped him to achieve this. As a circus performer prior to coming out as trans, he had to deal with high levels of gender dysphoria due to the gendered clothing performers were required to wear. He said

> At university my dysphoria was very high, because...if you are a female bodied person, you have to wear more girly outfits to get more work. So, at corporate events, sparkly tights, leotard. I don't know if it was because my dysphoria was so bad when I was there [at circus class] 'cos, I had to wear tight leggings. Cisgender male aerialists tend to get away with wearing joggers…a female body person, you'd be told off right away for having joggers on…you'd be told to take them off or go and get some shorter, tighter shorts.

Once Miles was able to perform in "baggier clothes", he felt much more comfortable, even before coming out to his friends as trans, which made a profound difference to his experience when participating, because he felt more physically comfortable. The way some sports clothing is designed, for example swimming costumes and tight-fitting clothing such as leotards, accentuate the body and allow freedom of movement in certain sports. However, there is no reason why other clothing could not be worn

which both allows the activity to be done and the participant to feel comfortable and relaxed. For example, Jude (21, non-binary, they/them/theirs, roller derby/rugby) said this about gymnastics outfits

> Why don't they make a more neutral one? Like you could wear a gymnastics leotard with tights or with loose shorts if you wanted…adapting that would be so easy.

For Miles, the middle stage of transition was "awful" because, if he was confronted in a women's changing room, he would have to say "I'm not a boy and then I'd feel really awful. I felt like I had to pretend to be female to use it because I knew that, if I used the men's, I'd probably be in a worse situation." As Miles's own gender transition progressed and he grew a beard, he was able to feel more comfortable in the men's changing room, but the significance of passing and having passing privilege was ingrained, and he never felt quite safe there either.

Passing can bring with it what is referred to in the trans community as "passing privilege". The participants in this study talked about whether or not they could "pass" or be "read" correctly by strangers and how this affected their engagement in physical activity. However, within the trans community passing is sometimes a contested term because it implies there is something false or surreptitious about a person being seen as their authentic self, or "looking trans." Thus, passing is not always a desirable or wanted practice, and a trans person who passes as cisgender, or non-trans, may feel a loss due to not being seen by others as trans (Nicolazzo, 2016). Butler's (1990) work on gender performativity draws parallels between how the impossible socio-cultural standards by which individuals are expected to pass can bring with it negative effects on a person's life and livelihood. As this chapter goes on to discuss, this has material impact on some of the people in this study when talking about their experiences of participating in physical activity.

Bernstein Sycamore's (2006) perspectives on passing mirror trans author and activist Julia Serrano's, whose own theories on gender interpretations argue that the necessity to change one's appearance to conform to a (Western) gender normative representation is perpetuated by the cisgender population and their 'incessant need to gender every person they see as either female or male' (Serrano, 2007, p. 177). As Butler (1990) argued, sex, gender and sexuality are performative acts which

individuals constantly display through their clothing choices, mannerisms and behaviours. This means identities are fluid and everchanging. Although individuals can choose how they want to act, behave, and identify through their performative acts, they may 'feel compelled to repeat performances of the heterosexual matrix of woman-feminine-heterosexual or man-masculine-heterosexual (Butler, 1990, p.312). This in turn embeds a pressure to pass in relation to hegemonic discourses of masculinity and femininity embedded in sport (McBride, 2021).

These performances were reflected in the lived experiences of the participants in this chapter, where passing in settings where physical activity takes place was a necessity. Passing was an essential aspect of participation, where not passing could have very real material consequences for people. Passing requires the constant repetition of gendered behaviours considered normative by others, further essentialising gender differences, which in turn 'support gender inequality through mechanisms of exclusion and violence toward those who transgress these norms' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p.748). Passing becomes a tool for perpetuating cisgender privilege, and whilst it might not be a desired state for some participants, it was unavoidable in the context of physical activity.

Considering how exposed bodies can be in swimming pools it is easy to understand how the passing privilege Persia describes facilitates a smoother participatory experience, as someone whose body passes as a gender normative body, and a sporting body. When Persia's experience of swimming is contrasted to Aimee's experience, the importance of being able to pass as female intersects with being able to access a specific sporting space: the swimming pool.

Aimee was mid-transition, unlike Persia who had, in her words, "gone through" her transition many years ago. Being at this mid-transition stage for Aimee meant she experienced a barrier to her participation in swimming, because she was not always read as female. She said

> I like swimming, but there is a barrier there…I would have to develop body confidence. There are a few places in Manchester which do trans swimming sessions…because personally I would feel uncomfortable going to a mainstream swimming pool as a trans person. I might feel uncomfortable going to a trans swimming session as a trans person, but at least I'd be more inclined to go to that.

The term “uncomfortable” is used here again, this time by Aimee, and also for Katy, Charlotte and Persia, their experiences of passing have a direct impact their body confidence and whether they feel comfortable enough to go swimming. James talked about how before he was read and subsequently passed as male, participation in sport was difficult for him. James spoke of how, after having top-surgery his passing privilege meant he was now read as male when he goes to the gym. This had not always been the case in the past. He said

> I felt very self-conscious…it was quite early on in my transition, and I was identifying as trans…and identifying as male but wasn’t being read as such.

Once James had recovered from top surgery, he spoke of how different his experience was in sport, now he passed. The appearance of breasts on a person are often the strongest visual clue used to signify a person’s gender and the removal of breasts through top surgery often has a significant impact on how a person’s gender is read, because it removes this visual clue. James said

> I found it difficult to participate in the sport I wanted to participate in, um, you know as a trans person [before top surgery]. It’s got easier, just because, you know, I pass.

James’s experience reflects how gender is something a person does rather than a universal notion of who a person is. For example, this was the case for those individuals who talked about the privilege they had from being able to pass in sports settings such as the swimming pool or the showers, without fear of confrontation.

The different ways in which participants navigated their gender identity in relation to sport and sporting spaces supports Butler’s argument that ‘gender is kind of imitation for which there is no original’ (Butler, 1990, p. 99). This privilege was often experienced at different stages of transition, such as pre- or post-surgery, and was more of a challenge for the trans masculine participants than the trans women in the study. Transitioning is a deeply personal and intimate process, yet still requires a degree of public unveiling. In her paper which discussed trans young men’s social, physical and embodied experiences of sport, Caudwell (2014, p. 402) found that, for her

participants, ‘gender has involved, and continues to involve on-going processes of negotiation.’

Passing is not then limited only to trans women, and these data suggest that discrimination and abuse towards trans men and non-binary people was also a concern for these participants. Wearing a binder also provides a degree of safety for people, not just in sport but in other places, as they help with passing. Alix said a way to reduce barriers for those wanting to wear a binder during sport is for a person to feel comfortable enough to be able to tell their teammates or instructor they are wearing one. That way allowances could be made for what it feels like, and to help make their experience safer and more comfortable. Alix said

> It’s being aware of it, making sure you’re working out alone so that person doesn’t have to wear that binder, or be less intense, so they don’t have to work so hard, or wear a looser binder, and finding ways to make them feel comfortable and safe.

Binding offered several participants ways to curb their gender dysphoria, and pass when participating in sport. Binders were not the only item utilised to help reduce gender dysphoria and facilitate participation in sport. Wearing a packer or particular clothing also helped five participants to change their silhouette. This was because the highly gendered and form-fitting clothing required to participate in their sport increased their gender dysphoria. Judith and Miles, who both go indoor climbing, reflected upon the harness they had to wear for safety. Judith said

> It can be a bit tricky…because in climbing you wear a harness. When you’re male to female trans you tend to have to tape up your bits, and the bits might get squashed in the harness (*laughs*).

Miles said “before top surgery I didn’t swim. I specifically kept away from swimming pools or swimming in public.” Like Aimee, Miles did not have enough body confidence to participate in swimming prior to surgery, a sporting activity which involves the body being on public display. Judith remarked “not many people go to the climbing centre or gym with lots of makeup”, and so she “climbs as a guy.” Judith’s gender presentation is hyper-feminine, and she uses ‘feminine’ clothes and make-up to ensure she is read as female, things she does not use when she is climbing. She said

> I need to feel I look like a girl to climb as a girl...I'm trying not to have people be confused when they look at me, if that makes sense?

One interpretation of Judith's experience is that, by climbing "as a guy", she avoids "confusing" people and avoids the stress and hassle of worrying about passing. Because Judith's gender presentation is hyper-feminine, she relies on clothes and make-up to pass, but does not want to attract attention whilst she is climbing. It is worth remembering passing is very often connected to avoiding the possibility of experiencing abuse and violence, and this may subconsciously be part of Judith's decision to "climb as a guy". This was an experience also shared by Miles. Miles talked about how his gender identity was read by others, and what a difference that could make when it was correct, but not always positively. Miles's decision to use the female changing rooms before he had top surgery at his gym resulted in him being challenged by other users of this space, resulting in him having to disrupt his own passing privilege. On one occasion he was confronted by some teenage girls, resulting in him having to "flatten" his jumper so his breasts were noticeable. Miles said

> Even before coming out as trans, I was still using female spaces…even though I looked [he means he passed as male]. Women would ask me, and usually it would be mothers or older women. It doesn't tend to be younger people unless they're like with a group... and the leader of the group will be like, excuse me, this is the women's changing rooms? I never liked saying well I am, 'cos I never felt that way, it made me feel weird saying that I was a woman. They wouldn't believe me… so I'd have to flatten my jumper back to show them I had a chest.

As the data in here show, the sex of a body is actually much more complex than that which is captured by fixed categories, existing as more of a continuum of differences (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). This research draws on Butler's writings on gender performativity (1990, 2004): the ways in which we interpret (male and female) sex are determined more by our cultural concepts of gender than by actual biological reality. This presents an opportunity of change and development for trans people's participation in sport, a way to celebrate these differences, rather than be defined and constrained by them.

For Tom (26, trans masculine, gender queer, non-binary, water polo/football, they/them/theirs), whose gender presentation is read as normative by teammates, yet their gender identity is gender queer, the type of sport being discussed here also impacts on participation. Water polo is a contact sport, and Tom is able to be involved in this sport because their body passes and is read by other participants as male. This means Tom's body in sport is perceived as being the 'right' body on the 'right' team. Tom's gender identity might be different to his teammates', but they are not treated differently because of their passing privilege. In contrast, James was concerned not being read as his preferred gender by a yoga instructor, and thus possibly being treated differently, would be barrier to participation. He said

> Although I enjoyed yoga, it was also very anxiety inducing for me to go…not knowing what the facilities were like [or] what the teachers were like…there were points when you were supposed to be relaxing and I was absolutely stressing out, wondering if they were going to come around! I was identifying as trans at the time, but I wasn't open about that necessarily with people I was meeting in class and stuff?

A body which is hard to read by others may result in an individual feeling (and being) excluded from a sport. Tom's sporting body (presenting as masculine and playing on a male water polo team), gave them passing privilege, even though they had not transitioned. Tom said

> Yeah, I do, I feel completely included and involved…I think people see me differently in the pool…part of that is to do with my body and, um, there is definitely some hesitation around, um, people with breasts or people, erm…who maybe have had some surgery. Because there's a big reluctance to touch people with breasts and I know that makes those people feel less included and involved when they are playing… because they are not playing it on quite the same level as everyone else.

These performances were reflected in the lived experiences of the participants in this chapter, where passing in settings where physical activity takes place was a necessity. Passing was an essential aspect of participation, where not passing could have very real material consequences for people. Passing requires the constant repetition of gendered behaviours considered normative by others, further essentialising gender differences, which in turn 'support gender inequality through mechanisms of exclusion

and violence toward those who transgress these norms' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p.748). Passing becomes a tool for perpetuating cisgender privilege, and whilst it might not be a desired state for some participants, it was unavoidable in the context of physical activity.

The body in sport, as these experiences show, is highly visible, either through the clothing some sport requires (such as swimwear), or through its interaction with others. This visibility opens up the possibility of scrutiny, interpretation and at times comments from others. This is amplified in the context of passing and passing privilege and the ways in which sport is segregated by gender. For Craig (35, trans masculine, non-binary, gym/running, they/them/their), even though "I'm beginning to pass as male, but I really identify as non-binary," passing does not necessarily make participation in sport easier, because, as Craig said, "sports is so kind of segregated." As Craig later remarked, "I think there's a weird correlation between being physically visible and your trans heritage being physically visible."

This visibility, the way in which passing allows one to be visible (by which Craig means passing safely), whilst also not attracting attention, was also mentioned by Harry (53, male, football/running, he/him/his). When he was getting changed after football training, Harry was asked about his top-surgery scars by a colleague. He said

> I pass very easily…I don't think people would know unless I told them. Oh! Somebody at work, he saw me take my top off, and he said, this is at one of the clubs after work, and he said, oh have you had heart surgery?

In that moment Harry said, "I just made the decision there and then to tell him…and he, he, he was ok about it." Harry was secure enough with his passing privilege (and perhaps his established place on the football team and at work), and he was able to tell his colleague the true reason for his scars, and not be concerned about their reaction. This sudden and uninvited request for a personal biographical disclosure was also experienced by Alix. Whilst on a training course to become a personal trainer, Alix participated in a group exercise which involved the male participants removing their shirts to practice using callipers on each other. Alix also removed their shirt, "because why shouldn't I?", at which point another member of the group pointed out their top surgery scars and commented on them. Alix described what happened

> Alix: And she was like, I didn't know that you'd had THAT done, and the guy who I was also working with was oblivious like, what, what, what are those scars from…I think she told him that I'd had a boob job or something (laughs), like, oh my god.
>
> Abby: Completely without your permission?
>
> Alix: Just talking about me…then for the rest of the course…she'd be like, you're so brave…I can't believe you did that, I can't believe you took your shirt off…I'm so proud of you, like, could you just stop? That whole, you're so brave thing…please stop.

As Craig observed earlier in relation to "the weird correlation between being physically visible and yours trans heritage being physically visible", on the one hand Alix benefitted from passing privilege, but only until their scars were revealed, at which point they had to share (like Harry) their trans identity. For Alix, although they did pass as male, passing was not something they desired, rather, they saw passing as something incidental, they would prefer to openly "look trans." What these lived experiences reveal is the importance of people's gender identity coming together in a way which makes them feel comfortable and confident enough not just within their own selves, but which allows them to reconnect to the sport they love. These temporary disruptions become instead resolutions. The wide variety of people's gender identities in this research indicates perhaps individuals are taking on fewer rigid definitions of who they are, and these can and do change over the course of a person's life (Saeidzadeh, 2020).

Returning to the importance of gender identity and its importance to participants, whether this was aligned through transition and/or passing (or not), its precise definition 'proves slippery' (Lawler (2008, p.1). Part of this of the slipperiness of the term 'identity' hinges on 'the apparently paradoxical combination of sameness and difference' (Lawler, 2008, p.2), a description which is especially relevant in relation to this research and the lived experiences of participants. This is because for all the participants, how they felt about their own gender identity, how they looked and how they were perceived by others, came more sharply into focus when they interacted with a gendered sporting environment. The ways in which a person's sporting and/or gender identity could be experienced as being both the same and different to other users within sports settings. Tom, for example, played on a cis team, presented as the

gender they were assigned at birth but described their gender identity as trans/gender queer.

It might be assumed that all sporting bodes are the same, and there is a 'taken-for-granted assumption that a coherent LGBT collective exists, and that transgender is a fixed, definable and agreed-upon category' (Caudwell, 2014, p.398). Reflecting upon how some people's gender identities and pronouns shift and develop over time offers an important insight in this research, showing how in reality gender is not fixed at one point in one place, for all time or for all people. Rather, the concept that gender is a social construct and it is fluid and on a spectrum can be seen in the lived experiences of the participants (Cowan, 2009; Galupo, 2017). All the participants identified in a variety of different ways, even on occasion such as for two non-binary people, not seeing the need to identify as any gender at all, but appreciating for the purposes of the research, gender identity mattered in the context of sport. Even those participants whose gender identity followed a classic gender binary trans narrative (Barras et al., 2021), such as from male to female or female to male, still had to engage with this construction and settle on their preferred gender identity in sport. Gender identity is a broad church, and as in the lived experiences of the participants, can be defined in whatever terms a person wishes to be, and is not necessarily a fixed identity. Because gender segregation in sport is fixed, this necessitated the ability to pass in sports settings, or to seek out a supportive team during the transition process.

4.4 Competitive Advantage, Lived Experience and the Body

This thesis concerns itself with the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, and, as such, is written from a sociological perspective and not an endocrinological one. As the literature review highlighted, this focus is because there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research which asks trans people directly about their experiences and what barriers they may face to inclusion. Historically, much of the literature of trans athlete's inclusion in sport has focused on the hypothetical elite athlete and questions about competitive advantage. This literature has in the main concluded that no physiological competitive advantage exists for trans women athletes, and that, in relation to what constitutes an advantage in sport, biology and the physical body are only one aspect of this.

However, over the course of writing this thesis, public interest in this topic has grown considerably, and there continues to be intense focus from the media about the inclusion of trans women competing in elite level sport. Trans men are visibly absent from this focus, though, as the literature noted, elite trans men athletes Chris Mosier and Patricio Manuel are outperforming their cis teammates. Whilst the focus on this thesis is on everyday sport and physical exercise, it is not immune to the discussions happening in the media. This is due to the issue of competitive advantage being a very highly charged and at times controversial, and, as Hamilton, Lima, and Barrett. et al., (2021. p.1) note, 'integrating athletes who previously experienced male puberty into elite female sport is far from straight forward and remains highly contentious.'

Many of these discussions in the media have been spearheaded by gender critical feminists, whose position frequently advocates for the exclusion of trans women from sport due to the question of both what they feel to be an unfair (and in some sports unsafe) competitive advantage, and the erasure of women and girls in sport. This erasure is focused on places being 'taken' by trans women athletes. This discussion is a thorny one to navigate, and this thesis acknowledges that it has become increasingly difficult to separate legitimate, evidence-based discussions about the issue of competitive advantage from some people within the gender critical feminist movement who advocate for trans women being excluded from elite sport. This discussion has seen a spike in interest again after Laurel Hubbard, who is a trans woman and weightlifter, qualified to compete in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

It is important to presume that some biological differences may exist for some people which may confer a competitive advantage for some individuals in some gender effected sports. These biological differences can affect all people and are not exclusive to trans or cis people. One of the arguments for the exclusion of trans women from elite female sport is that individuals assigned male at birth benefit from the androgenising effects of male puberty (Hilton and Lundberg, 2021). But this argument, write Erikainen, Vincent and Hopkins (2020, p.6)

> Are not only foregrounded by enduring conceptualizations of (implicitly White) women as the "weaker sex," but they are also, of course, not categorically true: Some women are bigger, stronger, faster, and perform better in sport than some men, and women competing at top levels of sports perform better than most men.

In this way it is possible to be both receptive to, and critical of, literature which argues for further evidence to justify continuing the discussion on inclusion for trans women in elite sport in a way which fundamentally also does everything it can to promote their inclusion. It is therefore possible to both acknowledge the emergence of this literature whilst still occupying a trans-feminist and trans-inclusive position, which advocates for the inclusion of trans athletes at all levels of sport and exercise.

A key concern for five of the trans women participants was the worry they may possess an unfair competitive advantage in sport by being assigned male at birth. This concern was still present even after they had transitioned, even if they had not possessed this before. This concern often manifested itself as a worry they may be excluded from sport for being trans and this assumed competitive advantage. This was the case for Aimee who said, because of her "physiologically male body", she had worried about joining her local roller derby team. She said

> I struggled with that at the beginning, I didn't want to be too good, in case people would think I was only good because I'm trans. There have been some barriers where if I try too hard, I'm going to be stronger than them or I'm going to have an unfair advantage. And I think that was a bit of a barrier for me to overcome when I kind of realised I wasn't the strongest, I wasn't the fittest because of that. I had to train hard to be good enough to join the team.

Roller derby is a notoriously fast and physical sport and requires a high level of fitness. Aimee was concerned having been assigned male at birth, her body would be 'naturally' stronger than the cis women players on the team and she would be better at roller derby. Instead she was surprised she had to "train hard to be good enough." This was the same experience as Jennifer, who said of her return to cycling on a women's team. She said

> It was problematic for me. I thought having gone through a male puberty and being exposed to all that testosterone, it almost felt like being a massive drugs cheat. But I'm not very good! There are a lot of people who are much faster than me. Any advantage I get is solely down to my own ability and skill rather than any sort of gender affected advantage of having been exposed to testosterone when I was younger.

Olufemi (2020, p.51) writes ‘feminists have been rightly concerned with the process of sex assignment: they recognise that, throughout history, to be ‘female’ has often meant death, mutilation and oppression. Sex categorisation has been the starting point for well-known feminist theories.’ There remain particular epistemological and political tensions between gender critical feminists and trans inclusive feminists as to the inclusion of trans people in sport, with a particular focus on trans women. These tensions often centre on discussions about competitive advantage and changing rooms. But where does this tension originate, and how can it be mitigated?

The term ‘gender critical feminist’ is a recent upcycle of the term ‘TERF’ (trans-exclusionary radical feminist). Many gender critical feminists today claim the term ‘TERF’ is a slur, despite it being a largely accurate description of their beliefs and instead prefer the term ‘gender critical feminist.’ This term is commonly used both inside and outside of academia, along with the slogan ‘adult human female’ often appearing on t-shirts at gender critical feminist protests and on social media (Hines, 2019; Pearce, Erikainen and Vincent; 2020).

‘TERF’ originated in the late 2000’s, growing from the feminist circles of the 1970’s as a way to distinguish radical feminists who support trans people from those who do not. One feminist group advocate for trans people (though it is trans women who are most often the focus of this discussion) by insisting on their recognition as women and maintaining that feminism includes fighting for their rights as women. The other feminist group questions, and often denies, the recognition of trans women as women, with non-binary, trans men and trans masculine people often disregarded on the basis they pose no ‘threat’ to feminism and cis women’s rights (Carrera-Fernández et al., 2018; Hines, 2019).

Gender critical feminists fight against the key demands of trans women, by locating the source of women’s oppression as their biology. Gender critical feminists see trans ‘ideology’ as a threat to feminist advancement and are very often dismissive about intersectional approaches so fundamental in feminism, such as Black feminism. Gender critical feminists view the presence of trans women as a threat to cis women’s rights (Sharpe, 2020), and the movement is populated with a number of high-profile supporters, including J K Rowling, Professor Kathleen Stock, Julie Bindel and Germaine Greer. During an interview with the BBC in 2015, Greer said that, ‘many

cisgender women think trans women do not look, sound, or act like women' (Greer, 2015).

This perspective of gender critical feminists originates from Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), in which Raymond claimed gender is an expression of biological sex, impossible to change and something which is fixed at birth. Chromosomal sex, argued Raymond, in addition to being both fixed and impossible to change, is strengthened by women's life experiences, including being socialised as female and by experiencing gender discrimination. For Raymond, trans women can never be 'real' women because they cannot ever know what it means to be a woman biologically nor socially. From this perspective, gender critical feminists are able to deny the identities of trans women through recourse to the fixity of biological sex (Hines, 2019), though little if any attention is paid to the ways in which trans men experience this recourse to the body.

The lived experiences of five trans women participants offer a remarkably different perspective to those of gender critical feminists on the question of competitive advantage. In the lived experiences of three trans women participants, no competitive advantage materialised. Rather, there was a realisation for these participants they had internalised the essentialist view all men are naturally better at sport than all women, based only on being assigned male at birth. For example, both Aimee and Jennifer found, to their surprise, the innate physiological advantage all trans women are assumed to have did not exist for them. Rather, they both discovered any advantage they possessed was acquired through practice and other skills not associated with innate physiology. In fact, both women felt the debilitating nature of taking hormones and medically transitioning instead put them at a disadvantage, due to their reduced muscle mass and larger frames, which meant they had to work harder, and took longer to recover than their cis women teammates.

When I asked Charlotte how she felt about discussions around competitive advantage and if they impacted on her participation, she said

> There is just this assumption that you must have such an unfair advantage, that you're a danger on the pitch, which is nonsense…so unless you really, really want to play that sport, you end up just giving up.

Jennifer felt the same when she said

> This assumption that any trans woman is wanting to compete as a woman…for some sort of competitive advantage, and 99 times out of 100…she wants to compete, or enter a sport for herself, because she's doing something she loves, because she's meeting friends, because it's a structured way of taking some exercise, or a way of benchmarking her performance…no one would go through this process just for some perceived competitive advantage.

When I asked Sarah, (67, trans woman, tennis/darts, she/her) if she had ever had to face questions about competitive advantage at her tennis club, she said

> Yeah, no one's questioned it, and um, it's very strange because I thought, physically, um, they might see me as having an advantage, you know, being trans and you can't really change certain bits about your physique (*gestures to shoulders).*

Because some trans women have been socialised as male, gender critical feminists believe this also confers the advantage of male privilege and male socialisation. However, what it means to 'be socialised' varies hugely, and expectations of masculinity and maleness can also be sources of stigma and vulnerability for those individuals assigned male at birth who 'fail' at being gender normative (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020; Schilt, 2010). It is also important to remember 'Western conceptions of gender are not and never have been, universal. Gender has no single story' (Olufemi, 2020, p.54).

Aimee reflected upon her lack of sporting ability as a child and said she was "never very good at sports" and would "do events against boys, but I regularly finished last." Even though she herself did not have the experience of being good at sports when she was a child, Aimee had still internalised the essentialist assumption that all men are better than all women at sport, irrespective of anything else, a view commonly held by many gender critical feminists. This was a view shared with Katy, who talked in great length about how her own internalised fear about retaining a competitive

advantage in sport (Katy plays on a woman's football team) had originated when she was younger. She said

> I guess my experience of growing up, I would have internalised that whole 'men are better than women' thing, and I have to get over myself…I was worried I've got this unfair advantage which I don't believe I have. I guess people's perceptions are so strong.

Along with an assumed and innate male competitive advantage, testosterone is not an automatic guarantee of better athletic performance, yet it is consistently framed as such. Much like Aimee's assumption her "male physiology" would give her an automatic competitive advantage in roller derby only to find it did not, Joe's assumption that taking testosterone would trigger an unfair advantage never manifested. Rather, Joe said the male advantage was "all in my head", and they had "internalised, like, that thing of being taught that men in sport, it's a men's game", and their ability to "pass easily" was what gave them an advantage in rugby.

Both these arguments frame these perceived advantages as not only being unfair, but as constituting deliberate cheating by trans women. Interwoven within these arguments is the claim by gender critical feminists that the strides women and girls have made in sport face being overshadowed or appropriated by trans women, because of the belief trans women will seize any opportunity to excel in sport by identifying as female (Barras, 2019a, 2019b). The inclusion of trans women at any level of sport will inevitably signify the future erasure of all cis women and girls in sport. Concerns of female erasure are central to gender critical arguments, and, by claiming to be marginalised and pushed out of sport, gender critical feminists are able to reframe themselves as the real victims in this discussion, 'the recipients of a kind of onslaught from a group of people who make up less than 1% of the population' (Olufemi, 2020, p.60).

For three trans masculine participants, there was the surprise that testosterone did not automatically provide a competitive advantage. Rather, it was their presenting (and passing) as male which conferred this advantage on them over their female presenting teammates. In other words, because they passed as male, opposing teammates treated them as such based on their appearance, and even in one case congratulated

them on it. Here Joe talks about playing on a women's rugby team whilst openly taking testosterone. They said

> I know that I was only like marginally bigger than I was before I started [taking testosterone], my voice was deeper and I looked more masculine, but I felt that people had established I was the strong one and would think twice about tackling me and that gave me an advantage.

Conversely, for the three individuals who talked about taking testosterone, they were equally concerned about possible changes to their body, such as increased muscle mass. They felt that increased testosterone would automatically and inevitably lead to their gaining an unfair physical advantage over their cis teammates. For example, when Evren talked about his experience of being on the hormone testosterone and no longer feeling able to remain in the women's boxing class once they presented as more masculine, he said it was because "there's the whole issue of assumed strength, or average strength based on gender." Joe was similarly worried starting the hormone testosterone "would be a barrier" for them and would confer on them an almost guaranteed competitive advantage. Joe was worried about being "a masculine threat to our team or the other team…in terms of my strength and my size. I didn't want to be that annoying guy that was there and shouldn't be."

Like Alix, who did not want to be perceived as a cis man, Joe did not want to be either "that annoying guy", or, more significantly, "a masculine threat to our team." This perception of being a threat due to looking masculine is similar to Evren's feelings about remaining on the women's boxing team after also starting testosterone. He said

> Now I'm on testosterone for a year I don't feel comfortable going to this class and people immediately say, oh are you saying you are stronger than the women? And I'm not saying that. BUT I want to avoid that kind of feeling basically…I felt so strongly that people would say that, that I pre-emptively removed myself from those spaces.

These participants have shown the embedded societal and internalised assumptions that all masculine (looking) bodies are stronger than all feminine (looking) ones are a lived reality. In Joe's experience, their body was only "marginally bigger" than before

starting testosterone. For Joe, it was the perception of them being stronger that conferred an advantage for them, which in men's sports would not be subject to the same level of scrutiny as it has been in women's sports. Joe said they knew "there would come a point where I would be stronger than a lot of the other women players, and that would not be fair."

Katy's comments about competitive advantage, which she does not believe she has, echo both Charlotte, Aimee's and Jennifer's experiences. Rather, as Katy said, people's perceptions "are so strong" the question of competitive advantage, even at recreational level, is one which needs more consideration from the perspective of trans women. The assumption that men's bodies are always stronger than women's is embedded within the institution of sport and is reflected in gender-segregated teams, organised along these lines on the premise all men are stronger and faster than all women due to biology.

As expressed by five trans women in the data, this felt like an impossible position for them to occupy. Their very presence in sport, even if they do not possess a proven competitive advantage, is still deemed intrusive, invading that which has been 'fought for' by cis girls and women. As chapter two identified, there exists a large amount of literature and research which reflects critically on the exclusion of women and girls from sport, at both professional and recreational levels (Cooky, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2017). The literature in chapter two argued women and girls have unquestionably been historically excluded from sport at the behest of men due to the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity, and, even when their inclusion has increased, they still often face sexism, gender stereotyping, and significantly less pay and media coverage compared to their male equivalents (Giulianotti, 2016; Phipps, 2019).

However, this historical exclusion and continued gender discrimination are in no way the responsibility or fault of trans people wishing to compete in sport and pre-dates their presence in sport at elite level. Despite trans athletes being able to compete at Olympic level since 2004, only two openly trans athletes, New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard, and Canadian soccer player, Quinn, have qualified. Whilst there are eight other Olympic and para Olympic hopefuls who identify as trans, trans athletes are still exceptionally rare (Hamilton et al., 2021b), and those who are competing at elite level are not outperforming their cis teammates. These athletes are having to

undergo stringent hormone testing which adheres to guidelines, a requirement which is not discussed by gender critical feminists (Barras, 2019b). Opposition to trans people participating in sport is frequently - though not exclusively as illustrated with Caster Semenya - directed at trans women (Buzuvis, 2011). As the lived experiences of the participants revealed, trans men/masculine presenting people are also subject to policing and gendered assumptions about their bodies from others in sporting spaces and communities, as well as concerns about safety and passing (Abelson, 2014; Schilt, 2010). As the literature in chapter two argued, 'discrimination and abuse towards trans men may also be apparent' (Phipps, 2019, p. 2).

The ways in which these discourses continue to be discussed in the media was mentioned by twelve of the participants, not only by eight of the trans women in this research, but by four of the trans men, too. This demonstrates that the lived experiences of these participants often told a different story to the one which gender critical feminists focus on. Yet it remains the case that when hostility to trans people in sport at elite level is widely reported in the media, it has a negative effect on those wishing to participate in everyday sport and physical exercise, as expressed by these twelve participants.

The majority of participants found a way to mitigate their own internalised feelings about what competitive advantage felt like, seeking out their own way of testing for fairness. Jennifer described her return to competitive cycling once she had transitioned

> I could have turned up and just competed and not said anything, but I didn't want to do that…I wanted to be able to take part as I always have done…I've done well based on my merits, not because I've got some biological advantage…this year I've started competing again in mountain bike orienteering and I came first in the first event by virtue of the fact I was the only woman in it (both laugh).

For Jennifer, completing her transition was incredibly important on many levels and enabled her to reengage with cycling on her own terms, terms which she felt were "based on my own merits" and which was a "normal performance." Jennifer needed to be sure her hormone levels reflected what she already knew, that she could "do it in a way that, not only that other people said it was fair, but that I felt I was being fair as well." Jennifer's self-surveillance in relation to her participation in sport is based on her own measurements of eligibility, because she needed "to have certain things in place

for me, it wasn't just about being out and jumping through a hoop, I needed to know in myself I could go back into this thing I enjoy doing."

No one on her team had questioned Jennifer or asked her to do this; rather, it was her decision to approach her re-entry back into sport in a way which she found made sense to her, based on her own experience as a cyclist. This was a similar decision made by Evren about which boxing class to attend once he started taking testosterone. In response to the researcher's question "is there an element that people feel that you are cheating?" he replied "the only reason I haven't felt that is because I have removed myself from some spaces where that might be levelled at me."

Half of the participants mentioned how they engaged in acts of self-surveillance to ascertain if they were able to migrate from their previous team to a new team. This was most often the case when they were part of single-sex team, such as in Katy's case. Katy talked about moving from the men's football team to the women's, after transitioning, and the conversation she had with friends about it. She said

> Even when I have conversations with friends I've known for some time…it's not them having a go at me, but I do often get questions …do you feel you've got an advantage,…is it 100% fair and most of it is framed as well at your level it's fine 'cos it's low level, but in elite sport I'm not sure whether it could be fair.

Katy has articulated a meaningful experience here, that trans people are often treated as one homogenous group of people, and the experiences of one individual are identical to the whole community. Rather, like all individuals, experiences of gender identity are diverse and rich. People navigate and negotiate their inclusion in sport in many different ways, and this was no different for the people in this study. Katy, for example, had to wait almost two years from starting transitioning to joining the women's football team, to be sure her hormone levels complied with the Football Association's policy on inclusion for trans players. This is despite the fact her own football team had not requested the need for such a compliance. This resulted in her testosterone levels being much lower even than those of cis women players, because she did not want any questions about her perceived of competitive advantage. Katy said

> But if my testosterone level is so low, it impacts on my energy levels, and that can be a bit of a day-to-day problem…I'm reticent to…look into testosterone supplementation because, for me as a trans woman playing women's football, to be on any testosterone supplementation is quite Daily Mail worthy! I don't really want to be dealing with that…

The detrimental impact of transition (whether surgically or hormonally) upon a person's body, and the subsequent changes it can make to an individual's sporting ability and energy levels as mentioned here by Katy, was also mentioned by other participants. Judith, who was still undecided about whether she would take hormones, felt it could mean "medically, life would be a bit shit." Evren said how he had "run up against a lot of physical and mental issues" once he started transitioning. It was clear the effects of a lifetime of hormone injections, the direct health implications of possible surgery, other treatments and side-effects, are rarely given enough consideration in discussions about how hard qualifying (and continuing) in sport is for trans people. Katy said her testosterone levels (for playing football) are still "well below that, so, to be honest, if they [the doctor] said to me…if I was cis, they would probably be putting me onto testosterone supplements."

As chapter two discussed, there is no such thing as a level playing field in sport, and many athletes bring their own advantages which are unrelated to gender to the starting line. This research is supportive of further research in the name of widening the discussion and adding new knowledge, but trans athletes should not be excluded from sport without exception until a definitive outcome is reached, and studies should not only focus on trans women (Caudwell, 2020). To conclude, gender critical feminists have created a false dichotomy – and a manufactured moral panic as seen at Hampstead Heath swimming ponds - between themselves and trans women. Instead, they would prefer to create a world of hypothetical athletes, rather than offer solutions to address the gender discrimination women and girls face in sport as discussed in chapter two (Phipps, 2019). Gender critical feminists also fail to acknowledge the oppressions and concerns facing trans men in sporting spaces, nor the intersections of race, nor the reality of the lived experiences of trans people in sport. As Caudwell (2020, p.20) says

> We cannot ignore that the existing lens is mostly on cultures pertaining to the west and global north. As such, it is easy to conclude that white

> transgender experiences currently dominate our knowledge; it is essential that we recognize this and make subsequent efforts to change the bias.

This research is fundamental for the empirical data it has provided to help in countering these false dichotomies, rather than trying to find a solution to a problem which does not exist (Barras, 2019b). These lived experiences of trans people on the realities of competitive advantage could be more widely shared. Chapter two argued the question of competitive advantage in sport with regards to the inclusion of trans athletes is complex, and there is little evidence to support the position trans women have an innate physiological advantage over cis women. When considering some of the more recent science-based research (Hamilton et al., 2021a, 2021b; Hilton and Lundberg, 2020, Hamilton et al., 2021; Karkazis, 2019), there remains a paucity of peer-reviewed data which has engaged with trans women athletes, and instead draws assumptions based on the best available scientific evidence. As Saini (2021, n.p.) writes, the fact that science is so frequently called upon in discussions about what constitutes as biologically male or female in these debates 'perhaps betrays how uncertain the boundaries of gender truly are.' Returning to a trans feminist position in this study, one which tries to interrogate the complexity of competitive advantage in sport, these papers have highlighted that, unless a trans epistemological perspective is taken, then cisgender privilege and transphobia will remain in these discussions. As Ahmed (2016, p. 22) writes, 'such transphobia works as a rebuttal system, one that, demands trans people provide evidence of their existence.'

The literature review showed how cis women are also discriminated against and marginalised in sport, and given the history of gender politics, gender critical feminism has a stake in changing this. One potential for allyship here might be to gather data on the lived experiences of cis women in sport and sports settings, to forge links between communities. The development of research which draws on the lived experiences of cis women who play alongside trans women might cultivate a mutually respectful political ground on which to reconsider how women's bodies in sport are constituted, and who has the authority to instigate this. By questioning the way in which sport is segregated along binary lines, this research offers a challenge to oppressive

gender regimes and reframes the science of competitive advantage and biology so often taken as fact.

It is important to acknowledge that the vocal debate about competitive advantage inevitably entered some participant's thoughts, feelings and experiences of taking part in sport as trans and non-binary people. The debates about competitive advantage are important in this thesis, but the research cannot (and does not seek to) answer the question of whether trans people do or do not possess a competitive advantage over cis people, let alone the exact physiological mechanism thought which this advantage is conveyed. What the research does show is that beliefs about gender, and about men having a competitive advantage over women by virtue of physical strength, do shape the ways in which some participants make sense of themselves as people who engage in sport.

4.5 Non-binary Experiences

Because a person's gender identity is intrinsic to their own personal sense of self (Anderson and Travers, 2017; Lawler, 2008), every participant had a different experience of what gender identity meant to them. For some people, their gender identity was placed firmly at one end of the gender binary. This meant they wished to both identify and present as the gender they were not assigned at birth, and would usually adopt the relevant pronouns, though not always. For example, eight participants who were assigned male at birth, now openly identified as female and wished to be read as such and use feminine pronouns (or vice versa). Others felt themselves to be masculine presenting, but did not identify as trans male, but as non-binary. Being read - passing - as male or female by others can help with gender dysphoria, so a visual signifier such as facial hair can be gender affirming (Fisher and Fisher, 2018), if a person's gender presentation (masculine) did not necessarily 'match' their gender identity (non-binary).

Tom presents as the gender they were assigned at birth (male) but considers themself to be gender queer/non-binary. Tom is read as male and has no desire to medically transition but was aware of how gender non-conforming teammates were treated during water polo matches (on the men's team). When I asked Tom if they felt there

is a hesitation around people whose bodies are not read as male on their water polo team, they said

> Yeah, because whereas no one has ever hesitated to touch me in the pool, and I don't think they should cos it's a contact sport…I can quite easily see that other people don't feel involved in the same way as I can. Because they are not perceived as being male…they have a harder time of it in the swimming pool.

For those who identified as non-binary, their gender identity became something which sometimes needed additional consideration when they participated in sport. This was because whilst a person may present as masculine or feminine, this was not necessarily how they identified. Although non-binary identities have become more visible in recent years in popular culture and the media (Twist et al., 2020), non-binary people in sport are less visible. Sport is a very gendered activity, where male and female categories are heavily regulated and enforced, and for non-binary people this can cause a barrier to participation (Spandler et al., 2020). Within sport there are often hierarchies, values, expectations and practices which are specifically gendered, and which need to be attended to if a person wishes to participate. These include the clothing which is worn in sport, the choice of changing room or the team played on. Being able to present (and pass) as the desired gender identity when taking part in sport mattered for many participants because this facilitated access to, for example, the changing room, the gym or the swimming pool.

As several participants had expressed feeling worried about being confronted about their gender identity in sporting spaces, being able to access a space without concern was an important consideration. As Phipps writes (2019, p.3), 'the binary structures of sport can create accessibility issues for everyone, but particularly for those who are trans.' The places where sport and physical activity take place most frequently only accommodate or are designed for those people who conform to the gender binary, and not every individual fits this model of organisation. This meant for some participants, they were involved in

> The continual effort to convince others (as well as to oneself) that one is a "real" man or woman, relative to cultural stereotypes of what such a "real" man or woman should be like (Channon, 2014, p. 588).

For non-binary participants, whilst they may not identify as either male or female, they still found themselves having to conform in sporting settings to what binary gender normative representations of male and female bodies most often look and act like (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020). Often a non-binary participant was subject to similar regulatory conditions as those participants whose gender identity and presentation was firmly situated on the gender binary, even though they felt uncomfortable doing this.

For the four participants who used they/them/their pronouns, the habitual use of binary gendered language or clothing in sporting settings (or for example in the absence of gender-neutral changing rooms), stressed how their gender identity was compromised, resulting in them having to either correct being mis-gendered, or temporarily align with a gender binary to facilitate their participation in sport. Jude questioned the gendered clothing in sport and wanted to wear what felt comfortable when they were involved in gymnastics, saying “I don’t see why there has to be a men’s and women’s outfit or a uniform.” Teammates using gender-neutral pronouns for everyone allowed non-binary participants to feel more included, whilst, for others, being addressed as ‘she’ or ‘he’ in sport helped affirm a binary trans identity and added to their sense of belonging (Caudwell, 2014, 2020; Phipps, 2019; Spandler et al., 2020). Jude, who is non-binary uses they/them/their pronouns, explained how, if everyone “got out of the habit of using gendered pronouns, it’s just better for everyone.” Jude’s own experiences when playing rugby were “everyone is so surprisingly good with pronouns.” Jude’s experience offers a clear and simple example of a way in which inclusion for non-binary people can be improved and barriers reduced, just by tailoring language.

Not using gender-neutral language in sports settings is one way in which gendered social practices are reinforced daily (Doan, 2011). This was often experienced as a microaggression particularly for those non-binary participants, who felt binary gendered pronouns did not match their own gender identity. However, it is important to note that for the twelve participants whose gender identity was situated on the binary, and identified as trans men or trans women, they found being gendered this way self-affirming. The use of pronouns for many participants mattered in sporting settings, because they reinforce the gender segregated structure of sport. In this way, gender binaries in sports settings were both comforting for some participants, but

uncomfortable for others, depending on how they presented and their own sense of gender identity.

The literature in chapter two argued there are low levels of participation in sport amongst trans people in general, with people often dropping out of sport during school and finding it difficult to return to it (Jones et al., 2017a, 2018; Lawler, 2008; Perez-Samaniego et al., 2018). There is little literature which explores improving inclusion for non-binary people's sporting experiences, though one way to achieve this would be to approach sport by 'starting from the presumption of non-binary inclusion instead of gender binarization can facilitate inclusion not just for non-binary people but diverse subjects with different kinds of bodies and needs' (Erikainen et al., 2020, p.23).

This study shows that perhaps not all trans people shy away from sport. Instead, some either remained involved in sport after leaving school, or returned to sport despite at times finding it hard to do so. All the participants during the course of their interviews reflected upon how their gender identity often impacted on their participation in sport, sometimes due to a complex mix of past and present experiences, and their relationship to being able to 'pass.' These experiences, as we will see later in chapters five and six, often intersected with the ways in which sporting settings and communities are gendered, yet most participants had successfully renegotiated their current involvement in everyday sport and physical exercise. In this way for many individuals, their gender identity really mattered when it came to their participation in sport.

4.6 Concluding Thoughts

Gender identity really mattered to participants and for many people it is directly connected to their physical body, their feelings about transition and gender presentation, and frequently had a direct impact on the level of engagement they have in sport. Passing and passing privilege can sometimes facilitate a less stressful experience in sport, but they can also compromise a person's feelings about being read as cis. A number of people spoke of feeling uncomfortable about participating in sport until they had transitioned, which whilst might make them feel more confident about taking part, did not remove internalised feelings about, for example, competitive

advantage. Most importantly, even though taking part in sport was sometimes hard for people due to their gender identity and the assumptions other people made about them, people still found a way to participate. It was also clear from these examples that people's experiences were not homogenous, and participation in sport was complex and different for each individual.

This chapter has drawn on trans feminist theory to further tease out the challenges posed to sex-segregated, sex-binary sport when the lived experiences of trans people are considered (Patel, 2021). It did this by revealing how trans embodiments and trans perspectives illuminate 'the dominant relationship of sexed body and gendered subject' (Stryker et al., 2008, p.147). Trans feminist theory provides a relatively new look into the ways in which sport is constructed, and the ways in which trans people participate in it. Trans feminist theory can sometimes be difficult to pin down in terms of what it achieves in practice for improving inclusivity in sport for trans people. This is a view borne out of the data presented in this chapter, rather than a sweeping statement, and the potential of trans feminist theory in this discussion is significant. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the tensions between what trans feminism aims to do via its key principles, and what the lived experiences of participants actually were. Most importantly, as both feminist and trans feminist writers have previously established, and as the data in this chapter has shown, some people are not immutably tethered to an innate experience of womanhood or manhood simply by being designated male or female at birth.

In principle, this chapter acknowledges trans feminism has helped with sustaining the fundamental aim of the overall thesis – the placing of trans people's voices centrally in research which they have contributed to, and which concerns them. In addition, as Krane (2019, p.60) writes

> What a trans feminist perspective teaches us is the need to consider the broad social and cultural issues surrounding policy and decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion…at the centre of this debate should be the well-being of all athletes…it can also lead us towards privileging inclusion without imposing narrow, Western, heteronormative expectations on elite athletes.

Whilst many participants had shared experiences of how they approached their gender identity (such as growing a beard or wearing a shirt), a person's experience often

shifted when negotiating their participation in sport. Whilst all participants self-identified as trans under the trans umbrella, this did not mean the research findings are homogeneous. Rather, due to the wide variety of gender identities and the many different types of sport played (and some people did more than one sport), experiences were diverse. Sports included football, water polo and roller derby, and the type of sport a person did made a difference to how much a person's gender identity mattered in relation to their inclusion.

This chapter has argued participating in sport enables an individual to develop a certain identity which can become symbolic of personal growth or self-actualisation, meaning participants' individual gender identities are much more complex if they are constantly being remade in the context of sport. For trans people, who may have formed one type of sporting identity in their youth, negotiating a new one can be complex, fraught with uncertainty but still empowering. Participants could also be seen as "political with a small p", enjoying and taking pleasure in sport as trans people, affirming their gender identity in often very gender normative settings, but not wishing to disrupt the status quo.

Whilst trans feminist theory, like the data itself, is grounded in lived experience, it is not without the occasional tension, as discussed here. However, in keeping with the aims and the integrity of the research, it offers a strong foundation for interpreting the latent meanings behind the data presented in this chapter. The foregrounding of lived experiences enables a deeper understanding of why barriers to participation in everyday sport and physical exercise for trans and non-binary people may be both understood and dismantled. Adopting a trans feminist theoretical approach then is more than a theoretical decision. It is also both a political position and a choice, enabling new ways to identify the socially constructed concepts of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport, as experienced by the participants.

A trans feminist approach also foregrounds the lived experiences of the participants, as presented in this chapter. Trans feminism seeks to address the issue of exclusion from social settings of trans people, such as sport, by 'offering formulations for how we might create more open and accepting movements and communities' (Serano, 2013, p.4). Trans feminism is primarily concerned with placing a focus on the importance of the lived experiences of those who do not fit (or who do not want to fit)

within sex and gender binaries, it illuminates the narratives of the participants, and places their lived experiences centrally within the research. These lived experiences become especially more relevant within the complexity of sex segregation in sporting contexts, because there is currently only a small amount of empirical research which does this, though the field is growing (Caudwell, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021a, 2021b; Harper et al., 2021; Hilton and Lindberg, 2020).

In September 2020, Judith Butler wrote in *The New Statesman* (Ferber, 2020, n.p.) 'we have to renew the feminist commitment to gender equality and gender freedom in order to affirm the complexity of gendered lives as they are currently being lived.' As this chapter has shown, trans people's sporting bodies, their gender identity, presentation and pronouns all matter. These are broad churches, ever changing for some, fixed for others, but always open to individual interpretation. Engaging with trans feminist theory, as this research does, means there is a necessity to constantly revisit 'the ways in which the medical determination of sex functions in relation to the lived and historical reality of gender' (Ferber, 2020, n.p.). As this research has shown, the lived experiences of participants in relation to sport have illuminated some key insights around bodies and the discursive assumptions made about them by others based on gender presentation. These lived experiences have been instrumental in recognising that 'being trans' does not simply mean moving from one gender binary to the other. Rather, the deeply personal relationship to gender identity and presentation many trans people have is much more complex (Olufemi, 2020).

A trans feminist perspective can advance our understanding of the needs of trans people who push conventional boundaries of sex and gender categorizations in sport, and who often face barriers to inclusion. As Krane (2019) notes, a trans feminist approach has an emphasis on respect, dignity and inclusion, welcoming all athletes across the spectrum of diversity, reframing discussions about advantage and fairness, celebrating compassion and prioritising lived experience. However, this respect and dignity has to be extended to all individuals in sport, if barriers are to be reduced and alliances formed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPORTING SPACES:

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents an analysis of the data concerning the theme of sporting spaces and the ways in which participants navigated these. These include both private spaces, such as changing rooms, and those more public spaces where physical activity takes place, such as the swimming pool or the gym. The sporting spaces people exercise in and occupy had a big impact on their participatory experiences as they were often influenced by other users.

The highly gendered organisation of sport continues to create barriers to participation for trans people. This is partly because participating in sport and exercise can be regarded as particularly challenging for trans people (Elling-Machartzki, 2017) with a lack of safe and comfortable spaces, changing rooms, transphobia and bullying cited as key issues leading to lower inclusion rates (Caudwell, 2020; Hargie, Mitchell and Somerville, 2015; Morris and Van Raalte, 2016; Perez-Samaniego et al.,2016; Phipps, 2019). Changing rooms can form social barriers, creating 'a situation of self-evaluation and the evaluation by others, regulated and influenced by emotional and cognitive factors' (Hook, Valentiner and Connelly, 2013, p. 203).

As chapter four highlighted, trans people often need to manage and perform their own gender identity in sport differently to cis people. This is often not just about managing their own comfort in relation to their own gender identity, for example through transition or wearing a binder to alleviate their gender dysphoria, but having to manage the comfort of others, perhaps due to potential prejudice and discrimination. As noted in chapter four, this was the reality of the lived experiences of participants, many of whom reflected upon how they had experienced threats and confrontation in sporting spaces. due to the way in which 'public space is imbued with power relations which operate to enable dominance, control and regulation' (Caudwell, 2020, p. 6).

Chapter one highlighted how discussions about trans people in sport are particularly had in the gender critical feminist movement, who have strongly vocalised their belief that trans people – by which they mean trans women – should not be permitted to participate in sport which includes cis women, nor allowed to access sex segregated spaces such as changing rooms. To recap, in 2019 David Lloyd sports clubs requested its trans members show a gender recognition certificate when accessing changing rooms (Alibhai, 2019). Later that same year, protesters from the gender critical feminist organisation Resisters UK (2021) staged a series of 'Man Friday' events at Hampstead Heath ladies' ponds in reaction to the news that trans women were welcome to swim there. A key component of gender critical feminism is the denial of trans women's identities as women, and the opposition of equality, such as by denying them access to changing rooms, toilets and in sport (Phipps, 2016). At times this focus on trans women has rendered trans men's and non-binary people's experiences invisible, which this chapter hopes to address.

5.2 Navigating the Private and Public Nature of Changing Rooms

Trans people's experiences of sporting spaces both shaped and influenced their participation in sport, because these spaces are often gender segregated. As changing rooms were frequently mentioned by several people as causing a barrier to participation in everyday sport and physical exercise, this section begins with discussing their significance as a sporting space. When talking about how it feels to use gendered changing rooms to get changed before swimming, Miles said

> A lot of the men's changing rooms don't have any cubicles to change in, especially public pools, like the outside ones, or some of them don't even have doors on. So, when you get changed it's quite scary, you don't know who else is changing there, and you don't know what their views are. In terms of safety, I do get worried, you don't know who's changing with you. And men tend to have a more physical approach to getting angry when they feel someone is in their space who doesn't deserve it. And whereas, whenever I've been, when I was more androgynous, and I was changing in the women's spaces I would still get asked to leave sometimes.

Miles is challenging the idea that what is considered to be a private space – a changing room – is perhaps not necessarily quite that private. Changing rooms are designed in

most cases to facilitate gender segregation, so that the people who occupy them can be certain that their bodies are not seen by those of the opposite gender. However, a space being gender segregated does not make the occupants within it immune from the gaze of other users. Even spaces assumed to be private still retain a sense of ownership by those who use the space, and for those people who might not conventionally look as if they belong there, or are challenging what other's expectations are of other users of the changing rooms should be, the risk of confrontation and violence was a genuine concern.

Aimee, whilst saying she was not personally concerned about "negative responses" in changing rooms as she passed, did reflect upon how they were often "more of a hindrance" for trans people. She said

> Going to gyms and experiencing a bit of a barrier there…a lot of gyms do generally have two changing rooms and lockers outside, so it is possible for someone not to go into the changing room. Many people aren't happy with changing rooms, but most of the time in the past I've tried to go into the female changing room 'cos obviously I should be able to do that, and it can be difficult.

There are several intersecting factors at play here which contribute to changing rooms feeling threatening or, as Aimee noted, "a bit of a hindrance" for trans people. There is the very real concern about violence, due to the ways in which gender is read off the body in these spaces, and even outside of the space, the concern about violence remains. Jude said, "if you are a very visibly queer person in a straight place, you do feel uncomfortable. I would." This resonates with the previous chapter on sporting bodies, and the connection between not just how a person's physical body may make them feel uncomfortable in sport, but how it then feels to occupy that physical within a very gendered sporting space, when gender is viewed as non-conforming.

Whilst changing rooms, especially when they are unfamiliar, might feel disorientating to many people, it can be especially so if a person is familiar with using a particular gender-segregated space their whole life, and is now changing to the 'opposite' one. Working out how to behave in that space might feel difficult. Many people are inhibited about others seeing their naked body, and whilst a changing room or a bathroom is be designed to serve a basic (and often private) function, these spaces can sometimes be dangerous because of potential confrontation, and many participants spoke of

needing to be hyper vigilant (often due to experiences of homophobic bullying in the past). The layout of changing rooms and toilets are often differently configured for men and women and there is a way of behaving in that space, depending on your gender, and where privacy can be minimal. Presumptions are made about the person using a particular changing room, in both explicit and implicit ways, often expressed in the kinds of behaviour and language people engage in, and how they talk to and about each other. Changing room 'banter' in men's changing rooms can often be sexually explicit and homophobic, whilst, in women's changing rooms, gender norms and presumptions can manifest through gender policing (Spandler et al., 2020).

A common assumption is that changing rooms are gender-segregated because both men and women want and prefer this, and many individuals simply feel more comfortable using a changing room alongside users of the same sex (Doan, 2011, 2015). Comfort and safety play an important role in the design of changing rooms, and users of these spaces will be used to accessing gender segregated changing rooms for much of their lives, likely starting at school, certainly in the UK (McBride, 2021). However, the more likely reason can be assumed to be due to the long history of sexual violence against women and/or children by men, and changing rooms can be viewed as sites of potential violence by those who may have experienced it and/or feel vulnerable in these spaces. Changing rooms, then, are designed to be gender-segregated because cultural norms expect men and women's bodies to be segregated when there is a possibility of nudity and vulnerability.

Miles found having to occupy this gendered space difficult because he had to say "I'm not a boy and then I'd feel really awful. I felt like I had to pretend to be female to use it because I knew that, if I used the men's, I'd probably be in a worse situation." For James, who often felt uncomfortable in changing rooms as a trans person, he said it got easier, "because, you know, I pass, so, you know, for want of a better word." Similarly, as Miles's own gender transition progressed and he grew a beard, he was able to feel more comfortable in the men's changing room, because it meant he could now use the men's without having to worry about not passing. He said "even when I first came out as trans, I wanted to use the men's 'cos it made me feel good. I could just be the gender I feel."

The anxiety Miles felt about being in a “male space”, and the concern about safety and violence (having experienced homophobic bullying in the past) was shared by Alix. Alix spoke of how, when using the changing room at the gym, they move between the communal area and the shower area wearing a towel around their lower body (Alix had undergone ‘top surgery’ but not had ‘lower surgery’). They said

> I’ve been in a situation where there were two guys having a conversation behind me, one of the men had gone out on a date with a woman and found out she was trans, and he said it was one of the most horrific things that had happened to him…I was frozen by my locker, I had a towel around me, and if I’d turned around, they would have seen that I was trans, like a really uncomfortable situation. It could get violent, so I stood there for ages in my locker, waiting for them to leave.

These experiences can have an impact on future visits. Alix, like other trans people, had a genuine concern about safety in changing rooms. They said

> Even if you have had top surgery, or any kind of surgery [meaning a person might pass better], you’re worried that if there’s a space you want to use, you worry you’re going to get assaulted, or verbally assaulted. And all you want to do is get changed.

Significantly in this research, narratives about safety in changing rooms came not from trans women, but from five of the trans masculine participants. Whilst safety in changing rooms was still a real concern for almost every participant, it was voiced most loudly by those accessing male spaces. Craig had expressed concern about using what were considered “macho areas, like the weights room”, and avoided the changing rooms and toilets, where confrontation could arise. They noted “until something happens it doesn’t feel completely real, but it’s something I’m aware one needs to be mindful of.” Often this was linked to having previously experienced homo and transphobic bullying and discrimination, as Craig had, in the past.

Gender critical feminists view trans women using single-sex spaces as ‘a legal and moral failure’ (*Fair Play for Women*, 2021, n.p), but why have such spaces, including changing rooms, become branded as ‘safe spaces’? After all, there has been no need to raise this as a concern before, and many gym and leisure centres already have open plan changing areas with individual cubicles. Where has the need come from to

frame changing rooms as ‘safe spaces’ which must be protected from trans women? There is also no equivalent conversation about what it means for cis men to share their spaces with trans men, though this is no doubt due to the lack of moral panic associated with this. The framing of trans people as deviant sexual predators who should not be allowed to use cis people’s changing rooms and bathrooms bears a striking resemblance to previous moral panics, most notably the one against gay men in the 1980s. Like trans people now being branded as a threat to women and young girls, gay men then were branded as paedophiles. Any mention of homosexuality was deemed to risk “turning children gay” in the same way that there is now concern that young people will be “turned trans” if they learn about gender diversity (Barker, 2017, n.p.).

Trans people are right to feel concerned about this media hostility have a direct impact on their participation in sport (Barras, 2019a). Chapter one outlined how, in May 2018, opposition from gender critical feminists to trans women using single-sex spaces designated to women manifested in a series of Man Friday protests at Hampstead Heath ladies’ ponds. Whilst this was also in origin a protest to reforms to the UK Gender Recognition Act (2004) allowing people to self-id, it follows on from the emergence of the gender critical Twitter hashtag #NoUnexpectedPenises in 2014. The choice of venue was significant. Swimming is an activity in which partially clothed bodies are on display, as well as the fact the ladies’ pond has been a single-sex place to swim since 1925. This combination of the public display of bodies together with the attempt to legitimise the preservation of a single-sex space as a kind of historical appropriation appeals to the gender critical ideology of tradition and authenticity, associating itself with a history which is no longer relevant. Rather, this desire to police single-sex spaces such as Hampstead Heath ladies’ pond under the guise of protecting women is about establishing stricter gender codes in order to legitimise their gender critical agenda (Hines, 2019; Phipps, 2016).

The idea that single-sex spaces must be protected from allowing trans women to use them has become a well-established part of the gender critical lexicon, based as it is on the belief that only those whose gender is authentic may occupy what have become to be known as ‘safe spaces.’ There have been similar lengthy debates with the US bathroom bills, generating and fuelling a moral panic which brings to the foreground questions of how gendered identity and embodiment are ‘managed, negotiated and

resisted through the on-going mundane processes and everyday spaces of life' (Hines 2019, p.150). As Caudwell (2020, p. 6) notes

> The cisgender gaze [that] is used to govern transgender bodies, hostile exclusionary comments, and physical ejection all amount to what "intensified policing" by cisgender people of what are viewed as "potentially contagious" transgender bodies.

Fair Play for Women are, in their own words on their website, a 'campaigning and consultancy group which raises awareness, provides evidence and analysis, and works to protect the rights of women and girls in the UK' (*Fair Play for Women*, 2021, n.p.) They are one of the most prominent gender critical voices in the UK, and their campaign director and public spokeswoman Dr Nicola Williams frequently appears on national television, radio (including Radio 4's *Women's Hour*) and in the mainstream media. As an organisation they have taken out full-page adverts in newspapers such as the *Metro* (Duffy, 2018, n.p.) to promote their position on trans women in sport, single-sex spaces and reforms to the UK Gender Recognition Act (2004).

Fair Play for Women's justification for their position is based on their belief that, 'most sexual assault is by males, against females. For our physical and emotional safety, we need to know where men are not permitted to follow.' This thesis does not deny most sexual assault is by males against females (*Women's Aid*, 2021, n.p.). It also fully supports any survivor of assault to own their own story and a right to safety. But changing rooms are not off limits to men even when they claim to be, and never have been. Many companies employ men to clean female changing rooms, and these men are not viewed with the same level suspicion. This also perpetuates the idea that sexual assault is inflicted by strangers in public or semi-public spaces rather than by family members, friends or acquaintances in the home. Recent scandals about sexual assault and harassment in sport, including the prosecution and imprisonment of the former Olympic gymnast team doctor and American coach Larry Nassar prove single-sex spaces are not a guarantee of safety (Freeman, 2018, n.p.).

The changing room is a quintessentially panoptic place (Doan, 2011; Foucault, 1977). Due to the open plan design and presence of mirrors, a feeling of being watched is often enforced if not directly, then indirectly, and several participants expressed feeling particularly vulnerable about their presence there. They are spaces which have their

own rules, expectations, language and etiquette, and a set of formal and informal practices which are unique depending on the gender of the person using them. In order to use this space, one must present as the gender the space is designed for and adhere to those practices expected of that gender. The changing room itself is a highly interactive and distinct social space where participants manage and display their gender identity and are expected to display appropriate behaviour. In the context of the changing room, an individual has to be accepted here if they wish to access other parts of the sporting facility (Doan, 2015).

5.3 Concerns about Confrontation in Sporting Spaces

Fair Play For Women acknowledge cis women enjoy the same protection under the UK Equalities Act (2010) as trans people do, because 'it's right that trans people have their own category under equality law, and protection from discrimination' (*Fair Play for Women*, 2021, n.p.). However, protection from discrimination is not a guarantee against experiencing it (Fink and Miller, 2014), and, as the data showed, over half of the participants had still experienced transphobia and discrimination in sporting spaces, and worried about being confronted. Hines (2019, p.147) says the relationship between feminist theory and trans has 'a complex history…the intersections of feminist theory, politics and community space, [and] the place of trans people within feminism has long been disputed.' Whilst many who identify as gender critical will insist they support the rights of all trans people in society, there remains the unwavering belief that trans women are not 'real' women, and their physical presence in female spaces such as changing rooms, constitutes that space becoming unsafe.

The concerns some participants had about being confronted by other users of sporting space often originated from experiencing real encounters of hostility and at times violence, or the threat of violence. For example, it took time for Alix to start feeling comfortable using the (male) showers (after they had top surgery), and they were always conscious of how others may view them. Nonetheless, they were adamant that they were entitled to use that space and would do so. Alix said

> I was going to the gym for about a year before I felt comfortable to shower there…I thought, why shouldn't I be using this space the way that everyone else is? I started doing it, but you can see how uncomfortable people are, not all the time, not everyone, but there's

> generally at least one or two people who are staring at me in the changing room, and it's uncomfortable. And I guess they're just super gendered places.

Alix's own comfort came, in their own experience, at the cost of someone else's possible discomfort, and Alix explains this as being because changing rooms are "super gendered places", they are not neutral. Evren avoided transphobia by "pre-emptively" not being in the space where it might happen, which is a difficult decision to make, as it meant Evren can no longer participate in the sport he both enjoys and finds beneficial for his mental health. If Evren wants to participate he has to join the men's boxing team, which opens up a new barrier. He said

> I have to be in spaces where it's safe for me to not wear a binder which realistically means women only spaces. Or women and non-binary. Which aren't working for me.

When I asked Miles how he felt about beginning to navigate using the male changing rooms and toilets, and how he approached this, he said

> There's a point in everyone's physical, medical transition…where they don't feel like they can use either. They have to hold it in or feel like they have to time it when no one is coming in or out. So, they run in, and find safe space, or you have friends who can go in and tell you where everything is.

The layout of changing rooms also caused a dilemma for most participants. This was because open-plan spaces in sporting spaces offered less privacy, and for those who had surgery scars, or who were binding, this often made them feel nervous about using them. James talked about how the open-plan configuration of changing rooms could create a barrier to participation, as he did not want to reveal his surgery scars nor reveal the lower half of his body. James said a few extra cubicles could help make the changing rooms more inclusive. He said

> Just a couple of cubicles in changing rooms would be nice, 'cos I just want to change my t-shirt after the gym then I'll come home and shower. But I can't even change my t-shirt, I have to go into the loo, into the one cubicle in the whole like place that's meant for men.

Alix felt the lack of toilet provision for disabled people was also an access and inclusion issue, and they did not want to take this facility away from another person. They said

> There are cubicles. There's a disabled toilet there, but I don't think there's a shower in there. And I shouldn't have to use the disabled toilet.

Craig spoke of the same situation, and so simply did not use the disabled toilets because "it's for disabled people to use…also, it feels a bit like, hi there, why don't I just announce myself?" When I asked Craig if they felt unsafe using the changing rooms because they are trans, their response was mixed. They said

> It isn't always that I'm ashamed of being trans, because I'm not, but sometimes I'm worried about safety and things like that too.

When it comes to single-sex spaces and extending greater provision to all, this does not have to mean the reduction of provision to others. As the research conducted by Spandler et al., (2020) and Erikainen et al. (2020) revealed, greater provision benefits not just trans people but is also likely to make sporting spaces more inclusive of other groups who face barriers to accessing sports spaces, including women and many cultural and religious minorities. Whilst creating fully inclusive spaces is not always possible, 'that does not mean that improvements cannot be made. The second-best solution is to re-design existing spaces to be more inclusive' (Spandler et al., 2020, p.7).

The worry, then of confrontation in spaces, was often spoken about in relationship to feeling 'safe', as opposed to perhaps a person feeling embarrassed or self-aware about their body. Many people feel self-conscious about their body in changing rooms, but, as the experiences of the participants have revealed, when gender identity is called into question in gender-segregated spaces, it can be uncomfortable for those having to negotiate the potential hostile reactions of others. For many participants, either due to homophobic bullying in the past or fear of transphobic discrimination in the present, openly identifying as trans in sports changing rooms was not worth the risk. Like Alix and Craig, Judith would often avoid areas such as the showers "unless I've transitioned, unless I've done surgery." In the same way in which Evren avoided

going to a women's boxing class, Judith said she "doesn't want to end up making a scene."

This was the experience of Sarah, who plays tennis and darts, when she talked about her concern about being confronted at her LGBT tennis club. Sarah, like Evren, pre-empted the possibility of confrontation by carrying around her gender recognition certificate "just in case someone wants to see it." When I asked Sarah if she felt safe at the club, she said "of course, yes, I do, but I don't announce it, who I am, I don't even talk about it." For Sarah, avoiding confrontation (and feeling safe) is achieved because she does not announce her gender identity. Like Miles, who sometimes felt worried about using the men's toilets, or Craig, who did not use the changing rooms at their gym, Sarah avoided potential transphobia by not telling anyone she is trans. Sarah was also worried someone may confront her and say "this is not fair, captain, this is not fair, that's not really a woman," and she would not be able to play tennis anymore.

Even when an individual was not confronted directly in a sporting space, there was still a residual fear about it happening, often due to past experiences of homophobia or transphobia. For example, although Alix said, "no one has directly said anything to me" about them being there and being trans, they still had to be on their guard. They said, "sometimes I can't tell if people are amused or uncomfortable, or angry that I'm in their space, um, it's yeah, it's a difficult one."

When I asked if they had experienced any direct transphobia in the gym, Alix replied

> No one has said anything directly to me, but again, they don't always have to, sometimes it's just enough, the way someone was looking at you? It's not always about violence, really, it's just the uncomfortable situation.

Like other participants who had experienced homophobic bullying and discrimination in the past, these concerns stayed with them in the present in sporting spaces. James, who had experienced homophobic bullying at school, said

> I knew I was gender nonconforming, and that made me uncomfortable in gendered spaces, like sports teams, like changing rooms…on the surface, homophobia perhaps…but [also] there was kind of a gendered aspect to what was putting me off.

The gender critical argument against trans inclusion in spaces such as changing rooms has also been tackled on the philosophical plane. Zanghellini (2020) argues gender critical feminists make a mistake on at least three points: first, in assuming or arguing only cis women are in need of the protection of women-only spaces; second, in insisting trans women's experience of socialisation mirrors that of cis males; and third, in not treating gender identity seriously as relevant to determining who counts as a woman. 'To be blunt', writes Hines (2019, p.155), 'the abuse of trans women is not considered to be a feminist issue within some sections of feminism because trans women are not considered to be women.'

Gender critical feminists have also been criticised for their failure to pay credible tribute to decades of feminist, trans and queer philosophical work debating how to define 'woman' and how trans women are positioned in relation to that concept (Zanghellini, 2020). The gender critical feminist insistence that the category of woman and/or female must be centred on bodily sex (as a biological category) has also come under criticism (Hines, 2019). Such a one-size-fits-all approach to feminism and gender can

> Inevitably result in double standards, where bodies and behaviours can only ever be viewed as right or wrong, natural or unnatural, normal or abnormal, righteous or immoral. A one-size-fits-all models for describing sexism or marginalisation – whether in terms of patriarchy, or compulsory heterosexuality, or the gender binary – always account for certain forms of sexism and margination whilst ignoring others. As a result, such models validate some people's perspectives while leaving any of us behind (Serano, 2013, p.7).

What is less considered by gender critical feminists is that changing rooms evoke unease for many people – not just in terms of sexuality or fear of male violence – but how race and culture also intersect here too (Saeidzadeh, 2020; Spandler et al. 2020). After all, the ways in which bodies have been – and continue to be - kept separate in public spaces is not limited to gender, and includes race, class, disability, sexuality and age (Hines, 2019). As chapter two discussed, the ways in which bodies other than male have been othered in sport (including Black and intersex athletes) and subjected to sex verification processes underpins much of why feminist contributions to sports sociology have been so crucial (Mansfield et al., 2017).

The worry about confrontation, coupled with concerns about safety when accessing a changing room as a direct result of being trans (even when 'passing'), was described by Miles. Miles had experienced transphobic verbal abuse whilst using a public toilet and he explained how these encounters subsequently altered his feelings of safety in changing rooms. He said

> If you're using a changing room, after experiences like that, you're terrified. Even if you have had top surgery, or any kind of surgery. You still know the world isn't as open as you are, or understands you, you're worried that if there's a space you want to use, you worry you're going to get assaulted, or verbally assaulted. And all you want to do is get changed.

Blending into this highly gendered and embodied space was both necessary and stressful for trans people. Because changing rooms are gender-segregated, they become sites of meaning for trans people in a different way than for cis people. Barker and Scheele (2020, p. 143) write trans people are 'unsafe in many public and domestic spaces, risking discrimination, ridicule and even violent attack if their transness is read. At the same time, they're often seen as a danger in places like public toilets or changing rooms.' Reflecting upon the data in chapter four, the relationship between passing and safety can be witnessed in the lived experiences of those who possessed passing privilege.

Changing rooms are therefore unique in that, whilst nudity is not compulsory (as many have individual cubicles with doors), partial or full nudity is permitted. But for some gender critical feminists, this nudity has become sexualised when there is the possibility of it belonging to a trans body. Phipps (2016, p.131), drawing on trans feminist author Julia Serano (2004), writes

> The penis is the key object here, 'stuck' to trans women through an invasive and violent obsession with their surgical status, but also imagined as a separate entity which is itself responsible for sexual violence rather than being, as Serano reminds us, merely someone's genital organ.

Gender critical feminists are, argues Hines (2019, p.155), seeking to not only misrepresent trans women as men but want to align them with 'the very worst of men, where the threat of violence against women is enacted through 'gender fraud.' As

Phipps (2016, p.132) writes, 'this politics of fear uses the language of victimisation and emotional triggers to great effect.'

This position arguably says more about the feminist who has such a fear than the reality of life for trans people. This view presumes the penis does define the person, and anyone with a penis would identify only as a woman for the purposes of entering a changing room, posing a threat to the (cis) women inside. It assumes the penis is the threat, or any person who has a penis and who identifies as a woman is engaging in a base, deceitful, and harmful form of disguise. This is, according to Butler (2020, n.p.) 'a rich fantasy, and one which comes from powerful fears, but it does not describe a social reality'. Trans women are frequently discriminated against in changing rooms and bathrooms, and as Butler writes (2020, n.p.), 'the fact that such fantasies pass as public argument is itself cause for worry.'

5.4 The Gender Normativity of Public Sporting Spaces

Eleven participants found interactions with staff members, instructors and players on other teams and the language used once they were participating in everyday and physical exercise could also be problematic. James talked about how gendered yoga can be, and whilst yoga, like many sports and activities may not set out to be intentionally trans exclusive, the gendered assumptions instructors make about people may make them feel excluded. He said

> I don't think that yoga is gender neutral…some instructors talk about menstrual cycles…obviously with the assumption a person is cisgender…I've definitely been to classes where if you are non-binary or trans, you are excluded from the instructions.

Similarly, the language used in sports and exercise settings could be considered to be gender neutral and goes mostly unnoticed by those it does not effect. Aimee reflected upon how she had experienced this during a fitness class

> Again there're some kinds of barriers there…there was one fitness class…one of the instructors was using [gendered] words to describe people, like, "you can do it girl, keep going girl', and I think I got a "keep going guy"…and I don't wear…tiny tops or tiny shorts like cis

> women may when they go to the gym…so it's a little less obvious for the instructor to know.

Aimee's experience here offers another example of how gender identity and the sporting body intersects with sporting spaces, and barriers can be both obvious such as gender segregated changing rooms, and subtle, such as gendered language. Alix also picked up on how "tapering" language and not making assumptions about a person's gender promoted inclusivity in sporting spaces. Alix said "I think sometimes it's just the way you are welcomed into these spaces, and the way you are spoken to, or how you're treated by people in the space…like what's your name, what are your pronouns? There's a lot more that could be done to make people feel welcome in those spaces."

It could be argued such adjustments would benefit many people who use sports settings, who would prefer less gendered assumptions made about them when accessing these spaces, as these assumptions are often connected to the space itself. Even when sporting spaces are not labelled as specifically gendered (e.g. an exercise studio or a swimming pool, as opposed to signed changing rooms and toilets), they can still feel as if they are, depending on who uses them.

The changing room is an anomaly in that it is both a private and a public space, often occupied by parents and children, the young and the old. They are most often gender segregated, and it is imperative a person looks gender normative to avoid being confronted as being the 'wrong' gender in that space or attract unwelcome attention. Whilst Herrick and Duncan (2019) argue changing rooms are sites for queer sexuality, very often they are trans/homophobic spaces (as experienced by some participants in the past), and dominated by both hetero and gender normativity, and the cisnormative gaze. The very fact many people are naked (or partially naked) in changing rooms creates what Eng (2006, p.58) terms 'body intimacy', that is 'the social relations in the locker room exist in an atmosphere of nakedness, close body contact, and focus on the body – assumptions are made about the asexual nature of them.' This thesis agrees changing room culture is based on the view that 'homosocial spaces are non-sexual – how changing rooms are segregated (men and women) makes heteronormative assumptions about the occupants' (Eng, 2006, p.59). For someone who transgresses gender norms (no matter if they are trans or not), they may well

experience what Doan (2011, p.635) has termed 'the tyranny of gender', and because gendered spaces shape nearly every aspect of people's lives, they can become disorientating for some people (Warner, 2000; Yeadon-Lee, 2013).

However, whilst many cis people experience assumptions about their gender identity, for people who identify as trans, these assumptions can sometimes result in receiving intentional transphobia whilst playing sport. Katy, who plays football on a women's team, talked about the transphobia she experienced from another football team. Whilst she said it did not happen often it was highly upsetting when it did. She said

> The [other] team…must have just gone out to get me from day one…they were quite nasty, kicking everyone, but I really got targeted. But that came from the crowd as well, so I was misgendered across the board from everybody, and the club was calling me he…the spectators and the people to do with the club were basically just encouraging people to call me he and so on, so that was the worst experience I've had.

Although Katy said there was possibly a language barrier with the referee (who was from another country), and as such she did not blame him for not picking up on the comments, she mentioned the importance of training to help avoid this in the future. She said

> Referees have got to be trained, and they have got to know about LGBT abuse, because they need to stamp on it, because you can't leave it to LGBT people to complain about. Because then we get targeted even more.

Katy is highlighting how training for all those involved in sport could be easily instigated to improve inclusivity. As discussed in chapter one, the ongoing hostility in the UK media to trans people participating in professional sport spills over into everyday sport and physical exercise. Charlotte said she knew there was opposition to trans women participating in sport and whilst she was able to ignore it, it undoubtedly impacted her own participation in sport because it was "off-putting." She said

> They're [gender critical feminists] putting pressure saying that it's unfair, we don't want what is classed as male bodied people in our spaces…it's really off-putting. What do I do if I do meet one of these people at the swimming pool [or] out on a run [or] I'm told I can't

> participate in certain activities, and are expected to produce certificates?

Like Sarah, who carries her birth certificate around with her at the tennis club, and for every other participant who has talked about their lived experiences of taking part in sport and accessing sporting spaces, this ongoing hostility furthers essentialising gender differences, which in turn supports gender inequality through mechanisms of exclusion and in some cases, the reality of violence towards trans people. Katy had even experienced a physical assault whilst playing football, and she had been "elbowed at a corner and I'm fairly confident that was deliberate." Similar to Alix and James who had suggested better inclusivity training needs to take place to help mitigate these occurrences, for Katy, the consequences of "the referee, he just ignored it", meant her participation in the match was over, because she "ended up getting taken off because my manager wanted to take me off for my own safety basically, so it was that level."

The majority of sport and physical exercise requires the negotiation of the private, gendered changing room, and the public space of, for example, the football field, and some participants keenly felt 'the fear of visual and verbal surveillance' (Caudwell, 2020, p. 6) which happens in these spaces and places. Returning to the occurrence of the word 'safety' and the term 'safe spaces', these experiences have highlighted the reality of the lived experiences of many trans people in sport, that their participation is often fraught with both the expectation and reality of discrimination and transphobia, as a consequence by the gender critical feminist movement.

5.5 Hegemonic Masculinity in Sporting Spaces

The previous chapter began with the most frequently mentioned topic by participants, their (sporting) body - and how their body impacted on their inclusion in sport. For many participants, their lived experience of being trans was intrinsically brought into focus when they participated in sport or were in sporting spaces. This was often due to the way sport is organised along binary lines. In sports settings, the body is explicitly used, displayed, observed and talked about, with bodily presentations an important

aspect of the performance of gender normative masculinity and femininity. Within these spaces

> Both physical and social dominant forms of heterosexual masculinity and femininity can be established and/or challenged. In these areas, peoples' gendered bodies and behaviours are both scrutinised and disciplined by their peer group, with public and negative labelling for those unwilling or unable to conform to group norms. (Paechter, 2003, p.71)

Trans women are frequently viewed as interlopers in cis women's spaces, but trans men do not seem to attract same concern from the gender critical feminist movement. The trans men in this research had genuine concerns about their own safety, but so long as they passed, or did not disclose what Craig called their "trans heritage", they were able to destabilise hegemonic masculinity to their own advantage. Both Craig and Harry were able to use their trans masculinity as a way to find their own place at the gym and in the changing rooms, both spaces which are often considered to be subject to displays of hegemonic masculinity. For example, when Harry was asked about his surgery scars whilst changing after football, he did not pretend they were from having heart surgery, as his teammate assumed. Instead, Harry disclosed the reason, which was having had top surgery.

When Craig was in the gym using the notoriously masculine weights area, an area in which frequently only the most experienced (cis) men worked out, they said that "I can just laugh about it [the men showing off] …it doesn't really bother me anymore." In Craig's example, they are deriding the presence of hegemonic masculinity and in doing so, adapting it to suit them, a trans masculine man in a (predominantly) cis man's space. This is an example of a way in which hegemonic masculinity can be thought of as 'incorporating or appropriating aspects of subordinate or marginalised masculinities in order to retain the gender order' (Abelson, 2019, p. 17). Afterall, Craig has not sought out a new space in the gym nor challenged the existing space, but rather established their own place in the gender hierarchy. Thus, sporting spaces become a primary example of understanding the production of hegemonic masculinity in action (Jarvie, Thornton and Mackie, 2017).

There exists a wide number of studies on hegemonic masculinity and masculine identity formation in relation to sport (Anderson, 2014; Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; English, 2017; Jarvis, 2014). These works have helped with helping to establish the link between maleness, skill and strength as the defining characteristics of sporting masculinity in the modern industrialised West. The lived experiences of several of the participants in this study support the position that masculinity is fluid, and not fixed; rather it is relational, dependent on the person engaging with it, and can shift. This is what Abelson (2019, p.21) terms Goldilocks masculinity, which she explains are being 'not too masculine and not too feminine, [and] is central to the regular guy.'

It has been argued (Connell, 2005) that hegemonic masculinity is embodied in all men who participate in sport and physical activity, and gender identity and the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are inextricably linked. This was evidenced by Joe when they said

> I've been going to the gym once or twice a week whilst I'm off sport, and I hate it. It's horrible. I hate the gym. I hate the changing rooms, I hate the showers, I hate all of it. I hate that the men take up all of the free weights area. It's the masculinity, the horrible air of masculinity (laughs) that surrounds gyms.

Many sporting settings, especially certain areas of the gym like the weights area, are often viewed as masculine spaces. As some trans masculine participants became more familiar with the rules and ethos of these masculine spaces, they were able to view them as less intimidating, because the cis men who occupied them were not a version of masculinity they wished to aspire to, which they saw as sexist and misogynistic. For example, Joe talked about when they went to the gym with his cis female rugby teammates

> It was disgusting, and I'd get a lot of looks like, they'd look at me, like yeah, well done, you're doing well. And I'd be like, I just want to come to the gym. They would just stare at all my friends, especially when they were squatting, so they could stand behind and see their bums, and think they couldn't be seen, like, there are mirrors you know! Disgusting.

Whilst these spaces still had to be navigated and a certain code followed to facilitate a person's use of that space, over time participants were able to use them to help construct and confirm their own gender identity and subsequent integration into that same space. Three participants poked fun at the overt (hegemonic) masculinity of these spaces, but they were able to do this precisely because they were reassured their gender identity 'matched' those of the other users. Returning to Abelson's (2019) and Goldilocks masculinity some of the trans men in this study, like some men, 'do not want to be hypermasculine, but neither do they want to be too feminine. Instead, the ideal may be somewhere in-between (Abelson, 2019, p. 5).

As Ravenhill and de Visser (2017) examine in their work on gay men and masculinity, gay men, like all other men, may utilise stereotypically masculine attributes and behaviours in an attempt to accrue 'masculine capital', a term referring to the social power afforded by the display of traits and behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity. This was the case for Craig, when they spoke about now being able to use the weights area in the gym, because they are read as male. They said

> I've kind of ventured downstairs to the weights area, which… you have to be a certain kind of person to go down there, but it tends to be populated by people who appear to be cis men. Um, pretty muscular, doing their thing…I don't care anymore, and it doesn't even induce anxiety, so that's quite cool.

For those participants whose gender presentation was masculine, how they looked was sharply called into focus when they entered a sports setting. At times, this masculine gender identity was perceived by others as conforming to what hegemonic masculinity embodies (strong, fast, skilful), yet in practice these essentialist qualities did not manifest, e.g., those who took testosterone did not automatically gain powerful muscles; rather, it was having a beard which made other players assume they were strong and fast.

This gender socialisation has been explored by Schilt (2010), via the experiences of trans men in the workplace. Schilt revealed the ways in which assumptions about innate differences between men and women serve as justification for discrimination and found that some trans men gain acceptance—and even privileges—by becoming 'just one of the guys' (Schilt, 2010, n.p.). Schilt found that some participants were

coerced into working as women or marginalized for being openly trans, and that other forms of appearance-based discrimination also influence their opportunities. Schilt concluded that this research was not only valuable for the ways in which it revealed workplace inequality for both trans men and cis women, but that the trans men she spoke to in her research found their experiences and practices of masculinity more salient than other men. This was a similar experience of the trans masculine participants in this study, who, like the participants in this study, found their masculinity to be more salient than their cis male gym mates. This was because their masculinity often varied in relation to the sporting location they occupied, such as the gym and the weights area, and how they became privy to sexist language and behaviour in these spaces due to their passing as cis men.

There was an acknowledgement of the hypocrisy of policing other people's gender in these spaces, and two participants used their passing privilege to look out for their fellow cis female teammates. In doing this, Joe, Alix and Craig are re-essentialising hegemonic masculinity as something which can be used to stand up for their cis female teammates and intimidate the cis male users of those spaces. Alix talked about how when they went swimming

> I do go to swimming pools, when I spend time with my younger brother, but it's not generally a pleasant experience, because people will just stare at you. Which I find bizarre, and it used to bother me, but now I enjoy staring back at people, and making them as equally uncomfortable for what they're doing.

In this example Alix is turning their gaze back on to those who are staring at them, which could be inferred as an example of the way Alix is aware of their own hegemonic masculinity and using it to their advantage. Alix, Joe and Harry were able to construct their masculinity in sports settings congruently with what hegemonic masculinity embodies, at times being confrontational when their gender identity was queried, or they felt themselves being subject to the cisgender gaze. A similar perspective is found in later studies, such as Abelson's (2014) research on trans men, masculinity and spatial safety, and Schilt's (2010) study on trans men's experiences of gender inequality in working life, where she details the interactional process of 'achieving social maleness (2010, p.48), that is, the work of being recognized as male by others.

In this way, Schilt (2010, p.48) argues trans men may gain acceptance and some privileges as men, but also 'may experience marginalization and discrimination if they choose to live openly as trans.

Trans men, argued Abelson (2014), do not become immune to the threat or reality of violence (from other men) by virtue of now being seen as men. Whilst they enjoyed increased access to public spaces or found that their body afforded them a new sense of safety, their 'geography of fear shifted' (Abelson, 2014, p. 558). That is, these trans men now experienced a new set of fears, brought on by 'the privilege of male violence' (Abelson, 2014, p. 558). This meant that for the trans men in Abelson's research, they felt that their change of position relative to women was not always a positive change, because it involved the possibility of being subjected to other men's violence in a new way. This included, for example, having to negotiate interactions with men in ways they found to be sexist or homophobic.

The participants in Abelson's research also identified particular bodily characteristics as important for their sense of safety. Like the participants in this research, their perceptions of safety changed based on their own body, the space they were in and the communities they engaged with. Abelson's research highlights similarities with the trans masculine participants in this research, because these perceptions of safety, such as in the changing room or the showers

> Are central to how they account for their masculine practices as they orient to their sex category and transgender status, as well as influencing how they anticipate and experience potential assessment and enforcement (Abelson, 2014, p. 562).

One very distinct aspect of changing rooms is the reality of encountering another person's naked body, and the possibility that, if wanting to use for example the shower, an individual's own naked body may be observed, something some of the trans male participants experienced, and how they expressed feeling vulnerable. This was also experienced by Craig, who although had not felt threatened in the gym, they worried someone "may notice something and accost me outside that space." Similarly, Harry said he had friends on his squash team who could not use the showers, as they "don't want anyone else seeing that they haven't got a willy, basically" and suggested more

individual cubicles with doors would be helpful. And as Evren noted, he had “removed myself from some spaces” as the gender segregated nature of them was beginning to cause him to feel uncomfortable.

This vulnerability was both a bodily one, and one which required these participants having to ‘newly orientate themselves to being accountable to gender expectations for those who are sex categorised as male’ (Abelson, 2014, p. 558). This was in part due to safety and in response to other (cis) men’s dominating practices and potential for sexist banter and even violence in these spaces. Determining safety and the wish to not jeopardise this safety was a genuine concern for many of the participants and was not only experienced by the trans women in this research. It was also experienced by some trans men/masculine and non-binary people, though the fear of the discovery of the visible signs of their female biography was more of concern for trans male/masculine participants. This raises questions about safety in (private) sporting spaces for many users, not just those who are cis.

Farber (2017, p.262) discusses this in her paper in which she analyses trans men’s experiences of masculinity via online fitness forums and their feeling about attending gyms. She says

> Gyms are not neutral spaces and particular forms of self-presentation, dress, actions and vocalizations are gendered. With cisgender men often controlling the gym space (particularly the weight room), and while many people experience ‘gymtimidation’, transgender men faced unique challenges in accessing and using the gym.

The spaces which gender critical feminists raise as being ‘safe/unsafe’ are seen only from the perspective of cis and trans women, and rarely involve any consideration of trans men and trans masculine users of these spaces. The experiences of trans men in these discussions are frequently overlooked, and this research acknowledges that their narratives provide what Caudwell (2014, p. 398) called ‘valuable testimonies on embodied subjectivities.’ In Abelson’s 2014 research examining how trans men construct their masculinities in public spaces such as on public transport or in the gym, she found that respondents masculine practices changed depending on who they interacted with and the level of safety (or potential violence) they perceived. Abelson (2014, p. 549) wrote

> Respondents concerns for safety, and their masculine practices, changed according to variation in transition, physical location, audience and their physical stature.

As Connell noted when writing about hegemonic masculinity as an embodied practice, masculinity tends to be something that only cis men's bodies do; masculinity can only be yet in these examples the participants bodies are also 'doing' masculinity (Halberstam, 1998). Using a trans feminist lens in this research and its relationship to hegemonic masculinity, trans feminism may help to conceptualise, as Sedgewick (1995) wrote, that sometimes masculinity has got nothing to do with men. Both Sedgewick (1995) and Halberstam (1998) have critiqued that there is a tendency within masculinity studies 'that everything pertaining to men can be classified as masculinity, and everything that can be said about masculinity pertains in the first place to men' (Sedgewick, 1995, p.12). The values which hegemonic masculinity places on certain demonstrations of masculinity (strength, speed, power) are shown to be unstable and trans feminism's epistemological positioning of the ways in which trans bodies are acknowledged and celebrated in trans experiences, helps to highlight that masculinity is 'something that not only some specific bodies (those assigned male at birth) have or own, but as a position that is more situational and which can be deployed and activated by a variety of bodies' (Gottzén and Wibke Straube, 2017, p.221).

This recourse to the physical body was experienced by Joe, Whilst Joe was transitioning, they stopped playing water polo and instead joined a women's (LGBTQ+) rugby team. They described how passing as male caused confusion for the opposite team

> My breasts were really small to start with, I'm tall, I'm 5ft 11, my voice got deep, at that point I was quite hairy, and they were like, what are you doing here (laughs)? And like I'd play at the back and yell and everyone would turn around and say there's a man on the team!

The confusion Joe speaks about was noticeable only because of - like gendered sports clothing - the existence of gender segregated teams. It is not that Joe's body is *not* passing as male, it is that it *is* passing as male, and is viewed as being in the wrong place, on the women's rugby team. In addition, rugby carries with it normative

understandings of masculinity and is traditionally deemed a male sport. As a contact sport it is reliant on physical strength on speed, and Joe's masculine appearance stood out to the other players on the field, not least as it was a women's team.

According to trans feminist activist and author Emi Koyama (2001), there are two primary principles of trans feminism that each trans feminist lives by and wishes to follow and wishes for all individuals. First, Koyama states that all people should not only be allowed to live their own lives in whichever way they choose and define themselves however they feel is right but should also be respected by society for their individuality and uniqueness. Included is the right to individualized gender expression without the fear of retaliation. Trans feminism is epistemologically situated within trans bodies, rather than cis bodies. When this focus shifts in sporting spaces, a person can sometimes feel differently about their body when this fear is removed, as was the case with Joe.

For example, James talked about using a gym where cis men were not allowed to join, and how different the experience was as a trans person, because of "the way that cis men behave…" In fact, three of the trans masculine participants shared this view of spaces being felt as masculine. Alix called the weights area in their gym "notorious…just big men down there, lifting weights…grunting…all very uncomfortable or intimidating." Joe, Craig and Alix all labelled these spaces as being "uncomfortable" and "intimidating," with Craig further adding one needed to be "a certain type of person" to use them. In James's experience it was specifically cis men who were the problem.

The majority of participants in this research found themselves having to negotiate changing rooms, showers and gyms to some degree, all of which function as sites 'both for the gendered display of hegemonic forms of heterosexual masculinity and for the subordination of alternatives' (Paechter, 2003, p.47). As chapter two identified, the sociology of sport has used queer theory to highlight the mutual interdependency of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity (Giulianotti, 2016), but one of the most powerful challenges to these concepts in sport over the last two decades has come from trans feminism which has argued sexual orientation is not the only way to differ from and challenge the social construction of sport. Serano (2013, p.5) said

> Existing feminist and queer movements (much like their straight male-centric counterparts) always seem to create hierarchies, where certain

> gendered and sexual bodies, identities, and behaviours are deemed more legitimate than others.

In other words, it is through the repeated practice of hegemonic masculinity (and gender normativity), regardless of who is practicing it, 'which come to organise social life, either sustaining a patriarchal order, or challenging it in unprecedented forms' (Gottzén and Wibke Straube, 2017, p.219). There is also the sense some of the trans masculine participants are in the privileged and unique position of experiencing both perspectives of how hegemonic masculinity works, offering a unique insight into the ways it is interpreted. This sheds light, for example, on the ways in which sporting spaces are gendered to permit easier entry to those who fit standard representations of what a cis man looks like. Whilst this research did not make a specific decision to ask participants whether they had better (or worse) experiences once they were re-entering sporting spaces as trans men, it could be argued that they practice masculinity more consciously than cis men due to their gender identity (Abelson, 2014).

Sports spaces are often organised in ways which presume women and men might engage in different sporting activities. For example, it is often presumed when women go to the gym, they will do cardio and muscle toning activities, whereas when men go to the gym, they will do weightlifting and muscle building activities (Spandler et al., 2020). The way in which the gym floor is organised can reinforce these presumptions, and a number of masculine presenting participants reflected upon how uncomfortable they found these 'male spaces' to be when they first started using them. Much like in male changing rooms, gendered norms and presumptions can manifest in overtly sexist and/or masculine behaviour and/or language.

This means for many trans people who are going through transition (and even once they pass), negotiating sporting spaces is anxiety inducing, where the cis normative gaze is strongly felt, and there might be pressure to conform to a certain gender stereotype, or risk being confronted. A person's gender identity is intrinsic to their participation in sport, but this was not always easy to achieve when people were worried about how their gender identity would be read by others. Passing and being read as your preferred gender requires the constant repetition of behaviours

considered normative by others (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020), which can not only be labour-intensive for some trans people, but not engaging in this performativity, or failing at this performativity can often have consequences (Bernstein Sycamore, 2006).

Major barriers to participation in sport still exist for trans people, yet often trans people – in these examples some of the trans masculine participants – still found a way to negotiate their participation. It is clear that these examples of hegemonic masculinity being both adopted and derided are dependent in certain sporting spaces. These lived experiences contribute to the existing literature on hegemonic masculinities, especially where hegemonic masculinity performed by bodies other than those which are cis gender. However more research is required to fully understand the constructions, meanings and display of the range of (masculine) gender identities reflected upon in this study.

5.6 The Need for Trans Only Sporting Spaces

The existence of spaces and sessions designed only for trans people was mentioned by Miles, Jude, Alix and Aimee. Like passing privilege, there are both benefits and limitations for these spaces and sessions. As Miles said “it’s nice that there are trans specific places and clubs, like swimming, that’s really important, ‘cos it’s intimidating. You feel very self-conscious.” These spaces (and the trans inclusive organisations who run them), enabled users to feel safe, accepted, and without the need to negotiate many of the issues already mentioned in this chapter. Jude said they thought “that’s what brings it all [doing sport] together. ‘Cos there’s a space where you can support each other during a game.”

Alix agreed with Jude and said “people know they can go to those spaces [and feel ok], which gyms in general just aren’t doing. I think what Trans Can Sport [a Brighton-based trans inclusive sports organisation] is doing is really important.” Miles also found public swimming “a bit difficult”, and when swimming on their own, Alix would only swim “at a trans specific swim group.” As Persia explained, for many trans people, swimming was an almost impossible activity to access and enjoy, because

> When they have the physical, sexual anomalies that they can't hide. Like I would never had gone swimming before I had surgery, which I've had…before then, what would I have done? You don't want to go anywhere near that.

Jude also felt they would "not go swimming, that's a definite." They said

> Although there are trans swimming groups around, which are really great, and I know a few friends have been and have had positive experiences…swimming is obviously one of the things that people find difficult because you wear as little clothing as possible. There's nowhere to hide.

James said, when he went swimming, "I still feel self-conscious, [but] it doesn't stop me from going". James found going to a trans only swimming session meant he was still able to do the activity he enjoyed. However James knew "some people won't go [or who] wouldn't feel comfortable going alone...they go with another, usually trans person, so they feel safe, or they'll go to a trans only space like the swimming… people really rave about that, it's really given people an opportunity to do something they otherwise wouldn't have done."

The existence of these spaces, arguably much like the spaces branded as women only or LGBTQ+ friendly certainly provide an important and necessary service. This is clearly of great benefit to those participants who feel self-conscious about being involved in sport, but trans only spaces and sessions are limited and not always available. This meant some participants, such as Alix would still use, as they called them, "straight" sporting spaces, which are more frequently available. The infrequency of trans only spaces and sessions can be a disadvantage as it can be hard to establish a regular routine to rely on.

Another disadvantage to trans only spaces and sessions was raised by Jude. Jude acknowledged that, whilst trans only spaces and sessions are "a really, really important thing, it's really hard for people who want to be really competitive in sport." Jennifer, who competes in cycling, agreed, saying, "very few women compete in the mountain bike orienteering…if you had a separate category, I'm always going to win that one…I don't always want to win it!" In addition, trans only sessions ran very

infrequently, at inconvenient times, such as late in the evening, and were often subject to cancellation at short notice.

Women-only spaces are often considered to be safe spaces where women are protected from sexual harassment and violence from men. For trans women and non-binary people (and for any woman with a more masculine gender presentation), this consideration of what a women-only space is supposed to represent, might make them feel uncomfortable, excluded from, and even harassed in these spaces by other women. What gender critical feminists miss in their attempt to manufacture a moral panic about trans people is that 'feminist thinking enables cis women to despise the social consequences of the sex they were assigned at birth and still comfortably occupy the gender that 'corresponds' with it.' (Olufemi, 2020, p 57).

These lived experiences reveal how barriers to participation in sport for trans people are never about one single issue, such as gender identity. They intersect with the spaces and places sports happen in, and the solution to improving inclusion is not to marginalise people more, but to perhaps widen what already exists. Joe felt that many of the issues in sporting spaces "weren't even a trans thing…I think lots of people find gyms horrendously uncomfortable."

Sporting spaces, like bodies, are gendered, where intense social interactions between people often take place, becoming sites of meaning for individuals to perform and confirm their gender. In these spaces people often draw upon dominant social understandings of gender to define themselves and others as legitimate users of that space (Abelson, 2014; Kauer and Rauscher, 2019). The body exposure these spaces require can be a significant barrier, making people unwilling or unable to use sports facilities because of that, or, if they do, using clothing or a binder to help them negotiate the space. The ways in which spaces such as changing rooms and gyms are laid out could be reconfigured in the future to accommodate not just gender diverse people, but those who may have cultural or religious needs. Gendered clothing and pronouns are easily adapted, and bodies of all shapes, sizes and ages might feel more welcome in these spaces (Spandler et al., 2020).

Within changing rooms, the binary gender norms, stereotypes and presumptions which characterise many sporting communities can be a barrier not only for trans people, but for cis men and women too. As Alix noted earlier, these spaces "are just

super gendered", and unrealistic expectations of gender normative presentations are challenging for many individuals in sport and sports settings. Navigating gendered spaces was not easy for many participants, as was the case for three trans masculine participants, who had experienced both direct hostility and a sense of threat in these spaces. Hines (2019, p.145) writes, 'these matters are not purely didactic…the protection of gender and sexual norms that fuel the panic of 'gender fraud', can, literally, be a matter of life and death.'

Some of these issues could be addressed, as Craig and Tom suggested, for example, by additional cubicles which would afford more privacy for users, not necessarily just for people who identify as trans. Gendered spaces are frequently policed both covertly and overtly by those who use them, as Miles and Alix experienced, with the possibility of being confronted or asked to leave if someone feels another person does not belong. For all these reasons, sporting spaces are not gender neutral, but are gendered sites of meaning.

5.7 Concluding Thoughts

This research is concerned with the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise. Asking about these lived experiences has led to seeing how barriers to participation in sport due to gender identity have been socially constructed, and the ways in which both gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity might serve to shore up this construction. It is important to examine these barriers, because gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport are built upon sexism, homophobia and transphobia (Waldron, 2019). Engaging with trans feminism helps to question these manufactured barriers and criteria for organistion, analysing the assumptions on which historic and current understandings of gender segregation in sport are based on binaries. Modern sport has always been a crucial cultural domain for the construction and reproduction of dominant, heterosexual masculine identities, and sports institutions at professional and amateur level still harbour formal and informal hierarchies which limit participation for those who sit outside of these identities (Mumford, 2021; Patel, 2021). These hierarchies were experienced by participants as they navigated their way around sporting spaces and how they both encountered and adapted to hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter two argued modern sport is still founded on a Western, liberal idea of inclusion, and trans feminism does go some way to raise questions about how to challenge this. If trans feminism is grounded in considerations of inclusion and exclusion, then this must also take into consideration everyone who wishes to be included (or is being excluded) in sport. However, the lived experiences of participants - a huge and varied group involved in a huge variety of sports – demonstrated that the principles of trans feminism did not quite map on to what their actual lived experiences are, nor what each and every person expressed a desire for. For example, rather than directly challenging the hegemonic masculinity and gender normativiity prevalent in sporting spaces, the trans masculine participants at times re-essentialised it and were themselves sometimes more salient in their masculinity than the cis male users of those spaces. However, there is a tension at play here, which is borne out of the data. Trans feminist theory is grounded in a critique of binary sex and gender in which only two sexes (male and female) and two genders (masculine and feminine) are acknowledged. It sees gender as socially constructed and agrees that using binary models to categorise people's identities can be harmful (Koyamo, 2001; Krane, 2019).

Conceptually, trans feminism is different to hegemonic masculinity in that it does not advocate for gender hierarchies. Rather, trans feminism champions bodily autonomy and living as a person's authentic gendered self, even if that means finding a place in that hierarchy. Because trans feminism places trans people at the heart of its thinking, it respects the rights of any trans individual to find a place in that hierarchy, so long as it is affirming for them. Centring trans people epistemologically in all research concerning trans people helps to encourage looking beyond the common or popularised sporting narratives which value gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity.

Trans feminism strives to closely listen to the uncommon naratives, those of the trans participants themselves. Arguably this is no different than any perspective which privileges a particular minority group. In fact, the centring of the voices of participants in this research are a given when adopting a trans feminist perspective, and thus this research meets the first and fundamental aim of what trans feminism does. Ahmed (2017, p. 227) writes

> Trans feminist politics illuminate not only how the sex-gender system is coercive, how it restricts what and who can be, but how creativity comes from how we survive a system that we cannot dismantle by the force of our will alone.

Trans feminist theory acknowledges that a reliance on binaries in sport can create accessibility issues for those people whose gender identity might not be situated along normative binary lines. Yet some participants in this research, many of whom were transgressing conventional or binary boundaries of gender identity, wanted to conform to a traditional gender identity, not just in sport, but in their day-to-day lives. For them, this critique of the gender binary may be something they acknowledge, but not something they necessarily wished to challenge. The epistemological position of trans feminism, which argues a reconsideration of how sport is organised – that is, not by anatomy – in order to achieve equality for trans people, was not necessarily what every participant vocalised. Rather, some found affirmation and an end to their gender dysphoria once their own gender identity was aligned, and for some, this meant sitting firmly at one end of sex/gender binary.

For trans feminists, it is 'the confines and coercive nature of the sex-gender binary structure, especially in physical activity and sport, which is problematic and in need of change' (Caudwell, 2020, p.8). However, whilst some participants acknowledged this, not all of them found this problematic, and no one expressed a wish to radically change it. Rather, their very presence in sport and sports settings meant they were involved in redefining gender from within and counteracting this coercive nature by continuing to participate in sport. This was achieved by continuing to occupy gender-segregated spaces such as changing rooms, and occasionally recognising (as trans feminism does) where cissexism and transphobia intersected. The use of trans feminist theory in this research reflects an academic belief in the need for a more concentrated lens when considering the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise.

Trans feminism brings to conversations about trans people's participation in sport the opportunity to be creative when thinking about inclusion and seeking out alliances with others who feel excluded in sport. As noted in chapter two, trans feminism also provided a lexicon to better understand how cis narratives dominate sport and look to ways to examine how gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity create barriers

for many people in sport. These considerations about equality were vocalised by five participants, in the ways in which they had internalised the essentialist view they would possess an innate competitive advantage over their cis teammates. For three trans masculine participants they often had the perception of being good at sport conferred upon by them by others. In this way, all of these individuals were subverting gender performativity to their own advantage, allowing for the possibility for change, resistance and subversion. In this way, 'the very freedom of the subject who is called upon to repeat and reinforce the gender normative, can open fissures that may eventually lead to a destabilization of power' (Butler, 1990, p. 67) which is fundamentally what trans feminism is striving for.

The ways in which a participant's gender identity was affirmed through their interaction with sporting spaces was discussed mainly by those who identified as trans masculine. The stories shared by participants reflect upon how and why their inclusion in sport shaped how they felt about their gender identity, and they were able to use sport as a way to help counteract feelings of gender dysphoria. The prevalence of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport, together with the cis normative gaze often compounds feelings of gender dysphoria for trans people, which is not to say cis people are immune from gender normative ideals and unrealistic standards of femininity/masculinity. In this way, sports spaces were gendered sites of meaning for participants and required careful negotiation and navigation.

CHAPTER SIX

SPORTING COMMUNITIES:

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data from participants about their sporting communities. Sporting communities are understood here as teammates, family, friends and allies, but also includes those organisations responsible for defining the rules of inclusion for trans people. The sporting communities people interacted with had a big impact on their participatory experiences as they were often intrinsic to their sense of belonging in sport. For many individuals, there was great value in being surrounded by an affirming community who helped them to feel more included when participating in sport. As chapters four and five have identified, barriers to inclusion for trans people in sport are not isolated to a single issue, such as transitioning, or changing rooms. Rather, they intersect with one another, making participation more complex and unpredictable. The lived experiences of participants were rich and diverse, and the communities they engaged with at times made a significant difference to their involvement with and enjoyment of sport. Many members of the trans community have spoken about feeling research fatigue, and as reflected in this data, being trans can often feel overwhelming, and being part of – and supported by - a sporting community sometimes offered a way to forget about those feelings for a time.

6.2 The Value of Supportive Teammates

Participating in sport can help people to feel connected to other people (Griffiths et al., 2017). As noted in chapters one and two, physical activity is known to increase both our social and emotional capital and our physical and psychological well-being (Barras et al., 2021). For trans people, whose bodies are frequently policed and politicised in sporting contexts, there can be fear and hesitation in participating in physical activity. Trans people have reported that sporting spaces are not always a welcoming environment (Caudwell, 2014, 2021), and the binary nature of physical activity and

sport in general can cause significant barriers to participation for trans people (Erikainen et al., 2020). This can result in trans people 'choosing not to participate in these activities or choosing to participate in individual sports that avoid body exposure and are less demanding in terms of social recognition' (Piggott, 2020, p.7).

The active support and encouragement of teammates were cited by several participants as key to feeling included in sport, and as a way to reduce barriers to participation. For example, Tom said they felt more comfortable about joining a water polo team when they went with a friend who is also trans. Tom said they "wouldn't have gone alone but having another trans person with me…we decided to go along together and try it out [because] I was expecting it to not be particularly trans friendly." Annie, who participates in motor racing said, "in general everyone is very, very supportive, and also, I've never had any hassle [from teammates]." Aimee, who only started playing roller derby once she had come out as trans, spoke about how both the sport and her teammates helped her feel better about herself and her gender identity. She said

> I know how important it is for my wellbeing…the running is how I process things, and the roller derby is how I made friendships and community, if I didn't have those two things my life would be in a much, er, I want to say dark, it would be less complete in a way…sport is really important to me, and I want other people to have access too.

Being with like-minded people helped participants feel accepted as both a fellow player and an equal player and being part of a team and participating alongside others was expressed as an important aspect in achieving this. Physical activity can give meaning to a person's sense of identity, and an established and shared connection to sport can be both a physical and an emotional experience (Bale 2003; Carter, Burdsey and Doidge, 2018). Sharing a love of sport with another person or people helped to establish feelings of team-ness, which can reinforce a sense of communality (Ehrlén and Villi, 2020). This helped people to strengthen social ties and create bonds within sports settings (Hinch and Kono, 2018).

This was evidenced when participants spoke about how much they valued their teammates' support. Joe said it was "really nice" their rugby teammates did so much to welcome them. When I asked Joe what kinds of things their teammates had done

to make them feel welcome, they mentioned it was not just one thing, but many different things, such as them using inclusive language and welcoming Joe into the women's changing rooms whilst they were transitioning. These things had all collectively contributed to an overall sense of Joe feeling supported and accepted on the team for who they were, making them feel like an equal member of the rugby team. Joe said

> They [Joe's teammates] all would actively not gender the team...and they would…call the coaches out and say, please don't say girls, can you try and say team, … if we were changing, someone would let me know what the showers looked like. All of them without thinking were very inclusive of me… exclusively use male pronouns…without fail…that was a massive thing…they would see me get changed…that was really validating…I still looked like a stereotypical cis woman, so it was great.

As discussed in chapter four, for some participants, the transition period can be difficult to navigate, as it can bring about changes to an individual's sporting identity, such as moving from a men's team to a women's team. Having supportive teammates can greatly improve this process. Joe said

> So it became quite difficult [during transition] but I carried on because I love playing, and my teammates were great, I loved my team mates, and they were like, we don't know what you're doing but it's fine, just, do what you want (laughs).

Although the World Rugby report (2020) has positioned trans women and some non-binary people as a threat to their teammates' safety and fairness, this was not something reflected in the lived experience of the participants. Rather, their relationship with their teammates was one of inclusion and equality and they were able to be visibly 'out' as trans or non-binary. Being able to use the facilities without any concerns about what their teammates may say was experienced by Jude, who said "after a game everyone goes and showers together and nobody like, bats an eyelid, like everyone's just like, cool, and it feels really inclusive… regardless of my body I'm going to be accepted in this team."

Participants' teammates all have a part to play in building effective alliances (Heyes, 2003). For example, when Joe, who had previously played water polo on the women's

team, began their transition, they started playing on an LGBTQ+ women's rugby team. They talked about their reservations, and how these were alleviated by the presence of other trans players on the team. They said

> I tried rugby…I'd never played before…the women's team at uni, basically the whole team was queer. There were two, three trans people who had played with them before, and there was one there that I was friends with. So, I knew it was safe it was just a far more relaxed environment. It wasn't we're here to win, it was we're here to have fun.

As chapters one and two highlighted, media antagonism and hostility from the gender critical feminist movement towards trans women in elite sport and a fixation on the science of competitive advantage, has had a direct impact on trans people's participation at day to day level (Barras, 2019a). Katy talked at length about how supportive her teammates on her football team were, who had said it was "really unfair that you can't play [because of the FA's rules]…they were aware of the fact that it was upsetting for me that I couldn't play and they could, so they were really good about it, the club as a whole was really good about it." When I asked Katy how her teammates had specifically supported her, especially during a difficult period of hormone testing which the Football Association had asked her to do, she said she thought "it captured their imagination a bit, and that brought with that whole kind of like, this is an injustice issue."

Despite the barriers outlined in chapters four and five relating to sporting bodies and sporting spaces, people still found a way to take part in everyday sport and physical exercise. This was because sport was meaningful for people and provided a way for people to feel good about themselves and to connect to other people, such as their teammates. In their paper on boundary work and the construction of a body-positive dance community, Hill, Sanford and Enright (2016) interviewed dancers at an LGBTQ-friendly adult ballet school about what their participation meant to them. The authors found that the opportunity of taking a class which was gender inclusive, gender neutral and body positive encouraged individuals to enjoy dance as 'a space in which participants can challenge and rewrite the boundaries and meanings of their physical culture through the co-construction of shared localized values' (Hill et al., 2016, p.673). Being alongside other like-minded people, as the participants in this research were,

helped to create shared values, shared experiences and shared stories. This was the experience of Tom, who “loves being part of a team, or something competitive or training.” Tom said

> I just like achieving things as a group and having someone to share the achievement with…like the feeling of just scoring a goal and maybe two or three people are involved in it, and looking at each other and smiling and thinking yes, we did that together. For me that’s a really fulfilling feeling, more than I when I go swimming or set a better time, or maybe do a few more lengths than I’ve done before.

Tom’s experience was enhanced by a shared motivation for their team’s success and their collaboration on achieving this. As Gleaves (2017, p. 29) writes, sports are inherently about ‘a story we tell ourselves about ourselves’ (Gleaves, 2017, p. 29). That is, taking part in sport helped the participants to create meaningful narratives about themselves which went beyond the more usual reasons for participation, such as health, well-being and socialising. This was an experience shared by Katy at her community football club. Katy said, because her teammates were openly trans inclusive, by extension the football club saw they had “a chance for them to say they can genuinely be inclusive, because there are people who fall short of that, and they were really good about that.” In this way the more usual benefits of sport do not always capture what it is about sport and physical exercise that people find so ‘enduringly captivating’ (Gleaves, 2017, p. 30). Sport also ‘carves out this space through its ability to create meaning through explanatory stories, or narratives that people have shaped sport to tell’ (Gleaves, 2017, p. 30). For Katy and her teammates, her participation in football became a social justice issue, too, and one of allyship.

Gleaves (2017) goes on to argue how these meaningful sporting narratives can subsequently become additionally meaningful to a person’s identity, something discussed in chapter four, when a person’s sporting identity becomes aligned with their gender identity. As shown in this research, sport’s meaningful narratives are not the work of individuals alone but can be boosted by a welcoming sporting community. Gleaves writes (2017, p. 36)

> They involve collaboration between us and the others who play our sport. Maria Schechtman (2011) points out that ‘[w]e are not composing stories of our lives in a vacuum, but in a world where there

> are others with their own stories about themselves and about us.' This leads Nelson (2003, p.33) to emphasize the social scaffolding of narratives when concluding that, properly understood, 'narratives emerge from and belong to the community.'

Having welcoming teammates who were accepting made a difference to people feeling able to participate in sport. Although Sarah has family "who are accepting, which is great", it was being able to play tennis with other people at her new club which helped her to feel "stronger and more confident." Without this trans inclusive support from her teammates, Sarah said she would "be in trouble with my confidence." Miles felt the inclusive nature of circus and the performers he worked with ("everyone is cool, I feel the most at ease") also helped him to continue participating.

Experiencing non-judgemental and unconditional support from fellow teammates was also mentioned by Jude, who said, when they started playing rugby, "I didn't have a clue what was happening, but carried on going and just met a great bunch of people." Supportive teammates were also essential for Joe to continue playing rugby. They said

> It was really accepting and loving and trans people had played for them before, and there was still one there, and like it was just the most accepting bunch of people that I've come into contact with. And honestly, they did so much for me.

There is a combination of the overt and covert barriers mentioned earlier in chapter five being addressed here in Joe's experience. The gender segregated structure of changing rooms (an obvious barrier) was easily disrupted and made more welcoming by Joe's teammates. Their use of gender appropriate pronouns (a covert barrier) was, for Joe "a massive thing", offering Joe the opportunity to consolidate their emerging gender identity with their sporting identity. Removing these covert barriers have an impact on a person's sporting experience. For example, Alix, who had attended a course on personal training for work, found the course was "very, very taxing, most of my friends are trans, so when I listen to them, I don't hear a lot of gendered nonsense."

When Joe faced issues from the organisation British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) regarding their eligibility to play whilst transitioning, it was their teammates who advocated for their inclusion. They said

> My teammates [said]…we have a trans guy playing for us, and your policy is bullshit…my three teammates, they couldn't change it, they were three small people, but they were trying.

When I asked Joe why it mattered so much that their teammates were so active in their support of them when disputing the BUCS policy, they said

> 'Cos I was Captain of the women's team. I care a lot about this team, I don't want them to get in trouble. 'Cos BUCS are really arsey about games, and if you like miss some…you get charged a lot of money [and] the team suffer.

Being with their teammates creates a supportive scaffolding for participants, which empowered them to shape and influence their involvement and ultimately have a meaningful experience in everyday sport and physical exercise (Jewett et al., 2019).

6.3 The Value of Supportive Sporting Organisations and Trans Role Models

Chapter two noted how sports organisations often only accommodate those individuals who conform to the gender binary, which arguably in turn can 'enforce social constructions of gender, effectively excluding many transgender participants from sport' (Phipps, 2019, p. 4). Many sporting organisations at both local, national, amateur and professional levels often have different policies on their inclusion for trans participants. However, as Jennifer explained, "most of them fall into line with UK Sport guidance for domestic competition, and the IOC for international competition."

Even those organisations which are openly LGBTQ+ inclusive still often subsume trans people's issues and experiences within a single LGBTQ+ policy (Caudwell, 2014), and can fail to consider specific barriers trans people may face in sport, such as those discussed in chapters four and five. Jennifer's own experiences with British Mountain Bike Orienteering (BMBO), the national governing body for her own sport, cycling was, she said, "amazing, they have got a really, really positive trans policy, and actually they just let people self-declare." However, Jennifer had "mixed feelings" about other organisations, such as the Sports Council Equality Group, who she felt had a disproportionate focus on testosterone as a measure of criteria to determine

whether a trans participant had any advantage over other participants. Jennifer's experience with BMBO was "very, very positive, my experience with them has been brilliant." Jennifer concluded "if everyone had policies which were much more like BMBO's…that would be a definite step, it would cease putting people off." When I asked Jennifer what she felt the reasons might be for some organisations being less inclusive than others towards trans people, she said

> It's just sad that some organisations are so wrapped up in putting barriers up in place to prevent people, and you sort of wonder what their motivation is, is it institutional transphobia, or is it a few individuals in those organisations who are pulling the strings?

Trans feminist academics and activists have long been thinking of ways in which alliances can be formed between groups by looking towards shared inequalities, such as sexism and misogyny, and how they might collectively challenge these for a greater impact on change (Hines, 2019; Pearce et al., 2020). One way to build these alliances is by encouraging all sporting organisations, not just those who position themselves as LGBTQ+ inclusive to be visibly trans inclusive, rather than wait for a trans person to ask about their policy. For example, Tom, who plays water polo with an LGBT club, said, whilst his own LGBTQ+ club had been active in being inclusive towards trans players, there were still occasional issues. They said

> They [the club] have told us we can decide what our gender is for the matches…if anyone has a problem with it, then they will take on the battle. Which is nice, but it takes confidence to play in a match, but also, it sounds like it's going to end up with a lot of pressure on us.

Tom's experience shows how it is crucial for a club to do the work of inclusion themselves, rather than expecting the excluded person to do the work of changing the culture at an organisational level. As noted in chapter two, visibility and representation in sport have a measurable impact, for example, the *This Girl Can* (UK) campaign has shown that 'a targeted, high profile initiative can drive participation in a group that has traditionally been known for poor take up of sporting activity' (Pride in Sport, 2016, p.4). As chapter five revealed, it can be daunting for trans people to access sporting spaces if they are highly gendered, such as a gym or changing rooms, due to concerns about safety and feeling welcome. Past experiences of homo or transphobia have

resulted in some participants feeling worried about being, as Jude said, “visibly queer” in sporting spaces if they do not know how friendly those spaces are going to be.

Following guidelines produced by the Sports Council Equality Group (2021), an increasing number of national governing bodies have developed policies which aim to outline more inclusive requirements for participation in competitive sport. Whilst these polices

> Aim to assist trans people by providing information about domestic and international competition, the requirements set out by ‘gendered’ sports for evidence relating to gender recognition is often a highly intrusive process, with trans people assessed on a case-by-case basis.’ (Pride Sport, 2016, p.7).

In other words, to be able to simply turn up at a club or sporting organisation was not always possible for trans participants, because they worried about whether they were, as Katy has previously said, “allowed” to play. Katy had been subjected to intensive and intrusive testing by the Football Association before she was allowed to play on her local, amateur team, and, whilst many individuals just wanted to continue taking part in sport, not being able to do so because of organisational policy was painful and upsetting. When Katy was temporarily not allowed to take part in women’s football whilst the Football Association decided about her hormone levels, she felt very isolated from her sporting community. She said

> It was hard going to training every week, and everyone was allowed to play, and I wasn’t…it created this social barrier, that I wasn’t quite one of the team because I was different…

Katy’s feelings of rejection were painful for her, it was “hard” and “difficult” when she was not allowed to play with her teammates.” Although Katy continued to attend the weekly football training, not being able to participate increased her feelings of being left out and of being “different.” Katy had to wait until she was “allowed” to participate again before she was able to reconnect to sport and play football with her teammates. Although her teammates understood the reason for Katy being excluded (she was undergoing testosterone tests as requested by the Football Association), this did not help Katy’s feelings of isolation. Being part of the team was a very important part of Katy’s sporting experience, not just the playing of the sport itself.

According to research carried out by Pride Sports for Sport England (2016), 64% of LGBT people who identified as something other than male or female (e.g. genderfluid or genderqueer) were not active enough to maintain good health. As there is an established link between recreational sport participation, self-esteem and reduced levels of stress (Jewett et al., 2019), this is an important consideration for those whose mental health would benefit from inclusion in physical activity. As chapter two noted, the difficulty of engaging with sport and physical exercise for people who identify as trans can lead to being excluded from the substantial positive change participation may bring to mental and physical health, as well as the feeling of community belonging, which is also often associated with participation in physical activity. Physical activity is not always about the activity; it can offer a valuable and meaningful connection to a person's wider sporting community.

This was the experience of Aimee, whose experience of roller derby was an inclusive one, and of Miles, who found the circus community to be "just great, they were so accepting [of me]." When a sporting community or organisation is welcoming from the beginning, as Aimee's and Miles had been, the overall experience is much more positive. The alternative, as Charlotte explained, is that

> You have all the sporting bodies putting out policies…you need to have the right hormone levels…or surgery…you think…can I join, and then it's hang on a minute, I'll have to check,…so you don't ever turn up…you don't really know if you'll be accepted or not, unless you really, really want to play that sport, you end up just giving up.

Charlotte's experience shows an example of an overt barrier, a way in which a club wants to appear inclusive (and may be so), but the actual reality of participation is much more complex, especially for trans women, or for those who do not look gender normative. For a few participants, it was navigating various sporting organisations and their policies which sometimes caused barriers to participation, especially as these often varied in clarity and inclusivity.

Within the literature, the importance of best practice, social justice and the centring of the personal accounts and lived experiences of trans people in sport are becoming more prevalent, with the aim of providing practical and helpful suggestions for creating

inclusive environments within sport, on and off the field (Perez-Samaniego et al., 2016). Whilst six participants had specific ideas about sport and sports settings being more inclusive, there was also the suggestion about mainstream sports settings being more inclusive generally, not just for trans people, but for all users. Alix observed certain spaces, even when labelled as LGBT friendly, are not as trans inclusive or trans aware as they could be, creating barriers. For trans people to feel welcome, it is important to embed trans inclusion in policies and practices, and actively identify ways in which this can happen. For example, Aimee suggested staff could use more gender-neutral language, "such as folks rather than guys", and Alix suggested training could be provided for gym staff about exercising in a binder.

It is not enough for an organisation to appear inclusive; it needs to be visibly inclusive. Tom's experience of playing water polo with an LGBT friendly club was that there was "a real effort at including us." Tom explained the club were making an active effort "trying to get more trans people involved, they run free polo sessions." Harry said changing the way in which teams are organised may encourage him and others to participate more. He said

> I think if it was kind of mixed sport, or all gender sport, or something like that, I still like competition and stuff, but, if that aspect was removed, I think I'd be much more inclined to engage.

Mixed teams were also suggested by Craig, as well as having more changing rooms, and there should be "more cubicles for people." When the I asked Tom if introducing mixed teams in water polo would help to reduce barriers to participation, they said

> I think the most important thing is, for team sports…is the long-term shift of having more mixed teams. Especially for younger people, so there's a tendency to split groups up from about 11 or 12, into boys and girls. I think it would be better to not do that…for young non-binary or trans people whose friends might be different genders, being able to continue playing sports with your friends without having any pressure to join different teams, or stop entirely, would make a really big difference in playing sports later on.

What is important is people should not feel they have to expect to be excluded because of their gender identity, or a person's inclusion is decided by someone else. This sentiment was reflected in the way some participants recognised and appreciated the

ways in which their teammates and friends advocated for them as trans allies, assisting with the breaking down of gender normative stereotypes. This means that the onus should be on the wider sporting community such as organisations and sporting bodies to 'proactively facilitate inclusion…and actively create an inclusive environment, so trans people feel welcome enough to come along in the first place' (Erikainen et al., 2020, n.p.). Sports community organisations need to be visibly supportive at all times and seek to engage with trans people and considerations about inclusion. And whilst, as Ahmed (2017) argues, considering this arrangement is often left to trans and non-binary people to do, this chapter has shown that when teammates and allies join this arrangement, it has a positive impact and makes people feel included.

Role Models

Another way to improve and promote trans inclusion in sporting organisations is by encouraging visible role models, and this was mentioned by Annie, Aimee and Katy. The presence of visible and positive role models in promoting sport and physical exercise has been shown to improve inclusion for those groups traditionally less engaged than others, for example adolescent girls and LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority communities (Spandler et al., 2020). Types of role models can include a family member, peer or celebrity sports person (Young, Symons and Pain, 2015), and can be defined as an individual who inspires others through personal contact and relationship (Ingall, 1997; Yancey,1998). Annie's own commitment to being visible in her sport, motor racing, was because "lots of trans people do not want to engage with sports, they are worried about other people." For Annie, who considered herself a role model to other racers, she liked to be able to say to others "it's alright, go ahead, there're always nice people even when you least expect them." Alice (45, trans woman, she/her/hers, cyclist, swimmer), who cycles, talked about how seeing a trans woman and former pro-cyclist commentating on a mainstream, popular television programme made her feel more confident about being visible herself at sporting events, and understood the significance of being a role model for younger gender non-conforming cyclists. She said she can "understand how people can feel different and separated from other people…how do we make these people feel included…how do we make it a good day for them?" Katy found her identity as a trans woman footballer

opened up new ways to connect with sport, and she “had something to fight for.” Katy said

> It’s got me involved in LGBT sports activism ever since, because I met a lot of people through it, people who were advocating for me, and got some help. So that was actually a positive, but of course you shouldn’t have to need to have these hardships to get that, but I guess that’s normally how that happens.

Annie’s own commitment to being visible in her sport, motor racing, was because “lots of trans people do not want to engage with sports, they are worried about other people.” When I asked Katy how barriers might be reduced to participation, the importance of role models was her first answer. She said “there are obvious ones, visible role models. I hear this a lot from trans people who want to get involved in sport, and don’t feel they can, is that first interaction… some things we might need to check, but please come on down.”

When Jude first watched roller derby, they said it made them feel like they “wanted to be part of that. I wanna do that too,” and that they were inspired to take up rugby after watching women’s rugby on television. Jude said they wanted to do the same, because they “just love running around outside, you know, being free.” Jude’s health and well-being were greatly improved not just by playing rugby and roller derby, but by being with others who also enjoyed it and accepted them as a fellow player. Jude had been inspired to try rugby and roller derby because they had watched others and felt a connection.

Young and Symons (2015) write in their paper about the importance of the involvement of role models for female adolescents in Australia. Their critical findings were also evident in other research, including Vescio and Crosswhite’s (2005) investigation of twenty-five Australian good practice case studies that increased female adolescents’ participation in physical activity and sport programmes. Young and Symons (2015) found that, consistent with this finding, a later national study of Australian girls (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) identified a lack of positive role models as a critical barrier to participation in sport. This finding of a lack of positive role models for adolescent girls, ‘thereby impeding their participation in sport’ (Young and Symons, 2015, p.453), has been replicated across a number of countries including the United

States (Women's Sports Foundation, 2011), Canada (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, 2012) and Britain (Tibballs, 2013).

There are similar findings within LGBTQ+ studies on the importance of visible role models (Pride Sport, 2016) and a recent report from Stonewall (De Santos, 2019, n.p.) noted that almost two thirds of young people they surveyed said that openly LGBT athletes would have a positive impact on the culture of sport. The Stonewall report noted that

> High-profile role models are just one part of a much wider cultural shift to make sport more inclusive. It's not fair to place the burden of tackling anti-LGBT attitudes and behaviour solely on the shoulders of LGBT athletes.

This was the experience of Katy who said by failing (possibly due to a language barrier) to call out the transphobic language during a match meant that the "burden was passed on" to those who are suffering from it, which contributed to feeling unwelcome in sport. The story here is not one of political conflict, but of mutual recognition and dignity (Humphrey, 2020, n.p.). Role models are not only important for trans people. Cis women and, to a lesser degree, cis men are no strangers to enduring discrimination and bodily objectification in sport, and this research has helped to illuminate the ways in which sport continues to use gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity to maintain and sustain this. Trans people, particularly trans women are frequently the victims of misogyny and hostility in the media, with much of this abuse focused on the body. Having role models who can challenge gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport means offering solidarity to those who are closest to the material impact these oppressions have on their bodies, and this means all genders, cis and trans (Olufemi, 2020).

Trans and feminist activists, writers and their allies, continue to counter anti-trans feminism through public debate, scholarship and policy recommendations, and this research hopes to contribute to similar opportunities for collaboration. This chapter has also revealed that the frequently overlooked narratives of trans men in sport would bring new and original perspectives to the ways in which trans people's inclusion in sport is often framed. From these abuses, a manufactured moral panic has grown,

grounded in outdated sex-based oppressions, most often grounded in 'the binary phallocentric founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorised, where only one body per gendered subject is "right"' (Stone, 1992, p.150). As chapter two argued, the ways in which gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity permeate sport often normalise the presence of homophobia, transphobia and sexism within it. This discrimination is not only experienced by trans athletes, but it is also experienced by cis athletes, such as Serena Williams and Gareth Thomas. Having positive role models in sport helps to challenge these discriminations and break down stereotypes (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020).

Similarly, Katy explained, in her experience, inclusion in sport for LGBT+ people generally is not always well attended to, because "often, sports is so bad at LGB+ plus stuff quite frankly, and we're [trans people] just tacked on the end of that, and sports is one of the areas where the key to inclusion works quite differently to LGB inclusion." When I asked Katy, what could be done to improve inclusivity for trans people in sporting organisations, she said "trans stuff really needs to be about including us in mainstream clubs." Visibility in sports is known to have a positive impact on others, and this visibility does not have to only be other players, it could extend to those involved in sport in other ways. Katy said, "it doesn't always have to be playing, it can be administration or officiating as well." Posing the same question to Alice, she replied

> I think openness…in clubs, in governing bodies, and national federations…if it was made more visible [like]…we don't care what your gender is…if you want to come and cycle, swim, you are more than welcome…that we are for everybody, really.

Sport is inspirational and role models are important, and, as chapter two outlined, the importance of initiatives like *This Girl Can*, *Kick it Out* and Title IX, which encourage inclusion for underrepresented or marginalised groups, demonstrates how crucial visible role models are (Mansfield et al., 2017; Silk, Andrews and Thorpe, 2017). Such recognition of the inspirational power of these initiatives makes a difference when promoting inclusivity and encouraging participation, and this was reflected in the narratives of some of the participants. The importance of participating in sport for physical, mental and psychological health and well-being is long-established and extensively researched in sports sociology, together with the benefits the friendships

and social interactions participation can also bring (Knoppers and McDonald, 2010). These benefits are intended to be the case for all individuals, yet the literature review critically identified participation rates in sport for trans people are significantly lower than for cis people, which can cause feelings of social isolation and increased gender dysphoria (Krane, 2019; Travers, 2014). By being open and practical about their inclusion for LGBTQ+ people, sports organisations can help to change this, which will in turn encourage more trans role models and visible representation.

6.4 Sport is Meaningful and can Create Alliances

What the lived experiences of all the participants revealed was, no matter what barriers they might have encountered in relation to their sporting body, sporting spaces or sporting community, they still found a way to be involved in everyday sport and physical exercise. Whilst in part this was for their own physical, mental and physiological health and well-being, a known positive outcome of taking part in sport, it was also because sport was meaningful to them. That is, participants found something which fundamentally transcended the more often noted health benefits of sport.

According to Chen (1998), meaningfulness in everyday sport and physical exercise involves consideration of the purpose and goals of movement, judgements related to the emotional value of the experience, and a sense of coherence that provides a 'big picture' comprehension and connection between these and other life experiences, Chen (1998) sees personal meaning interpretations as being constructed in relation to the world, where individuals make connections to 'something that reaches beyond the actual experience, linking it to something else' (Chen, 1998, p. 286). Persia spoke of how swimming and yoga had "made my body strong and lithe, they made my body basically." Miles, who enjoys swimming said it was "so good for you, you just get in the water and ahhhhh..." For Alice, whose gender dysphoria dates back to her early teens, taking part in open water swimming meant she could "put on a wetsuit with electric blue toenails and no one will give a damn, because I'm just there for a swim." Sarah felt tennis had "saved me, basically, it saved me", and without it in her life she would "not be very confident." In all of these experiences from participants, there is an undercurrent of joy and pleasure taken in the act of participation. For many individuals, they were motivated to find a way to participate in sport because doing so made them

feel happy when they did. Sometimes this joy was connected to feeling physically better. These pleasurable connections between the body and sport helped people to establish and affirm their own athletic performance and sporting ability. This is discussed by Caudwell, who calls it 'collective pleasure' (Caudwell, 2020, p.7), and was something she observed amongst participants of a local trans swimming group. Caudwell (2020, p.7) writes

> After being in the pool, participants reported feeling: happy, content, calm, relaxed, confident, healthy, body confident, relieved, refreshed, peaceful, natural, energized, and motivated to do more exercise. In addition to these feelings, there is evidence of a collective pleasure.

In her study, Caudwell (2020) linked this pleasure to the opportunity swimming provided for positive displays of the body, and this physical joy was shared by some participants in this thesis. In the context of recreational sport, face-to-face contact and shared physical experiences are also important for establishing emotionally meaningful social relationships (Ehrlén and Villi, 2020). This interaction is not only a facilitator of social relationships but can also be perceived as a meaningful social practice which is integral to feeling good (Serafinelli, 2017). Katy said

> Team sports [helped] me get out of social isolation…it did help me to get out and see people and socialise more…even when I couldn't competitively play, or be involved at all, that would help me to get out and meet people a little bit more, which is a thing we see in LGBT communities, especially trans communities.

The allyship of their team for Joe in sport meant more than just being trans inclusive. It was also about contesting what the policy of the organisation was, whilst ensuring the team were not penalised. As some other participants reflected, once they had been attending a sporting activity for a longer time, their sense of belonging and commitment to their team grew, which in turn helped them to feel more comfortable with participating in sport as their preferred gender identity.

Like Katy, Joe was well-supported by their manager and teammates, but the wider issue of transphobia and positive representation for trans players is still not addressed in the sporting community. For Katy, there was the wider issue, that "you can't leave it to LGBT people to complain. Because then we get targeted even more." The necessity

of allies and strong relationships with teammates are essential in the ways they can foster shared attitudes, common interests or goals for many participants. Whilst sport can be empowering and inclusive, it can also be intimidating and stressful, especially when reflecting upon all the intersecting barriers at play between sporting bodies, sporting spaces and sporting communities. It is also unfair to expect the trans community to do all of the heavy lifting in challenging transphobia and put themselves in the spotlight.

This research includes people with a wide range of gender identities and lived experiences, which can help to develop a shared understanding of how social constructionism can shift assumptions of gender binaries in sporting contexts. Trans feminism and queer politics and perspectives have been fundamental in their contribution to challenging discrimination in sport, and as Heyes (2003, p.1094) wrote, 'feminists of all stripes share the political goal of weakening the grip of oppressive sex and gender dimorphisms in Western cultures.' If one of the primary goals of feminism is to challenge biology as destiny, then examining the enforced binaries within the nexus of sex, gender and sexuality (Heyes, 2003) can offer up new ways of thinking about how new alliances might be forged.

Rather than divide women and erase their achievements in sport, the lived experiences of participants demonstrate that there is an opportunity for shared meaning and relevance with those they play sport with. By experiencing these moments of meaningfulness, participants were able to engage deeply with their sporting community and connect with others in an enjoyable environment (Hill et al., 2016).

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

Trans feminism asks that the similarities between the oppressions faced by cis and trans women (and others who are positioned on the margins in sport, including intersex athletes) need to be recognised, and that there is more potential for collaboration amongst communities than division. This collaboration might include cis women who choose not to (or do not want to) conform to unrealistic beauty standards and gender normative stereotypes, wear revealing sports clothing or be subjected to other patriarchal expectations demanded of them in sports environments. For example, a

number of participants reflected upon the ways in which form-fitting clothing had an impact on their participation and could heighten gender dysphoria. As coverage of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics unfolds, a number of news reports (Bullens, 2021; Pruitt-Young, 2021) have commented on how female athletes are facing double standards where clothing is concerned. The Norwegian women's beach handball team were fined because their shorts were too long, British Paralympian Olivia Breen was told by an official that her briefs were too short and Olympic swimmer Alice Dearing will not be allowed to wear a swimming cap for natural black hair at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Female athletes are being scrutinised for their choice of sportswear. Breen pointed to a double standard regarding athletic dress codes and questioned whether male athletes would be subjected to the same level of scrutiny. As the literature in chapter two noted, this is not the first-time clothing policies for female athletes have been unnecessarily different than the men's, such as the wearing of skorts for female boxers at the 2012 London Olympics (Mansfield et al., 2017).

As this chapter has identified, sporting communities are made up of teammates, organisations and role models, all of whom can have an impact on a person's sporting experience. A number of participants reflected on how valuable the support of their friends and sporting organisation was, and how this made their participation in sport more meaningful. Returning to Heyes's (2003, p.1093) words, 'effective alliances can be forged in feminist spaces,'one way in which alliances can be formed in sport is by working together to challenge and change the structural inequalities in sport and create new history. Instead of seeking to win every argument using hard science, the common sense position and statistics (Hill Collins, 1990, Mumford, 2021; Patel, 2021), feminist alliances can help to address the continuing marginalisation of (cis) women's sport and organise for solutions to end sexism and misogyny in sport. In this way feminist alliances could be formed, to 'better collectively speak back and organise against oppressive structures like sexism on a local and global scale, by unsettling the idea that binaries divide us' (Olufemi, 2020, p.158.). Trans-exclusionary voices within feminist circles only serve to divide feminists and support a heteronormative and oppressive status quo. Trans feminist theory provides a way to deconstruct and understand their experiences, 'debunking the assumed naturalness or normalness of the sex, gender, and sexuality binaries that the institution of sport works so hard to enforce' (Kaurer and Rauscher, 2019, p. 55).

According to Kylan Mattias (2015), the lives of women and trans people are considered less valuable in a patriarchal society, arguably a shared suffering which results in a shared claim to feminism. In the face of this shared oppression, and with a trans feminist perspective, the lived experiences of the participants supports the view that forming alliances is 'a far more effective political strategy than fomenting divisions and creating false debates about who 'really' gets to be considered a woman, and therefore share in feminist movements' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020, p.757).

The alliances which could be formed here in sport could be focused on what Butler calls in *The New Statesman* 'gender freedom…the political claim to live freely and without fear of discrimination and violence against the genders that we are' (Ferber, 2020, n.p.). That is, the idea all people get to make a political claim about their gender, and to be open about the ways in which traditional gender presentations might be constraining for some people. The lived experiences of participants in sport has helped to challenge the gender binary: even when people are comfortably situated at one end of it, their very presence in sport leads to a better understanding of the value of supportive sporting communities, and a greater appreciations of what it means to be a trans person in sport. The fight for equality and the connection made with trans feminism in sport starts with questioning who is included/excluded, and why. As Humphrey (2020, n.p.) reflected in *The Guardian*, 'a trans and feminist dialogue can only work through respectful alliance, not divisiveness. It can only be effective through abandoning the dead-end of territory-claiming wars over biology and rights.' Rather than focusing on what might be lost for cis women in sport when trans women are welcomed, the focus needs to be on what could be gained from rethinking conventions of sex and gender and to deal 'generously, not defensively, with change' (Humphrey, 2020, n.p.).

These lived experiences, which carry the same importance as feminist and cis people's experiences, allow what Rofes (1990, p.87) called a drawing upon of 'status queer' to 'rethink our efforts and our role in either maintaining or radically transforming the status quo'. They are also fundamentally, as Krane (2019) argues, about treating trans athletes with dignity and respect. The socially constructed gender binary, and, with it, a gender normative and essentialist expectation serve to exclude those who transgress this normativity, and sporting communities have a role to play in

acknowledging and being sympathetic to those who feel excluded. As Butler concludes in their interview in *The New Statesman* (Ferber, 2020, n.p.)

> We fight those misrepresentations because they are false and because they reflect more about the misogyny of those who make demeaning caricatures than they do about the complex social diversity of women. Women should not engage in the forms of phobic caricature by which they have been traditionally demeaned. And by 'women' I mean all those who identify in that way.

Participants talked about the value of visible role models and of being role models themselves to others in the wider LGBTQ+ community. The lived experiences of the participants offer a way to work towards inclusion through alliances and future recommendations for inclusion in sport (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020). Adopting a trans feminist approach has a focus on community building, including representatives of diverse groups in organisational roles, better support for non-binary and other gender diverse people and works towards facilitating access to sport. Feminism has long acknowledged that different experiences and identities open up shared goals, and solidarity remains at the heart of most feminist thinking. Trans feminism welcomes alliances and dignity and questions notions of authenticity – of who is, or can be, considered to be a 'woman.' Denying trans people in sport this authenticity 'breaches the goals of equality and dignity [and] runs counter to the ability to fulfil a liveable life or, often, a life at all' (Hines, 2019, p.155).

There is a clear opportunity raised by this research to consider ways in which alliances can perhaps be formed with others and look towards ways to reduce hostility in practical ways in sport, an idea expressed by several participants. After all, 'one of the most distressing aspects of the hostile narrative,' writes Kim Humphrey in *The Guardian* (Humphrey, 2020, n.p.), 'is that it side-lines a reality of alliance.' As this research has shown, gender critical feminists are frequently set in opposition in the media against trans people 'on a seemingly unrelenting path of mutual antagonism…trans rights have been pitted against sex-based rights for "real" women, with conflict forever spiralling into charge and counter charge of hate speech and silencing, and into bitter social media wars' (Hines, 2019, p,155). This chapter has shown many participants had a long history of participating in sport, whilst others had found a new connection with sport, one which helped them to both establish and

validate their gender identity. The importance of participating in sport for physical, mental and psychological health and well-being and social change is long-established and extensively researched, together with the benefits friendships and interactions bring (Hill et al., 2016).

People spoke of missing their sporting community and their teammates and the social aspect of participating in sport. Sometimes this was the motivation for making a return to sport, despite it being hard to access it due to the barriers previously discussed. This reinforces the importance of sport in people's lives, and the ways in which sport enriches personal satisfaction and meaningfulness on a multitude of levels. To be disconnected from sport because of a person's gender identity resulted in feelings of exclusion and social isolation, as discussed in chapter four.

It is necessary, then, to remember the importance of inclusion in sport, and the meaningfulness it brought to those who participated in this study. Most important is the recognition that participating in sport and exercise is something everyone is entitled to, and the same health and well-being benefits are experienced by everyone. These benefits are not exclusive to trans people, and the barriers they have described as facing and overcoming could easily be addressed. We all benefit from exercising and being physically active, from seeing our friends and playing together, but the data presented here has revealed many trans people face a larger number of intersecting barriers to participation.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK, in order to identify any potential barriers to participation. This chapter summarises the key findings in relation to the four research questions posed and draws out the specific theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Next it will address how the aims of the research were met, before presenting the original empirical and theoretical contributions to knowledge this thesis has made. Finally, it will discuss the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.

The literature review in chapter two critically argued there is a lack of in-depth qualitative research which examines the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK. Chapter two also highlighted that participation levels in sport and physical activity for trans people is often lower than for cis people, with recommendations for improving inclusion often subsumed under the LGB sports policy umbrella, with a greater focus on discourses surrounding elite participation. This research has positioned trans people's narratives at the centre of LGBTQ+ scholarship which can often render trans people invisible As Elling-Machartki (2017, p.256) notes

> Physical activity and sports can be regarded as particularly challenging social practices for trans people, regarding the centrality of the body, gendered structures like changing rooms and competitions, and normative gender ideologies. In the emerging body of literature on trans people and sport, the main focus has been on mainstream, competitive sports as non-inclusive.

By directly asking trans people about their participation in sport, this research fills an important gap in what can be understood about their lived experiences. From a social constructionist/interpretivist perspective, and remembering how my position as an outside researcher has heightened my concerns to not cause research fatigue, placing these narratives centrally in the research was imperative, Gathering these lived experiences together and then reflecting on them offers an opportunity to better understand how barriers in sport might be reduced, suggesting new ways to improve

inclusion in sport, not just for trans people, but for the wider sporting community. How a person achieves their (gender) identity within the context of this research is revealed within chapter four, sporting bodies, chapter five, sporting spaces, and chapter six, sporting communities. It was clear that, for the majority of participants, their lived experiences, individual actions and responses to their sporting environments were 'part of a wider social order that permits some actions and disallows others' (Lawler, 2008, p. 104).

7.1 Addressing the Research Questions

What are the lived experiences of trans and non-binary people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK?

The lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK are complex and heterogeneous. This thesis has shown how the intersections between people's sporting bodies, the sporting spaces they exercise in and the sporting communities they exercise alongside can be difficult to navigate when gender is viewed as non-conforming by others. Sometimes a person's sporting experience was a journey of disruption and resolution, due to taking time out to transition, or when negotiating their own feelings about using changing rooms. Other times it was more smooth and seamless. Either way, participants needed to (re)learn gendered norms and behaviour in sporting contexts. Frequently, these lived experiences were emotional, with stories of joy, meaning, success, pleasure, fear and even sadness.

Because trans people's bodies are frequently policed and politicised in sporting contexts, participants often felt anxious when involved in physical activity. Nonetheless, participants found a way to be involved in sport, and vocalised that their involvement was both a vital and valued aspect of their lives and gave them considerable joy, and, in many cases, sites for where a person's gender identity was (re)confirmed and affirmed. For all these reasons, participation in sport was meaningful.

How have these experiences impacted on their participation, either negatively and/or positively?

All participants had both negative and positive experiences. Negative experiences included feeling anxious about being welcomed and accepted in gender-segregated spaces such as changing rooms, and concerns about being confronted in them and asked to leave. Often these concerns were based on past experiences of trans/homophobia, such as at school. Negative experiences also included being misgendered or incorrect pronouns being used during sport, or feeling uncomfortable wearing gendered clothing, such as a swimming costume. Sometimes these negative experiences could be mitigated by going to an acitivity with a friend, or by attending trans only sessions.

Positive experiences included the support and allyship of teammates and friends in sport, such as them advocating for a person's inclusion on a team they had formally belonged to, or on a new team. The experience of being welcomed in sport whilst transition was still in process was felt to be especially important, because it allowed a person to maintain a relationship with their sporting identity, stay connected to friends and not feel socially isolated. In addition, many participants enjoyed the opportunity to become visible role models in their communities, and to seek out ways to further include sport in their lives and careers. Participants also enjoyed engaging in everyday sport and physical exercie for the physical health and fitness benefits it brought, and because they were good at their sport, and took pride in their accomplishments, and their engagement was meaningful.

Other positive experiences also included the chance for someone to forget about the worries they might be dealing with in their everyday life, such as gender dysphoria. These positive experiences were meaningful for people, because in this way participation in sport could help reinforce a person's gender identity, and they felt a sense of kinship with other people. Sport was an activity they were good at and it was something they enjoyed doing, and was an important part of their overall identity.

How do these lived experiences challenge (or do not challenge) gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport, and what can a trans feminist and queer theoretical lens bring?

This research has It argued that, whilst queer theory has been instrumental in helping to better understand the literature regarding LGBTQ+ sporting narratives, trans feminism is a more appropriate theory in this research. Many participants worried about using gendered spaces such as changing rooms and the ways in which gender-segregated teams enforce these concepts. These spaces were often difficult for trans people to navigate and they sometimes felt unsafe. Discussions about passing revealed that some participants did not want to disrupt or challenge the gender binary in sports settings, and felt comfortable when their gender identity was affirmed by others and they were read correctly.

Nonetheless, the range of the gender identities of participants involved in this research highlights how some individuals challenged these concepts through their continued presence in sport and sporting spaces. This is because gender identity, regardless of the place on the gender spectrum an individual may occupy, highlights the ways in which sport is organised along gender-segregated lines. Participants were mostly not overtly vocal about the ways in which they were challenging gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport; rather, they were “political with a small p.” Some individuals embraced binary models of sport, and did not want to break down gendered structures, though it is still important to note that sometimes the need to pass and be safe in sports spaces was necessary. This did not mean that participants did not notice or care about the presence of gendered structures such as changing rooms in sport. In some cases, they identified examples of where cissexism and transphobia intersected.

How can these lived experiences help to inform recommendations in reducing barriers to future participation and improve inclusivity in everyday sport and physical exercise for the wider trans community?

The lived experiences of participants in this research have helped to inform recommendations for reducing barriers in sport in a number of ways. Although some participants had specific ideas about sport and sports settings being more inclusive, there was also the idea of making mainstream sports settings more inclusive generally, not just for trans people, but for all users, especially cis women. Participants noted certain spaces, even when labelled as LGBTQ+ friendly, were often still sites for the marginalisation for trans individuals in sporting contexts, creating barriers. This could

be addressed by gym and leisure staff using more gender-neutral language (such as ‘folks’ rather than ‘guys’), with relevant and sensitive training provided. As this research has consistently shown, gender identity matters, and gender identity, gender presentation and pronouns are broad churches, ever changing for some, fixed for others, but always open to individual interpretation.

In addition, sports spaces are often organised along binary models (e.g. ‘macho’ weights areas vs ‘feminine’ toning areas), making them unnecessarily gendered and intimidating for some people. A number of masculine-presenting participants reflected upon how uncomfortable they found these ‘macho’ spaces to be when they first started using them. These binary markers often resulted in the space becoming sites for gendered behaviour, such as the use of sexist language. This means, for many trans people who are going through transition (and even once they pass), negotiating sporting spaces is anxiety-inducing, where the cisnormative gaze is strongly felt, and there might be pressure to conform to a certain gender stereotype, or risk being confronted. This research has shown a person’s gender identity is intrinsic to their participation in sport, but participation could be difficult when people were worried about how their body would be read by others.

The body exposure these spaces require can be a significant barrier, making people unwilling or unable to use sports facilities because of that, or, if they do, using clothing or a binder to help them negotiate the space. Sporting spaces are often gendered sites of meaning, such as changing rooms and gyms, and, where possible, adjusting the layout of these spaces would help to accommodate not just gender diverse people, but those who may have cultural or religious needs (Spandler et al., 2020). For example, exercise equipment stereotyped as “feminine”, such as resistance bands or balance balls, could be placed in the “masculine” weights area. Within the changing rooms, the binary gender norms, stereotypes and presumptions which characterise many sporting communities can be a barrier not only for trans people, but for cis men and women too. This research acknowledges that changes to outdoor spaces may be harder to instigate, but this does not mean small changes could not be made, such as promoting inclusive language amongst staff and users. Unrealistic expectations of gender normativity are challenging for many individuals in sport and sports settings; some participants suggested that more flexibility with clothing, such as allowing people

to wear less revealing clothing, would be more inclusive for bodies of all shapes, sizes and ages.

7.2 Addressing the Research Aims

The thesis has two research aims: firstly, to challenge existing notions of hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport, originally drawing on trans feminist and queer theory to do so. However, as identified in chapter two, queer theory was deemed to be of less relevance than trans feminism and was not engaged with during the analysis in chapters four, five and six. Drawing on trans feminist theory in this thesis offers a chance to consider new ways of thinking about how to answer the research question in a way which best illuminates the lived experiences of the participants in a way which queer theory might sometimes overlook. The second aim is to make possible recommendations and suggestions for increasing inclusivity in everyday sport and physical exercise for trans people. How this theory has been put into practice will be discussed later in this chapter.

The first aim of this thesis has been met by conducting original empirical research with eighteen self-identified trans people in the UK. The use of qualitative methods provided important first-hand accounts of people's lived experiences together with a better understanding of what barriers to inclusion were faced. Listening to these lived experiences has led to identifying suggestions and recommendations as to how barriers to participation in everyday sport and physical exercise can be reduced, and greater inclusivity for the wider trans community improved, and how hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity in sport might be challenged.

The lived experiences of the participants have revealed trans people are frequently the victims of hostility in sport, with much of this abuse focused on the body. Yet the question of competitive advantage being an innate quality all trans women possess never materialised. Rather, it was a person's skills (or not) in a particular sport which provided them with an advantage, or the appearance of a beard which provided the illusion of being better at sport. As this research has identified, participants were aware that the unwanted attention they sometimes faced was not dissimilar to the sexism and gender discrimination their cis friends and teammates also experienced in sport, such as in the gym. As this study has argued, gender critical feminists are frequently set in a manufactured opposition against trans communities in the UK media. Trans

feminist academics and activists have long been thinking of ways in which alliances can be formed between groups by looking towards shared oppressions, such as discrimination in sport, and how they might collectively mobilise towards challenging this.

Trans and feminist activists, writers and allies have also found ways to counter gender critical feminism through public debate, scholarship and policy recommendations, and this research hopes to contribute to similar opportunities for collaboration. Cis people can endure discrimination and bodily objectification in sport, and this research has been instrumental in shining light on the ways in which sport continues to use gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity to maintain and sustain this. Challenging gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport means offering solidarity to those who are closest to the material impact these oppressions have on their bodies, and this means all genders, cis and trans included.

Following a social constructionist epistemology, as this research does, means there is a necessity to constantly revisit what can be assumed about the experiences of trans people's inclusion in sport, and the reality of their stories. As this research has shown, the lived experiences of participants in relation to sport have illuminated some unique insights around bodies and the discursive assumptions made about them by others based on gender presentation. These lived experiences have been instrumental in recognising that 'being trans' does not simply mean moving from one gender binary (or one changing room) to the other. Rather, the deeply personal relationship to gender identity and presentation many trans people have is much more complex and intersects with the sporting spaces they use and the sporting communities they exercise alongside. This research has also shown that the experiences of trans men receive less attention than trans women in these discussions, and their contributions offer valuable insights into, for example, the ways in which competitive advantage is perceived. The narratives and lived experiences of trans masculine participants has offered valuable insights into this thesis and remains an area which would benefit from more research.

Using a trans feminist theoretical approach has also helped to meet the research aims. This is because it is primarily concerned with placing a focus on the importance of the lived experiences of those who do not fit (or who do not want to fit) within normative

sex and gender binaries, foregrounding the narratives of the participants, and placing their lived experiences centrally within the research. These lived experiences become especially more relevant within the complexity of sex segregation in sporting contexts, because there is currently only a small amount of empirical research which does this. This research has revealed how the lived experiences of participants in relation to sport were complex and heterogeneous.

7.3. Original Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis has drawn on trans feminist theory as a way to understand how gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity impact on and intersect with trans people's lived experiences of participating in everyday sport and physical exercise. This is a complex subject, but it is important to clearly identify what the practical, day-to-day implications might be for trans people in sport, and the differences this research can make for improving inclusion and reducing barriers to participation.

This section turns next to the two original theoretical contributions this thesis makes, followed by the three empirical contributions.

Theoretical Contributions

Using trans feminist theory to examine the lived experiences of the participants offers two original contributions to this thesis.

Firstly, the lived experiences of some participants in this research show they did not wish to challenge the way sport is organised along binary lines in the way that trans feminism advocates for. Trans feminist theory regards the reliance on gender binaries in sport as problematic for trans people. It calls for, if not a complete dismantling of gender binaries in sport (and more widely in society generally), then at least a calling into question the ways in which sport uses anatomy as a criteria for organisation, as well as the ways in which sport normalises binary gender structures, such as sex-segregated teams and changing rooms. Supporters of trans feminism celebrate gender fluidity, self-identification for gender and a blurring of the socially constructed reliance on gender essentialism in wider society, not only in sport. In addition, trans feminism recognises that such binary gender structures can cause barriers to

participation for trans people, resulting in lower participation rates in sport than the cis population.

However, this was not always reflected in the data. Rather, a number of participants did not want to dismantle or challenge the ways in which they engaged with sport. Instead, once they established their own gender identity in relation to sport, they celebrated this, and found affirmation in being able to participate, for example, on a women's football team, or use a male changing room. This does not mean that such examples of gender binaries were not at times oppressive and difficult to negotiate; they were nonetheless a positive experience for many, particularly for those individuals who passed. Arguably, this could be interpreted as a matter of some participants wishing to feel safe and to conform to societal norms, but the data revealed that this was only one aspect of their participation in sport. What was fundamental was the embracing and celebrating of their gender identity being situated as binary (male or female), with no attempt to challenge this in sport or within their day-to-day lives. In this way, gender identity mattered because it felt affirming for a person to be able to participate in sport as their authentic gendered self.

The second theoretical contribution this thesis highlights are the different thoughts various participants had about gender-segregation in sport. For example, whilst many participants recognised the importance of trans only sporting spaces and sessions to enable people to exercise safely and confidently, others enjoyed the gender-segregated organisation of sport and the increased opportunities for competition this brought. Trans people in the UK make up less than 1% of the population (Olufemi, 2020), and those participating in this research said how they wanted to continue participating in sport alongside their cis teammates and friends, or else there would be no competition. Trans only sessions were often infrequent and subject to cancellation due to low numbers of participants. Whilst trans feminist theory advocates making space for trans people in sport, perhaps with more mixed-teams or, as noted earlier, thinking of different ways to organise sport other than using non-binary models, some participants rejected this. For these people, reducing the opportunity to compete alongside other athletes took away what they enjoyed about sport – the chance to win or to benchmark their performance. Not being able to be involved in sport with their peers might lead to their leaving sport, because there was no opportunity to measure

their ability against others on what. What is assumed about trans people's lived experiences in sport do not reflect the reality of their lived experiences or their desires.

Trans feminism recognises some people are not immutably tethered to an innate experience of womanhood or manhood simply by being designated male or female at birth. Many participants found the ways in which sport is organised along gendered binary lines difficult to navigate and would agree that such an emphasis on anatomy is reductive. What trans feminist theory argues for in sport is not the doing away of gender binaries or some kind of categorisation for participation, but the opening up of the ways in which trans people can be included. Trans feminism places the lives of trans people at the centre of its discussions and, within sport, advocates for trans athletes to compete and participate as themselves. This includes those athletes, like some of the participants, who wished to compete and participate on a gender-segregated team. Trans feminism recognises not only the discrimination and barriers trans people face in sport, but also recognises the complexity of these barriers and works towards an ethics of inclusion. This means trans feminist theory has the potential to offer a stronger epistemological foundation on which to expand the narratives, which will better help to understand trans people's lived experiences, working towards greater inclusion for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise. Trans feminist theory brings to the forefront trans people's experiences and makes room for what has been diminished and marginalised and asks for these experiences and narratives to be placed centrally.

In this way trans feminism can help work towards change through alliances. It is keen to invoke positive changes to improve inclusivity for trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise. For example, the ways in which the barriers faced by trans people in sport, such as feeling intimidated in changing rooms, or feeling uncomfortable in gendered clothing, are both the product of an institution which inherently privileges existing notions of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity. The fight for equality and the connections made between trans feminism and sport start with questioning who is included and/or excluded, and why.

Empirical contributions

This thesis has three original empirical contributions which help to address the lack of participation in everyday sport and physical exercise by trans people, and the barriers they face. The first original empirical contribution this research makes is that, whilst rates of participation in sport for trans people are low, some trans people do participate in sport, despite the difficulties they experience. Reasons for doing so included the mental and physical health and well-being benefits sport can bring for participants, such as helping to reduce gender dysphoria. Participants also spoke of the joy and meaning sport brought to their lives, and the positive relationships they formed with others, such as with their teammates.

The second empirical contribution this research makes is the way it identified participation in sport for many trans people is frequently not straightforward. This is because sport is often gendered, for example in single-sex teams and changing rooms. Sport also involves the physical body, often in quite revealing ways. For example, the ways in which the body is accentuated through gendered clothing, or through movement or in changing rooms. This can be difficult for trans people to navigate because bodies and gender identity are central aspects of their lived experiences. This is further complicated by spaces in which bodies and gender identity become perhaps more or less salient, and the availability of communities which might be more (or less) supportive than others.

The third empirical contribution this thesis makes is that it provides a forum for the voices of these people to be heard. As identified in chapter two, there is little research on the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, and often their experiences are rendered invisible by being subsumed within LGB sporting policies and analysis. This research demonstrates that these experiences are often a complex mix of a person's individual biography and their gender identity, the type of sporting activity they are involved in, the spaces they play sport in, and the communities they belong (or do not belong) to. This means that the barriers some trans people face are not homogeneous and are consequently navigated in different ways to each other.

7.4 Putting Theory into Practice

This research has shown the importance of visibility of trans people in sports spaces, the creation of role models, coaches and teammates all have a part to play in promoting inclusion in sport. Because the research is grounded in the voices of the participants, practical suggestions have been identified to improve inclusion and reduce barriers in sport for trans people. One of the most effective ways to do this is to encourage more trans people to participate, by making the sporting environment inclusive and friendly.

This could be done by employing trans staff and include more signage which demonstrates the space is trans friendly, such as gender-neutral changing facilities or LGBTQ+ literature and posters. Training could be offered to all staff to help employ gendered language and working with policy makers/organisations could help to standardise what might be needed. For example, clothing policies could be relaxed to allow people to wear what they feel comfortable in, and staff trained about binder usage. Organisations, such as Mermaids or Trans Can Sport, could be approached to help deliver gender-inclusive training.

Speaking to cis teammates could also help to alleviate concerns they may have about trans people being included. This would help with challenging the misconceptions some cis people have about trans people in sport and was an idea many participants raised. This could help form stronger alliances between users of sporting spaces and amongst the sporting community. Academic research about practical ways to improve inclusion for trans people in sport could be disseminated to universities and sports colleges, organisations such as BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) and those places teaching gender studies. Information could also be provided for local authority run leisure facilities who have dedicated diversity and inclusion officers. Many private businesses who provide gym and fitness facilities for their staff may also benefit from information about improving inclusion for trans people in sport.

7.5 Limitations of this Research

Whilst this study makes an original and valuable contribution to the field of gender studies, the sociology of sport and theoretical discussions about the lived experiences of trans people in everyday sport and physical exercise, there are three key limitations which are worthy of consideration.

Firstly, the findings raised in this study relate to only a small sample of people. These people were almost exclusively White British, and university educated. Whilst this was not intentional, it is a potential outcome of the sampling method used. Participants were primarily selected on the basis of being over 18 and by identifying as trans and/or non-binary. As a result, there may be other significant meanings which have not been captured by this research that could offer very different insights into the lived experiences of trans people of colour in everyday sport and physical exercise. Individuals from more diverse ethnic backgrounds could have been specifically recruited, as well as individuals who had not been raised in the UK. Although the criteria for participation was a necessity to identify as trans, this in itself may have also limited the scope of other potential gender identities. It is therefore acknowledged that there are some limitations in the sample and notes their impact on the research.

Secondly, whilst the findings discussed have added new perspectives on the lived experiences of trans people in sport and the barriers some of them faced, arguably the scope of these findings is still limited. All these individuals had found a way to overcome their exclusion or barriers to participate and many had a good network of support through teammates and family members. Therefore, whilst undoubtedly the lived experiences of the participants in this research are fundamental to understanding what barriers may exist, it is acknowledged these lived experiences come from a particular position. Research with people not doing any sport currently could offer insights in this area to create new knowledge.

Lastly, whilst the rich and varied gender identities of the participants and the sports they took part made this research diverse, it was sometimes too broad, and made it difficult to focus on the smaller details. This is because some sports, such as roller derby, or LGBTQ+ organised sports were often more trans-inclusive, and so participants felt more welcome. Other sports, for example, teams with cis players, were

less trans-inclusive, creating barriers. By focusing on one particular sport, for example football or tennis, there would be the opportunity to thoroughly examine the culture and nuances specific to that sport, and potentially be able to offer specific recommendations for improving inclusion for trans people. There is also a huge variety of provision between gyms and leisure centres, for example how modern their changing rooms are, or if they are able to reconfigure spaces to make them more inclusive. The broadness of the types of sport discussed in this study means some of these finer details may have been difficult to tease out.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has three specific recommendations for future research, three practical and one methodological. Firstly, greater awareness of the issues and barriers facing trans people under the age of 18 would greatly help to mitigate the issues they may face in the future. This will also help to build awareness amongst friends and peer groups and will help those young people who want to stay in sport, to continue doing so, because in physical education (PE) and sports, there is little theoretical and empirical knowledge about trans people, and their experiences of inclusion at school. Research with schools and on the PE curriculum could help to prevent dropouts at certain points (like puberty) and encourage mental health and well-being generally, which is frequently cited as a concern for gender diverse young people and adolescents.

Secondly, research which looked over the whole life course would be beneficial for trans people, and not just children and young adults. As this study has revealed, sport and exercise are a valued part of participants' lives, and, even when it was sometimes difficult to access, people still found a way to be involved. Finding ways to engage older trans people at any stage of their lives, for example, during transition, could offer new and inclusive ways to encourage people to get involved in everyday sport and physical exercise. This is especially significant since the impact of Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of daily exercise and access to green spaces and concerns about isolation amongst older populations. In addition, high quality data are required to monitor health trends, assess health needs, and evaluate the effects of policies and other interventions. However, 'valid sources of quantitative data for trans people can be difficult to find, and population-based surveys are limited by the lack of standardised survey items used to identify trans respondents, and are often too small to provide

meaningful samples of trans people' (Thomson and Vittal Katikireddi, 2019, p.369). There is an opportunity, then, to encourage more quantitative research which could sit alongside qualitative findings in this under-researched area.

Thirdly, future research with cis gender teammates could help to develop wider understandings not just of trans people's sporting experiences, but those who form part of their sporting communities. This could help to foster suggestions about how to improve inclusion for people in sport generally which will lead to stronger alliances between different groups. It is also important to listen to cis voices and experiences if this is to be achieved. Whilst the qualitative nature of this research has been fruitful in producing a rich understanding of trans people's lived experiences in everyday sport and physical exercise in the UK, other research designs could produce equally rich contributions in this area. Quantitative research could yield important contributions regarding sporting participation rates in the trans population, or ethnographic research which examines how cis and trans athletes exercise and interact alongside each other.

7.7 Concluding Thoughts

As gender identity exists and influences all our lives, understanding how it also intersects with participation in sport specifically for trans people should not be hard to appreciate. This study contributes greatly to widening discourses on how barriers can be reduced in sports settings, emphasising the importance of foregrounding trans people's voices to achieve this. Foregrounding these experiences also has the potential to make sport more inclusive generally for others. Thinking about barriers for trans people helps to move the focus away from measuring eligibility and instead focus on the importance of participation for people, the enjoyment and pleasure doing sport brings. The rich and varied experiences shared by participants demonstrated this study has contributed a different perspective.

It is important to reiterate sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups of society. The prevalence of gender normativity and hegemonic masculinity in sport shows whilst much of the literature is supportive in its advocating for trans people's inclusion in sport, sport remains difficult to access, and those who experience gender

incongruity will often face significant barriers when attempting to participate in sport and physical activity. However, as this research has shown, the literature in this field is growing and there is more visibility and representation of trans people in media, popular culture, politics and sport.

We all benefit from taking part in everyday sport and physical exercise. At the time of writing circumstances have been very challenging for many people in the UK due to lockdowns and the closure of playgrounds, gyms and leisure centres, and the importance of daily exercise and its connection to mental health and well-being have become a priority for many people. There is now an even greater recognition of not just the physical health benefits sport brings, but the additional benefits such as socialising, having fun and belonging to a community. To deny any group of individuals these benefits, whether they be trans people or those who cannot access a green space, sends the message that access to sport and exercise and by extension access to health and well-being are the preserve of the privileged.

Trans people's inclusion in sport has been under constant attack around the world, in particular under the Presidency of Donald Trump and, as shown at the beginning of this thesis, regarding World Rugby and at Hampstead Heath swimming ponds. A recent statement from the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), challenged what they called anti-trans laws and bills in sport, saying, 'in the USA and beyond, there have been spikes in attacks legally, physically, culturally, and politically against gender and sexual minorities, both in and out of sporting institutions' (NASSS, 2021, pp.1-2). The common goal should always be to raise awareness, understanding and compassion for a group of people in sport facing more unnecessary barriers than others. In this way this research offers an original contribution to ensuring trans people's lived experiences and voices matter.

Whilst sport can be meaningful, empowering and inclusive, it can also be intimidating and stressful for many people, though especially so for those who participated in this research. It is also unfair to expect the trans community to carry the burden of challenging transphobia, and this was a concern of several participants. Martinez-San Miguel and Tobias (2016, p. 5) write trans feminism is 'trans-specific in a way that nothing else is. It expands, complicates and enriches, and is embedded in activism too.' Trans feminism is not, as Julia Serrano wrote (2013. p.47), 'a conundrum'. It is

simply one of many third-waves feminisms, whose point ‘is to challenge societal sexisms and other forms of marginalisation’ (Serano, 2013, p. 47). This sentiment, when applied to inclusion in sport, offers the potential for trans people’s participation to bring new ways to consider and celebrate diversity in everyday sport and physical exercise. In keeping with a trans feminist perspective, this research closes with the words of Alice, who had this to say about their experiences of cycling and being trans:

> Sport gave me an identity that wasn’t around being trans, and as you know, I’m proud of being trans, it’s been really good for my mental health, and for my happiness as well, to have that. And I’ve made a lot of friends through it, yeah, it’s been a really big part of the last few years, a big part of my life.

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APPENDICES

Ethics Approval Letter

University of Brighton

Tier 2 Cross-School Research Ethics Committee
Research Office
M24 Cockcroft Building
Moulsecoomb
Brighton
BN2 4GJ

Abby Barras
School of Applied Social Sciences
University of Brighton
Mayfield House
Falmer
Brighton
BN1 9PH

SSCREC18-11 25 April 2018

Dear Abby,

Thank you for your resubmission to the Cross-School Research Ethics Committee for Social Sciences at the University of Brighton.

The committee feel you have now addressed all the issues raised and are happy to offer a favourable ethical opinion for this study.

Favourable ethical opinion is given on the basis of a project end date of September 2021. If you need to request an extension, please contact the CREC secretary. Please note that the decisions of the committee are made on the basis of the information provided in your application. The CREC must be informed of any changes to the research process after a favourable ethical opinion has been given. Tier 2 research that is conducted without having been reviewed by the committee is not covered by the University research insurance cover. If you need to make changes to your proposal please complete and submit a change notification form in order that the CREC can determine whether the changes will necessitate any further ethical review. The form is available at:

https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/ease/ro/Pages/ethics%20and%20governance/CREC-LHPS.aspx

Once your research has been completed, please could you fill in a brief 'end of project report form' that can be found on the same website. Finally please could I ask that you flag up any unexpected ethical issues, and report immediately any serious adverse events that arise during the conduct of this study.

We wish you all the best with your research and hope that your research study is successful. If the CREC can be of further assistance with your study please contact us again.

Best wishes

Email to Informal Gatekeepers

University of Brighton

'What are transgender and non-binary people's experiences of participation in everyday sport?

Recruitment Help Needed

DATE

Dear

My name is Abby Barras and I'm a PhD student at the University of Brighton.

I am hoping to recruit participants to take part in interviews between September 2018 and July 2019 and was wondering if your organisation might be able to help me.

What are transgender and non-binary people's experiences of participation in every day sport?

The aim of my research is to better understand these experiences, and to help promote and improve inclusivity and participation for transgender and non-binary people.

Organisations likes yours may benefit from research results and a sense of community support and representation for their participants, having helped to improve sports inclusivity and engagement. This means that your help is valuable and greatly appreciated.

I'm writing to ask your permission to share a poster and postcards in your organisation (see attached). Interested participants can then contact me directly if they wish to take part, or if they have any questions. All answers and results from the interviews are kept strictly confidential and the results will be reported in a research paper available to all participants on completion.

It would also be helpful if the information could go on your social media platforms, such as Twitter and/or Facebook. I can supply you with a digital file for this and a short explanation about the research.

All I will need is to arrange a suitable time with you to come and leave the materials and help display them (if appropriate).

If this is possible please could you email me on the address below? Please feel free to call if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Abby Barras

a.barras2@brighton.ac.uk

07983 364 468

This research has approval from the Social Sciences Cross-School Research Ethics Committee (CREC) and is supported by the Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender (University of Brighton).

Recruitment Poster

Table 4: LGBT Sports Organisations Contacts (SE)

Organisation	Recruitment Help?	Recruitment Location
Trans Can Sport (incl Trans Swimming), *Brighton Trans Sports Society*	Yes	Facebook, Twitter
BLAGGS *Brighton LGBT Sports Society*	No reply	N/A
LGBT Masters Aquatics Club, London (with a Brighton Branch)	Yes	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
Tags Swim, London and Tags YOGA	No	Facebook
Trans Fit Online directory run by transgender fit-pro to help trans/non-binary people find sports/activities that are welcoming	Yes	Website
B-Town Brawlers Roller Derby League, Brighton	No reply	Facebook
London Bike Kitchen (Women and gender Variant sessions)	Yes	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
Not So Trad Southern LGBT Climbers, London/UK	Yes	Email member list
The Clare Project, Brighton (Charity for trans related health advice)	No	N/A
Allsorts Youth Project, Brighton (and Transformers, Trans Youth)	No reply	N/A
Beaumont Society, London	Yes	Website
The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES), Surrey	Yes	Facebook, Twitter
UK Trans Info	Yes	Facebook, Twitter

All About Trans UK	Yes	Facebook, Twitter
Trans Unite	No reply	N/A
UK Trans Info	Yes	Facebook, Twitter
Active Sussex	No reply	N/A

Table 5: LGBT Sports Organisations Contacts (NW)

Organisation	Recruitment Help?	Recruitment Location
The Titans, American Football	No reply	N/A
GHAP, badminton	No reply	N/A
Open Athletics/Manchester Frontrunners	No reply	N/A
Northern Jump	Yes	Facebook
Orca Divers (PADI)	No reply	N/A
Manchester Sharks Water Polo	Yes	Facebook/email member list
Outdoor Lads, Outdoor Pursuits	No reply	N/A
Northern Waves Swimming Club	No reply	N/A
Northern Aces Tennis Club	No reply	N/A
Village Manchester FC	No reply	N/A
The Proud Trust Manchester (youth and sports charity) – did display posters and in exchange for help have asked me to speak at Youth Pride in September 2019	Various	Posters, website
Manchester Village Spartans, Rugby	No reply	N/A
Monthly Marlins Swim Group	No reply	N/A
Manchester Lynx Women's Basketball Club - Loreto High School, Chorlton	Yes	Facebook/email member list
Manchester Stingers FC	No reply	N/A
Northern Rebound Squash Club	No reply	N/A
Monthly Sunday Walk Out - walking club	Yes	Emailed member list

Participant Information Sheet

University of Brighton

'What are the experiences of transgender and non-binary people's participation in everyday sport?

Participation Information Sheet

Hello, and thank you for offering to take part in my research.

Before we start, I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I am happy to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. This should take about 10 - 15 minutes. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear. You will be given time to think about whether you still wish to take part before we begin, and you can take this sheet away with you at the end.

Background

I am a PhD student at the University of Brighton. My research focuses on understanding transgender and non-binary people's experiences of participation in everyday sport, past, present or future. Whilst there is lots of research about transgender and non-binary athletes competing at elite level, there is much less about those participating in everyday sport. There is also very little research that asks transgender and non-binary people directly about their experiences.

I would like to know what your experiences are, so that we can try and improve inclusivity, awareness and acceptance in everyday participation in sport for transgender and non-binary people.

Sample Interview Questions

Below is a sample of some of the questions I will ask you. There are no right or wrong answers.

1) What are you experiences of participation in everyday sport?
2) Where do you participate?
3) If you no longer participate, why is that?

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited because you responded to a poster I sent to a wide range of transgender sports groups and networks in the South East of England. You also identify as transgender and/or non-binary and have experience and/or interest in participating in everyday sport (currently or in the past). You do not have to take part.

What is expected of me taking part?

I will ask you to tell me your experiences of participation in everyday sport. We will hold the interview in a mutually agreed space, somewhere quiet and comfortable, and in a community setting.

I will conduct the interview, and audio-record with your permission. I will then transcribe your interview and all recordings will be used solely by me, in accordance with the University of Brighton's Research Ethic Guidelines. The interview may take from 30 minutes to 1 hour, but there is no time limit.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

Taking part in this research may offer you the chance to reflect on your own experiences. Your experiences may help to better inform improved inclusion and participation recommendations at sports clubs, organisations and policies (such as those written by councils) in the UK. This means that the wider transgender and non-binary community could benefit from this research, thanks to your valuable information.

What are the potential disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Sharing your experiences about participation in sport may be enjoyable, and you may find reflecting on recollections of participating in sport a positive activity. However, if sharing your experiences makes you feel uncomfortable or upset, please remember that we can stop, take a break, and you do not have to answer a particular question if you do not want to.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. All data will be treated confidentially and the information you share will be protected following the Data Protection Act (1998) guidelines. The study adheres to the University of Brighton's data storage policy, which means that the data will exist in the form of an audio recording and typed transcriptions of the recordings. The data will be kept on a password protected computer for a minimum of six years, in line with the university's retention policy. The only people to have access to your information will be myself and my supervisors.

Your name will be anonymized in the transcription and use of data. If you prefer not to be anonymous (which means using your real, first name), please let me know and we can discuss what this involves.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You may withdraw at any time for any reason. If this happens before your data has been analysed, then it can be destroyed. However, once your data has been analysed, it can be difficult to remove it from my research. In this case, no direct quotes from you will be used, and every effort will be made to remove your data.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be published in my doctoral thesis, which will be held by the University of Brighton and in the UK PhD database. The data may be used for future academic publications, policies and conferences. As you will not be contacted again for permission for future publications, it is important that you are aware of this when you participate today.

If you would like to know the results of the study, please let me know and I will email you once it is complete.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is being organized and funded by the University of Brighton in the School of Applied Social Sciences.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by the Social Sciences Cross-School Research Ethics Committee (CREC) and is supported by the Centre for Transforming Sexuality and Gender (University of Brighton).

What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns, please contact my lead supervisor Professor Katherine Johnson:
K.E.Johnson@brighton.ac.uk

My Contact details

Abby Barras, School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Brighton, BN1 9PS
a.barras2@brighton.ac.uk
Tel: 07983 364 468

Email to Participant

Dear XXX

I am in indeed looking for people to help with my research, and I really appreciate you getting in touch. I'd love to hear about your experiences of taking part in sport.

For a bit of background, I'm a PhD student at the University of Brighton, and my research focuses on trans and/or non-binary people (or any other term people wish to use) and their experiences of participation in every day sport - so running, swimming, roller derby - anything! The aim of the research is to raise awareness, increase participation, and share all of this with the trans and wider community, to hopefully make some positive impact about inclusivity.

In terms of the interview, it would involve either meeting up with you or talking to you over the phone, if that's ok? I can send you some information for you to read and decide if you wanted to take part. If you did, we can then arrange a date to speak. The questions are quite open, the aim is to keep it unstructured! I would record you, interviews normally last about an hour, but there's no time limit.

What do you think? Do feel free to ask me anything at all if you want to. My number is at the bottom of the page if you want to ask me anything.

Warmest regards and thank you so much again.

Abby

After Care Letter

University of Brighton

After Care Information

DATE

Thank you for participating in this research today. I hope that you found the interview interesting and I appreciate your time and contribution.

Sometimes after taking part in research individuals may feel emotional. Whilst I hope you do not experience any distress or upset, it is important that you are able to seek appropriate help or counselling if you need it.

I have listed below some organisations who are qualified to listen and to advise transgender and non-binary people.

General Support

Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard	**01273 204 050**
Mind Out LGBTQ Mental Health	**01273 234 839 (on-line support also available)**
LGBT+ Switchboard	**0300 330 0630**
LGBT Foundation	**0345 330 3030**

Immediate Support

SAMARITANS (24 hours, 7 days a week)

116 123 (free call) / 0161 236 8000 (local charges apply)

You are welcome to get back in touch with me or contact my supervisor Katherine (details on the participant information sheet).

Many thanks.

Abby Barras

Consent Forms (Non-Anonymous and Anonymous)

University of Brighton

Participant Consent Form Non-Anonymous

Title of Project: What are transgender and non-binary people's experiences of participation in everyday sport?

Name of Researcher: Abby Barras

	Please initial or tick box
I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.	☐
The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and any possible risks involved.	☐
I am aware that I will be required to take part in an interview.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.	☐
I understand how the data collected will be used, that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researcher and supervisors and will not be revealed to anyone else. Also, I understand the researcher may use the anonymised data in future publications and conference presentations.	☐
I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

I do not wish my interview results to be anonymous, and I understand that my first name only may appear in the following publications and that no further consent will be sought. I understand that the researcher may have no control over where my data may be published, or when in the future this may happen.

Doctoral Thesis	Conference Presentations
Academic Journals	On the Internet/other media
Sports Policies	Other future publications

.....

Name of Participant, Date, Signature

.....

Name of Researcher, Date, Signature

University of Brighton

Participant Consent Form: Anonymous

Title of Project: What are transgender and non binary people's experiences of participation in everyday sport?

Name of Researcher: Abby Barras

	Please initial or tick box
I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.	☐
The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and any possible risks involved.	☐
I am aware that I will be required to take part in an interview.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.	☐
I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researcher and supervisors and will not be revealed to anyone else. Also, I understand the researcher may use the anonymised data in future publications and conference presentations.	☐
I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

.....

Name of Participant, Date, Signature

.....

Name of Researcher, Date, Signature

Example of Complete Un-coded Transcript

Interview 4 with Katy (K) and Abby Barras (AB), Wednesday 18.07.18, 1pm, by telephone

---

Katy is 34 and lives in [redacted]. She identifies as female.

Interview duration: 1.06 minutes

The interview took place at AB's home and was recorded over the telephone. I had approached Katy as had already interviewed [redacted] who mentioned she would be interested.

Good interview with rich data, very comfortable, she knows her stuff.

AB: Hi, is that Katy?

K: Yeah, hi Abby.

AB: How are you?

K: Yeah, good thank you. Not bad at all.

AB: You got some cooler weather where you are?

K: It's cooled off just a little bit, yeah, we had some rain yesterday and it's improved things a little bit, it's a bit more bearable.

AB: The rain was a joy, wasn't it, we were all in the garden staring up at the sky, like we'd never seen it ever before (laughs).

K: I was trying not to complain about the heat, because you know, we don't always get it, but it was beginning to get a little bit wearing.

AB: Oh, I complain about the heat all the time, it doesn't work for me! But anyway. Katy, is it ok to call you Katy?

K: Yes, absolutely fine.

AB: And just to double check, pronouns for you?

K: She/her.

AB: Thank you. And thank you firstly so much for…

K: I should ask you the same question (laughs).

AB: Oh, yes, I'm she and her for me as well, thank you. Thank you in the first instance for agreeing to talk to me, I really, really appreciate it, and I know that you are and incredibly busy person, so thank you very much.

K: No problem at all, I don't mind doing something like this for sports, it's a subject I'm quite interested in, so, I'm happy.

AB: Ah, well I really appreciate it. And just before we continue, I'm recording, are you ok with me recording?

K: Yep, no problem.

AB: I think you've read [redacted] participant information sheet already, hadn't you?

K: Yes, I have.

AB: So, you kind of know what this research is about and where it's come from, and what the point of it is?

K: Yes, I think so.

AB: No need to for me to go through all that with you, you're quite happy?

K: Yeah, yeah, that's fine. That's all good thanks.

AB: I'll send you another consent form and then just pop it back in the post with [redacted] when you're ready, that would be great, thank you.

K: Will do!

AB: Um, can I just get a little bit for context, so I can get from all of the people I am talking to a bit of a demographical blueprint, is it ok to ask you how old you are and where you're from?

K: Yeah, yeah.

AB: And if there's anything you don't want to answer just say no thank you and we'll move on.

K: Yeah, no problem. Go ahead.

AB: So how old are you Katy?

K: I'm 34. I think!

AB: I know, you et to an age and you have to work it out!

K: I'm 35 this year and I keep telling people I'm already 35, so I keep forgetting! So, I'm not yet!

AB: You're adding on a year when you don't need to! Stop doing that!

K: It's a fatal error!

AB: I know! And where are you from, Katy?

K: I'm from [redacted]

AB: And I'm just going to ask this, and forgive me if I get this wrong, and you identity as female?

K: Yes, I'm a trans woman, yes.

AB: That's the only kind of big questions that I was really going to ask you, everything else is pretty unstructured, what's important is that you just talk to me about what your experiences are, really.

K: Yes. So, sure, so at the moment the main sports I'm kind of involved in is football, but I also run as well. And football wise I play competitively, and I have always played competitively, I played pre-transition, I played post-transition, and I've playing for a local team – [redacted]. The one we're in now, Division One, we've just got promoted?

AB: Congratulations!

K: So, I've playing for a season and half really, but my previous last half season was disrupted by various surgeries and injuries, so, but yeah, those are the two. I guess those are the two sports I'm mainly involved in the minute, but running, I do run competitively every now and again but nothing particularly outstanding, no clubs.

AB: Ok. So, playing competitively at football and then running more sort of more recreationally for you?

K: Yeah, yeah, so I do races but I'm not a member of a club, I'm not massively serious about it or anything.

AB: But it's something that you enjoy doing, in that you do it reasonably regularly?

K: Yeah, I do enjoy it, a lot of it is keeping fit for football of course, but when I couldn't play football, like in the middle of transition, I got into running quite heavily as an alternative?

AB: Why do you think that might be?

K: Getting into running?

AB: Yeah, in terms of when you were doing it more heavily?

K: So, the background to it was. I stopped playing men's' football when I knew, I guess when I knew I was going to transition , I'd got to the point where lots of people knew I was going to and I didn't really feel comfortable doing it anymore, so I stopped playing men's; football at the end of one season, and then I didn't start playing women's football until, for another couple of seasons, because I wasn't sure if I would be welcome, I wasn't sure if I was allowed. I knew there had been some stuff around trans women playing football, I knew of a couple of trans women who had managed to, I wasn't sure if I was going to be allowed, and I wanted, so I got quite unfit for about a year, and then I wanted to start getting fit again, and so I started running, and because running is obviously a solitary pursuit, I thought it could be quite good for my mental health, and I didn't have to kind of agree my participation with anybody? Um, so it felt safer to get involved with?

AB: Thank you for that, that's really helpful. That had popped in my head…

K: It's a pretty common experience, and that was mine. It was partly, in equal measures, it was me not feeling comfortable about, I wasn't sure enough in my identity to go along and try and be part of a women's sport group of any sort, obviously as most sport being gendered? And also, I didn't feel confident that I would be accepted.

AB: Ok. We might jump around a bit. Are you ok with that? Cos you're saying a lot of stuff that I really want to come back to, but I also really want you to be telling me everything you want to. But you used the word 'allowed', which I thought was, about being allowed to play football?

K: Yeah, so, yes, I guess, there are different levels to it obviously, there's nothing to stop me from just going along to a five a side game and whatever and participating, and I did occasionally with my friends, still play football, down the park or whatever, but, yeah. In terms of accessing competitive football, I, wasn't entirely sure what the rules were, erm, and I know they changed, and that was what actually got me involved, was there, I knew there had been…I'm trying to remember her name (*Hannah Mouncey*). There was a trans woman a few years ago, it was in the papers a bit, and this was before I transitioned, at the time, I definitely made a mental note about it, because I knew this might be something I might face at some point. Anyway, she wasn't allowed to play football until two years after she'd had bottom surgery, so obviously I knew this was going to be some time for me, so I was

like, ok, I'm not going to be able to play women's football, I don't really want to play football, so, and , there isn't really much of a scene for competitive mixed gender football, there isn't really anything, so, certainly not in the adult age group. So, um, I, er, I didn't think I'd be allowed to, so I didn't really try, I didn't try at all. I didn't get in contact with any clubs or anything, so I don't know if they would have let me train or whatever. But from what I now know, from the clubs I now go to, I'm almost certain they would have let me train, I think they would have got me involved as much as they could, er, but I didn't realise that until afterwards. And what it actually was, was the World Cup, in Canada, 2015, so obviously women's football got a big boost from that, cos England got to the semi-finals, and I was watching that and was like, I really want to get involved, and at a similar time they announced on Twitter that they had reviewed the criteria for trans participation, that there had been a change of rules, and you didn't need to have, and I think it was actually as a result of the controversy with, I can't remember her name, but anyway. They were now, they changed the rules, and you didn't have to be two years post-surgery, bottom surgery, it was just based on hormone levels.

AB: That's right.

K: So, I applied through that. So, I firstly reached out to my local club and said, I'm trans, can I come down, and they said sure, and they were very welcoming, and at the same time I reached out to the FA and asked can I be allowed to go through your process to be allowed to play. It took rather longer than I had hoped still, it took a couple of years, 18 months, a couple of years, cos there were some problems with my hormone levels and my testosterone levels weren't low enough and, um, wasn't ideal. But in the end, it was all sorted, and in the meantime, I was able to play with my club and I played friendlies and so on and they were really supportive, so…that's the story of me stopping and starting again.

AB: So, can I ask you if it's not too personal a question, when did you start t transition?

K: Hmm, so I, I suppose the first big coming out at work is when I usually measure it from, that was, October 2014.

AB: OK.

K: Erm, so yeah, and then, relevant to this story I guess, GRS was February 2017. Yeah.

AB: So, you'd socially transitioned prior to medically transitioning, and hormones?

K: Yeah, hormones was actually October 2014 as well. Erm, and, I'd done the 6, 10, 12 months prior to that seeing friends outside of work socially, but then work was later, and the name change…

AB: I'm only asking because obviously I am speaking to people who are trans and people who are non-binary and anything else in between, that they wish to identify as, so for many people the surgery and the hormones, it depends on what level of sport they are playing, and how closely they are paying attention, and you obviously have paid very close attention. When you spoke to the FA did you find that they were receptive to your enquiries, did you feel there were any barriers at all?

K: Um, it's mixed. So, the Equalities Manager was someone I spoke to, they were very respective of it, they seemed really good, um, they didn't always seem entirely to be massively knowledgeable about the kind of medical side of it, I kind of felt, like a lot of trans people end up having to know a lot about the medical side of their transition because a lot of the people we encounter don't know what they're talking about. So that's a lot of why I have, and also, one of the problems I have with the FA's policy is that it doesn't clearly define a, what an acceptable testosterone level is for trans women, trans women people, so I knew what my level was, I didn't know what they were expecting. So, I had to apply and

they came back and said it wasn't low enough, but they couldn't tell me, and this is where I'm not sure where the disconnect was between the Equalities Manager I was dealing with, and the Doctor they have doing the assessment. So, you learn from third parties who might be the Dr there. So, they came back and said the testosterone level wasn't low enough, but they couldn't tell me what the threshold was (laughs). So, I was kind of trying to get my testosterone down to a level that was acceptable without knowing what the acceptable level was which was not really ideal. So, the first thing I did was went to see my doctor ad get my medication changed, because I was on S, a testosterone suppressant and it's not a great one. Um, and my testosterone level I think at the time was about 7 nanals per litre, so, what I used to say at the time, was it was good enough for the IOC, but it wasn't good enough for [name of football team].

AB: Yes, the IOC are notorious for changing their mind!

K: Yes, erm, but anyway, so they rejected it once, then I had to get my medication changed, and I think that medication would have been, it took too long as they had some problems with dealing with my doctor, I think that rejection…I applied probably in July or August 2015 it must have been? Or 2016, no 2015 cos it was after the World Cup, so. That rejection came in September or October 2015, I then got my medication changed and reapplied in about January 2016? Er, and that's when they said ok, it is low enough, but it has to be at that level for a year, so then I had to wait until January 2017 to play.

AB: Ok.

K: So, going back to your original question. The Equalities Manager I spoke to they were really good, their policy was really well written, I know they partnered with Gendered Intelligence on their policy, and wording wise it was all good, the difficulties has with a round the decision making, the process around what the hormone levels needed to be? And I've since learned I think the hormone levels, the testosterone level they are expecting is 1.5 nonalos per litre, which to me feels quite low.

AB: That's very low.

K: I'm still well below that, so, to honest, they said to me if I was cis they would probably be putting me onto testosterone supplements.

AB: Right, that's interesting.

K: It's not really a good look, and in fact, this is probably quite significant that because my testosterone is so low, stop me if I'm rambling!

AB: No! It's difficult when you do telephone interviews because you can't see me, I'm nodding like a mad thing at this end!

K: But if my testosterone level is so low, it impacts on my energy levels, and that can be a bit of a day to day problem, not a huge one, but it's kind of sub-optimal, erm, but I'm reticent to go and get, to look into testosterone supplementation because for me as a trans woman playing women's football, to be on any testosterone supplementation is quite Daily Mail worthy! I don't really want to be dealing with that, so…

AB: That's a really powerful story and I'm really glad you've told me that and I'm hugely grateful to you for sharing, because you're the first person I've spoken to whose kind of that, who's had to go through that, really had to think carefully about hormones in relation to what sporting organisations and bodies are asking of trans people. And they are messy, I think, there aren't any really clear guidelines. The Olympic Committee as you mentioned, they keep changing their mind, like you said in

2014, they kind of gave and stopped asking for people to have GRS and they said there's no test, we can't prove…

K: Yes, and that's why this research, any kind of research is so important, because there isn't enough known about the impact, and I think where they are getting tied up, they keep trying to apply the same levels at all levels in in the sport, and of course I fully support their being some control at the elite level, but what happens, quite clearly what you don't want is someone who has transitioned 10 minutes ago to go and win the women's 100 m, wouldn't necessarily happen of course.

AB: No, it's never going to happen.

K: But it wouldn't be a good look if it did (laughs)! Erm, but, at the same time, at the level I'm playing at, I work with [name of football team] on participation and we're trying to get more people into the sport, and policing people out of it doesn't feel joined up.

AB: Yeah, and you're so right that the hypothetical trans athlete that's going to rock up in a dress and win everything, it's just such an uninformed position to take, and as you so kindly told me about your own transition, and how long that takes, and what's involved, this is not…it's like you said, that Daily Mail approach of people are going to do this to cheat, and there is no evidence for this.

K: And even if they did, what wold the rewards be? There are very few people who make good money out of women's sport, and (laughs) and the kind of person who is going to be good enough to do this theoretically going in and dominating women's sport is probably already making more money out of men's sports than they ever would out of women's, so why would anyone do it? (laughs).

AB: That's a really smart point, Katy! It's one I often say to people, there's no benefit in this, it's not going to happen, and we forget that people competing at elite level are already pretty exceptional athletes anyway, and everybody has an advantage that they bring to the starting line. Whether it's money to train or, many people who compete at elite level are already in a different sphere, so it's, yeah, there's nobody competing at elite level who are openly trans, apart from Chris Mosier, who is interestingly a rans man, and nobody talks about Chris!

K: Yeah, its funny, I always bring Chris up, he's the one winning! And in an individual sport, where there are trans people that I am aware of, trans women anyway, competing at anything like elite level, in any sport, it tends to be team sports, I guess Laurel Hubbard being the exception.

AB: And I know people talk about Caster Semenya a lot and I think it's always difficult to talk about Caster because although she's been diagnosed with hyper androgenism, I don't know if she's openly intersex and that's a completely different thing. And the thing I always say is that if Caster really did have this amazing advantage that people keep saying she has, she'd be wiping the floor, and she's not. So, it doesn't take much unpicking of this argument to realise that a lot of what the Daily Mail likes to put out there, it's just not true. How did this all make you feel when you were going through this business with the FA? Did you feel it was something…actually, I'm going to leave that there. How did it make you feel?

K: I felt a number of things. I'll go with the negative first. So obviously it was it felt like I was happy to prove myself, it wasn't, I think I said to them at one point it doesn't feel very inclusive, it felt like, I was applying for dispensation to be a not good enough woman to be within sport kind of thing, you know, it was like being an exception to process, so like, I'm sorry for being like this but would you please let me compete, there was an element of that? I'm quite pragmatic so I'm kind of accepting that we are where we are in society so, it wasn't like a massive hit of my self-esteem, but there was a hit there, it was hard going to training every week, and everyone was allowed to play and I wasn't, it was just a

reminder of that I'm not quite one of them, so that was kind of hard sometimes, and that was quite difficult. I guess when I got rejections through saying that my hormone levels weren't low enough, but we can't tell you what is low enough, that was quite upsetting for a while. I think a lot of it, what was upsetting about it was how it created this barrier, this social barrier, that I wasn't quite one of the team because I was different, erm, so that. On the flipside, it gave me a kind of sense of, not quite indignation, but a sense of, that I had something to fight for, and it's got me involved in LGBT sports activism ever since, because I met a lot of people through it, people who were advocating for me, and got some help. So that was actually a positive, but of course you shouldn't have to need to have these hardships to get that, but I guess that's normally how that happens.

AB: So, the people around you, who were training, this is the [football team], the training that you were attending at the time?

K: Yes.

AB: How were they towards you when this was going on? Did they agree with you? Did they think this is crazy that you couldn't play?

K: Yes, I was really buoyed by the fact that everyone really did seem on my side, so we did, erm, I went training every week, never had any problems, initially I was quite nervous and I kind of held back a bit, because you internalise all the stuff about oh, you're too strong and you're going to hurt someone, so I kind of held back, and I'm not strong at all anyway! (laughs). I just held back because I was worried about what might happen if I did kind of like catch someone a bit hard, I guess a lot of that is the kind of internalised misogyny that we all grow up with. But like, I got over that and lot of it was, I spent time with everyone, a lot of people who I play football with, a bit of background to my team, there used to be a lot of police teams, there was lots of police officers in it, so they'd done the kind of training, they do know what you're talking about. It's quite a queer football team anyway, loads of lesbian women and gay women in it. I mean that can go both ways, but in this case everyone was really fine., And honestly, like, it's never really been an issue, we don't really talk about it anymore, but at the time, a lot of people would say to me quite regularly, it's really unfair that you can't play, and they, I think they were aware of the fact that it was upsetting for me that I couldn't play and they could, so they were really good about it, the club as a whole was really good about it. We actually did a bit of filming for like a football v homophobia training session, which I participated in.

AB: Fantastic. So, the others were championing you, then and waiting? How much of that do you think was to do with the fact that you were jumping through these hoops to be allowed to take part?

K: I think it captured their imagination a bit, and that brought with that whole kind of like, this is an injustice part, and my football clubs [redacted] and they're a really good community football club, predominantly like youth age group teams, and they've got a few adult teams as well, they're really involved in increasing women's participation in football in the area. So, I think they're trying to be really, really inclusive in the club, so they've got lost of LGBT people in the club, well L people. Gay men in football is not quite so prevalent. They've done a really good job on that and I think it was kind of a chance for them to say they can genuinely be inclusive, because there are people who fall short of that T, and they were really good about that. And I'm thankful that that was my local club, because I don't imagine that it's the experience that everyone would have everywhere.

AB: No, no.

K: So, it was really important that they were inclusive and when I reached out to them their first, they answered the question in exactly the way I advise people to answer that question now when I advise

people, they said yes, absolutely, come on down and get involved. We don't know about the competitive aspect, but we can check the policy later, but you can absolutely get involved. Which is exactly right. It's not, oh, I've got to check, it's exactly how it should be.

AB: Yes, it's exactly how it should be.

K: That made a big difference.

AB: So obviously the tam that you are playing with it's not and LGBT club specifically, it's the women's division 2 football team?

K: Yeah, we were [name of team] last season, we're division 1 this season. We've actually got two teams now, they're doing this really good job of increasing participation for women in football, which is good.

AB: How have the crowd been?

K: So generally, really good, at my level we only really play, we get people who are either in the park anyway or passing or know people who are playing for ether team., we're getting attendances of 20 people. In our cup final, we're getting 250, 300 people who came to watch and again in that situation it was absolutely fine, I didn't get any difficulty off anybody, and I haven't had, even when we went to away games, in places you might think twice about going to as a trans woman, it's absolutely fine. Apart from on one occasion where we played away, and a team I think, they basically must have just gone out to get me from day one, they weren't a very nice tram anyway, they were quite nasty, kicking everyone, but I really got targeted. But that came from the crowd as well, so I was mis gendered across the board from everybody, and the club was calling me he, and they were, the spectators and the people to do with the club were basically just encouraging people to call me he and so on, so that was really, really and (AB: I'm sorry), and that was the worst experience I've had.

AB: Ok. And I'm sorry to ask the question if it's been upsetting for you.

K: No, no I don't mind being asked the question because it's got to be out there, but yeah, I ended up getting taken off because my manager wanted to take me off for my own safety basically, so it was that level.

AB: Well I'm sorry. Even one incident of that happening is too much, but it sounds as if you were with people who were caring for you and looking out for you, at least there was that.

K: Yeah, exactly, and I never felt like I was in any serious danger, the only series danger was like I got elbowed at a corner and I'm fairly confident that was deliberate, but the referee wasn't doing anything about it. The only risk I felt was if somebody did something like that, I wasn't worried about a big pile up happening or anything because everyone on my team was really good about it, and quite lot of people afterwards were saying how shocked they were that people still do stuff like that. They were pretty horrid.

AB: Do you think it was the ignorance of the referee that was more upsetting, or…

K: Yeah, that was definitely a significant factor, the referee was…I sympathise a bit with the referee because I think h was Bulgarian, and so a lot of the language stuff would have understandably passed him by, so I don't blame him for that necessarily. Whether they took advantage of that I don't know. But he didn't do enough, there was a lot going on that he could have put a stop to, but he was a bit weak, and again, his is one of things when I'm doing work with the FA, that referees have got to be

trained, and they have got to know about LGBT abuse, because they need to stamp on it, because you can't leave it to LGBT people to complain about. Because then we get targeted even more.

AB: Yes.

K: So, and also, it's not always targeted at anyone who is LGBT, they might not be out as such, they might not want to draw attention to it. Anyway, I digress! Yeah, I think part of it might actually be that we were top of the league and we were doing really well, and they targeted what they assumed, what we just said, what was going to be our best player, so they targeted me, but I'm not! I was second top goal scorer this season, but I got ten, and like the other girl got 35, so (laughs).

AB: Wow, that's a big difference.

K: She is the one who they should have been targeting. I did score eventually, and I was quite happy about that before I got taken off.

AB: Those assumptions that people make about male bodies having an innate physical advantage, do you think that's something, obviously it's something you've come up against from talking about it there, is that a barrier do you think in other sports?

K: Yeah, I think it definitely is, and it gets played out on quite a few levels. On the one hand you've got your internal stuff, certainly I can only speak for me, but I guess my experience of growing up, I wold have internalised that whole men are better than women thing, and I have that to get over myself. And of course, like I said that played out in my earlier experiences of playing sport as I was worried, that, I shouldn't be there or whatever because I've got this unfair advantage which I don't believe I have. I guess people's perceptions are so strong, and I get so much more of this, and I guess it makes sense, I get so much more criticism for being a trans woman in women's sports from men than from women.

AB: Really? Can you tell me a bit more?

K: So this is typically when I've done stuff on line, an awful lot of the negative response and criticism, has been and appears to be from men and my personal belief is that it comes from that exact same belief, that well, if I as a man just put on a dress I could go on and win the women's world cup kind of thing. And there are men who believe that!

AB: I know, I know…(laughs)

K: And I think they see me as someone who's doing that, and clearly the level of football I've achieved shows that I'm not quite world beating, so it's like we both said, it's demonstrably untrue, but there really is that perception out there, and I really get it a lot from men. Whereas women I guess have a much better typically balanced view of, well, women who play women's sport know what it's like and have played against men from this supposed position of interiority and know that it's absolute nonsense.

AB: When you say men that you've spoken to, where from?

K: Online a lot of time. So, for example I've done a lot of interviews with people talking about trans women in football, and obviously the comments that come back, and that's not the fairest test in the world, but that's one thing. Even when I have conversations with friends I've known for some time, this plays out very differently, it's not them having a go at me, but I do often get questions about how is it, do you feel you've got an advantage, you know, people say it's a really difficult question, they're not sure how they feel about it, is it 100% fair and most of it is framed as well at your level it's fine cos

it's low level, but in elite sport I'm not sure whether it could be fair. It generally feels like I get that from men. I guess my kind of sample set is skewed because I know a lot more men who are interested in sport than I do women, I guess because of my history of having played men's sport for longer than I've played women's, but for like it feels that way to me, which is interesting because it goes against the kind of, erm, accepted view that a lot of the anti-trans sport thing in women's sport comes from the anti-trans feminist lobby which I don't think it does…I mean, it comes from them, but actually…I've definitely had run ins with them! But, it's not, the day to day stuff is not from women typically, and non-one at my club has vocally disagreed with me being there. I mean, I don't know, someone might, there might be people who are uncomfortable with it, but they've chosen not to say. Opposition players I've played again, I mean, this is one of the things I love about women's football, there often is a really nice football, it's often a case of people wanting to play people rather than people just wanting to kick each other which in the men's…I love that, we play a hard game, it's competitive. But it's a sport, it's not a kicking competition! So other than that one game I've had no other problems at all.

AB: I'm really glad you've said, that and I agree, the way that sport has been organised, historically, to benefit certain people, and keep others, women, out.

K: Yeah, I was saying to someone the other day, at least the bigger sports anyway, if a boy is really good at sport, he knows he can make a living from it, he might not even reach elite level, but he knows he can make a good living. Whereas if a girl is very good at a sport, she's probably got to reach the absolute top to make a living out of it and drives all sorts of choices about participation at youth level that aren't fair.

AB: You are absolutely right. Those choices that girls and women have to make all the way through their career in order to make a living and play professionally…sorry, I'm rambling now!

K: No, one of the most interesting things I got from talking to women on my teams and their experiences of football in their youth, cos actually, I never played football as a child…

AB: Oh, I'm glad you've said this as this was going to be my next question!

K: Ok, so I never really played football as a child. I went along to train with a couple of teams a couple of time, but they never picked me, so I never really got involved. I suppose the saturation of boy's football, I was never really good enough to get into any of the teams, so I never stuck around with any. So, I never really started playing football properly, apart from in the park, I never played it in any organised setting until I was about 21?

AB: Ok.

K: When some people set up a Sunday league team, and that's when I played competitively from that point. So, talking to lots of women in my team about their experiences of playing football, there were quite a few who were at [football club], and that's the team I play for, partly created out of the [football club] and the police team, and when they played for Farnham Town as kids , they had to train in the car park, they weren't allowed to train on the pitch cos they didn't want them to mess it up. And this is a gravel, dirt car park, not even grass. I just can't even fathom, even going back 20 years here, it's not ancient history, I can't imagine that ever being done to boys' teams.

AB: No. Or that there weren't more people speaking up for the women and the girls playing.

K: Yeah, yeah, it's just staggering really. So…you wanted to ask about…

AB: Yes, well, key junctures really, in your life, perhaps because lots of people talk about playing sport when they were younger, then they reach puberty and it becomes much harder, but you didn't play any sport when you were younger?

K: I wasn't sort of one of these people who wasn't completely not involved in sport, I quite liked it, I think for me, it never felt like a place I was ever particularly comfortable in? So, for example, going along to these training sessions for these boys' football teams, the atmosphere was quite, it wasn't particularly fun? Even though this was youth football, it really was about winning, it was about taking it quite seriously it was about these boys behaving almost as men, it was really quite kind of a vary masculine atmosphere, and I know, I don't like this idea of trans women necessarily being driven away from hyper masculinity, because actually I'm still quite masculine, I'm not totally ani that. But at the same time, it wasn't really for me, it wasn't right. It was, I didn't feel entirely comfortable in that atmosphere. And football was the sport I was mostly interested in so that was, if I was going to be properly involved in a sport, that would be the one I would be involved in. I did do a bit of running, but again that was at school, I played hockey for a bit with my primary school, but again, it didn't grab me in the way football did. And a bit of cross country as well.

AB: Can I just ask you a bit about that, about discomfort playing youth football, you mentioned that you didn't feel good enough, can I ask how much of that was a barrier was that for you? Can I ask if this was wrapped up with your gender identity at that point?

K: It's an interesting one, because it is hard to say. I was certainly aware of my gender identity at the key stage at 2 or 3 years old, which is the key one, when people say your identity is said to form. But I don't feel like that consciously impacted on me not wanting to get fully involved with sport, and I guess we're talking about early teens here. But I would be surprised if it didn't subconsciously impact on me. I knew I wasn't a , quote unquote, good enough boy at that point, and actually I've often reflected, I think me getting into football is originally partly me trying to compensate me trying to be a boy slash man, there was definitely an element of that. I made myself get into it, more than perhaps I would have done otherwise?

AB: Ah, ok.

K: So, it was definitely wrapped up in there somewhere, but I don't remember making a conscious decision around getting involved in sport in direct relation to gender identity, if that makes sense, but I'm certain it was factor.

AB: Thank you, and sorry, that was a personal question.

K: It's fine, I'm fine with personal questions! I talk about it a lot.

AB: I often wonder if there are certain sports that individuals move towards or away from because of this perception that they are for boys or for girls.

K: I think that's definitely a factor, the social power around football being for boys and netball for girls, that kind of stuff, it's pretty strong, An interesting aside, I think I remember once when I was at middle school, the end of primary school, there was a letter came out that was, um, the different sports clubs you can involved with, and I remember looking at that with my mum and dad and wondering which ones should I get involved with. And I remember saying that I would quite like to do netball, and I think at the time that netball and basketball weren't quite the same thing, I wasn't cognoscente of it, and I said I'd quite like to do netball, and they were like, that's probably for girls but you can do it if you want, and I was like I won't do it then, I won't do it! It was like, I don't want to be found out kind of thing, but that was definitely a powerful thing.

AB: Yes, absolutely. So, for you, your gender identity, would you say it's wrapped up in the sport you play now or, cos you mentioned that you weren't thinking about it consciously…

K: I would think, actually, being involved in football has helped me quite a lot with working out more about my gender identity, cos I think. Because it's seen as a masculine thing to be involved with, and a lot of the women I play football with are absolutely happy about being, about doing things which society would see as being quite masculine or appearing as quite masculine. So, there's quite a lot of lesbians on my team, quite a lot who would find themselves quite butch in various flavours. It's helped me feel a lot more comfortable to over perform femininity, to feel comfortable in my gender, if that makes sense?

AB: Yes, absolutely. It does.

K: Yeah, I've definitely got a lot more comfortable with that, especially since getting back into football again, and being involved in sport in general, because actually in my experience, I've found women in sport are a lot better at being called that because I guess a lot of them have experienced that since ever, that whole pressure about having to be feminine enough and playing against that, I'm surrounding now by people who have done that for years. So that's been really quite helpful to me. And that's been one of the biggest things I've taken away from being involved in sport again.

AB: That's a really interesting thing to hear, thank you. So, football for you is something you're hugely passionate about and involved in and will continue to be involved in. I don't normally ask people this, but you're clearly very involved in this, do you think there are any recommendations to reduce barriers for trans people and non-binary people playing sport, day to day, and at your level?

K: There are obvious ones, visible role models. I guess, the one I said earlier about, one of the things for me, and I hear this a lot from trans people who want to get involved in sport, and don't feel they can, is that first interaction, and it's hard as you have to train those people, but it's that first interaction, of, when a trans person, particularly a trans feminine person wants to get involved in sport, because it's usually trans feminine women who get policed, though not exclusively so, um, when we want to get involved in sport, when we ask the question, can we get involved, if the person we speak to as got some sort of authoritative answer, then, which preferably revolves around saying yes, then that makes so much of a difference because that helps us, that makes us feel that our involvement isn't kind of, dependent on some third party opinion, or some sort of process. It feels like our being there is valid, but there's just some barriers which need to be crossed in the background. That's a really powerful one. And, yeah, like I said, the way that my club answered was yes, that's absolutely fine, some things we might need to check, but please come on down.

AB: It's such a simple response, isn't it?

K: Yeah, exactly.

AB: And yet so much of the stuff I read about trans sports policies, it's all subsumed into LGB policies and the trans ends up being this box ticking bit at the end.

K: Well, actually, that's a really important point, because often, sports is so bad at LGB+ plus stuff quite frankly, and we're just tacked on the end of that, and sports is on of the areas where the key to inclusion works quite differently to LGB inclusion, like, we're effected by the same social attitudes etc etc, but in sport there's quite a specific difference, and I think quite often they do quite well, and I'm reticent to say this, but separate the policies a little bit. I'm absolutely not about the separating of those letters under any other circumstances, but I think it might, to appreciate that there are separate

section in the same policies, that the needs are quite different, and actually even in sport quite a lot of negative attitudes can still come from LGB people.

AB: Yes, that's very true.

K: Even within our clubs. I know people who have been to LG sports clubs and not necessarily been that included.

AB: They are not always safe spaces, are they? Or welcoming. Your partner [redacted] made a good point last week, she said I don't want things to be separate, because where's the competition?

K: Well, I was going to come to that actually, and I know she's clear on that, and she's absolutely right, because, at a fundamental level, there aren't enough trans people, certainly in some areas of the country, to justify there being any sort of trans specific offering. I know with Trans Pride, I was down there last weekend talking to someone from the council and there's trans specific swimming there, and I guess in Brighton or in London, that works, because there are enough people, and obviously swimming is very specific. But, generally, you know, I'm not sure I know enough trans women involved in football in the country to make one team (laughs) so even if we could, who would we play against? So, it needs to be, for trans people particularly, and this is when it gets a bit less than for LGB+ stuff, trans stuff really needs to be about including us in mainstream clubs, because, and that's even without factoring in the whole sports as a lever for social change, which I'm really keen on, actually, you don't get that by having separate clubs, you get that by including everyone generally. There is something to be said for having certain specific targeted activities, specific games to play. So, I don't know how you could do it with football for example, if you could have some sorts of trans specific, get involved activity, or try-out activity, then that works really well, cos I suppose one thing that people are really keen on is getting trans people trans women, in particular, like to know there's another one when they go along.

AB: Yes. So you mentioned, and I won't keep you much longer, and I'm sure you have lots to do on a Saturday morning!

K: No, it's great, it's an interesting conversation!

AB: It is, and to widen participation for the trans community is so important, and nobody is really talking about it. And people are very divided, and there's a lot of misinformation.

K: I guess because there's a history of trans people transitioning, and then going stealth and hiding, and I guess none more so than in sport, because people don't want to be found out because they would have been kicked out of the sport. It's quite a hard barrier to break, for our people.

AB: There's a long way to go. You mentioned earlier about gateways with football clubs, and that your own experience was you approaching your club and asking. As you said, that puts the emphasis on the9indovidual to make that step, that's a big thing to do, do you think there's way of clubs engaging with the trans community first?

K: Yeah, I think so. It's difficult to say entirely how but I think, on the one hand, just doing anything that's visible to show that there are supportive of the community, and I know it's a cliché and it gets a bit of criticism sometimes, but when you get for example football clubs or the ECB doing it the other day, changing their social media headers to a pride flag with their logo, it shows at least they're thinking about it. Usually they get a load of criticism from it from both angles, and a lot of it is justified. I was at [redacted] recently, because there was a conference up there, someone from [redacted] mentioned how they had partnered with a local LGBT group to run a sort of trans specific football

taster session, so they run them, they fund it, promoting it through LGBT groups, and saying here's a space to come down and play. So, they've created a space, kind of build it and they will come, and it's been reasonably successful so that's one way that sports clubs can…it's a section for trans people? I don't know if it's exclusively for trans people, but I guess you could use something similar. Like what LGBT running clubs do for example, they say, right, we're an LGBT running club, we're for LGBT people, but actually you don't have to be LGBT to come down, but this is a space for LGBT people. But then you have enough people coming to make the numbers up, but it's typically LGBT people but then you have allies.

AB: I really like that idea.

K: That's the sort of thing that could work.

AB: Yes, and I think you're right, it's those visible role models which are so important. It's such a quick message, like with the Pride flag. Those markers are so important for those looking for inclusive messages.

K: Yes.

AB: I've taken up so much of your time, Katy, thank you. Is there anything else you want to mention or that I have perhaps missed, that you feel is a really important part of your participation?

K: Erm, I suppose we touched on it a bit, but suppose another thing that was really helpful for me was, um, team sports as helping me get out of social isolation? I wasn't in masses of social isolation like some people end up in, but it did help me to get out and see people and socialise more. So, even when I couldn't competitively play, or be involved at all, that would help me to get out and meet people a little bit more, which is thing we see in LGBT communities, especially trans communities. I think when organisations are talking about getting people involved in sport, I see some doing this, and some are better than others, but it doesn't always have to be playing, it can be administration or officiating as well.

AB: That's a really good point, Katy, and I've read that too. Coaches, managers, administrators, they are often still men, and those role models need to be everywhere throughout sport, not just on the pitch or the starting line.

K: And that goes back to what I was saying before about referees, I can't imagine how much abuse a trans refer would take, but if there are trans people in these groups then it helps get the understanding out there.

AB: Absolutely. Thank you. It's been a real pleasure to speak to you, I've really enjoyed it, and there's a huge amount that you've touched on. If there is anything else, or you know anyone who would like to talk, or I can help with anything, then please get back in touch. At this stage I'm just gathering information and then later analysing it.

K: Cool. If I think of anything, or you think of anything, let me know.

AB: I appreciate that, thank you. You were at a conference recently, weren't you?

K: Yeah, at [redacted]. I try and do a bit more, the thing is I run [redacted], and we had a sports area at the park, which was really cool.

AB: I saw that, cos I'm based, I live just outside Brighton and I was volunteering at the TNBI Conference, but I didn't go to Pride cos I was, mainly because I have a young son, but also as a cis gender person I feel it's not my space to occupy.

K: This year we had lots of cis allies, which was good, so this year you would have been absolutely welcome, but I appreciate that a lot of people feel like that and that's valid.

AB: It looked like a great day and it looked like it was hot!

K: It was a fantastic day and it was huge, in felt, on so many levels, like a step change. There were loads more people but also it felt like it had more of an impact than usual? I don't know if that's just the social context that we're in at the minute, but it really felt big.

AB: Yeah, I heard lots of people say the same things, venues there's been so much negativity with the GRA that's it's so important that there's a supportive environment, and a visible one.

K: Absolutely.

AB: Thank you, I'll pop you a consent form in the post if you don't mind along with [redacted]. Do please thank [redacted] again, I feel I caught her on the hoof when we spoke, as she was at lunch, and I didn't want to keep her long. And I hope she's ok, I saw [redacted]

K: Yes, she was [redacted]

AB: Do please send her my regards. And I will let you get on with your weekend.

K: I will. Thanks.

AB: You have a lovely Saturday, take care. Bye bye.

K: You too, bye.

Example of Complete Coded Transcript

Interview 9 with [redacted] (C) and Abby Barras (AB)

Weds 29 August 2018, 7pm, by telephone

[redacted] is 35 and lives in [redacted]. They identify as trans, non-binary, male.

Interview duration: 45 minutes

The interview took place at AB's home and was recorded over the telephone. [redacted] attended the TNBI conference. Interesting interview – emotional but quietly so. We had shared some very friendly emails. [redacted] is a PhD student too.

C: Hi, Abby.

AB: Hi [redacted], hi, are you ok, have I pronounced your name correctly. Is that right?

C: Yeah, that's right, that's right yeah.

AB: Ok. Um, firstly hello!

C: Hello!

AB: Hello and thank you so much for getting n touch, your contribution is so important, and I don't mean to sound like a cliché, but it is, so I do really appreciate you getting in touch.

C: You are welcome.

AB: Before we start, are you ok if I record this?

C: Yeah, absolutely.

AB: Brilliant, ok, and just a little bit of housekeeping, did you have a chance to look at the participant information.

C: Yes, it all makes sense, and it's all fine with me.

AB: Wonderful, thank you for having a look at that. What can we do at the end is I'll post you some consent forms which you just need to have a read of and sign just letting me know whether you are happy to use your name or if you'd like me to anonymise you. I can pop a stamp addressed envelope in there for you, to just sign and return.

C: OK.

AB: Well, it's lovely to speak to you.

C: And you.

AB: And thank you for taking the time out of your day. Is there anything you want to ask me before we begin?

C: Um, I'm interested in how you identify and how you, and what inspired you to do this research?

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AB: Yes, ok, and that's reminded me to ask about your gender identity! I'm sorry, I've had a couple of weeks off and I've forgotten what to do! (both laughs).I identify as female and my pronouns are she and her, and I'm cis gender, and I'm in my mid 40's. I got into this because my master's degree was in gender and I had a particular interest in how women access sport and how that led me into looking more into how trans and non-binary people, are experiencing barriers and transphobia and discussions around sport. And there seemed to be something missing in asking about day to day activities. Cos you're at [redacted], aren't you? You're researching as well?

C: Yeah, that's right, but er, I was only kind of living there for 9 months or so when I was teaching, and now I do the occasional lecture, um, so, I've been in [redacted] for ages, yeah.

AB: So, you're doing your PhD too?

C; Yeah, that's right, I'm just writing up now.

AB: Oh wow, well in which case I'm even more grateful for your time because I know you must be completely cross-eyed with that!

C: I'm really happy to do this.

AB: Thank you. Well as you know yourself with data collection, I'm going to keep it pretty unstructured, I'll start with asking a very general question and we'll take it from there. If there's anything you don't want to answer, do please let me know. It's an unstructured interview.

C: Ok.

AB: Is it alright to ask you a little bit about you? How old you are and where you are from?

C: I'm 35 and, er, I am originally from Berkshire.

AB: Ok.

C: Yeah.

AB: And how do you identify [redacted] if that's ok to ask you?

C: Yeah, I identify as trans, um, non-binary slash, er, male.

AB: Ok. Great, thank you. Can I ask you then about your experiences of participation in sport? You mentioned that you're doing solitary sport at the moment. — sport

C: Yeah, that's right. So, er, running, cycling, going to the gym, um, yeah. By myself (laughs). I do occasionally run with a friend who's actually also trans, that's not the reason we run together, um, but we are, we're very close and maybe that, could have something to do with the fact that we have that shared experience of being trans. I'm not sure. But yeah. We occasionally run together.

gender identity

AB: You mentioned that you were maybe interested in taking part in team sport.

C: Yeah.

AB: Can I ask you a bit about that, can you expand on that please?

C: Yeah, definitely. In the past I played hockey and football and I'd be really keen to do stuff like that again, um, I'm aware of [redacted]. Um, but, I've heard so many things like, oh you don't want to go there, it's not rans friendly at all, it's just completely focused on, predominantly on the G, a bit of the L and maybe a tiny bit of B. So, I haven't really investigated that, and actually, I've been toying

2

inclusion/barriers

TRANSITION

PASSING

with...I only formally started my transition at the beginning of this year. Something I've been thinking about for years and years and years, so it's still kind of something that I'm, er, people who I've been close to have known for quite a long time. But it's definitely something I'm still getting used to articulating, and it's something I think, I think I would almost feel like I needed to announce it if I wanted to do kind of sporting thing. Um. Because I think I'm beginning to pass ok as male, but I don't feel like, as I said, I really identify as non-binary, so as you know, sports is so kind of segregated, so yeah...

AB: So, for you, the aspect of participation in team sport you feel there's a barrier there because you feel you have to announce – or you want to announce - or feel a pressure to announce?

PHYSICAL

C: I suppose there are feelings of inadequacy, um, like I guess, erm, I'm quite short. I'm not particularly strong. Um, so I guess in terms of an average cis male, um, I would...it's funny because I went to an all girls' school and there I was captain of teams, I wold always be picked like first, that kind of thing. But I would anticipate being probably someone people would want on their team? Um, yeah, I guess, there's just something I don't identify with being on the women's team.

AB: Can I take you back a little bit back there when you were at school, and your experiences, it sounds like, and stop me if I make assumptions...that those experiences in terms of sport were positive for you?

BEING GOOD

C: They sort of were, they were in the sense that within the school environment, um, I kind of excelled at these things, but then teachers would say, well I think you should probably go to this external hockey club or whatever, you know. You're really good, give it a go, and I just wouldn't because I, school felt like something I had to do, whereas doing something extracurricular, I don't think I would have been able, sort of, couch it in these terms then, but just felt like something, like anxiety provoking? Yeah?

School

AB: Ok. My apologies, positive was probably the wrong word, when you mentioned captain I assumed...maybe success and positivity are two different things...

C: Yeah, I mean, don't get me wrong, I enjoyed like doing the physical activity, um, yeah. I guess it was quite positive.

AB: And so, when you stopped, and we can bounce around, did you stop participating in sport once you left school, because you clearly had a talent...

C: Yeah, as soon as I left school I didn't do anything like that. So, I carried on a bit of running, some kind of recreational cycling, pretty much like I do now. And I didn't go to the gym for years. So yeah.

AB: How is the sport that you're doing now is connected to your gender identity?

Solo sports?

C: Well, I think I go to the gym because I enjoy it, but I also go there to try and craft, er, a kind of more masculine physique. So, I guess that is, sort of, connected in some way. Um, I think other than that there's nothing about those sports per se that relate to my gender identity other than the fact that I can do them alone.

team sports?

AB: Ok, ok. So, are you doing them alone because you're still, you mentioned that your gender identity is something that you're coming to terms with this year, I don't mean in terms in how you've always felt, but the formal transiting you mentioned earlier?

Bodies again

3

+mixed sport

C: I think some of it has to do with that. Its hard to project into the future and imagine what one would feel like, so, I think a lot of it has to do with the whole non-binary thing, more than the fact that's it's, um, being a more recently physical transition thing. So, if I think if it was kind of mixed sport, or all gender sport, or something like that, I still like competition and stuff, but if that aspect was removed, I think I'd be much more inclined to engage.

AB: That's really interesting, thank you. Can you tell me more about those feeling of the non-binary, your experiences in term so non-binary and sport?

C: As far as I'm aware it's basically non-existent. I've heard people say that quidditch is a thing where gender isn't really a factor, but I'm not big on Harry Potter (both laugh). I don't know if I want to play that. I don't even really know what it is!

AB: Yes, roller derby comes up quite a lot as a positive queer sport to take part in. But quidditch, yes, how are they even playing that? It's not real! How are they flying on broomsticks?

C: No idea (laughs)! You're right, roller derby. I've seen that when I go to trans prides. I guess really, I'm into maybe kind of traditional sports, um, and with that kind of tradition I suppose comes that kind of segregation. I suppose as you most know from your earlier research you did with your masters, it's only really recently that women's sports have even been given much coverage or given much credence.

AB: Absolutely, you are absolutely right, and still woefully underrepresented and under paid. So, in terms of seeking out activities which you may like to do, team sports and things, as a person who identifies as trans and or non-binary, you mentioned BLAGGS already, do you feel that you have to seek out LGBT specific groups in the first instance?

C: Um, in a way, yes. Um, I'm not really sure exactly why, um, I suppose some of it might be that I feel it would be desperately apparent? Um, I, I couldn't go in the changing room for instance with everyone else, I mean I'm sure no one would say , why are you changing here, how come you don't want to change at home, but, um, you know, it's one of those things that probably if I actually did it, it would be fine? But, um, it, I think I'd really kind of have to brace myself to go along to something and I think, yeah. I don't, I'm not sure. Um. Yeah. CHANGING ROOMS

AB: Ok, that's ok, we can…in terms of, and I'm sorry if I'm probing and I don't want to offend you…

C: No, no.

AB: In terms then if you are going to activities where you are wanting to play on the traditional men's team, is this is why you feel you need to announce it, because if you do then get changed in the men's' changing rooms, there's no surprises.

C: Um, no, I'm not firstly, I don't think it's that I'm desperate to play on men's teams I feel it's no longer, it never felt really appropriate for me to play on women's teams which is why I've never done that. It really doesn't feel appropriate now. I don't view myself as a man, so I'm not kind of gagging to get integrated with those teams, um, and I think if I did go along to something and they said, of ok, it's the men's running group or whatever and I went out with them, um, I don't think I would be announcing that I was trans because I wanted to go in the changing rooms, and, um, I was preparing people for that. I think, I don't know why I was doing it…more a sense of shame perhaps? Or a sense that perhaps people would notice this, so I ought to announce it so that I go there, I've said it, and now they don't need to wonder why I've got such skinny legs or something like that?

4 sport + body + trans + changing room COMBINED

Ok, well my apologies if I had misinterpreted that. So, you cycle, and you go to the gym. Are there are any other activities that you have taken up a little more recently? You had a gap in between leaving and school and resuming them later?

• ADDICTION

C: I've been an erratic runner. I was a really heavy drinker for about, for years ad years and years, and during that time I did very little sport. But the last four and a half years I've been sober, so I've been doing a lot more stuff in that sense and I say probably n the last tow years I've been doing quite a lot.

AB: Congratulations on being sober, that's small achievement.

C: Thank you.

AB: So, you're doing more sport, you're getting out and feeling you are healthier and happier?

C: Absolutely! And with the gym in fact, I kind of in the last three months I've kind of ventured downstairs to the weights area, which is, I mean there's something to say that, you know, you have to be certain kind of person to go down there, but, it tends to be populated by people who appear to be cis men. Um, pretty muscular, doing their thing so., I started to venture down there, and I don't care anymore, and it doesn't even induce anxiety, so that's quite cool.

CIS MEN (stero-types)

AB: Ok. And the gym you go, just a run of the mill gym, a walk in, it's a regular gym?

C: Yeah, it's just, the one on [redacted], the gym...

AB: Yeah, I know it! And you feel comfortable there, you've not felt any barriers to participating there, in direct relation to your gender identity?

CHANGING ROOM

C: I think the only thing I'd say it's quite fortuitous that I live very close, so I just get changed at home, and then I go there and get changed when I get back. There is a disabled toilet that I imagine one could use, but I would feel kind of bad about doing that because it's for disabled people to use. And also, it feels a bit like, hi there, why don't I just announce myself...yeah. It isn't always that I'm ashamed of being trans, because I'm not, but sometimes I'm worried about safety and things like that too.

SAFETY

AB: Of course. Do you feel that safety with participation in sport for yourself is a very real issue? And forgive me if I'm being completely naïve about this.

C: No, no. its fine, it's so hard t say. I think until something happens it doesn't feel completely real, but it's something I'm aware one needs to be mindful of?

SAFETY

AB: Do you feel that gyms and sporting arenas are potentially spaces for, you know, concerns about safety for people who are gender non-conforming?

C: Not necessarily, um, I can only speak for myself. But I don't feel that threat in these spaces, I worry that someone may notice something and accost me outside that space?

SPACES

AB: Ok, thank you for sharing that, I can appreciate that's not an easy, you know, to talk about.

C: It's fine.

AB: How does sport make you feel when you do what you do?

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ENJOYMENT

C: Really good. I love it, and um, I love doing sports with people as well as just, it's so rare I would do that. Like I say I really like football but, I only occasionally play it, just a kick about maybe with one friend. Um, so yep.

AB: Are there teams or groups that you would be comfortable approaching to participate? Or possibly not what you have the time for with the PhD!

C: Its not something I've recently investigated. I think it's something I've with in the past, and I had a look at the [redacted] team. There is, as you know, [redacted] as well. I haven't been to any of those sessions, but I'm keeping an eye on what they're doing, and I think it's a really brilliant initiative. The only thing about that I guess, due to funding and due to the kind of niche targeting, it's pretty small groups? So, I've never seen something like football on there, so I suppose it might bene be a bit of a struggle to get 5 a side?

NICHE

AB: Yes, that's come up a few times in terms of irregularity for people wanting to do sport which is only just, um, you know trans, or non-binary specifically, that often it's hard to get people together regularly together in once space if there aren't enough people.

C: I agree.

AB: I kind of feel that you've given me so such in such a short amount of time, are there...

C: Good!

AB: Yes, it's lovely! Thank you. Is there anything you feel in terms if your own experience, um, as a non-binary person that could be made, any barrier out feel that could be reduced perhaps for people in sport? On a day to day level?

MIXED

C: Um, I think it would be nice sometimes to, not having to specify your gender, sometimes I think about, I used to compete in running races, a lot, and, yeah, as like a teenager, and, um, sometimes think about doing that now, but you have to pick whether you're male or female, um, and I understand that they are going to categorise people or whatever, but it would nice to be able to say, well ok, can you just record my time and not have to say ok, I was in the, you know, the top 2000 men or women or whatever, you know.

GENDER IMP

AB: Do you think with the way sport is segregated in terms of, because lots of people don't think sport should be segregated, because like you said, you go running and it doesn't really make that much difference as you said, it's for the stats at the end, who's come where and if they're male or female...why we can't we have mixed teams, I saw some swimming recently...I'd never seen that before...

C: Yea, that's interesting and I suppose you sometimes you have mixed doubles and things.

AB: Do you think that some people feel worried, it's an incorrect worry and one I don't agree with, in terms, in particular with competitive advantage and trans women, cos you mentioned earlier about feeling...

C: At a disadvantage?

AB: That people wouldn't want you on their team?

C: Yeah. Just to be really clear it's not an argument I agree with either about trans women, but having said that, and I'm ashamed to say it but I'm going to say it anyway, you know when I was talking about running, that's just me doing it, say I was to enter a competition or a half marathon or

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COMP ADVANTAGE

whatever, it's not like I'm letting down the team. But when I was a teenager I used to sometimes to win stuff and I did really well...now, my um...

AB: Ok. C. AD | BODY | MASC | PHYSIOLOGY

C: Statistically, but that's just come from my minor ego thing, that's not a serious concern but it's just something that's there. People wold think that, um, I sadly I think often the problem is nearly always with trans women, because I think trans masculine people kind of blend in much more easily, and I think, I think there's a weird correlation between being physically visible and yours trans heritage being physically visible. And people feeling like perhaps, er, you've got an unfair advantage, if you are quite tall and muscular and you were a trans women people would have more of a problem with you than if you were very slight and you know, perhaps you were read as cis?

AB: Yea, yeah, absolutely. And it's ironic really, there's an American triathlete who's trans and he's winning everything. But people make incorrect assumptions about trans women and think they're cheating just by definition of being trans. And trans men are not read that same way. Because they are not expected to win and so they count. And it's a terrible thing to say and I don't agree with it all.

C: Yeah, yeah, absolutely, in that kind of heteronormative masculinity are fundamentally still viewed as women.

AB: yes. G. CIS | T. WOMEN | C. AD.

C: So, yeah, you're not a threat, cos you're just a woman, which is wrong in so many levels. Oh, that's amazing! Chris Mosier?

AB: Yes. MOSIER. He's a really big advocate for LGBT for sports inclusion in the states. Do you feel then that you are physiological disadvantaged when you compete?

C: Well now I feel bad because of Chris Mosier winning when answering!

AB: No! Don't feel bad!

C: Do I think I'm at a physiological disadvantage? — HM | GN !!!

AB: Because you mentioned earlier about that feeling about not being good enough.

C: Yeah, I do think I am, I think if you are going to look at it through a binary lens, then yeah, definitely. I go to the gym I see a lot of people who I imagine as cis women lifting a lot more than I do, they seem a lot more physically fit. And I'm trying really hard! Um, so, and it is that terrible assumption that's why I say, if you look through that heteronormative and divisive lens, that if women are inferior, and men are on top of that, then you know, well, I must be really inferior, and I suppose, er, I guess me kind of thinking that on some level means in some way those kinds of toxic thoughts must filter into my being, even though er, intellectually, politically, I whole heartedly do not agree with, you know, those statements or sentiments?

AB: Yeah, that's really well put, I feel the same. So, [redacted], I don't want to keep you, you must be exhausted, and these things can be quite tiring, I cannot thank you enough for your time. It's been a really interesting and through provoking conversation, and I'm really blown away by your generosity in terms of talking to me, so thank you very much

C: Well, thank you for speaking with me.

AB: Would you like me to send you the consent forms with the stamp addressed envelope? I can send you anonymous and non-anonymous and you can decide.

C: Yeah, please do, thank you.

AB: It's not a hassle for you?

C: It's fine.

AB: Is there a preferred address?

C: It's [redacted].

AB: Lovely, thank you. Is there anything else that you feel you want to raise before we end?

C: No, I don't think so, thank you.

AB: And of you have any questions or anything you're not happy about, please get in touch. Good luck with your PhD!

C: And you too, I look forward to hearing about your findings!

AB: Thank you. Maybe we should have a cup of tea as students sometime, it's so funny, doing a PhD!

C: It is!

AB: Ok, you take care, and bye.

C: You too, bye.

Table 2: Coding Table (codes extracted after initially manually colour-coding transcripts)

Name	Sport	Age	Gender Identity	Codes extracted from manual coding becoming THEMES
1. Sarah	Tennis and darts	67	Trans woman	• Class and poverty • Childhood • Gendered sport • Discrimination • Space (darts v tennis) • Acceptance • Biology, competitive advantage • Happiness and joy • Importance of sport • Women's rights. • Role models
2. Judith	Climbing, hiking, kayaking, running	47	Trans woman (lives mostly as a man)	• Biology, competitive advantage • Fairness, rules • Passing – clothing and makeup • Space – where is ok to pass? • Hormones • Racial Stereotypes • Equipment
3. Charlotte	Swimming, running	33	Trans woman	• School and trauma, PE, puberty • Transition • Competitive advantage • Activism and feminism • Space – allowing trans people in cis spaces and visa versa
4. Katy	Football, running	34	Trans woman	• Transition, passing, embodiment • Competitive advantage, male socialisation, internalised misogyny • Hormones, biology, club regulations • Acceptance by team • Space – football pitch, social barriers • Self-esteem, confidence, happiness • Activism • Role models • Spectators, staff, training • Importance of sport to happiness
5. Jennifer	Climbing, kayaking, orienteering, cycling	50	Trans woman	• Childhood, gender dysphoria • Transition, body • Joy of sport, social aspect • Competitive advantage, fairness • Role models (BMBO) • Spaces – outdoors and barriers • Sport for health and sanity • Importance of inclusivity
6. Aimee	Roller derby, gym, running	35	Trans woman, female	• Some things are not a barrier if trans (badminton/tennis) • Spaces – pool, gym, roller rink, queer • Bodies – acceptance of all shapes • Gendered language • Gendered clothing • Identified from young age • Hormonal balance, low testosterone, • Competitive advantage, IOC, rules, physiology • V passionate about sport, good at it, important for well-being Barriers

7. Persia	Yoga. Swimming	69	Trans woman	• TERFS, activism, rad fems, prejudice, language • Transition • Freedom to exercise anywhere as passes • Goes to yoga and swims (not trans, doesn't need to, body passes) • Swimming as a reward • Karate 'made my body' • My body is lithe and in good shape, hyper-aware of her body • Spiritual gender • Gender is a mockery, it's theatre
8. Evren	Boxing	23	Trans masculine, non-binary	• Never thought sport was them, testosterone changed everything • Contact sports and identity and physicality cancelling each other out • Inclusive but not accessible spaces • Removes self from spaces to pre-empt cheating trope • Space – linear, impasse, belonging to neither space but needing the techniques training, can't go to either class • Feels no longer welcome in sorts spaces they would like to be • Segregation, box putting, esp with contact sports, being gendered as male means spending all of energy getting hit • Mixed sex camaraderie works well • Assumed strength or average strength based on gender - stereotyping • Tennis, class, football, race, cis-het dominance • Junk science, fake and constructed categories • Hormones and muscles matter, transition •
9. Craig	35	Running, gym, cycling	Trans masculine, non-binary	• Played sport as a child and was good but dysphoric • Transition, inadequacy, competitive advantage • Passing • Spaces – gendered • Shame (of body) • Addiction
10. Annie	55	Motor sport, occasional yoga, swimming	Transsexual, female	• Grew up around motor sport • Gender has never been a barrier, • Perception, how people see you – she is stealth, she has no issues, others have issues • NOT transgender, gender is a social construct. • Motorsport – huge joy and passionate • Life is happy, occasional discrimination at work • Equality and feminism • Addiction • Unfairness in sport • Caster, Serena, unfairness
11. Tom	26	Water polo, swimming, football	Trans, gender queer, non-binary	• Loves water polo, contact sport • Sense of achievement • Role models and inclusivity, even in LGBT clubs, self-id and visibility important • First sport enjoyed since school • Helped body confidence

				• Social aspects sometimes awkward • More training (staff and players) would help • Helps that they pass as masculine • Barriers are around being good enough • Set up trans football group, recreational but mixed gender, inclusive, all abilities • Historical barriers at sport (school, youth) impact on later involvement, you never improve because you never play • Loves team activities
12. Miles	26	Male, trans male	Circus skills, skateboarding, horse riding, swimming, climbing; hockey, football and athletics when younger	• Stopped sports other than s'boarding when got to college, felt uncomfortable in male/female spaces • Worried about other people • Gendered nature of sport generally finds uncomfortable, segregation etc. • Played happily on men's football team • Puberty triggered gender dysphoria, hyper aware of body • Gendered spaces (changing rooms etc) • Skateboarding very inclusive but treated him differently (cooler) when he identified as female • Juggling – male jugglers have bigger expectations on them than female, bar is higher (pressure from peers). • Circus inclusive, family supportive • Toxic masculinity • Never compared himself to male jugglers, so was shocked that when performing as male his talent was deemed substandard. • Circus arts classes all mixed • No other trans people • Unhappy with body when younger • Resisted transitioning so as not to hurt other people, made him feel sad, loathed self and felt isolated • Scared that transitioning would mean no longer able to hang out with girls or play sports with them, that boys would ignore him too • Uni increased dysphoria – gendered clothing in circus was a big issue, men allowed more flexibility

				• Ariel v gendered, liked disrupting it, felt liberating (political with a small p) • Identity and embodiment, liked when nobody knew if he was male or female, nickname • Being read as masculine closed some doors but opened others • Climbing – harnesses, packing, can make you feel bad about self • Gendered equipment • Changing rooms, being confronted by mothers with children and/or teenage girls • Safe spaces, importance of allies and friends to help • Swimming and packing • Binders – positives and negatives • Mental health • Safety, toilets, bad GP experience • More easily available resources and information earlier in life (school etc) would help lots • Body positivity, role models (being and having visible ones) • Managing anxiety with exercise, knowing own body • Having fun • Trans specific spaces in sport crucial
13. Alice	45	Trans woman	Cycling, horse riding, running and rugby when younger and helper at events	• Able to hide feminine side (shaving legs) in cycling • Importance of supportive wife • Dysphoria dates back to early teens • Hyper aware of feeling not right in body from early teens • Does not enjoy alpha male environments • Loved riding and show jumping, often female driven • Bullied, worried about looks and how perceived • No obvious barriers to doing sport but only recently come out, so when younger didn't understand discomfort, and kept playing rugby • Cycling important for mental health as still guarded about gender identity • Cycling also caused body issues to increase, weight loss, self-image • Role models, visibility • Changing facilities at open air events • Feels inclusion in sport intersects across lots of

				areas (disability, fat bodies etc) • Clothing, park run
14. Alix	27	Trans masculine, gender non-conforming	Running, coaching	• Most of life completely inactive, enjoyed sport before school. Trans Can Sport • Sport was traumatic, school, PE, homophobic bullying • Spaces - bullying, violence, changing rooms, yoga, clothing • Puberty and sexuality, uncomfortable in gendered spaces but couldn't articulate why • Facilities, under the surface gendered aspect was off putting • Addiction - eating issues, gender dysphoria • Role models, activism, Chris Mosier • Yoga and running not gender neural – instructor touches, menstruation, leagues, clothing • Energy level, hormones, steroids • Coaching, breaking down barriers • Spaces - improving for trans people, swimming, • TW more vulnerable, trans misogyny, women in sport, bodies, advantage, TW bear the brunt • Feels good about self in sport and those spaces, gym, changing etc • Private part of identity that doesn't always get a choice about keeping private (swimming, scars) • Kitemarking • Positive experiences are important, building bridge • Proud of being trans, but sometimes when transitioning can feel like whole life, so nice to have a break from that • A joyful part of their identity, being trans is good for their mental health, a really big part of their life
15. Harry	53	Football, badminton, aqua aerobics	Male	• Always felt like a boy from a young age and wanted to play football. Put pressure on self to play better as felt that being a boy equalled being better at sport • Played netball at school but hated it • Loves racquet sports even though they are gendered

				• Hates mixed doubles as worries won't be as good as male partner (not that he'd be found out as trans, doesn't care) • Went to queer football, but never any cis men there, and mostly women (who he worries he'll have an advantage over) • Feels stuck in the middle sometimes still in sport • Knows that assumptions about male bodied people being better are false, but still wants to be • Doesn't have any barriers as transitioned long time ago and passes • Loves exercise and is competitive, social aspect • Making sports mixed would help inclusivity • Better changing facilities • Taking testosterone has improved strength but not speed or skill • GRA and sport – red herring
16. Alix	29	Personal trainer	Trans masculine	• Space – gyms are very gendered and often dominated by cis men • Swims but not very comfortable • Took a long time before he'd use changing rooms and showers, which made him angry • Weights room very toxic – not good for women either • Had visible scars so does worry about being seen or confronted or feeling unsafe • Knows if confronted the other person would have to leave gym but the feeling is unpleasant • Has raised issues with gym before (membership card asks for pronouns but only has M/F boxes), so feels tokenistic • Visibility of staff crucial, PT's are often very normative looking, more diversity generally is welcoming for all • Different bodies should be welcome • Addiction – sport helped to take mind off • Mental health • Wants to help others who are trans to enjoy sport and feel safe • Gendered language at PT training sessions and lack of information about trans bodies (c/f allowances for pregnancy, age etc) • Does not like cis men, does not want to pass!

				• Importance of Trans Can Sport and other trans specific places • Trans people face lots of micro aggressions (language, assumptions, seen as a minority so not worth considering) • Can be made to feel body is less valid than normative ones • Recognises the importance of trans people exercising (mental health, dysphoria) and only works with them • Gendered spaces and the assumptions that get made about someone in that space (must be male or female) • School, PE was traumatic because of the gendering, not fun – so thought sport not for him rather than understanding the reasons • Advantage, rules, hormones, puberty, stereotyping • Understanding by others of different needs and changes that trans people's bodies may have – it's nice to have a trans trainer because you don't have to explain everything • Binders • Role models, allies, normalising trans inclusivity (and all bodies) in exercise
17. Jude	21	Roller derby, rugby	Non-binary	• Joined roller derby to make friends, loves the social aspect and how queer it is • Also plays rugby • Pronouns and language when correct is very validating • Roller derby is very accepting of different bodies and sees all bodies as improving the diversity and strength of the team • Clothing at roller derby is brilliant, all about being comfortable and rebellious and that's great • Inclusive and supportive space, good for mental health • Visibility and role models make a big difference (incl. mainstream sports) • Rugby – also a great queer team, lobes running around, liberating • Everyone changes together, feels safe and body is accepted • Gender assumptions (feminine)

				• Binders • Some sport can feel uncomfortable if can't wear what they want – Irish dancing, gymnastics, swimming, feminine and tight clothing etc • Trans only groups are crucial • Gendered equipment (gymnastics) • Sexualisation of women in sport generally • Puberty
18. Joe	24	Water polo, rugby, swimming	Non-binary, trans masculine, trans male	• Loves water polo passionately and is very good • Trans 'feelings' came on very suddenly • Felt happiest in the water, felt conflicted, hate gendered aspects like changing rooms and language • Clothing and body image • Binders • Importance of teammates support • Knew that taking testosterone would mean an end to playing – would be stronger and did not want anyone to feel uncomfortable • Swimming costume would be a nightmare • So long as could keep playing felt ok, but mentally not brilliant • When stopped playing felt awful, felt let team down, missed it terribly • Found rugby helped – loves contact sports • Queer women's team, felt safe and was accepted • Still not passing – tall and broad, knew wouldn't fit in with men's team. • Passing was about not being the odd one out, didn't want to explain to others (on another team) • Language, pronouns, acceptance, identity are a very big deal • Liked disrupting gender norms at matches • Perceptions of him as male vs reality of strength and ability • Worried people wouldn't tackle him or were scared and didn't want that • Social aspect • Socialization of women to be less aggressive • Difference in coaches' attitudes to male and female players • Left rugby when finished uni

				• Nowhere to play now, feels no space for him to fit • Mixed teams would be good • Really misses water polo and wants to play – still finding the right space • Importance of trans only spaces • Importance of visibility and allies and at least trying to be inclusive and welcoming from the start • No space for trans people, no one knows what to 'do with us' • Other bodies are given allowances (incl. puberty) • Hates the gym, toxic masculinity and cis male domination • Feeling judged • More diversity in gyms benefits everyone • Role models • Communal changing rooms would be better rather than changing in the loo • Seem to be very few other trans people doing port in the real world • Fairness, hormones, having to tell other people when wanting to keep on the team, doing all the work • BUCS and RFU policies • Wanting to be fair to his team • Being discussed without consent

Image A: Photo of codes 'activity' used to identify and organise themes.