TROUBLING SPORT OR TROUBLED BY SPORT: EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER ATHLETES

Cathryn B. Lucas

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

December 2009

Committee:

Dr. Vikki Krane, Advisor

Dr. Nancy Orel

Dr. Nancy Spencer
ABSTRACT

Vikki Krane, Advisor

Sport has long been considered a space in which traditional gender norms are reinforced. The gender binary in sport (the belief in only 2 categories of sex and gender: male/masculine and female/feminine) is strictly policed in today’s sporting climate by sexist, homophobic and transphobic language and behavior (Messner, 2002; Semerjian & Cohen, 2006). While a few openly transgender athletes have gained attention and challenged the traditional notions of gender in sport, little literature has examined the personal and cultural impact of their participation. A queer-feminist framework, forwarded by Sykes (1998), guided this critical examination of the experiences of transgender athletes. Three self-identified transgender athletes participated in 2 interviews: the first, unstructured, covered their sport experiences; the second, semi-structured, clarified and expanded upon issues raised in the first interview. All three participants competed in high school sports, two continued at the collegiate club level, and one continued in martial arts. The participants’ experiences were presented in two narrative forms composed across the participants’ interviews, but comprised entirely of their own words: (a) background profiles and (b) multiple, short narratives addressing various themes. A layered narrative approach (Caulley, 2008) was used to present and analyze the participants’ experiences. The athletes’ narratives, juxtaposed with theoretical discussion, challenged common definitions of “transgender athlete” and exposed a gender continuum in sport. Because their gender identities varied across the gender continuum,
the participants’ presence in sporting spaces challenged the common practice of
segregation by gender. All three participants found safe spaces in which to participate,
however seemingly supportive actions, such as a separate locker room designation,
became problematic. Two participants experienced prejudiced behavior even within queer
sport settings. The participants’ diverse gender-identities troubled the sport physiology
research rooted in the trans narrative promoted by the medical industry. The common
discourse in sport, which tends to conflate transsexual with transgender and ignore non-
transsexual people, was troubled by the participants’ diverse gender identities.
Transgender participation policies based in the sport physiology research, such as the
IOC’s Stockholm Consensus, were also challenged. Implications for both critical research
and inclusive practice were forwarded.
For all the trans people sport has forgotten.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Vikki Krane, for all her encouragement and guidance through this process. From the moment the idea was born to the final revision, she believed in me, stood behind my ideas, and pushed me to think beyond. There are not enough words to express my gratitude to her for all she has done. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my committee members for all their hard work and thought provoking feedback. This thesis would not even be a shadow of its full self without their help. I would especially like to thank them for their encouragement to write myself into the thesis, as that has made a world of difference. Thank you.

I would like to thank all my friends and family who have endured this seemingly endless process, complete with sometimes unanswered phone calls and month-long delays in returning emails. I would like to thank Sarah especially for coming to understand the true meaning of “almost done.” Without all of your encouragement and reminders that a world exists outside my office, this thesis might have swallowed me whole. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank Ryan, Harvey, and Jake for sharing their lives with me. This thesis would not exist without their willingness to tell me about intimate details of their lives. They have taught me more than any class could ever teach (sorry Vikki) and have renewed my zest for working toward transformative change. Thank you.

A thousand thanks to all of you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW 1

Bullying and Harassment 5
Sport and the Maintenance of the Gender Binary 7
Invisible Transgender Athletes and the Medical Establishment 11
Queer-Feminist Approach 15
Current Study 19

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY 20

Participants 21
Gaining Access 21
Interviews 22
Procedure 24
Trustworthiness 26
Reflexivity 28
Data Analysis 37

CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 39

Participant Profiles 39
Ryan 39
Jake 43
Harvey 46
Summary 49

Layered Narrative 49
The Gender Identification Process 49
Transitioning 57
Safe Spaces for Sport Participation 59
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queer Resistance and Community Formation</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer Resistance as a Continually Negotiated Process</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Locker Room</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and Gender Segregation</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Participation and Policy</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fairness Debate</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on the Researcher’s Lens</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections on a Narrative Approach</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Implications</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Remarks</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOTES</strong></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX B: INTERST FORM AND INFORMED CONSENT</strong></td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX C: SELECTIONS FROM REFLEXIVITY LOG</strong></td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDIX D: FREQUENTLY USED TRANS TERMS</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Three women stand on a podium, mud still caked on their jerseys and shorts. They have just completed the toughest course of the season. They all appear excited and the electricity of the crowd is high. Just before the women are announced, a man hands something to the second place finisher. It is a t-shirt, she puts it on. Scribbled in block letters is the statement, “100% Pure Woman Champ 2006.” After a few moments, the crowd begins to hoot and holler.

This scene could be very confusing to the casual observer. All of the women look like downhill mountain bikers; long haired ruffians who are muscled but not like body builders. On the surface they all appear to be quite normal. Perhaps the second place finisher is making a statement about the sexual promiscuity of the winner.

The crowd grows rowdier, some laughing and some beginning to yell obscenities.

“She-male! Get off the stage!”

“You’re not a real woman, go home!”

All three athletes continue to smile, although they sense that something is amiss. Clearly, Danika Schroeter’s t-shirt is not a message about promiscuity. The woman standing atop the first place podium is Michelle Dumaresq and she is openly transsexual. She has just won the Canadian national downhill mountain biking championship, and many people are not happy about it. Her presence has caused quite a stir amongst the Canadian mountain biking community. Her competitors circulated petitions for her removal, after she placed well in several events, and here at the national championships her place in women’s mountain biking is the subject of protests again.
The Canadian cycling governing body uses the same policy for transsexual participation as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which is the Stockholm Consensus. This policy, adopted in 2004, allows transsexual athletes to compete in IOC sanctioned events. The athletes must meet the criteria of: full sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), at least two years of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and legal recognition of their gender change (IOC, 2004). Having met these criteria, Dumaresq freely competes in the women’s category and would be eligible to compete in the Olympics if downhill mountain biking were added to the program.

The response of her competitors indicates that the policy is quite controversial. A quick internet search about Dumaresq’s inclusion in the women’s competition will reveal a plethora of positive, negative, and uninformed opinions. Within sport, and North American society more generally, there is a lack of understanding about transgender identities, bodies, and athletic inclusion. These opinions are complicated by cultural norms about the nature of gender, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and sport. These cultural norms are specific to modern North American culture, and would be very different in any other sociocultural moment in history. However, norms operate in ways that ensure they are continually reinforced (Butler, 1990). For example, in U.S. society gender is typically thought of as directly linked to sex and that both are natural and biologically derived characteristics. This assumption ignores the cultural forces that reinforce it and therefore nothing can challenge it. The more people believe it, the more gender is considered natural.

However, norms can be resisted via shifting language. Christina (1997) suggests that some words we use to define ourselves are “loaded” with multiple interpretations. Our interpretations of these words then shape the way we experience and understand the world around us. The words people use to describe gender often have multiple meanings that can be
redefined in new ways. Sex, gender, and transgender are three of these loaded words. They are understood by different people to mean very different things. These various meanings have value attached to them. Christina (1997) argues that a common definition must be identified before dialogue can emerge. Therefore it is critical to define sex, gender, and transgender before productive discussions can be engaged.

Sex is the sum of multiple biological and physiological characteristics of a person that classifies them; whereas gender is the culturally and socially constructed characteristics of a person (Brown & Rounsley, 1996). Sex, therefore, encompasses an individual’s chromosomal make up, hormonal disposition, external and internal reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. While multiple combinations of genetic and physiological make-ups are reflected in a wide array of physical bodies, only two categories of sex are recognized by the medical industry: male and female. Typically male sex is defined by XY chromosomes, larger amount of testosterone than estrogen, presence of testes and penis, and secondary characteristics such as facial hair and deepened voice. Female sex is defined by XX chromosomes; larger amounts of estrogen than testosterone; presence of vagina, uterus, and ovaries; and secondary sex characteristics such as breast growth and menarche.

Gender, then, is separate from sex. Again, only two options are recognized in contemporary American society: man (masculine) and woman (feminine). In today’s society, masculinity is characterized by strength, stoicism, and steadfastness; whereas femininity is characterized by weakness, emotionality, and indecisiveness. These categories are culturally constructed, meaning that they have a specific definition created in and reinforced by sociocultural forces in a specific historical moment (Butler, 1990). Masculine and feminine, then, are shifting categories. What was considered masculine 500 years ago in France is different that
what is considered masculine today in America, and both will be different than what will be considered masculine one thousand years from now.

Today, both sex and gender are understood as dichotomous categories. That is, only two options exist, with male and female for sex and man/masculine and woman/feminine for gender. To understand one category, you must know it as NOT the other (Delphy, 2003). To be male is to be NOT female, to be masculine is to be NOT feminine. This is known as the sex/gender binary. Additionally, sex has been assumed to precede gender; a child with male anatomy will be a (masculine) man and a child with female anatomy will be a (feminine) woman (Delphy, 2003).

Boys and girls “learn to move, speak, dress, and behave in the way the culture deems appropriate for a male or female” (Brown & Rounsley, 1996, p. 21) as they grow up in that culture. The way that people move, speak, dress, and act is an individual’s gender expression. Gender identity is the internal sense an individual has of “being either male, female, something other, or in between” (Cho et al., 2004, p. 5). Gender identity cannot be deduced by the way a person dresses, moves, or looks (Brown & Rounsley, 1996).

Most peoples’ sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression align predictably. However, some peoples’ sex, gender, gender identity, or gender expression may not match. As Diamond (2002) defined, people with an incongruence between an individual’s inner sense of self-gender and the gender assigned at birth are transgender.

Diamond’s (2002) definition of transgender has a multitude of manifestations. Intersex people are born with both male and female genitals. Transsexuals have completed sexual reassignment surgery, are currently taking hormones, and have legally changed gender. Some people feel that their gender identity is of neither female nor male, while other people feel that their gender identity is a mixture of both masculine and feminine. Mayer et al. (2008), therefore,
define transgender as “an inclusive term to describe people who have gender identities, expressions, or behaviors not traditionally associated with their birth sex” (p. 990). This definition takes all people’s gender and gender identity into account without limiting the accessibility of the category.

Recently, transgender has come to be considered an umbrella term including anyone who challenges the boundaries of sex and gender (Feinburg, 1996; Plante, 2006). “Trans” people often resist gender categorization and they may situate themselves “within the broad matrix of socially constructed gender” (Plante, p. 84). Stryker (2007) explains

Some people move away from their birth-assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to another gender in which it would be better for them to live; others want to strike out toward some new location, some place not yet clearly defined or concretely occupied; still others simply feel the need to get away from the conventional expectations bound up with the gender that was initially put upon them. In any case it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place - rather than any particular destination or mode of transition - that best characterizes the concept of “transgender” (emphasis in original).

Like Stryker, I have chosen the term transgender because it is the movement that I would like to privilege in this study. The type of embodied manifestation is not as important as the movement away from the rigid dichotomous sex/gender structure.

*Bullying and Harassment*

Transgender individuals are one of the most discriminated against social groups in society today and they have few legal protections (Stryker, 2008). Very few anti-discrimination clauses include gender identity and expression. Employers, therefore, can deny employment and
promotion or even terminate individuals based solely on their gender identity or expression (Namaste, 2000). Transgender individuals also often face discrimination at the hands of doctors and first responders who refuse to give them medical treatment (Feinberg, 1998). Additionally, many trans people face daily verbal harassment from strangers, peers, teachers, co-workers, and even family members (Sausa, 2005; Wilchins, 1997). The verbal harassment runs the gamut from the seemingly benign “are you a boy or a girl” to the overt “faggot” (Wilchins, 2006).

In schools, gender-related bullying is very common (Cho et al., 2004; Roberts, 2008). Boys who fail to do boy appropriate things well are called sissies and are often beat up, and girls who fail to do girl appropriate things are shunned. For youth who identify as transgender, the bullying can be even worse. In a 2003 survey, 55% of transgender youth who responded reported that they were physically assaulted at school because of their gender expression, 81% reported that they were sexually harassed at school because of their gender expression, and 90% reported that they felt unsafe at school (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight, Education Network, 2003).

Because transgender people challenge the dichotomous gender categories, bullying and harassment serve to reinforce the gender binary by labeling transgender people as deviant, abnormal, and wrong (Stryker, 2008). It is important to remember that as a social construction, gender is dependent on the culture and the historical moment in which it was created. Some cultures across the globe, past and present, have recognized three or four genders. Some Native American tribes believed that transgender people were better able to converse with spirits and therefore were treated with respect and reverence (Stryker, 2008). In contemporary American society, only two genders are recognized and the gender norms are strictly enforced and the boundaries strictly policed by daily verbal and physical harassment.
Sport and the Maintenance of the Gender Binary

Sport is an unfriendly site for many people. They might remember the bullying they received after dropping a ball or for wanting to dance instead of play football. They might remember the pain of being ridiculed for beating the boys or for being too good in a sport in which they were not supposed to be successful. This ridicule often is triggered by gender incongruence: children and adolescents are ridiculed for perceived cross-gender behavior. Little boys are ridiculed for dropping the ball or dancing, while little girls are ridiculed for playing football or winning games against boys. Those individuals who fail to fulfill the norms in sport suffer very real consequences (Krane, 2001; Krane, in press).

As a social institution, sport both reflects and informs societal practice. It comes as no surprise then, that traditional gender norms are reinforced within sport settings. In fact, sport has long been considered a masculine preserve, fit for only the most masculine men (Cahn, 1993; Messner, 2002; Pronger, 1990). Modern sport was originally developed as a place where boys learned to be men through physical games (Rader, 2004). In the 1800s, it commonly was believed that boys were being emasculated at school. Rigorous physical activities were developed to combat this emasculation and to instill a sense of masculinity in the boys. President Theodore Roosevelt once said that only aggressive sports could develop “Brawn, the spirit, the self-confidence, and quickness in men” (quoted in Rader, 2004, p. 105). Sport was no place for a woman to be, as prevailing Victorian ideals for women emphasized passivity and frailty.

By the mid-twentieth century, public opinion had changed, but not by much. Metheny (1965) forwarded guidelines for appropriate physical activities for men and women. Proper activities for men included those with heavy physical contact and sports that demanded domination of the opponent. Proper physical activities for women included those that utilized
“natural” body movements and very little contact with the opposition. This demarcation of appropriate behaviors falls well in line with traditional gendered social norms. At that time, men were expected to be assertive, strong, and determined while women were expected to be passive, weak, and obedient (Kane, 1987). Appropriate physical activities for men included football, wrestling, and basketball; whereas appropriate activities for women included dance, ice skating, and swimming.

With the implementation of Title IX, the number of women playing sports increased exponentially (Messner, 1988). This included sports that had previously been considered inappropriate for women. By the 1980s ideas about appropriate physical activity had evolved, but a clear difference between the expectations for men and women in sport remained (Kane, 1987). Sports considered appropriate for men still demanded heavy contact and domination, while sports considered appropriate for women now permitted competitive atmospheres but still no heavy physical contact. It was perceived as acceptable for women to play softball and tennis, but still not appropriate to play basketball or football.

More recently, Riemer and Visio (2003) reported that more gender neutral sports existed, but that the majority of people still consider Metheny’s gender guidelines appropriate today. Basketball, softball, soccer, and volleyball were found to be considered appropriate for both men and women. However, the heavy contact or collision sports such as football and rugby still are considered inappropriate for women to play (Ravel & Rail, 2006).

The demarcation of appropriate activities and athlete behavior has been strictly policed throughout sport history. Although sexuality and gender identity are not directly related, in sport they often are conflated. Gender inappropriate behavior stands as a marker of homosexuality. Therefore, the mannish lesbian and effeminate gay male stereotypes have long been used to
prevent gender non-conforming women and men from entering the sport world (Anderson, 2005; Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1992; Griffin 1998; Krane, 1996; Krane, 1997). The lesbian label has been used against many female athletes to discredit their accomplishments, and it works by scaring all women, regardless of their actual sexual orientation or gender identity, into emphasizing their femininity on and off the field (Griffin, 1998). Babe Didrickson is a highly illustrative example. She was a world class athlete, winning championships in multiple sports and setting multiple world records. However, her amazing athletic accomplishments were overshadowed by rumors surrounding her sexual orientation. Eventually she underwent a super-feminizing makeover. She switched from track and field to golf, wore skirts and bonnets, and married George Zaharias to prove she was a proper lady (Cahn, 1993). After this makeover, she was well received by the public and became a beloved golfer.

Conversely, emphasis on hyper-masculinity and strength renders effeminate gay men invisible in sport (Anderson, 2005). Boys and men who are perceived to be homosexual because they do not engage in gender appropriate activities are targets of homophobic bullying (Roberts, 2008). These boys and men are either driven out of sport or they begin to act in appropriately masculine behaviors. They often become complicit in the bullying behavior to secure their perceived masculinity (Messner, 2002). These bullying behaviors again serve to reinforce the perception that gay men and gender non-conforming men are absent from sport. This perceived absence then reconfirms sport’s location as a masculine pursuit and reinforces the gender dichotomy where masculine equals sport excellence and feminine equals sport failure.

Children recognize gender appropriate sport and physical activities and understand the consequences and stigma attached to incorrectly performing those activities (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). At an early age, children can identify a physical activity that will mark them as
deviant for the rest of their lives. Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006) argued that trans and non-trans children are aware of the stigma attached to participating in gender-inappropriate physical activities and understand that participating in these activities can make them targets of homophobic and transphobic bullying. The current structures of physical education classes and youth sport do not meet the needs of or protect transgender youth from homophobic and transphobic bullying (Cho et al., 2004; Grossman, O’Connell, & D’Augelli, 2005). Grossman et al. argued that appropriate boy and girl activities still exist and are still encouraged by physical education teachers. Cho et al. (2004) argued that structures such as antidiscrimination policies based on gender identity or expression are not in place in many schools and that many teachers are not equipped with the correct tools to react appropriately when students are victims of transphobic bullying. Semerjian and Cohen (2006) presented the story of a trans person who was bullied in school. The school administration blamed the trans person for the bullying and simply suggested that he wear gender appropriate clothing to school.

Messner (2002) described a scene from an opening ceremony of a local American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) season with teams of 4 and 5 year olds. The Sea Monsters, a boy’s team, watched as the Barbie Girls, a girl’s team, danced nearby. Several of the Sea Monsters were enjoying the music and dancing when their teammates started chanting ‘No Barbie! No Barbie!’ The Sea Monsters who had begun dancing quickly joined their teammates in the chant. Even at 4 years old, the boys realized that they are supposed to be different than the girls, that dancing is feminine, and that they should do as the other boys do to avoid the ridicule of their peers.

The previous examples speak to the power of the sport structure as it exists today. People who fall outside the categories of man (masculine) and woman (feminine) are intimidated into
silence and compromise their self-identity, becoming invisible. This invisibility then reinforces the sport gender binary because men and women are the only visible people. In turn, the gender binary in sport is considered to be normal and people who fall outside of the categories are ridiculed and bullied for being abnormal.

Invisible Transgender Athletes and the Medical Establishment

The recent emergence of transsexual athletes at the elite level poses an interesting challenge to the gender binary as it has been traditionally enforced and reinforced in sport. Michele Dumaresq, the Downhill Mountain Bike Champion mentioned earlier, is joined by Kristen Worley, a track cyclist, and Mianne Bagger, a professional golfer, as openly transsexual athletes competing at the international level. Their presence should disrupt the gender binary, but thus far the binary has gone un-altered. Important questions arise such as what does the emergence of these athletes mean for sport? And what mechanisms are in place to prevent the visibility of transgender athletes from broadening the definition of gender?

Unfortunately, the structure of sport (as a social institution) is such that traditional gender norms are reproduced and reinforced. Sport governing bodies turn to the medical literature for information and guidance. The medical discourse has held transsexuals as abnormal and deviant individuals who can be “cured.” In the late 1800s and early 1900s individuals exhibiting transsexual behaviors were considered deeply disturbed (see von Kraft-Ebing, 2006). This belief continued throughout the mid 1900s with John Money’s treatment programs. Money believed that children who were born with ambiguous genitals could be brought up to be one gender or the other with proper socialization and reinforcement for gender appropriate behaviors (Garfinkel, 2006).
Luckily, the methods of Money have been denounced by the medical establishment (Garfinkel, 2006), but vestiges of these beliefs remain today with the inclusion of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR (DSM-IV-TR). GID consists of a strong cross-gender identification including possible insistence that the individual is actually the cross-gender, intense desire to participate in stereotypical games of the other sex, preference for playmates of the other sex, and persistent discomfort with their body (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

As surgical procedures were developed to alter adult genitals for SRS procedures, the guidelines were created for allowing access to these procedures. An individual who wished to undergo SRS must have been in counseling with a psychologist to be diagnosed with GID, would be referred to an endocrinologist to receive hormones, and have lived for a year in the desired gender (Stryker, 2007).

This evolution of psychological, medical and surgical “treatment” has shaped the ways in which sport governing bodies have established policies concerning transgender athletes. The IOC’s Stockholm Consensus is deeply rooted in, and dependent on the medical discourse about transsexual individuals. The group of doctors and physiologists selected to develop the policy used literature focused on the physiological and hormonal factors involved in transitioning and relies upon the medical definitions of GID and SRS to develop the definition of transgender. Much of the literature used to establish the policy is focused on the physiological aspects of transsexual participation in sport (Genel, 2000; Gooren & Bunck, 2004; Ljungqvist & Genel, 2005). These studies explore hormonal levels, muscle mass, skeletal structure, and adipose distribution. The findings indicate that the physiological differences between pre- and post-surgical transsexuals are significant. Post-surgical transsexuals have a physiological profile
comparable to individuals in their desired gender. For example, Gooren and Bunck (2004) compared muscle mass pre- and post-hormone therapy in female to male (FTM) and male to female (MTF) individuals. The reduction of muscle mass in MTF individuals after testosterone deprivation (post-reassignment surgery) resulted in a large overlap with FTM individuals pre-testosterone therapy muscle mass. This overlap was great enough for the authors to suggest that it is justifiable for MTF athletes to compete with other female athletes. Additionally, testosterone therapy in FTM individuals resulted in increased muscle mass levels comparable to MTF pre-testosterone depletion.

Further, Bhasin et al. (2001) found a dose-response relationship between blood testosterone levels and performance on the leg press, muscle volume, and blood hemoglobin levels in men, implicating current (not previous) testosterone levels as the major factor determining strength and muscle mass. There has been some concern that their testosterone treatments unfairly benefit FTM transsexuals (Teetzel, 2006). However, the levels of testosterone created through hormone therapy of a transsexual man would be equivalent of other men and significantly less than the levels seen in men using testosterone as an illegal doping agent (Ljungqvist & Genel, 2005; Teetzel, 2006). These findings point to the conclusion that post-surgical transsexuals pose no physiological threat to the other athletes.

Transsexual athletes wishing to compete in events sanctioned by the IOC must have proof that they have completed SRS, have been on the appropriate hormones for two years, and have legally changed their gender. After the IOC accepted the Stockholm Consensus, many other athletic governing bodies adopted the policy (Sykes, 2006). The policy allows transsexual athletes to compete, but leaves out all other transgender people. Excluded from participation are athletes who do not wish to have surgery, cannot afford surgery, identify outside of the gender
binary, or perceive their gender identity to be too fluid to have surgery. Many transgender people are content with their bodies as they are (Queen & Schimel, 1997; Wilchins, 1997), and undergoing SRS just to compete in sport would be out of the question for them.

In a controversial move, the Gay Games adopted a policy similar to the Stockholm Consensus in 2004 (Symons & Hemphill, 2007). The Gay Games were developed as a place for the gay community to celebrate diversity and inclusion (Messner, 1994), but excluded many trans athletes by adopting the policy. Eventually, the Gay Games developed a trans-friendly policy in which athletes can compete in the gender category with which they self-identify (Symons & Hemphill, 2007). Unfortunately, this policy still demands that athletes choose male or female and excludes athletes who self-identify as neither or both.

The most glaring evidence of the erasure of transgender athletes is the absolute lack of literature focused on the athletes as people. The physiological research reduces transsexual individuals to their parts: hormones, anatomy and, muscle mass. Additionally, sport and exercise psychologists champion physical activity for the improvement of quality of life, mood states, and self-esteem; yet the discourse surrounding transgender athletes continues to ignore the athletes’ experiences. Michele Dumaresq, Kristen Worely, and Mianne Bagger have been competing for several years now, but no research has been focused on their accomplishments or obstacles they have faced.

Birrell and Cole (1990) examined the events surrounding Renee Richards’ participation in women’s tennis competitions. Richards, a fully transitioned transsexual successfully sued the United States Tennis Association after being banned from playing in the U.S. Open. She was finally allowed to play in the 1977 U.S. Open. The authors argue that despite appearing to
challenge normative gender expectations, Richards and the media covering her participation reinforced traditional notions of gender.

Semerjian and Cohen (2006) interviewed non-elite transgender athletes, and is the only known study of its kind. The authors used transgender as an umbrella term to include a variety of trans identities. The athletes interviewed all self-identified as transgender, but were of body types and various places of (non)medical transition. Semerjian and Cohen consistently expressed the individuality of each person’s experiences and argued that there is no one “Trans” experience, but rather a variety of trans experiences.

Instead of focusing on the athletes’ medical status, Semerjian and Cohen focused on the athletes’ self-identity and their experiences in sport as a person identifying as such. This approach challenges the effectiveness of the current sport segregation system while privileging the stories and experiences of the participants. Semerjian and Cohen found that the athletes’ experiences were as diverse as their gender identities and argued for a broader conceptualization of gender in the sport context because the needs of the athletes were not met by the structures they played in.

Queer-Feminist Approach

Scholars across disciplines have pointed to the fluidity of gender and the various forms of masculinity and femininity that have evolved (Butler, 2004; Messner, 2002, Wilchins, 1997). Gender has been theorized to extend beyond the dichotomous structure that has been constructed (Cromwell, 2006; Vassi, 1997). To understand this complex relationship between gender and sport, I will employ a queer-feminist framework. This framework will blend queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Wilchins, 2004) and feminist theory (Bulter, 1990, 1993; Delphy, 2003; Haraway, 1988) to conceptualize gender, sexuality, and transgender identities. Feminist theory has
continually challenged gender stereotypes and championed the broadening of gender definitions (Butler, 1990; 1993).

Critical to a feminist understanding of gender is the work of Judith Butler, who asserts that all gender is performative (1990, 1993). Butler theorized that individuals repeatedly perform acts of gender, such as women wearing skirts and painting their finger nails and men wearing their hair short and wearing baggy clothes, in order to fit into the male/female categories. The repetition of these performances reinforce the category and the need to perform is sustained. Therefore, individuals are compelled to be a gender and express that gender in acceptable ways (Johnson & Kivel, 2007). Over time the acceptable performances become the expected norms of behavior. People, in essence, learn to do their gender rather than gender being something that they naturally are.

One’s gender depends on other people’s perception of it. Other people’s reading of one’s gender therefore decides if a person is doing their gender correctly. Individuals who do their gender in acceptable ways enjoy privilege and power that accompany membership in the normative category; whereas people who do not do their gender in acceptable ways are often the targets of physical and emotional harassment (Waldron, Semerjian, & Kauer, in press). Butler (2004) further argues that our gender is constantly undone by those around us. Because gender norms are fictitiously produced and are not as fixed and stable as they appear to be (Jagose, 1996), they are constantly being de-constructed and re-defined. The promise of this theory lies in this ongoing re-working of gender. Challenging established definitions of gender changes the topography of knowledge.

For many feminist scholars, gender discrimination is the deepest form of discrimination and oppression. Therefore sexism must be conquered before any other social problems can be
attended to. In this conceptualization, gender and sexuality are separated, with gender implicated as the primary antecedent to oppression arising from gender and sexuality (McLaughin, Casey, & Richardson, 2006). Yet, several theorists were critical of this placement (Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). They argued that by foregrounding gender, feminist theory marginalizes queer experiences. Queer theory was developed to privilege sexuality and examine the oppressive structure of heteronormativity. The term “queer” became an all-encompassing yet undefinable category that provided space for multiple contestations of traditional understanding of sexuality (McLaughin, Casey, & Richardson, 2006). Theorists examined the various ways lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identities disrupted, challenged, and reinforced traditional structures of knowledge.

For queer theorists, language itself is critical to the process of de/re/constructing knowledge and reality. An individual’s ability to define and understand her/his/self is dependent upon language. Therefore, queer theorists work to challenge existing meanings and to open new spaces for construction of meaning. The ability to name oneself is significant in resisting oppressive structures.

Additionally, queer theorists question heterosexuality as the norm (i.e. heteronormativity) by examining how power, language, and representation intersect to construct the world (Jagose, 1996). More specifically, marginalized sexual identities are not just victims of oppressive operations of power; they are constructed by those very operations (Jagose, 1996). Using Foucault’s conception of power, Ravel and Rail (2006) state that power is relational, not fundamentally oppressive. Resistance, therefore, does not consist of liberation, but rather contestation of discursive meanings and re-construction of language.
One fundamental tenet embedded in queer theory is that identities are fluid and continuously shifting; they are deconstructed, reconstructed, and reinforced constantly. Capitalizing on the notion that identities are unstable, queer theorists seek to dismantle the very structure of gender and sexuality that produces them. Traditional norms and oppressive systems can be challenged, resisted, and subverted.

Although both feminist and queer theorists have challenged the binary system of gender and sexuality respectively, considering them separately does not fully take transgender identities into account. Additionally, some scholars contend that feminist theory and queer theory are incompatible (e.g. Merck et al., 1998). Oftentimes scholars from both camps have been blinded by their own theories and fail to see possible negative implications of each. Feminist and queer theories have also been criticized for creating hetero- and homonormative atmospheres respectively (Stryker, 2006). It is important to consistently recognize “other modes of queer difference” (Stryker, 2006, p. 7). Several scholars have bridged the gap between feminist and queer theory (Butler, 1993; Fraser, 1997; Butler, 2004; Krane, 2001; Wilchins, 2004).

Combining feminist and queer theories enables theorists to think about gender and sexuality together, fully considering the intersections between gender and sexuality in people’s lives. The hybrid theory allows theorists to de/re/construct gender and sexuality systems while considering the practical implications of such changes.

Heather Sykes (1998) utilized a queer-feminist hybrid theory to consider the construction of gender and sexuality in sport. Using the framework, Sykes investigated the lived experiences of lesbian educators. Sykes’ theory destabilizes existing stereotypes and gender/sexuality norms and revealed that the educators had complex identities that exceeded the existing expectations. This destabilization generated space for the creation of alternative identities and expectations.
Current Study

Using this queer-feminist framework, I can consider practical implications of transgender athletes’ sport participation while simultaneously deconstructing the normative discourses surrounding gender that have produced the “natural” gender binary in sport (Britzman, 1995). As Judith Halberstam states, utilization of this hybrid will “rewrite the cultural fiction that divides a sex from a transsex, a gender from a transgender” (Halberstam, 1994, p. 226). The system of gender segregation in sport can be destabilized so that the identities of all athletes, not just transgender athletes, can be understood as fluid and unstable, occupying various locations.

Additionally, using this framework I will be able to revisit Kane’s (1995) conceptualization of the sport continuum. Kane argues that the current structure of sport reinforces fictional perceptions of men and women’s abilities. One important aspect of the current sport structure that maintains the sport gender binary is the segregation of men and women. By exposing the mechanisms that reinforce the sport gender binary, Kane begins the deconstruction process. I will be able to put the voices of the transgender athletes in dialogue with Kane’s in order to re-conceptualize the sport gender continuum.

Responding to the lack of research on trans athletes in sport and Krane et al.’s call for sport psychology to conduct research with trans athletes, this study examines how transgender athletes experience sport while simultaneously interrogating possible locations for resistance and reconstruction of the sport-gender binary. The results of the study will expand the sport studies knowledge base and encourage further meaningful research. The research questions guiding this study are (a) how do transgender athletes experience sport?, (b) how does sport contribute to identity construction?, and (c) how do transgender athletes use sport experiences to understand other areas of their lives?
CHAPTER II

METHODODOLOGY

Life histories often have been used by researchers when trying to discover large amounts of information about an individual (Miller, 2000). To collect such large amounts of information, several different methods can be employed. Written artifacts, interviews with relatives and friends, and personal oral histories have all been used to collect people’s life and family histories (Tierney, 2000). While life histories have long been considered a “biographical method” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 82), Tierney (2000) contended that the life history is also a narrative statement. No two people engage with the past in the same way, and therefore each person has a different narrative to tell.

A queer-feminist perspective locates the researcher and the participants within a matrix of knowledges. No grand truth is recognized and multiple, situated knowledges are privileged (Haraway, 1988). In this study, the participants’ narratives were important in the construction of their own identity and understanding of that identity and their experiences. While they might have common experiences with other trans people, they do not represent or speak for any other trans people or experiences.

Tierney (2000) encouraged conducting interviews in which participants can construct a narrative on their own terms. Conducting interviews in this fashion frees participants from a chronologically restricted structure, and allows them to construct their narrative in their own temporal configuration. Bredemeier, Carlton, Hills, and Oglesby (1999) used this type of in-depth life history interviews to gather narratives of four lesbian sportswomen. The participants were not strictly held to a specific structure and were free to speak about their experiences in a
way most meaningful to them. I will use this type of in-depth interview to gather narratives of transgender athletes.

*Participants*

Three transgender athletes were interviewed for this study. All participants self-identified as transgender and had experience participating in competitive sport. Each athlete participated in sport at the high school level. Two continued sport participation at the collegiate club level while the other participated in a club not affiliated with a university. Profiles of each participant are included in the results section.

*Gaining Access*

Due to the near invisibility of transgender athletes, I utilized a purposive snowball technique to recruit participants. The snowball process includes identification of key informants who helped identify potential participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Silk, 2005). Because of discrimination and prejudice, transgender communities tend to be tight-knit and wary of outsiders (Namaste, 2000). Additionally, harm done to transgender and intersex people by the medical field and other scientific researchers (Garfinkel, 2006; Namaste, 2000) further decreases the likelihood that the participants would respond to a flyer requesting participation in a study. Also, due to my location in Northwest Ohio, it was unlikely to find a local group of transgender athletes as one might in a larger city setting.

To overcome these obstacles, I identified key informants to assist in locating potential participants. I asked fellow graduate students, committee members, scholars working in the area, and current athletes on sexually diverse teams to contact potential participants. The informants described the study and introduced the researcher to possible participants. To do this, the key informants were given a script with the information they needed to provide the athletes (see
Appendix A). They also were given an interest form (Appendix B) for the athlete to complete and return to the key informant, who then gave it to me. The potential participants also were given my e-mail so that they could contact me directly if they preferred. Two participants were recruited using this process. The other participant volunteered after learning about the study during a group conversation he attended. He gave me his contact information directly. Once I received the interest forms from the two other participants, I initially contacted all the participants via email and then completed a follow-up phone call to further explain the study procedure, ensure confidentiality, and arrange an interview session.

**Interviews**

Interviews are a staple of qualitative research. An interview is one of the most powerful strategies to understand the ways in which other people experience the world (Amis, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2000). During an interview, both the “what” and the “how” of a person’s experiences can be explored (Fontana & Frey, 2000). People construct their realities from the world around them (Amis, 2005). It makes sense, therefore, to talk to them to better understand the way they perceive and experience the world. In-depth life history interviews examine a person’s experiences, behaviors, and beliefs across time (Miller, 2000). The interviews I conducted focused on the participants’ sporting history, but also encouraged them to bring in relevant information from other life experiences. The participants were encouraged to think about life experiences that related to or affected their understandings of their sport experiences.

Life histories rarely are formulated from one interview (Miller, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Fontana and Frey (2000) also suggest conducting multiple interviews. This allows the interviewer time to review the first interview and identify any answers that are not clear. I conducted 2 interviews per participant to provide enough time for the participants to construct
their narrative, to elaborate on original responses, and to clarify any murky areas from the first interview.

The first interview was unstructured. This format provided the participant the opportunity to freely construct his/her narrative. As Fontana and Frey described, unstructured interviews “can provide greater breadth of data than the other types” (2000, p 652). This structure is more flexible than other interview formats and both participant and interviewer are free to explore a variety of topics.

Interview questions progressed from icebreaking general sports questions to in-depth questions about their gender identity and sport. The primary topics included in this interview were their sporting history; self-definition of gender identity and sporting identity; sporting experiences; and the joys, challenges, and strategies for coping with any obstacles they have faced while participating in sport. While they talked extensively about their gender identity and sport experiences, they were free to talk about any subject they felt appropriate. I avoided leading questions, double-barreled questions, negatively worded questions, and ranking questions (Amis, 2005; Shensul et al., 1999).

I utilized a semi-structured format for the subsequent interviews (see Appendix A). This semi-structured format included an interview guide written before the interview process began and another set of questions written after reviewing each athlete’s first interview (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This semi-structured approach allowed for latitude and variation in important topics for each person (Amis, 2005). Plenty of clarification questions were developed because what may have seemed clear to the participant or me may not be clear to another reader. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that interviewers constantly should ask clarifying questions, prompting the participants to explain exactly what they experienced in their lives. Questions were omitted or
added to the second interview depending on the flow of the dialogue and how extensively the person talked about a topic.

The first interview guide initially was developed based on the existing literature about transgender athletes. Given the dearth of data, questions were constructed broadly to allow individuals ample opportunity to explore and describe their experiences. Queer-feminist researchers reviewed the interview guide. Using their feedback, the interview guide was revised before being submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix A for final interview guide). The additional sets of interview, specific to each participant, were developed after reviewing the transcripts from the first interviews. These questions were designed to encourage clarification and explanation of topics covered in the first interviews.

My goal was to conduct as many interviews face-to-face as possible. Amis (2005) suggests that face-to-face interviews are the best way to capture the participant’s non-verbal cues. However, Fontana and Frey (2000) indicate that telephone communications are a viable option for researchers who cannot otherwise reach their participants. Several scholars have identified situations in which face-to-face interviews were not possible and used telephone communication with great success (Anderson, 2005; Krane & Barber, 2005; Shaw & Amis, 2001). When it was not possible for me to conduct face-to-face interviews, I utilized telephone communication to complete the interviews. In all, I was able to conduct 2 face-to-face interviews with one participant and utilized phone interviews for both interviews with the other participants.

Procedure

Approval was obtained from the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. Once approved, the key informants were given contact scripts and the interest forms and upon their return I contacted the potential participants. After arranging the interview via
email and confirming via telephone, I emailed a copy of the informed consent (see Appendix B) to the participants who could not be reached for face-to-face interviews. These participants were asked to read the form and provide an electronic signature. Consent was reaffirmed verbally prior to beginning each interview.

The participants who completed telephone interviews chose the interview dates and times so they could be in a comfortable setting during the interview. Both face-to-face interviews were completed at the participant’s house, at a time and date of his choosing.

Before beginning the interviews, I explained my purpose and rationale for the study and my role as a researcher. It was important for me to explain the ways I will maintain confidentiality due to the sensitive topic and it was crucial that the participants fully understood what they were expected to do (Amis, 2005). Additionally, I wanted them to know how their narratives would be used. I cannot speak for them, but rather have done my best to present their narratives in a manner that reflects their experiences. I also reminded them that they could withdraw from the study at any time and they could choose not to respond to any of the questions asked.

After confirming informed consent, I asked for permission to audio-record the sessions via telephone and video-record the face-to-face sessions. I explained that the recording was for transcription purposes only. Once transcribed, all names and potentially identifying information were removed or coded before the transcripts were printed. Participants were reassured that only myself and my advisor would have access to the transcripts. I also informed them that all tapes, notes, and transcripts will be kept in a secure location to prevent a breach of confidentiality.

The first interviews ranged from sixty to eighty minutes. I began by describing my sport background and asking an icebreaker question regarding their sport participation when they were
young. After they seemed comfortable, I asked them to talk about either their recent sport experiences or their gender identity. The participant shaped the discussion throughout the remainder of the interview. I asked clarifying questions, when necessary, to promote further discussion, however, I mostly listened and let them speak extensively about their experiences.

After completing the first interviews, I transcribed them verbatim into a word document. I read and re-read the transcripts and reviewed them with my advisor. I then developed an interview guide for the second interview specific to each participant. Time between interviews ranged from one week to three weeks.

The second interviews ranged from sixty to ninety minutes. I began the second interviews by reviewing the study and reminding the participants about the purpose of the second interview. I again attained their verbal informed consent. I then asked an icebreaker question following up on their childhood sport experiences. When they seemed comfortable, I began asking questions from the semi-structured interview guide, utilizing follow-up questions as necessary.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). My queer-feminist framework resides in a constructivist paradigm that privileges multiple and situated truths (Haraway, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Research in this paradigm seeks to treat the participants fairly and to produce a story that as closely as possible represents the experiences of the participants (Markula & Denison, 2005). Trustworthiness, then, evaluates the research process based on these principles (Ely, 1991). To enhance trustworthiness in this study, I established rapport, utilized bracketing, and maintained a working relationship with a critical friend.
Establishing rapport was essential toward gaining the trust of the participant. Because of the deceitful ways past research has treated transgender individuals (Namaste, 2000), establishing rapport was especially important to my study. To establish rapport and gain the trust of the participants, I shared personal information about myself at the beginning of the interview. Also, I constructed a welcoming, conversational dialogue by allowing the participant to shape the interview and asking questions that kept the flow of the interview. For the face-to-face interviews, I used my body language to show my interest in what the participant was saying as well as using other active listening strategies such as not interrupting and asking meaningful follow-up questions. This style of interviewing seemed to help establish rapport as well as made the interviews more comfortable for the participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

While I shared personal information at the beginning of the interview, I was careful to not project my personal biases into the subsequent conversation. Bracketing assisted in this endeavor. Ely (1991) described bracketing as a process that requires researchers become aware of their own assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions. These preconceptions have to be put aside – bracketed – in order to be open and receptive to what we are attempting to understand. Bracketing enhances trustworthiness because it prevents projecting assumptions onto the participants (Ely et al., 1991). I spent a considerable amount of time before the interviews contemplating my assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions. Before and during the data collection, I used a journal to record these, and as I conducted the interviews I practiced self-awareness about these assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions, noting in my journal what I was feeling and thinking about each follow-up question that I asked. Using my journal to interrogate potential follow-up questions increased the likelihood that the participants had the
opportunity to fully describe and explain their experiences in their own words, devoid of my preconceptions.

Additionally, maintaining a relationship with a critical friend further enhanced the trustworthiness of this study. Ely et al. (1991) suggested that a critical friend acts as an auditor of the research process, consistently checking the methods and analysis for personal biases and alternate explanations. I met regularly with my critical friend where my processes and interpretations were consistently challenged. I was asked to identify my own biases and perceptions within my interpretations, and I was asked to develop alternative interpretations. Dr. Vikki Krane was my critical friend throughout the research process. Other committee members also played a smaller, yet equally important role as critical friends.

Reflexivity

In critical research it is important to discuss the epistemological foundations of the research and the researcher’s relationship to both the participants and the topic of study. Many scholars have discussed this relationship (e.g. Spivak, 1988, Tierney, 2000). Simply put, the participants answer the researcher’s questions. These interview questions are heavily influenced by the researcher’s ontology and epistemology. It is important then for researchers to examine their own epistemological assumptions before and during data collection and analysis. I am not an objective observer or a detached instrument of the research process (Krueger, 2007; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008) As the researcher, I have a privileged role in the research process, and I have power over the participants (Spivak, 1988).

Therefore, it was important for me to create room, as possible, for participant agency; although I must also understand that interviews are always co-produced (Tierney, 2000).

Interviews framed in a queer feminist paradigm have opened many possibilities for participant
self-definition and discursive construction (e.g., Ravel & Rail, 2006; Semerjian & Cohen, 2006). Because transgender individuals vary greatly in experience and identity (Namaste, 2000; Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002; Wilchins, 1997), it was important that I provided the athletes in this study the opportunity to fully articulate the ways in which they defined and experienced their identities.

To fully recognize my place in the research process, I located myself in terms of identity and ideology. I am a 23 year old, identifying as White and female. I have been involved in the LGBT community for several years. However, I have fought with the LGBT alphabet soup labels, often feeling that none of them truly fit what I was feeling. While I am in a committed non-heterosexual relationship, I do not believe that the term lesbian will ever fully encompass my experiences. I therefore prefer the term queer as its construction better reflects the fluidity that I have experienced. My position in the university setting locates me firmly in the middle class, and I must recognize my location in the LGBT community. White, middle class, lesbian and gay people have marginalized lesbian and gay people of color and bisexual and transgender individuals for decades (Namaste, 2000; Wilchins, 1997). I acknowledge this position and have worked toward breaking down the barriers that have been constructed.

To illustrate my process of reflexivity, I will present a dialogue with myself. The questions and answers are ones that I have posed to myself throughout the process of completing my thesis. Some of them began as notes on scrap paper, others were developed in my reflexive journal. They have been organized into a more coherent conversational dialogue, as if I were interviewing myself.

*Okay, so you are a queer, white graduate student? What exactly does that mean?*
Well, I prefer the term queer because none of the other categories really seem to fit my experiences and how I feel about myself.

*And how do you feel about yourself and your experiences?*

I’ve had several long term relationships with both men and women. In fact, I really thought I was going to marry the man I dated in college. After we split up, I met my first long term girlfriend. I was also playing on the rugby team then, so I was surrounded by a lot of people who were either gay or outspoken allies to the community. But, sort of in this wishy washy place where I didn’t want to HAVE to decide. I liked boys and I liked girls, but I wasn’t really ready to make a statement about myself. I kinda just avoided labels and agreed with whatever anyone decided I was. My lesbian friends assumed that I was part of their circle, and my straight friends knew me as the one who broke all the rules. I guess some people would have read me as soft butch or as an athle-dyke, but I didn’t really feel like that was it either. Those were tired old categories. Plus that was way too much commitment. All the people I knew were very committed to their identity… my lesbian friends spent a great deal of time grooming that persona. The dykes I knew always dressed, acted, and lived in a very specific way. ALL THE TIME. I wasn’t ready for that.

*Is that how you feel now?*

No, I’m much more comfortable with who I am and I have learned that there are other people out there who aren’t comfortable with the categories either. I mean, I’m fairly certain that many people read me as lesbian. And that’s fine, I mean they have to operate with the definitions that they have. But, I prefer the
term queer when I describe myself. There is a fluidity to move between or transcend categories; I don’t have to pick one that almost sort of describes me.

**How do you feel about the term queer more generally?**

Queer is not something that should be reserved for the gay community. It is complex and often paradoxical. I think queer troubles all the things that we think we know. I mean the gay community has done a lot of queering, but at the same time they have done a lot of homo-norming as well. Queer steps away from the normative and attempts to forge a different path. I mean non-normative heterosexual couples should be considered queer as well. As soon as you reserve ‘queer’ for the gay community you have already broken the number one rule of queer feminism – troubling common language and socially constructed categories.

**So what does queerness have to do with completing a thesis on transgender athletes?**

Well, there is obviously the queer theory connection. Unfortunately, I think some queer theorists have broken that number one rule. Trans people are often left out of queer theory texts or even worse, used as a vehicle for asserting a theoretical point (Namaste, 2000). I would like to broaden the boundaries of queer theory as they are aligned right now. Trans people are an incredibly important part of the queer community and have been all but shut out of many gay spaces.

I have used a queer-feminist framework to design and conduct my research. This framework blends feminist and queer theory in a way that values the ability of an individual to define themselves within the world that they are living (Sykes, 1998). So utilizing this framework means that I have accepted the trans athletes I talk to on their terms. During our conversations I had to couch my
own definitions of transgender in order to privilege their definitions. There were several times in interviews when I wanted them to talk about their experiences using my definitions, but I had to realize that I was looking through different lenses than they were. The point of my interviews was to get into words the way that they experience and understand the world.

I major part of that is understanding the situated positionality of each athlete. I have borrowed from Haraway’s ideas on situated knowledges (1988). Each athlete has as fluid, fractured, multiple, and disjointed ontology that must be privileged. They tell their story and no one else’s. I am trying to develop their narratives to expose the trans narrative as a myth.

What does the term transgender mean to you?

Trans is anyone who feels that they fall outside the binary categories held as natural opposites in our society.

Trans is a person who looks like s/he belongs in the category woman but feels like s/he belong in the category man.

Trans is feeling like you don’t belong in either category, that neither one really encompasses who you are.

Trans is not fitting in, no matter where you go.

Trans is not knowing which bathroom to use… based on how other people read you.

Trans is trying to be comfortable with who you are regardless of which gender society says you should be.

Trans is breaking boundaries

Trans is not necessarily heroic. It is a long hard process.

Trans is constantly fighting against what you have been told all your life.

Trans is realizing that you are not like other people.
Trans is realizing that you are like other people.

Trans is a journey to yourself.

*How do you identify in terms of gender?*

Well, I have never really seen myself as not-woman. But at the same time, I am a very different kind of woman. I would never pass as the kind of woman our society generally values most (heterosex). I think that the categories are arbitrary at best and that we need to rethink the way we organize people, if people should be organized at all.

So if I was defining myself to people, I would say that I am a non-normative woman or a queer woman. Some of my gender expressions could be read as masculine, and I do take deliberate steps to break expectations of gender on a pretty consistent basis. I have been reading a bit about the terms pan- and pomo-sexual, although I am not sure that I really feel that way either.

*Can you talk about the development of your gender identity?*

There were several points in my life where I think my gender was questioned by other people. I never really did the right kinds of things to be considered a girl, and my parents encouraged me to do what I wanted. I think I was pretty oblivious to a lot of it at the time, now that I look back I see that other people had a hard time understanding me, but I never really went through a time of questioning my own identity. At the same time, I never really had a strong identification with girl, so I guess I have always been a bit ambiguous.

As a kid I really don’t think I really saw myself as a gendered person. I mean I lined up in the girl’s line and went to the girl’s bathroom, but I played with
the boys. I was the best athlete in the school. I came in first place when we ran the mile and I was second place in the softball throw. I rode motorcycles all the time. I really think if anything, being a physically active kid was the biggest part of my identity then… I wasn’t a girl, I wasn’t a boy, I wasn’t a tomboy, I was a motorcycle racer. I was a football player. I was a tree climbing hooligan who played in the creek, hiked the local trails, rode my bike wherever I wanted.

It wasn’t until I signed up to play football that I really even noticed gender. All the adults made a big deal about me playing. She might get hurt, these boys are really tough, they hit each other hard. But then on the first day of practice in pads I laid out the “best” player on the team. There seemed to be a collective silence from the adults. I didn’t know what it meant, but I was hooked on football after that.

I had really long hair when I was little. I hated it only because my scalp was really sensitive and my mom would brush my hair so hard it felt like she was pulling all of it out. So I finally convinced her to let me cut it short. I picked out the style that I liked, and when we went to Bo-Rics to get it chopped off, I remember the stylist saying “you can’t get this one, this is a boy’s hair cut.” I just liked the way it looked. It was short and functional. No more painful combing and brushing, no more nagging from my mom to brush my hair.

So I got this hair cut the summer before 6th grade. And on the bus to school the very first day this older kid came up to me and started asking me if I was a boy or girl. I had always been a girl, so I wasn’t sure what the problem was. Was he stupid? I wasn’t sure why he was asking. I kind of realized then that it
was my hair that people used to know if I was a boy or girl. That seemed really silly, you know, using hair length to determine how you are going to treat someone.

Also in 6th grade, we had a substitute who asked us our names as we went around the room. I’m pretty sure she thought my name was Kevin, not Cathryn but I’m not sure. She never called on me… I think she was pretending that I didn’t exist so she didn’t have to deal with my ambiguity.

By high school I never really felt that I was not a girl, but I for sure knew that I was not doing girl the right way. I didn’t wear the same clothes, I didn’t wear make-up, I wasn’t really interested in the things that so many of them seemed to be interested in. I did all the stuff that girls do, like wear dresses to prom and put bows in my hair for track meets, but I never really knew why we did that. I just sort of went along with it.

Besides, I had gotten pretty good at dealing with people who did not know how to deal with me. I wore baggy jeans and t-shirts, molding my look into more of a punkish style than anything else. I wore lots of bracelets and had one of those heavy metal ball necklaces. I’m not sure I’d say I was really goth per se but a lot of my friends would have claimed that identity. I still wouldn’t really say that I felt all that girlish, but I really didn’t feel all that boyish either. I was used to getting dirty/confused looks from people, however there were so many factors that could have led to those looks that it is impossible to say whether it was my gender expression that confused them.
Finally in college I joined the rugby team and found a bunch of girls that didn’t really do girl the right way. It was awesome. I could finally be myself (and hit people really hard) and no one looked twice. I think that is what it is… I cannot ever really put my finger on it because in high school sports, no one ever really treated me badly, but they really didn’t treat me well either. I was never invited to any of the parties nor did I hang out with many of my teammates off the field. They were indifferent, I think mostly trying to ignore my presence. It was not hostile by any means, but it was not welcoming either. So, the rugby team was a bunch of girls who act in all sorts of ways. It was the first real space where I recognized that girls were able to act in ways outside of what was expected, and it was encouraged. I mean my goth friends in high school acted in very different not girl ways but they were ridiculed for it. In rugby, girls carried themselves with swagger, sported black eyes, and acted much more stereotypically masculine and it was encouraged!

What kinds of experiences do you expect to hear from the transgender athletes?

I expect that there will be a range of experiences. I think it might depend on the type of sport and the level of competition. There will probably be negative experiences such as bullying and teasing, but I’m hopeful that there will also be positive experiences as well.

I think it will also depend on how the athletes identified at the time. Like if they were really unsure of what was going on, I think the experiences have a different connotation than if they strongly identified with a (non)gender. I expect that some things will come up about the fairness of transgender athletes playing
on a certain gendered team, especially if they are on hormone therapy. That tends to be the most talked about aspect of trans athletic participation. I’m thinking that talk about the locker room will come up as well since that is the most public space for the naked body to be on display in a sport setting.

I must be careful now to not let these expectations guide my interviewing. I don’t want to ask any leading questions just because I expect a story about one of these. That is all part of the process, I need to ask open ended questions and let the athletes guide the discussions.

**Data Analysis**

In this research, I attempted to “craft stories from people’s experiences to show how lives are lived and understood as complete wholes from the inside” (Markula & Denison, 2005, p. 165). To achieve this, a narrative approach was used (Silverman, 2000). Smith and Sparkes (2009) advised giving a clear-cut definition of narrative inquiry is difficult and suggest describing what narrative inquiry can be. They further suggest that narrative inquiry can be an effective means of relaying and interpreting stories. As Markula and Denison (2005) argued, narrative inquiry describes, interprets, and explains. Sermijn, Devlieger, and Loots (2008) used the rhizome as a metaphor for narrative construction. Narrative construction, like a rhizome, need not be neat and orderly. Instead it can be fragmented, disjointed, and discontinuous.

To begin the process, the interviews were transcribed verbatim into a word document and were read and re-read for emerging themes (Markula & Denison, 2005; Sparkes, 1999). Rich stories from every participant emerged from the transcripts. I utilized techniques from the growing field of creative non-fiction (Caulley, 2008) to develop multiple narratives for each participant from across the transcripts. While the narratives were created using participants’
actual words, some narratives were condensed from several different conversations across a participant’s interviews. This allowed a more coherent and evocative narrative to emerge (Caulley, 2008).

While creating the narratives, it was important for me to remember that I cannot give a voice to the participants, nor can I create a grand narrative for all transgender athletes. I am simply examining their experiences to better understand the ways they exist within and understand the sporting world. I engaged with the data analysis process accordingly, allowing the narratives of the athletes, not my assumptions and biases, to guide the process. My reflexive processes and discussions with my critical friend assisted in this endeavor.

A layered approach was taken to interpret and analyze the narratives (Caulley, 2008). This approach consisted of combining the voice of the participants through their stories and the voice of the researcher through theoretical discussion (Ely et al., 1997). This combination, or layering, can create an evocative, gripping story that pulls in the reader while distributing important theoretical information. All of the narratives found in the layered story are directly from the interview transcripts from each respective participant.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rich discussion about the participants’ lives emerged from the interviews. To provide the reader with a picture of the participants’ lives, I combined information from different sections of both interviews into short personal profiles for each participant. The profiles are presented to situate the athletes’ narratives in the specific social, geographical, and historical moments in which they live. In particular, their sport histories and the development of their current gender identities are provided in these profiles. Each profile is composed entirely of direct quotes from the interviews.

Participant Profiles

Ryan

Ryan is a twenty-eight year old individual who remains ambiguous about his gender identity. Ryan is White and describes himself as exploring Buddhism. He recently completed his bachelor’s degree and lives in a midsized city in the Midwestern United States. Ryan is currently participating in martial arts, but has played several other sports throughout his life.

Growing Up, Playing Sports. When I was in first or second grade, well probably even before that, I was in soccer. I didn’t quite get into having a ball flying at my head so much, but I still did it anyways. Then in third grade I moved and I don’t really think I did any sport there, some gym class. Fourth and fifth grade I got into a different school again; it had some kind of like flag soccer, like half soccerish thing I think, so I didn’t really get into that. So I was pretty much out of sport for a while. Seventh grade I played basketball; I tried out and made it. I’m not sure why. Some may speculate it had more to do with my academic performance in the coach’s class than actually my abilities. I mean I wasn’t strong enough to actually get the ball up to the
basket (laughing). I had a free throw once and I did that, but it was a junior high sized court, you know it was like the size of this room (laughing).

Oh, um yeah wait, maybe back before first grade or so I was in karate class. But I didn’t really like it. I can recall being in a gym with a bunch of people in white uniforms punching and kicking. So it may not have been the art form so much as the volume of people involved because if it was a smaller setting I might have actually gotten into it, but there was just a lot of people and I would just sit on the floor and hide or something (laughing).

Then when I got to high school, I don’t know, I guess band is not really considered a sport, but I did marching [band] in high school. But by my sophomore year, I wanted to join the football team. So I joined the football team, [it was a] small school, so I mean basically if you showed up to summer practices then you are on the team. If you die, or pass out, or leave, then you are not on the team (laughing). I didn’t do band my 12th grade year. So it was only in my 11th grade year that at half time I would go put on a band uniform and march and then go back. But you see I didn’t play a lot of games in football. I hardly played in the games.

Oh and then track and cross country. I was a distance runner for track in [grades] 10, 11, and 12. I did cross country I think in 11th. One year I did both football and then on Saturdays I ran cross country. I just did the Invitationals on Saturday because the seasons ran together. So the Saturday football practices, I didn’t go to for the full time because of the cross country meets. I just did cross country that one year. And I didn’t really practice with them, there’s a few times where I went running with them somewhere if for some reason football practice happened to be cancelled. And there might have been that the cross country season went a little longer or something because I remember doing a couple things with them at some point in the season, and I think it was because football season wasn’t overlapping. I’m not sure why I only did it that one
year. I know I didn’t think about it until that one year that I did it. It might have just been because it was a lot of stuff, on Saturday to go run. That was all the official sport stuff, but through grades 9 and 10, I also did a lot of weight lifting and just running in general as part of my day.

That puts me in Aikido, 4 or 5 years, starting around the age of 20 maybe. And then, going to Public University, studying classical guitar which is probably further away from sport as probably most people would define it, but I see it as a body practice so I’d count that, doing that for 4 out of the past 5 years.

*Gender Identity.* I think [gender] is like the soup that I’m in, not realizing I’m in a soup more than anything. For me it was never any kind of any active thing, you know. I really wasn’t all that gender conscious so much through high school, like after football, we’d be driving around and what we were supposed to do was be able to spot a woman walking around and be able to point her out and stuff like that. I just really wasn’t, I don’t know if I wasn’t into it, maybe I didn’t allow myself to do it, maybe I wasn’t really into it so it was easy not to allow myself to get into it. But, even after high school even. I mean I just may have felt a need for it to be there, but I wasn’t trying to go against gender this and that or trying to be more conscious about even how I related. I just don’t think I was really thinking about it. (pause) Maybe I just trained myself not to see gender so maybe I just actively don’t see it when it is actually really staring at me, or it’s not something that I am concerned about. And maybe that is just part of my transgenderedness: maybe I am supposed to see that as a *man* whenever I am supposed to see through gender and I just don’t (emphasis his).

Now I usually prefer to avoid talking about my gender as often as I can. I kind of like the ambiguousness of it. Not too long ago I was getting ready to leave and I was getting my coat on,
but it’s a little too big for me, it was a little bit poofy and down. So it was a big coat kind of like this (pointing to his down vest) and had my hair back in a pony tail and I was getting ready to leave and I was looking in the mirror and I was like, just looking at me in the mirror [and I] can’t tell if I am a man or a woman you know because the coat it just sort of absorbing my whole body shape and I’ve got the long eyelashes, which has always been a more of a feminine characteristic, and now I got the long hair pulled back. So, I guess I’m liking being in a more ambiguous area.

But, after I graduated high school I went to Public University for a little while and I did have a fairly large social anxiety thing going on at the time where I didn’t even want to walk across campus. I didn’t want to be seen or perceived by anybody. I think gender would be an aspect of my social anxiety. Just not being comfortable with what it is that I already am. But, as I get older and the more and more I feel at home in the assumption that most of humanity doesn’t have any clue what it is doing anyways, so most people’s judgments are probably not very good. But I also don’t want to push people to much over the edge and develop a conflict situation. I try to push people’s buttons a little bit, but not the big button.

Usually I just [try to] see how gender functions in the quick moments. You know I guess I’d just say depending on the situation I might just try to say the opposite of what people would probably normally want to hear (laughing). It might have a lot of complexity to it, but it might be easy in the moment to settle it down to penis and vagina. So, if I’d mention that’s what I got, it might help. I would probably just say that I have a penis. That might be enough. Or I might just talk a bit lower (lowers voice) that might be enough of a hint… what they might be looking for as to how they are going to discriminate [his gender]. But, if it comes up, I might just say, my
name is Ryan and you can refer to me as Ryan, or “that person.” But if they just need to know
I’d say man, boy maybe, I kind of look young (emphasis his).

I mean I understand that our language is really structured around having one or the other,
and it’s possible to avoid to using obviously gendered words, but it’s difficult. You know, if they
refer to me as she or some sort of feminine pronoun, I don’t correct it. I would more or less let
them choose one or the other and let conversation flow around that gaping hole (laughing). Now,
if we are talking as a professional setting or a career setting, and there is some sort of personal
gain for me to identify as a more traditional male, then I will. But, then over all, I have a lot what
be considered more feminine conversational styles, soft speech, more receptive and less
assertive, not specific about answering questions, you know so…

I might be more feminine than a lot of other people around me, them being penis or not,
but I still wasn’t raised in society as a woman. I come from a White middle class family. We had
money, I mean its gone now like other peoples’, but we were upper-lower class. But, anyway,
you know my mom was, I think she didn’t feel the need for me to do the right gender stuff as
much as maybe my dad did. And I think that she tried to get me into like karate, you know
maybe he’ll like this and maybe it will get him some friends or something. But, you know I don’t
think for her it was a big deal as long as I was happy.

Jake

Jake identifies as trans man. He is twenty three years old, and has recently graduated
from college. He is White and lives in a small, conservative town in the Northeastern United
States. He does not currently play a sport but has played sports throughout his life, including ice
hockey at the collegiate club level.
Growing Up, Playing Sports. My dad was in the navy and then worked for IBM which stands for I’ve Been Moved. I grew up in Western State and then went to high school in Eastern State. But, there were a bunch of stops within those two and there were also 4 in Southern State then Midwestern State, then finally to a few different cities in Eastern State before I went to high school. I actually finally lived in the last place for 6 or 8 years. I started out, I didn’t really know what it was like not to move around. So it didn’t really seem like a big deal (laughing) You get into a place and you live there for two years and you’re like “ok… I’m ready to go, let’s get out of here (laughing).” So, it didn’t really seem that different, I guess it does force you to be more assertive and social because you don’t get to rely on tons of shared past experience.

I kind of tried every sport I could get my hands on except for the ones where you had to wear a skirt (laughs). Let’s see, from the beginning I grew up mostly playing basketball. I played on boys teams until I was twelve, and that was like 3 or 4 seasons a year. And then I played AAU basketball. I also played a bunch of different sports in high school, like with the high school. Track and field, field hockey, soccer, and softball, and cross country and basketball. But then I did BMX racing and some mountain bike races and triathlons [not associated with the high school].

Then when I got to college I kind of wanted to try sports I never got to try before. So, I joined the ice hockey team, I had never skated on ice before (laughs). But, it ended up working out well. I mean you got to do everything that you weren’t allowed to do in most sports; they like when you do it in ice hockey. So that was really nice. All the fouls and the “stop here,” you don’t have to stop there anymore (laughs). So I did that for a couple years in college.

I liked how sports was a way for you to, it was like the only way where if you moved to a small town and all the families had been there for generations, and if you were a good athlete it
would help you get into that town. Sports are a pretty good way to fast forward getting to know a lot of people. And you could show people kind of what you are made of very quickly. So you didn’t have to take all the time of having to do it through like very small experiences. It could help you assimilate into a new town really quickly, which I thought was really cool.

I also liked how it was completely, like when you were actually on the court, how it was completely separated from everything else. Like, all of the outside rules that you had, like completely stopped when a game started. Whenever a game was happening, all of it stopped. It was nice, everything was very simple (laughs).

Gender Identity. I am actually like two months on T¹, identifying as male, as a trans man. When I first came out, I was kind of identified as being more butch. But I’m not really butch. Like I had a friend tell me that she was a lot more butch than I was, but that I was a lot more of a guy than she was (Laughing). So, I’m not like, I don’t know, I guess its all just a horrible stereotype, but I never really fit the big dyke lesbian stereotype. I mean, I wanted to, just a little bit, but it just didn’t fit. So, I guess I tried that one on for a while, but after about two months I was no, no, no, there’s something else, but I don’t know what the word is for it. Then I read Stone Butch Blues (laughing) like every other tranny in America, it was like, “Oh that’s what I am, oh shit (laughing).” Yeah, so then after that it was transgender or just genderqueer until I could do something about it. And then, its still transgender, only I’m doing something about it.

Now I prefer he, but I would start out with she because it was legal. I mean there’s been lot of confusion [about his gender] since I was little (laughing). I go by Jake now, but everyone I know has called me Joey for my whole life, and I had a bowl haircut. Then I was a really, really late bloomer, so I only had about two years of my life where I ever looked at all girly, like physically, like at all. I don’t have any hips, tall skinny, kind of a low voice to start off with
(laughing). So there was a lot, a lot of questions, pretty much always. Yeah I think I knew what a shim was before I knew what sex was, it’s pretty funny (sarcastic tone). So, I learned to block out pronouns a long time ago. I kind of don’t even notice which ones they use, if they are looking in my direction I’ll probably answer (laughing).

I am planning on getting top surgery. I don’t know when, probably asap. I am doing my consultation soon, but they say that you should wait at least 3-6 months on T before you do top surgery. So that will be soon, and I don’t really want to get bottom surgery. I really never felt that part of it. It was like every thing outside of my boxers that I was going for.

And, I will change my gender only on my driver’s license, because if you change it on your social security and birth certificate and anything happens like at all, including if I have to go to gynecological exam once a year or if get cancer related to transitioning, then none of that is covered by insurance, like at all. So, I’d pretty much be poor if anything ever happens at all. So, I think I’m going to wait until those policies change (laughing). So, we’ll only change the driver’s license for now. I mean it will be a little awkward when I leave the country with a passport (laughing).

Harvey

Harvey is a twenty-nine year old, White individual identifying as transgender. He graduated from college several years ago, and describes himself as culturally Jewish. He lives in a small city in the Southeastern United States. Although he is not currently playing a sport, he participated in sports throughout his childhood, high school, and collegiate years.

Growing up, playing sports. I actually grew up in Southern State until I was 19, and then I moved to another Southern State at 19 and I pretty much lived there solidly for about 5 years.
Then I’ve been, well that’s my base, but I spend about 6 months of the year on the road. A little bit of everywhere.

I didn’t play much organized sports as a kid, you know just PE class. I played on different volleyball teams in middle school and also in high school. I was a setter because I was a shorty. But, I quit the team because the coach was really hard and mean on me for some reason. I ended up feeling sort of a bit bullied off the volleyball team; just like constantly getting made fun of and stuff like that. And, I didn’t think they were taking it seriously enough (laughs) but that’s all I did as far as school sports.

But, I did martial arts from the time I was 12 ‘til the time I was 17 at the same dojo. And I quit a week before my black belt test to show my sensei what’s up (laughs) because he was just really sexist and racist. I was the only one of my age in the school there. I mean there was one guy that was a few years younger than me, but I was the only one in the adult classes my age. I didn’t do much competitive fighting, but I fought in a few tournaments.

Then I went off to college and from the very beginning I played rugby. Now, I had no desire to play rugby; I went out just to meet girls. I mean I knew queer girls played rugby (laughs) so I thought that was a good place to start making friends and absolutely fell in love with the sport. And I didn’t end up dating anyone on the team ever. I don’t play anymore, I sort of just gave it up. I don’t even know if I’m that upset about it. I mean I’m ready to go into surgery in a few months to fix an injury I got playing rugby. You know my body hurts too bad to play rugby anymore (laughs). After that I took some martial arts classes and I ended up going to this ROTC martial arts school (laughs) but they just didn’t know what to do with me.

_Gender Identity._ I’ve always identified in terms of sexuality as queer, pansexual⁵ and I was out really young as queer. I mean I think that maybe 13 was when I first started identifying
as bisexual. But, I feel like I had crushes on girls since I was a little kid, I mean really little. Like 3, 4 years old little. And, I’ve always been attracted to people of all genders, and I feel like that manifested itself in a lot of terminology over my life. I’ve never identified as heterosexual once in my life, I don’t think. I would say that I started using the word queer in college where I heard it used more often. But, you know, it was always just being the different one in the space. Like all the teachers at the school knew my name. I mean all the way through college when it would be a big room and I was the person who was a little bit different.

I am trans and for me that means that I was born in a way that doctors assigned me female, but I don’t know if I feel as female now. I feel that my identity is definitively trans, where I sort of feel a little bit of neither and little bit of both. When I started transitioning, I think I was 19 or 20. And, I medically transitioned at 25, which is taking medical steps to change my physical appearance from one gender to another. I just feel trans in the head and now I feel trans in the body.

For me it started with a mastectomy and 8 months later I started a hormone regiment that I am still on. And I’ll probably continue to do so for a little while, but you know, I want to have a baby and live as much of life as I can. It’s been an awesome blessing to get to live as a woman, a teenage boy for 10 years; I mean what a bizarre experience. And then, you know, coming at it as a teenager being a really awkward girl to being a dude, being an adult awkward man. It’s such a more comfortable space being an adult and doing it all over. Thank god when I went through second puberty I wasn’t a teenager again (laughs). It was like my identities have sort of calmed down with the knowledge that you don’t have to be one [gender] or the other. Like in the last several years it has been just easy peezy, and now I feel really true to myself. I don’t want to be anything other than myself. Like any performance of anything else isn’t really true to me.
Summary

While Ryan, Jake, and Harvey all self-identified as transgender and played sport, their experiences varied. They all played sports throughout their childhood, high school, and collegiate years; however, they played different sports. Harvey and Ryan both participated in Martial Arts, but the art forms they participated in were very different. Karate (Harvey) is generally regarded as a combative art form, with participants learning kicks and punches; while aikido (Ryan) is generally considered an anti-combative art form, with participants learning to non-violently disarm other participants. Jake and Harvey both played on women’s collegiate club teams, however Jake’s early experiences were unique because he played on both boy’s and girl’s teams.

Ryan’s, Harvey’s, and Jake’s gender identities were as diverse as their sport experiences. Ryan was assigned male sex at birth, but has moved away from that designation as he explored his transgender. Harvey and Jake were both assigned female sex at birth, completed top surgery, and are both on testosterone HRT, their gender identities are different. Harvey identifies as both and neither genders, whereas Jake identifies as a trans man. These differences in both sport experience and gender identity help shape both their understanding of their identity and their world-view. The experiences mentioned in these profiles will be revisited in greater depth.

Layered Narrative

The Gender Identification Process

While all the athletes self-identified as transgender, their identities and experiences are quite obviously dissimilar. The use of transgender as an umbrella term is quite helpful to consider their experiences in relation to one another; however the diversity of their experiences has not been reflected in the sport literature. As one of the goals of this project is to trouble the
current sport studies approach to the examination of trans athletes’ sport participation, I must first interrogate and destabilize the medical and physiological literature in which most of the sport research is based.

As discussed in Chapter I, the medical industry has long policed the transgender body. Historically, to get SRS, an individual must be diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder (GID), lived in their desired gender for a year, undergone at least one year of hormone therapy (HRT), and have a referral from a medical doctor. Therefore, people wanting to get SRS must first convince a psychiatrist that they have GID so that they can get a referral and begin the transition process. As trans people learned that doctors expected specific thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, many learned to manipulate the system to get the surgery that they desired. Garfinkel (2006) relayed the story of a trans person who convinced the staff at a gender identity clinic that she had testicular feminization syndrome⁶ and passed all the psychological and physical exams for a proper referral from the doctors to be granted full SRS. Garfinkel later found out that the individual was actually born intersexed, had falsified her documents, and altered her life history to gain access to the procedure she desired.

As medical researchers detailed the transition process, including these falsified life histories, a “mythical trans narrative” has become expected. The mythical narrative includes stories about cross-dressing at a young age, feeling as though they fit in with the opposite sex better than they do with members of their sex, severe negative feelings about their body, and psychological problems such as depression and low self-esteem (Namaste, 2000). This mythical narrative has been continuously reinforced in medical literature documenting the developmental processes of trans people (Stryker, 2006). Therefore, this narrative has become the expected, monolithic “Trans narrative.” If a person comes out as trans, it is assumed that they have
experienced all of the thoughts, feelings, and events associated with this mythical trans narrative. The uncritical acceptance of this mythical trans narrative within the medical discourse leaves the manifold and disjointed experiences of trans people unheard. People, such as Harvey, who feel that they are neither male nor female, have historically been erased from the medical discourse. In fact, Harvey’s experiences are much different than those heard in the standard trans narrative. In his profile, Harvey discussed not wanting to change from one gender to another, but rather feeling definitively trans: that he felt he was both and neither genders at the same time. This identification troubles the standard trans narrative. Many trans people, like Harvey, do not want to simply switch genders, instead they live in a constant state of fluidity and undefined gender identity. 

It’s been an awesome blessing to get to live as a woman and a teenage boy 10 years, I mean what a bizarre experience. And now all of a sudden testosterone ages you so quickly, it switched really fast to living life as a man where people see me as not a kid anymore.

And then, you know, coming at it as a teenager being a really awkward girl to being a dude, to being an adult awkward man. It’s such a more comfortable space being an adult and doing it all over. Thank god when I went through second puberty I wasn’t a teenager again (laughs). It was like my identities have sort of calmed down with the knowledge that you don’t have to be one or the other. Like in the last several years it has been just easy peezy, and now I feel really true to myself. Like I don’t want to be anything other than myself. Like any performance of anything else isn’t really true to me. I just feel trans in the head and now I feel trans in the body.
Harvey’s story illustrates the importance of recognizing that trans experiences are not monolithic, and should not be treated as such. It is important for fluidity in identity to be recognized, and researchers must understand that many trans people’s lives do not reflect the mythical trans narrative.

Jake’s identity also exemplifies gender’s fluidity and instability. Yet, his narrative is much different than Harvey’s. For example, he identified as queer in high school and genderqueer throughout college. As he said,

For a while genderqueer was my identity. I guess there are parts that will always be that. I don’t think that I will ever lose that, but I feel that the balance is just a bit different. I think there are a lot of crazy queer adjectives that people have and so when I told people that I was genderqueer it seemed to adequately describe where I was at the time.

A lot people were always like “are you trans because if you are you can tell me, you don’t have to say that you are genderqueer.” It’s like when you go home and say, “Mom I’m bisexual,” and she’s like “Really? Because if you’re gay you can just tell me.” It’s like no; I’m not trying to break it in easy. At that time that’s what I really felt I was. And, I’d still agree with many of the aspects that are related to someone who is genderqueer, it’s just the less and less androgynous I look, me acting like a guy turns less and less androgynous. So, I don’t really appear as genderqueer anymore. Because as my body changes, so does what counts as being androgynous. If I was to act feminine now, I would be androgynous.

So, there’s actually a lot of different factors. There’s the physical attributes, there’s how you move and handle your physical attributes, and there’s social cues: likes
and dislikes, and as my mom says “which side of the manner tree do you fall down on?”

So do you open a door or do you expect others to open a door?

And I think all of those taken together gives you some semblance of how a person identifies. And I think that a big part of identifying as queer or androgynous is that interplay of all those contradictions. I think that is what makes someone read as physically queer. And so the further I get into transitioning, whether or not I have changed how I actually handle my body or you know a lot of the things from when I was genderqueer haven’t changed, but it’s no longer the best adjective to use for myself because other people don’t see that there is a contradiction anymore. Even though I haven’t really changed, the body changing changed the fact that there’s a contradiction. And I feel that is where genderqueer comes in: that contradiction between your body and how you act. So, I kinda fell out of it, but it has less to do with me choosing or consciously moving out of it, than, uh, I guess just a change in circumstance. Because if I took it like one step farther and became trans fag, I’d be genderqueer again.

It is clear in these stories that vocabulary was very important in Harvey and Jake’s identification processes. In the mythical trans narrative, people know from an early age that they are not the gender they were assigned at birth. The stories of wanting to be a girl/boy and early attempts to be recognized as such are quite common (Stryker, 2006). However, none of the trans people I interviewed told stories about that. In fact, they told very different stories, stories about not knowing. In his profile, Jake talked about trying on different identities, including lesbian, queer, and butch. However, he felt that none of them really fit how he felt. Similarly, Harvey talked a lot about not having the right words for what he was feeling and simply wanting to be something:
You know, I really wanted to be a girl… And that’s why it was so hard for me because that is when there were cliques and circles to be a part of, like what kind of girl are you? And it was all starting to be defined. I tried to be different types of girl but none of them really felt right. I just sort of came to understand that I wasn’t very good at playing girl, but I didn’t even know that I had any other sort of option.

I don’t even remember when I found the word queer. But guess it was sort of an ease. Like um all these terms are so, like when you say lesbian, gay man, bisexual, so many assumptions put behind them. I felt always like, “well here’s the term that best defaults towards me.” I like the word dyke you know; because it felt so empowering because lesbian is so like kinda like old school, like I felt like it came with all these assumptions that maybe weren’t me. But, then dyke, it’s like hard core. And it felt nice to say you know. And then I really liked queer because like queer people were like “I don’t even know the word for that, that’s great you know.” And I just feel like using that term with my sexuality just feels a lot better.

I would say that in college was when I found out [about the word transgender]. Like I didn’t even know the word transgender even existed until one of my college roommates came home from class and was like “I need to talk to you about something which relates to your situation.” And I was like, what, what is this? It was a moment of horrible anxiety. Um, I would say that finding out that there was, that I could change myself so drastically and that I could have the world change with me was like enough to put me into a panic for years. So I would say that it was not as nice of a discovery. I always do these talks that I re-count this time of horrible anxiety and terror in my life when I found out that trans people existed and that I could be one of them. I mean, I
didn’t even know I could get people to call me “he” you know, I had no experience, I didn’t know other people, I didn’t know that there was a way you could do it without surgery or hormones; that you could just live your life non-medically transitioned. 

While Jake knew trans people existed, it was not until college that he thought he might be one of them. Reading Stone Butch Blues was a major turning point in his identification process. As he described,

I didn’t know much about trans people, even going to Private University. I kind of knew vaguely, oh yeah there are some girls who turn into guys but yeah ok whatever. But I never really understood what that would have to do with me.

And then I pretty much read that book, and it’s really, really startling to read a book that someone else has written that you see so much of yourself in, and things that you though nobody else knew. And all of a sudden you are reading someone talking about your experience only it was their experience too. And all of a sudden I was like ‘oh god that’s it, oh shit, for better or worse, that’s what I am oh shit.’

It feels like I am now who I always have been, only now I have words for it. I’ve changed physically. Like I got bigger and I don’t have to wear girls’ clothes that look like boys’ clothes, I can just wear boys’ clothes now. But, I mean I’m wearing all the same things and doing all the same stuff that I did when I was like five. I don’t really feel like I have changed much at all, I just finally found the vocabulary that isn’t just like close enough (laughs).

In their identification processes Harvey and Jake were dependent upon language. They both tried on different identities using different terms. For them, the terms were as important as the identities they described. Foucault (1973, 1977) argued that discourse is not only the words and
language that constitutes it, but also its real effects on people’s lives. Ravel and Rail (2006) explain that discourses “specify what can be said or done at particular times and places, they sustain specific relations of power, and they construct particular practices” (p. 398). Therefore, Harvey’s and Jake’s ability to identify was dependent on the lexicon and identity categories available to them, and this had tangible effects on their lives.

Because of the medicalization of the transition process, only one transgender identity and one term was available to them (Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 2007; Valentine, 2007), and they did not see this identity as a reflection of their own identity. Contrary to the mythical trans narrative, both Jake and Harvey did not discuss strong associations with the opposite gender from a young age even though they both felt that they did not fit into the category “girl.” Instead their stories reflect a disjointed existence.

Throughout the interviews, Ryan struggled with describing his gender identity and indicated that he was even exploring it as we were talking. He vacillated between talking about having been born and raised as a boy but not feeling like one and talking about enjoying his feminine characteristics. He gave several examples, this one about wearing his partner’s pants while attending rehearsals for a dance performance in which he participated.

So I was wearing these long brown pants I got from Margaret, very flowy and big. Girl pants. And you know when I was doing rehearsals for the last week I just kept them on for a couple days and wore them to some of my classes and stuff. And I remember, not too long ago I was talking to one of my roommates and he said “yeah I met this girl from your conducting class, one thing she asked was, ‘Is he high all the time, did you see the pants he wore to class that one day?’” I mean for one I was kind of concerned about
going out in public in them because I’m a little paranoid to be perceived in public as too much of a girl, but it was happening anyway (laughing).

Ryan did not name his gender identity like Jake and Harvey did. In fact, he was very specific about not identifying his gender. Ryan’s non-identity is an act of resistance in and of itself. In his refusal to name his gender identity, he cannot be placed into any category and lives with his gender as unstable and fluid everyday. His transgender identity is as significant as Harvey and Jake’s, and it is important for scholars to respect and acknowledge his transgender identity.

Several recent volumes present the life stories of a variety of trans people who are usually silenced by the medical discourse (Haynes & Makenna, 2001; Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002; Queen & Schimel, 1997). The addition of these volumes to the academic discourse opens possible locations of resistance and re/construction of expected narratives and norms. Additionally, the recent growth of third wave feminism, queer studies, and trans studies has begun to trouble the mythical trans narrative. Academic discussions urging a re-conceptualization of the gender binary are beginning to take hold.

Transitioning

Transitioning is the crux of the trans narrative, all events in a person’s life supposedly lead up to the magical moment when he/she switches genders. According to the medical literature and the mythical trans narrative switching gender is directly linked to the SRS procedure, and the only type of trans people are those who get full SRS. This conceptualization erases many trans people from the dialogue and reinforces very specific ideas about sex, gender, and transgender. The recent fem/queer/trans dialogue (e.g. Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002; Queen & Schimel, 1997; Valentine, 2007) has begun to trouble the assumed link between gender and sex and the need for surgical transitioning in general; often writing about people who live as
trans without surgery. For people like Harvey, who live as both and/or neither genders, the transition process can be more complicated. As he described,

> Like I could pass as a straight man now if I wanted to, but I have a weird body for a dude, I’m like 5’4”, 150 lbs. You know, and then I don’t have a dick. That’s totally fine with me but it’s in a space where [having a dick is] a large part of society. And I don’t want one.

I mean I don’t like to do the thing where people say, “you know I was supposed to be born a boy” because for me that doesn’t, I don’t feel like I have a mind-body disconnect anymore. Like I feel trans in the head and now I feel trans in the body, you know so, I don’t like to give them the “I was supposed to be born a boy, and I was a girl but now I am a boy” because that just doesn’t work for me.

I think for me to change my gender legally I’d have to get a hysterectomy, I don’t want a hysterectomy. So legally my name is Sheila, and I don’t plan on changing that anytime soon. I like the fact that there’s always a sense of having to come out over and over to strangers.

As mentioned in his profile, Jake recently started HRT and is planning on getting top surgery soon, but like Harvey he doesn’t want bottom surgery. For Jake, transitioning is less about anatomy and more about passing as a man. He said,

> I have so much energy that I spent before like trying to get a look, and trying to get other people to see how I felt, and like the further I go into transitioning I just feel like I have a lot more energy to do other things. Like I don’t have to first do damage control before anything even happens. I just don’t have those problems anymore. So, I just get to do normal stuff like worry about bills (laughing). I don’t have to worry about getting cash
from an ATM because last time I bought something at the store the person didn’t accept my credit card because they thought that I was using my mom’s card (laughing).

As with trans identities, transitioning is not a monolithic process. For some people transitioning includes full SRS, legal gender change, and living full time in their desired gender. For some people, like Jake, transitioning includes some surgery and passing as a certain gender. Still, for other people, like Ryan, transitioning may not even be part of their transgender identity. The variety of trans experiences and identities again illuminates the misrepresentation of the mythical trans narrative.

Safe Spaces for Sport Participation

Because most of the sport studies literature on trans athletes’ participation in sport is based on the medical and physiological literature, it is heavily dependent upon the mythical trans narrative. The inability of the mythical trans narrative to fully encompass the experiences of all trans people demands an interrogation of the sport studies literature. Following the assumptions of the mythical trans narrative and its application to sports, the only trans athletes who compete in sports are fully medically transitioned; which means that neither Ryan, Harvey, nor Jake would be able to compete in sports. However, all of them were able to carve out spaces for participation while pushing the boundaries of the gender binary. Ryan, Jake, and Harvey all discussed finding places where they could participate in sports. Ryan talked specifically about how learning to valuing other things in the sport context can help people look past an individual’s transgender expression or identity.

I guess, in the end, hard work might make up for non-standard gender identification. Because if people are trained to process someone’s value through that. Just like a carrot, if someone is hungry they are going to value the carrot, but if you can show
them that the carrot has value even when they are not hungry, then they might be able to see that value in other ways.

So if you work hard then maybe people will value that and let [non-standard gender expression] just be its own thing. In high school I didn’t really get into the competition, I just tried my hardest to do what we were doing and that was that. You know, I wasn’t going to be like “well I don’t want us to win; I am going to sit here and do nothing.” I really just liked physical activity. I always tried as hard as I could to do the [physical] things. I wasn’t always great at it, but I was in a position where I didn’t have to succeed. All I had to do was try hard and that was fine. Like holding a football dummy or say their offense was going to practice something so they needed some defense people and it was like “ok you stand here and then you run over there as fast as you can.” Ok. So I was able to handle that stuff, and I don’t think people really had a problem with me.

I just think that I wasn’t approaching sport like most people around me were and so it seems as though one of the goals of being on the football team was to practice so that you can win your football games, I didn’t really care if we played football games, I was into the practicing like ‘let’s get out there run around, hit each other for awhile, and then go home.’ And so I mean I really didn’t have much of a competitive drive. And in some ways I think it might have kind of isolated me. I wasn’t into community so much, you know after the games I didn’t really go hang out with other people on the team or anybody (laughing). I kept mostly to myself when I was in high school. I didn’t try to be a problem for anybody, you know it was a small school, so everyone knew who I was, I think that to some degree other people on the team had a thing where they were going to protect me or whatever. I mean when like 99% of the school is in protecting Ryan mode,
there is nothing to protect me from you know. But they would have been totally fine lynching somebody that did something to me that most people didn’t like.

I recall this one person who, I don’t know, there were a few weeks where occasionally I’d be walking down the hall and they’d just pick me up by my neck and hold me up against the lockers and just be like, “What’s going on?”

“Not much, what are you doin?”

“Not much, going to math class.”

“Yeah I’m going to study hall; I’m going to take a nap.”

“Cool.”

And then he’d put me down. I guess I just didn’t really feel threatened by the situation, and I think it confused people because I wasn’t like “get the fuck out, I’m gonna do something to your sister man.” You know, I wasn’t really into it, so, (pause). So I think at one point there was someone who was having a problem with me and most people hated him anyways, and I think it was a reason for most people to come together and be my friend as an excuse maybe to pick on someone else, but it carried on for a while, people would be like:

“Yeah that’s Ryan, he’s cool, don’t fuck with him man.”

“Ok, you don’t fuck with him either”

“We won’t, ok.”

“Ok.”

For awhile everybody wanted to protect me. I suspect for one that most people weren’t used to dealing with someone who didn’t resist them. So I pretty much let people do whatever they wanted to do and I wasn’t too concerned about it.
Throughout this discussion, Ryan contradicts himself saying that the majority of his peers wanted to protect him, but then he tells the story of the one student holding him up against the locker and tells that he felt isolated and lonely. It seems that as he tells the story, Ryan is attempting to reconcile the discrepancies as he finally explains that trying hard in physical activity is enough, that he fulfills the expectations set out for him by trying hard physically and avoiding social situations. His refusal to engage in physical/verbal altercations contributes to his gender ambiguity, so as long as he avoids potentially awkward social situations, most people left him alone. He talked more specifically about aikido later in the interview. He said,

I think aikido also helps [create a safe space], (pause) since it’s not going with “I have to win this thing” it seems easier than what I remember in high school to approach [practicing aikido] as “I’m going to figure myself out.” Because that approach is going on, it can have positive influence on gender identification. So if the artificial imposition is “someone is coming to hit you in the face, get out of the way” rather than “this person is approaching you, what do they do during the day, what do they do at night, how do they do this, are they going to pick heavy stuff up or not, are they going to be passive,” you are looking at yourself and you are not in these sort of gender imposed situations.

So when you get comfortable moving freely in situations where gender isn’t really called into play, when it is called into play you have a self-confidence about yourself that is not gendered to hold and maintain through that situation. So, I have this kind of identity and I have this kind of identity or I have this kind of existence and I have this kind of existence, you know whatever. So if this is being called into question, or poked, or whatever, then that can be engaged, but you still have a reference point outside of that and I think that’s cool. And sport can do that too. Well, what does it matter what gender I
am, I’m still going to kick your ass. We’re still going to beat you. You know that works too.

Ryan learned that if he did not resist people in expected ways, they would either leave him alone or actually want to protect him. Stitzlein, (2007) argued that gender-nonconforming people learn valuable skills that help them negotiate other events in their lives. Ryan’s strategies for non-violent resistance helped him adapt to aikido well. He carries this form of resilience with him in other areas of his life. He talked briefly about a recent trip to a hardware store where he observed many men exhibiting macho behavior. During the discussion he used similar resistive strategies as when he was held up against a locker. He remarked that were “wasting energy that could be used for something else” and he “refused to engage with them.” Clearly, these experiences inform his perspective about the ability of hard work to overshadow gender-nonconformity.

Although the context was much different, Jake also found protection within sport. His basketball teammates seemed to be able to value Jake for his contributions to the team and to look past his non-normative gender. He explains,

In high school we had this coach who was a really fucking hard ass, a real jackass in every avenue of life. And, he was like “Everybody has to wear a skirt.” I was like, “uh I don’t own one, shit.” So, I ironed my khakis and I ironed my button up shirt. And I remember ironing it specifically going “this equals skirt because I used starch, so that should count (laughing).”

So I show up, and he’s like “you’re not respecting yourself, you’re not respecting your team,” and he was like “you’re not starting.” I was like “whoa,” and I was upset. And actually what was really cool, I had my teammates, without me even asking, went up to the coach and were like “what are you doing, like she ironed her pants and her shirt,
like that’s her equivalent. It’s obvious I mean come on, have you ever seen her in a skirt?” And he was like “well, no.” And they were like, “well yeah, that’s equal for her, we are okay with that. That should count for her.” And he finally kind of gave into it, but only because they told him that it was okay with them. Like if they hadn’t been verbal at all, I have no doubt that I would have continued to get shit for that all the time. Which was really cool because they weren’t particularly liberal girls, and they weren’t even girls who were really good friends of mine. It was just like really obvious to them and they saw how really backwards it was. Like how old fashioned it was.

In environments like these, athletes exploring their gender identities can explore their identity more than in more strictly regimented environments and still be valued for their sporting abilities.

*Queer Resistance and Community Formation*

Despite the support of his teammates in the mandatory skirt situation, Jake often felt isolated in high school. Embedded in a story about finding community after high school, he discussed the loneliness he experienced:

So, I played basketball pretty much in a really small very conservative town and a pretty conservative area, rural conservative area. So I felt like you always end up getting isolated, even though you may not be, you feel like you are, especially when you haven’t even put a word to yourself. So you can’t even like go out and search, you can’t even like google it because you don’t even know what the word is for you yet. It’s a little bit tricky to know if you’ve found someone like you because you both probably don’t know what you are. And you just kind of sit there checking each other out going “I don’t know.”
So anyway, there was a point guard on one of the other teams and there was always a rumor that she was gay. And I remember her very distinctly, her name was Kelly, and she always wore headbands, she liked headbands, and they were always color coordinated. I always thought they were really cool. I wasn’t sure if it was a gay thing, but I remember thinking that it was really cool.

And, I finally saw her somehow right after I had come back from my freshman year of college and we both kind of looked at each other like “Oh my gosh, I know you.” So we decided we were going to hang out, so there we were hanging out and we basically just vetted out all the gay people in our entire league (laughing). And when we got down to it, it was like most of the really good athletes were like the big humongous gay, it was hilarious because we were like, wow if you took all the gay people out of the league… (laughing). It was just I guess it was just mind boggling to figure out how many of us there were and no one was talking about it (emphasis his).

You know, like no one was out and no one knew the word for it everyone was really, really quiet. You know it would have been really easy if there was like a group, and everyone had already known each other too, is the funny part. I already hung out with most of the other girls without knowing. Why? I just you now thought they were really cool. We just had an affinity for each other in a sense; we could sense that the other person was going where we were going. So I guess after the fact there was a real sense of community, it would have been very nice during the fact to have that but it definitely still helped after the fact, going back and finding everybody who was [queer] and listening like “oh how did you go through it, how’d your team feel?”
Jake identifies several different concepts in this story. The first being the isolation he felt as a queer athlete. Several scholars in sport have identified the deep closets in sport keeping lesbians and gay men silent (Anderson, 2005; Fusco, 1998; Griffin, 1998; Krane, 1997). It is not surprising that the high school athletes on Jake’s team and in the league were not talking about it, especially with the strict rules Jake’s coach imposed. The mandatory skirt policy might have made other girls uncomfortable too, but according to Griffin (1998), those kinds of strict rules work to keep athletes quiet about their identities in fear of a public outing. The second interesting concept Jake identified is the benefit of finding a community, even after the fact. Krane et al. (2002) described the social psychological benefits of participating in sport in a welcoming atmosphere and subsequent community creation at the Gay Games. Jake implies that finding this queer community, even after they had finished competing against each other was helpful in his gender identification process.

Harvey’s team was certainly a location for queer resistance as he and his trans teammate were able to come out as trans while playing on the team, obscuring the line between woman and man. Women’s rugby has been regarded as a queer space and has been known for its community formation (Baird, 2001). Broad (2001) identified women’s rugby as a location for queer resistance and argued that the dichotomous lines separating genders and sexualities are blurred in the context of women’s’ rugby. Throughout his interviews, Harvey talked about the social support that a sports team can provide. Here he talked about rugby in general and more specifically the importance of his team in his transition process:

I think the benefit of having [rugby] was I had a space where I could be physical and I could release all that anxiety energy. Because you just get to hit people and that’s awesome. And the sport like rugby where people get as close as they do, its really helpful
to have people who know you and have watched you grow, and on a team like rugby where fucking half your team is queer anyways they seem to somehow get what you are going through. I don’t know if it would have been that close of a connection with any other sports, like I was never that close with any of my other teams.

But, I do feel like having the rugby team there, like I’m hanging out tonight with my old rugby buddies, you know, they just kind of create a sense of family. A secondary family where you are at and I think that is crucial. My friends of the rugby team are still absolutely my dearest friends, it was definitely a family. And when I started coming out I had a built in family in that situation. They acted in whatever support I needed you know. And they didn’t really have an obligation to do it. But, they are definitely a second family to me.

[The other trans person on the team] and I were just so loved that it was sort of a “you could do no wrong” kind of deal. So, it was pretty easy I guess. It was just nice to have that “no matter what support” and, you know, not worrying about it on the field. And shoot, you go to a rugby party and there is a lot of androgyny happening (laughs). If you have to come out in a sport, it’s a pretty safe sport to come out in.

Similar to women’s rugby, women’s ice hockey has been considered an effective site of queer resistance and community formation. Theberge (2000) explored the various political aspects of gender and sexuality in women’s ice hockey. Again similar to women’s rugby, Theberge found that queer women were provided with the space to be open about their shifting gender and sexual identities. Playing on a collegiate women’s ice hockey team, Jake found one such queer atmosphere. As he said,
People were supportive, or at least like the athletes were. I mean there are always people who will be like “Oh, why do you want to be at an all girls school anyway?” But, I mean for the most part everyone was really, really supportive.

Our whole team was really close. Probably too close (laughing), small women’s campus, all of a sudden practice turns into speed dating. But, yeah, everybody was pretty close. We always had this joke that if one person got hit on the ice too hard you’d have the ex, the current girlfriend, and the future girlfriend all out to get them. (laughing). And, [off the ice] it was totally fun, no one cared at all. I was kind of lucky in that respect because it was not new on our campus, and it probably was something a lot of my teammates were expecting before I knew it.

Jake, Harvey, and Ryan were able to find sporting spaces in which they were valued as people, regardless of their gender identity. It is clear that the spaces are available and it is possible for trans people of all shapes and sizes to play sport. Harvey’s and Jake’s experiences were somewhat similar due to the similarity of cultural contexts between women’s rugby and ice hockey; however Ryan identified valuing hard work rather than gender presentation as a basis for understanding people as very useful strategy that seems to be in play in those contexts. As locations of queer resistance, Harvey and Jake’s teams seemed to be able to look beyond superficial contradictions in their gender presentation and accept them as they self-identified.

*Queer Resistance as a Continually Negotiated Process*

Even though Harvey and Jake’s teams were very supportive of them as they transitioned and created a space in which the gender lines were blurred, their sporting experiences still were challenging. Jake explains:
There were already trans people on the team, like transsexuals as well as transgender people on the team, but it was still very much like “this is ours and you can come play with us, but this is ours, like look how open we are being by letting you play with us.” There was no one on our team who was like “you guys disgust me, get the fuck out of here,” but there were women who were like “I never want to date a guy again, I hate men” and then like there is a transsexual getting changed in the locker room.

But usually the terminology wasn’t malevolent at all, which is why it might be even more surprising that [their ignorance] was that obvious because it was by people that you knew supported you. [The atmosphere] was very open but the way it was talked about was like “oh like aren’t you glad you go to Private University? I can’t imagine other teams that would let you guys play” (emphasis his). It’s just such a new issue that a lot of people, when they use terminology, they don’t know how that would apply to somebody who is trans. And then you get something like a trans person playing sports, and it’s like look I know it’s your team, I know you think you are very nice for letting me stay, just let me just do the actual sport part now.

Similarly, Harvey talked about the frustrations he faced on his rugby team. He said,

Even though these are like my best friends and they are still my best friends today, you are on a women’s sports team. So here I was, wanting it all, and trying to be a dude in the rest of my life, but I wanted to play sports on a girl’s team. So, one of the main challenges was that you were constantly reminded that you were on a girls team. Like the ref was always like “come on ladies” or if they ever called me “he” during a game it wouldn’t go over very well. Then you go to parties and your just like, “all these people think I’m like them but I’m not.” I just don’t think there was space on the team.
For the other person on the rugby team who was trans, his experience was a little bit more frustrating because he was strongly male identified. He took them having trouble with his gender a lot harder than I did. I mean (said in a deep voice) being man was something that was really uncomfortable for him; where I was more like “well I just don’t think I feel like a woman” you know. I just wasn’t that upset about it because I just didn’t know. I didn’t know that you could ask people to call you he and they will call you he. You know (laughing) and that it didn’t have to be so internal.

I feel like for him that the pronoun thing was really difficult because it was a slow roll to getting to male pronouns. There were times when both of us were seen as like a 14 year old boy or just a queer girl. So, the team was really slow to pick up on “he.” And they kept calling him she, kept calling him she, kept calling him she, and I feel like it’s a real slap in the face when it’s people who know you so well, and who seem really fine about it but they can’t make this change in their conversation. So I think he had a more frustrating experience.

There was this other time I remember, we were playing a team from a Southern State and there was one woman on the team who was a bearded woman and it was like a point of some contention with women on our team. Like they always mentioned it, like “oh the one with the beard.” Where I think that is totally rad. It was something where they were like ‘wait a minute, wait a minute.’ I mean I don’t know how that person identified. I don’t think it was a testosterone issue, but I don’t know. I just felt gross about that situation. I just sort of felt embarrassed for my team. I can’t remember if I said anything or not, but it was just an embarrassing situation. Just to hear them, even though they never said anything in front of her, just to hear disrespectful talk is kind of difficult.
Capitalizing on Foucault’s (1977) notion that power is productive and relational, Ravel and Rail (2006) identified several ways in which power and resistance in a queer sport setting are continuously negotiated. They found that while some teams welcomed queer identities, they simultaneously created new systems of oppression within their team culture. Similarly, some lesbian softball leagues applauded queer women and butch lesbians while discriminating against trans participants. Some explicitly banned trans participants while others have unwritten rules emphasizing identification as a woma(y)n (Travers, 2006). These leagues, like Harvey’s and Jake’s teams, both resist and reinforce the sport gender binary. A gendered line which cannot be crossed seems to exist even within communities of queer resistance. Fortunately, this line is continuously pushed, crossed, and renegotiated. Harvey’s teammates eventually called his trans teammate and him “he” and stopped considering them as simply queer women.

**Bullying**

Although he did not define it as bullying, Ryan’s experiences of being up by the neck can certainly be considered bullying and physical harassment. And, unfortunately, other trans people are not protected by their peers. In fact, trans and non-gender conforming people continue to be bullied, physically, and verbally harassed on a daily basis (Cho et al., 2004). Several youth recently have committed suicide after enduring homo/transphobic bullying (GLSEN, 2009). Harvey discussed more overt bullying he experienced while participating on the high school volleyball team. As he said,

> I ended up quitting the volleyball team actually. The coach of the team was out as a lesbian at our school and I was really obviously queer, I mean *real* obviously queer.

> And the coach was really hard and mean on me for some reason and I don’t know
whether she was just self-hating or what, but I ended up feeling sort of a bit bullied off the volleyball team and just constantly getting made fun of and stuff like that.

My general memory of it, it was just like pick pick pick pick on me you know. It was just like a feeling that I was just an easy scapegoat because I was a really weird different kid. It was like whenever anything would go wrong, I would get yelled at for it. If we were moving too fast, I would get yelled at for it. I felt like I was a scapegoat for the team, who by the way are almost all queer now (laughing), I saw a few of them later in life playing rugby and kept seeing them like making out with girls at parties. So, I just feel like I discovered something early in myself that they hadn’t discovered yet, and it was that weird identification pick on, like “I see something in you that I don’t want to see in me yet, and I’m going to pull you out and tell you about it.” They just sort of made my life difficult.

Gender expression and perceived sexual orientation are two of the top three reported reasons for bullying (GLESN, 2009), which both Ryan and Harvey experienced. Several programs designed to combat bullying in schools, including school sponsored sport teams, have been implemented in schools across the country (i.e. Beyond the Binary, Safe Schools, & Safe Zone). The continued use of these programs and further development of safe spaces for gender nonconforming youth is necessary to ensure their safety and personal well being.

*The Locker Room*

The locker room, as a place where naked bodies are publicly displayed, is an interesting space for trans athletes. Considering the mythical trans narrative, one would expect the locker room to be a place of extreme discomfort. Harvey and Jake talked about feeling uncomfortable,
but neither talked about the kinds of extreme discomfort that accompanies the mythical trans
narrative. Harvey talked about being in a girl’s locker room in high school:

I felt really out of place in girl situations, like locker rooms were always really
uncomfortable because I always thought that girls thought I was hitting on them and I
wasn’t. And I was a little self-hating and like any teenage girls do, I was really super,
super self-conscious about my body, you know, and I don’t know if that had anything to
do with [being] trans or just not. I just felt like I was faking it along you know. In a locker
room situation, like I mean I wore training bras pretty much through high school. I didn’t
really have much to talk about (laughing), and it was a sense of, like, I can’t even do this
right naked.

Here, Harvey discussed several different factors involved with his discomfort of being in the
girl’s locker room, but does not identify severe discomfort with his body as the mythical
narrative suggests. Instead, he talked about not doing girl correctly, which is consistent with
what he said about his gender identity at the time. He mentioned identifying as tomboy, lesbian,
and dyke; however, none of them felt right. He seemed to be trying different identities, shifting
from one to another. This shifting and feeling as if he did not know what he was may have
contributed to his discomfort in the locker room more than any severe dislike for his female
embodiment.

Jake felt discomfort based on his trans body in the locker room. He talked about being in
the women’s locker room while playing ice hockey in college.

Lockers rooms were pretty awkward. It was just stuff like, never, ever, ever
looking while anyone else was changing, like when you are changing you’re head is
down. They were changing so if you look up, even you are looking at them while they are
talking to you, if you happen to look anywhere you are not supposed to, or if you catch them looking anywhere they are not supposed to. That’s a typical kind of locker room thing. But, I feel like it is a lot more so with somebody who is trans because you have people who are already pretty body conscious trying to preserve manhood while getting naked in front of all of their best friends and future girlfriends and past girlfriends (laughing). And you know in sports it’s supposed to be the one time that you are not worried about covering certain parts, and where you are not worried about your aesthetics, like how you look. But when you are trans you can’t just stop, that’s in every aspect of your life. Like you can’t just stop binding\(^9\) once to be more comfortable for hockey.

And then you go into the locker room and all these people you hang out with outside of hockey and now they are seeing your chest and like it was it was just like “ah damn it, I’m just going to stay in my sweaty clothes until we go home, I’ll meet you guys outside.”

Clearly for Jake, changing in the locker room and having his body seen by others was uncomfortable. However, his discomfort was not extreme and he did not mention any hateful feelings toward his body. His unwillingness to stop binding troubles the gendered expectations of his sport. Being on a women’s ice hockey team is in congruent with his gender identity, but he cannot legally play for the men’s team. He is uncomfortable in the women’s locker room, but like sport in general there is no other place for him.

Consistent with his discussions about his gender identity, Ryan’s locker room experiences completely trouble gender and sport. He does not talk about discomfort with his body, instead talking about discomfort with gendered attire expectations. He said,
So, I haven’t done laundry in a while, there’s a laundry machine down there but it’s not working so I’m not going to be doing laundry for a little bit longer. So underwear, well there’s a couple pair that [my partner] Margaret has down in the drawer, so that’s what I am wearing now, fine with me. But when I went to the rec center yesterday to go practice I brought my speedo, which is the manly version I guess, to put on after I got done with the shower so that I was wearing appropriate gender whatever. So it’s still something that I do sometimes, the gender appropriate thing. But it’s not as important or that big or a problem for me as it would have been awhile back. I mean if I was wearing women’s underwear at 18, I might have been freaked out and also been like if someone finds out they are going to think I am a sex offender or a creep or something. It’s like well no, I just haven’t prioritized laundry all that much and these happen to fit fine.

Ryan’s discomfort lies firmly in the gendered expectations of the sport locker room. Because he uses the men’s locker room, is expected that he wear gender appropriate underwear. Like Jake, he is forced to choose one gender when entering the locker room despite his ambiguous gender identity.

Some facilities have designated gender neutral locker rooms to negate the negative experiences of locker rooms and to provide a comfortable space for trans people. However, even when a gender neutral locker room option is available, awkward moments and frustrations still arose for Jake. He talked about using a gender neutral locker room at Private University for a swimming class:

It was actually pretty cool, like they had a genderqueer locker room, for trans and family/other/all locker room at the college, which was really cool. It was great [when] I had a swimming class, like can you imagine how awkward that would have been like
trying to get changed in front of everybody, it was like oh man (laughing). That was really really cool, but at the same time, all of the social interaction that you have in the locker room, like you talk and meet with all your friends, it was just, I don’t know. It made it really, really obvious that one person in the class was really, really different.

As Jake points out in the second half of this story, the locker room not only a place to change into the sports uniform, it is also a place where team culture and friendships are developed through social interactions. For Jake, the social setting in the women’s ice hockey locker room also was uncomfortable. He said,

You know, it didn’t really feel like my locker room. It felt a lot like visiting, it was like “get in, get out!” We kind of had a running joke. There was a “boys club” we called it. So it was like any of the masculine identified lesbians or butch women and all the genderqueer or trans [people]. It was really funny because we would like all change on one side of the locker room (laughing), and all the girly-girls changed on the other side of the locker room. And like we can’t touch and don’t look, but the girls on the other side of the locker room could do whatever they want.

Not only does Jake notice that the locker room became a gender segregated space with the masculine identified people relegated to their own section of the locker room, he also comments on the gendered behaviors of his teammates. It seems as though the gendered expectations are much different for the masculine identified people versus the feminine identified people in Jake’s locker room. This is fairly consistent with observations about some queer spaces. Ravel and Rail (2007) found that women in “gaie” spaces gradually established a “gaie hegemony” by encouraging a more feminine gaie identity. Doing so, they created a dichotomous structure in which gaie is cast in opposition to more butch or masculine lesbian identities.
Sport and Gender Segregation

Throughout the interviews, Ryan, Harvey, and Jake struggled with the negotiation of gendered expectations. This is not surprising because sport is steeped in traditional notions of gender. Even within queer spaces, divisions have been constructed based on traditional masculinity and femininity (although it is important to also note the resistance to these categories when they are taken up by queer people).

Since gender is at the crux of Ryan, Harvey, and Jake’s experiences, it is important to interrogate the most obvious challenge to transgender athletes: sports are segregated by gender. Men compete against men and women compete against women. Even the few co-ed sports have strict rules about gender. Mixed doubles tennis for example demands one man and one woman per team, and co-ed recreational softball demands that four men and five women be on the field with no more than two men batting in a row. In such a segregated atmosphere trans people are forced to choose one category. While Harvey and Jake were able to compete as openly trans people on women’s teams, it was made quite obvious to them that they were still on a women’s team. Harvey talked further about his frustrations when being separated by gender in sport throughout his life:

My [childhood] physical education experiences were always really frustrating because I was really athletic, like the boys would put me as QB block when we played football because I could hold back the guys. I would say my in the public school physical education it was always frustrating to be put with the girls and be separated. It would be like girls [play] hopscotch, and it boys [play] tetherball. I don’t know if that’s because what we had to do or if we got grouped up. But, I can just remember being really
frustrated because even if we weren’t separated, I’d have to like *beg* the boys to play (emphasis his).

[As I got older] I took some martial arts classes and we’d always get separated into men’s and women’s groups. And even then I was always the odd man out where it was like “who do we have this weirdo fight?” I usually just fought whoever the other odd man out was. Like in my martial arts school growing up it was a huge dude for a while because he didn’t have anybody to fight either so they just put him with me. [After that] I ended up going to this ROTC martial arts school. Again, they just didn’t know what to do with me. You know, they didn’t know whether to put me in the men’s group or the women’s group. And so, I didn’t do much competitive fighting. I fought in a few tournaments but they are all like the same thing; isolate boy, girl, boy, girl in fighting and in my weight. Again it’s like, fucking why do you even need to separate it? You know, it’s not a sport that needs to be separated.

Sports have been segregated by gender because traditional notions about gender hold that men are better athletes, and the combination of socialization and differential treatment has taught people to believe this simply a natural fact. Ryan talked about having limited options during the interviews. He explained how he ended up playing football in high school:

    So, I want to do physical activity. Well, what do I do? Ok, I’ll join the football team. That’s what guys do, we join the football team. So I would have seen myself as different, I mean girls do the cheerleading, guys do the football; okay I’ll do that. But, what didn’t come to mind, well gosh maybe I should do dance or gymnastics, or aikido or anything like that. Which, I think if I would have saw something like [the aikido form] I have been practicing now I would have done that. But, yeah so I mean a lot of the things
that I think would have been cool to have done just wouldn’t have come up as even an option because I think there is already the social momentum where ‘people like me do these things, and people like them do those things’ when I went to high school. Ryan astutely identified the social forces that surrounded him when he was in high school. Consistent with Metheny’s (1965) guidelines for gender appropriate physical activities, the only activities available to him were deemed masculine appropriate despite his wanting to do other activities. Not only are the appropriate sports different, but the ways in which boys and girls were taught to play sports was greatly different. Girls have historically been taught to play for fun, while boys were taught to play to win. Additionally, a higher level of aggressiveness and rough play has become acceptable for boys and not acceptable for girls to participate in. Harvey’s frustrations were not solely based in being segregated by gender; he wanted to play harder. He said,

I was just a super tomboy and I felt like the girls were not playing as hard as I wanted them to be (laughing). Like I wanted to play wall ball where you got spanked by the tennis ball you know, I just, I think I just wanted to play harder than the girls wanted to play.

Jake also recognized the different expectations for boys and girls in sport. He played on a boy’s team as child and switched to the girl’s team in high school. As he said,

It could be the team that I played on, but the guy’s games seemed to be much more competitive and that was okay and cut throat was healthy and that was encouraged, that all or nothing mentality and a very results-oriented mentality was okay. Whereas when I brought that to the girl’s teams that I played on, it was just like everyone was just
like “whoa calm down, its just supposed to be fun, this is supposed to be for enjoyment.” they just weren’t used to that kind of aggression.

There was an aggression and assertiveness that I had to tone way back when I first switched. I just remember it was very physical, everything was, I feel like the big difference was that people really seemed to use their bodies. Like, women place themselves and a lot of it is about technique. A lot of it in guys sports, for better or worse, and I think a lot of it is cultural and social, they just use their bodies, almost sacrificially, ‘well I’ll just stand here and let the guy run into me’ and its like ‘well yeah that’s what everyone does.’ Whereas if you told that to a bunch of girls the same age, they’d be like ‘I do what, uhahh…’

So, that aggression and physicalness did not help my cause when I switched to a girl’s team. I had a lot of the parents saying ‘oh yeah you are much too aggressive’ and like ‘whoa whoa whoa, calm down, whoa what’s going on’ like ‘whoa you’re going crazy on us here.’ Where I wasn’t at all the most physical with the guys, I was just like a medium player. You get to the girls, and it was just stuff like if you grab for the ball, no one would grab back for it. They would just be like “Oh my god, you just took it from me, oh my god” and sort of like a different style of play, there was less emphasis on sit back and wait for your teammate to pass it to you [on the boy’s team], it was more like go get the ball from your teammate.

Jake learned to play on a boy’s team, which translated into a level of aggressiveness unsuitable for girls. Because of this, he found that when he entered high school and played on the girl’s team, the expectations from the coaches, parents, and athletes were very different than when he played on the boy’s team. Despite the increased competitiveness and aggressiveness in girls’
women’s sports, there remains a line which they are not to cross. Krane et al. (2004) argued that everyone knows the line exists and can identify when someone crosses it, but the line itself cannot be identified. As sports have become more acceptable for women to play, the line has shifted. However, it still exists, and still designates the point at which people begin to doubt her femininity and her birth sex may even be questioned. Therefore, female athletes are forced to negotiate their athletic identity and their feminine identity (Krane et al., 2004). However, as a trans person Jake’s story needs additional consideration. The negotiation eventually wore on him and he came to a realization. He said,

I had a couple of girls on my team say that it was unfair for us to have to play against each other because I didn’t have to like play by the same rules that they did. I was already pretty much a lost cause in terms of femininity. Like, I put on a dress twice: once for prom and once for semi. So, I could workout as much as I wanted and look as manly as I wanted, and of course I was the better athlete for it because it came at the cost of doing all the social stuff.

Everyone knew I was the athlete and that’s what I did, and I didn’t really go into the other lines of work, like being socially popular. Everyone just kind of left me alone. Like, ‘well you know if that’s what you want to do, I don’t feel threatened. There’s no competition, that’s your baby, and you seem to like it and be good at it.’ And so I didn’t really step on any toes by being an athlete.

I think you get to a place where athletics was really the only kind of thing that was expected of me. Which was good, because it kept me out of a lot of trouble. Got me out of a lot of grief, because you know there were a lot of other things that I could have
gotten grief for that I wasn’t really living up to. But I was a really good athlete and that was what I did and really focused on, and it could get me out of a lot of trouble.

The problem was when I started to want other people to expect more from me, you know. I wanted people to not just see me as an athlete. And when they stopped just seeing me as an athlete is where all the other factors that I escaped grief on really came back into play, like feminizing properly or doing more social things or the proper social things. And all of those things that I kind of skipped out on in high school started coming back only this time I was even farther down the queer road. All of a sudden there were more expectations on me, including outside of sports. And I guess it kind of just got worse and worse, until it was like I really want to be trans and I want to go through with this and I want to identify as male. Really I wanted to be like a whole person, not just a tool in a game (laughing). Which is good because you want people to value you for more; not just how fast you can run or how many points you can make.

Jake’s sporting ability coupled with his gender ambiguity pigeon-holed him as simply an athlete. He passed as a girl if and only if he remained “the athlete.” This negotiation, as he acknowledged, helped prevent possible bullying and harassment. Therefore, his gender identity was not questioned as long as he remained in that static identity position. However, he finally came to a point where his identity shifted, the negotiation was no longer beneficial to him, and he needed to come out as trans.

Conversely, Jake’s failure to perform gender appropriately on and off the field caused his teammates to perceive him as threatening. He experienced derogatory dialogue from them accordingly. They could sense that he did not have to abide by the same social codes they did and were upset about it. Interestingly, the dialogue from teammates shifted when they no longer
had to compete directly against Jake. He talked briefly about his high school track and field experiences:

I was ranked third coming into the New Englands meet for javelin. It was so fun, and it was really nice. I didn’t have any of the bitching component because I wasn’t competing against my other teammates. It was you against yourself and against other teams. So, I mean it was like really, really easy for me to be a huge girl throwing really, really heavy things and people were still excited about it (laughing).

Here the incongruity between his perceived gender and his sport ability was actually valued by his teammates. Being a non-gender conforming girl was not threatening to his teammates because they were not competing against each other for a position or during scrimmages. This reaction is consistent with the experiences of other transgender athletes. For example, Michelle Dumaresq was encouraged to start riding competitively after she rode with some of the women on the Canadian downhill mountain biking scene for a few years. After she won a few races, those very same athletes who encouraged her to begin racing circled a petition to have her license revoked (Wilson & Duthie, 2004). Several transgender athletes played on Jake’s collegiate club hockey team, but only the ones who were perceived as a threat were questioned.

We had one transsexual who was not a very good athlete. And he was on hormones, but no one really cared about him, even the other teams. But the minute we had a transgender person who was an excellent player who was not on hormones that’s when everyone, like all the other teams started getting like “hey, hey this is women’s hockey,” they started to check. They wanted us to check to make sure that they are not transitioning yet. Like it’s just interesting because it’s not a big deal and no one really cares until someone is a really good athlete and they could lose because of that person
and then all of a sudden they want us to check. It was like, ‘oh come on, the one who is not on hormones is the one you want us to check?’ (laughing) its kind of funny.

It is very clear that other people’s perceptions of gender are important in the discussion. As the Olympic gender verification system stands, perceived gender is valued more than self-identified gender. If a female athlete’s gender presentation considered suspicious, opponents can challenge her gender. She must then undergo a battery of gender verification tests (Sykes, 2006). In fact, the Beijing Olympics set up the first on site gender verification laboratory, ironically since mandated gender verification testing ended in 2000 (Teetzel, 2006).

Trans Participation and Policy

Currently, the Stockholm Consensus has created a precedent for how sport can be inclusive of transgender athletes. However, this policy also is extremely limiting. First, it excludes non-post-operative transsexuals. Second, the policy entails policing transgender athletes’ bodies in a manner akin to how women athletes’ gender was policed when gender verification tests were the norm.

Unfortunately, with no other precedent or policy for guidance, sport governing bodies across the world have adopted the IOC’s policy on transgender athletes’ participation (e.g., Ladies European Golf Tour, the United States Golf Association, Women's Golf Australia, USA Track and Field, and the Canadian Cycling Association). Widespread adoption of the policy would limit access to sport to only transsexuals who have completely transitioned. As Jake, Harvey, and Ryan’s stories demonstrate, not all transgender people want or feel the need to undergo full SRS, hormone replacement therapy, and complete legal gender change. By allowing only fully transitioned athletes, as defined by the medical community, to compete in sporting
events, these policies reinforce the gender dichotomy and the abnormality of trans people like Ryan, Harvey, and Jake.

The Stockholm policy demonstrates how the distinction between transsexual and transgender becomes very important. The only type of transgender identity and body recognized in sport is the fully transitioned transsexual identity and body. Therefore transgender athletes, like Ryan, Harvey, and Jake, who do not want, cannot access, or cannot afford full SRS are considered abnormal and are systematically excluded and erased from sport discourse. Harvey talked briefly about this issue and his involvement at Camp Trans\textsuperscript{10}. He said,

I think we are a community of folks who haven’t been that involved in sports in our lives, you know. Like at Camp Trans I put together a kick ball team, like a kick ball game, and it was like watching people who have never held a ball in their entire life, run around missing kicks and not catching balls, and just running around not knowing what bases were. And just laughing hysterically. You know, it was just like, talk about a failure of a kickball game. It was hilarious. It was just people you know, who have never felt that they had a space in athletics.

Harvey’s discussion about the people at Camp Trans reveals the structural challenges most transgender people find blocking their participation in sport. For some there is literally no place for them to play under the current gender segregated structure. Harvey and Jake specifically searched out spaces to compete when they entered college. At the collegiate club level, individual teams are self-regulating, create their own team policies, and the regulations regarding transgender participation can be more relaxed than in other sport structures. Transgender people can compete on club teams; however, severe restrictions may be placed on the team by the League rules. Jake described the restrictions his ice hockey team faced:
There are eligibility options where if you have somebody who is on hormones, you take your team out of state championships or any championship tournaments. You basically only get a regular season, and you only get to play the teams that agree with you, and say its okay. I was not at the scheduling organizational level where I would hear if a team didn’t want to play us. So I wasn’t really privy to that kind of information at the time. But, I knew that we actually had to go through the process of actually asking them. While this policy allows transgender athletes to participate, the rules are quite discriminatory, and again place transgender people as the abnormal other who has to ask the “normal people” if they can play. The power is put into the hands of those people who are already in a privileged position and it is taken away from transgender people.

Despite discriminatory rules, Jake and Harvey were able to find teams and leagues with rules relaxed enough for them to participate during college. However, now that they have graduated, they have found it more difficult to find sport spaces in which to participate. Many recreational leagues do not yet have official policies on transgender participation (Sykes, 2006), and athletes simply sign up according to their legal gender. Harvey said,

I would want to play on a volleyball team somewhere, but there won’t be any in Southern State. If I go up to Big City or if I stay here in Small City there are a few recreational teams that I bet I could get on. Or just pick up games. I just want to play. I think not doing sports these last few years, because I’ve been traveling so much, has just been really hard on me. I love playing sports. I just want to play. I don’t care if I lose a lot, but I just want to play through a game without a lot of fuss. I don’t want to ask about the rules a million times, I just want to play.
But then again, like legally I’m female. Like when I sign up with my identification card, they have to put down Sheila, you know. I’ve been dating somebody who plays in a couple recreational soccer leagues. She plays in one co-ed and one all girls. And she has to show her ID when she comes to play. That would be another thing that I would have to work around. I don’t even know how that would work. It’s going to be tricky. It means that I’m going to be paying cash a lot (laughing). It sucks.

These types of (non)policies force transgender people to participate as their legal gender; therefore, asking them to compete in that category does not take their gender identity fully into consideration. And, as in other aspects of their lives, they are asked to compromise their sense of self to fit into the existing structure.

Additionally, these polices provide no safeguards for transgender athletes. While they were in college, Harvey and Jake played on teams that created safe, welcoming atmospheres. However, now that they are out of college, they no longer have that safety net. When talking about finding a place to play now Jake said,

It’s kind of hard to find things to play and a lot of the leagues are (laughs, long pause). You know, I’ve been trying to find things that I can get into without any really awkward situations coming up. I don’t live in a really super like safe area I guess. It’s like a really conservative area so its kind of like trying to weigh the awkward situations you can get in, along with having a bunch of people who live near you knowing who you are (laughs). It’s like really Catholic Italian, super blue collar. If someone walked up and asked me [about my gender identity], I would tell them, but I’m not going to dance down the street with big trans banners (laughing). So it’s tricky to find places where you feel comfortable enough to be as exposed as you are when you are playing sports.
Because he must sign up using his legal gender (female), Jake has had a hard time finding a place to participate in sport where he feels comfortable enough outing himself. Similarly Harvey discussed his rugby history, and how he necessarily outs himself if he wants to talk about it. As he said,

Meeting new people here in Small City who are friends with my rugby players here, like I’m hanging out with all these rugby folks and they are like “well how do you know these people?” And so I have to be like, “well I played on the rugby team with Tammy and Kate.” It was just like a trans person going to an all girl’s school, people are like “where’d you go to school?” “Oh, I went to Private Women’s College.” And, you sort of out yourself in a way that you just wanted to have a casual conversation, you know?

I don’t really feel like I felt it so much when I was playing because those were like my best friends. And, like the safest place I felt was with my rugby team because they loved me so much. But, my history of it now is sort of like… well I could go to a rugby event and sort of hide it. You have to either decide to hide that history or just out yourself.

Under the current gender segregated structure, trans athletes’ sport history, current participation, and future participation are contested spaces. None of the policy options Harvey or Jake have experienced privileged their gender identity. They constantly were responsible for negotiating the rocky terrain and balancing their inner sense of gender identity, desire to play sports, and desire to live peacefully without being barraged by questions regarding their gender identity.

Recently, the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association enacted a policy that may help future trans athletes live more peacefully while competing in sport. The policy allows
people to participate as their self-identified gender in state sanctioned high school competitions (WIAA, 2008). Hopefully, the policy will serve as a model for other sport leagues and more safeguards will be implemented to keep the athletes who come out as trans safe.

The Fairness Debate

Gender segregation within the sport community and subsequent gender verification tests, transgender policies, and transgender verification are grounded in traditional notions of gender. More specifically, they are grounded in the belief that men are better athletes than women and that gender segregation is necessary to create a “level playing field” (Teetzel, 2006; Willis, 1982). Transgender athletes, therefore, are believed to have an unfair advantage. As Jake explains,

It basically gets really hairy the better [athlete] you are. Like if you are just a [trans] athlete playing in club sports and you’re not that good, I’d say its not that hard, and depending on where you live of course, you wouldn’t get that many people objecting to you. It’s when you would actually sway an L to a W, that’s when people are like “hey wait, wait, wait.” So, if you are a trans person and you are a really good athlete, I could see that you’d run into a lot of people trying to stop you very quickly. It really sucks.

MTF athletes are seen as having an upper hand because they went through their first puberty as men, and FTM athletes are considered to be cheating because of their testosterone hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Harvey talked about this challenge while discussing playing rugby after starting HRT when he graduated from college. As he said,

I mean post-college there wasn’t really any space for me to play. I mean I’m not going to play men’s rugby because I’m such a wee man (laughs). Honestly, just the way they play, I wouldn’t make it through a few minutes without being pounded. Plus, it’s almost like I
lost my position on the field because I am too little to be a hooker on the dude’s team. Like on the women’s team I played hooker. I mean I’m 5’4” about 150, at the time I was like 5’4” 140 and hooker was like a perfect position but then if I was to go to a men’s team, you know, I’m too small to play as a forward, and way to fucking slow to play in the back (laughing). So there is not actually like a position on a men’s team playing at a club level that I could work with.

I mean legally I guess I could play on a female team because I never changed my gender legally. But I just feel like if I played at a higher level, I would be in a space where I was constantly making people feel uncomfortable and question the fairness of me being there in the first place. Because I’m not that athletic and I’m on performance enhancers you know. So there’s a sense, like I go to [women’s] rugby tournaments now and before I’d try to find a team to play with, but I won’t even try now.

Here, Harvey illustrates both aspects of the ways in which the fairness debate reinforces the gender binary. He begins the story by asserting that he is too small and weak to play on a men’s rugby team. He then states that he also feels uncomfortable playing on a women’s team because he taking testosterone supplements. The discourse reinforces itself as Harvey ignores the great diversity of people with various trans identities and great diversity of people playing rugby. Instead Harvey falls back on stereotypical assumptions about gender, size and athletic ability.

Similarly, Jake alludes to the unfairness of his participation in high school and college women’s sports. He said,

I feel like it will be a lot easier once I am transitioned. I will be bigger and stronger, and it will be very clear which group I should be playing with (laughs). But, it was really, really hard when I was really genderqueer. Because I worked out a lot and I’m
almost 6 feet tall. So, a lot of people thought I was already starting T. There were a lot of people that were like “this is unfair.”

I just think fairness is fairness, it doesn’t matter if you suck or if you are good. You know, we all know what fairness is and we all know when we are playing in a situation that is not fair. We have all been in the one game where we were like, “the other team has so much funding this is totally unfair. You know, we have seven girls and we play out of a garage and we’re going to get creamed and it’s not because they are better.” Everyone knows when someone is related to a ref (laughing), you know when things are unfair, and no one wants to play in that game… it sucks. And I think that, (pause) you know when there is a girl on the team that is totally pubed out and crazy hormonal before all of the other 7th grade girls who still look like birds with pony tails. It’s totally unfair, she’s huge (emphasis his), everyone’s been in that situation.

Again, Jake relies on traditional assumptions of gender to demonstrate with which group he should be playing. He then discusses fairness as a universally understood concept to explain his place in women’s sport as unfair. Like Harvey, Jake ignores the diversity of genders, body shapes and sizes and fails to conceptualize a sporting structure other than the gendered format that currently exists. However, later in the interview, he began to describe a sport structure that takes more than gender into account. When talking about strategies for trans athletes to fairly participate in sports he said,

I think the best thing to do, and its not an easy thing to ask (laughing), is to make sure that you are always very conscious of that line you always have to straddle between being fair to yourself as an athlete and being fair to other athletes. It’s the physiological things that have to do with separating fair play. Really, the purpose of sport is segregated
by physiology, by predisposition, by how you attain and maintain muscle. So, disregarding self-identification and gender, find the people who have similar body types and who are hormonally and physiologically the closest to yourself. That will be a truer test of your athleticism. So, just reminding people that even though you may be a male-bodied person identifying as female or a female-bodied person identifying as male, that sport is segregated not really by gender. But also, make sure that people do respect your gender identity.

His discussion is both problematic and transgressive. He looks past gender as a category marker and places physiological disposition as the central factor in segregating athletes. His reasoning lies firmly within the traditional medical and physiological research on transgender athletic participation. He invokes this traditional discourse to talk about creating a level physiological playing field. His suggestion to rely on physiological and hormonal markers necessitates a high level of physiological policing. Already, many trans people’s physiology and hormonal levels are policed by the medical industry (Stryker, 2008). Jake’s suggested type of segregation structure would only increase the level of surveillance on trans people.

While Jake remains rooted in the discourse of “fairness,” he steps out of the traditional line of thinking by suggesting that athletes find those people with similar body types and hormonal and physiological dispositions. His ideas of fairness include playing against people similar to each other, and he is able to conceptualize physiology and hormones as detached from sex and gender. He seems to not care with which gender people identify or to which sex they were assigned. This is an important conceptual step and should not be ignored. He has looked past the fact that assigned sex does not always match a person’s inner sense of gender.

Additionally, his segregation of sport would include people of different genders competing
against each other as long as they are similar hormonally and physiologically; a team may consist of non-trans and trans people.

Kane (1995) suggested a similar sporting structure. In her argument “there exists today a sport continuum in which many women routinely outperform men and, in some cases, women outperform most - if not all - men in a variety of sports and physical skills/activities” (p. 193; emphasis in original). Conceptualizing sport as a continuum on which men and women compete at varying abilities moves away from thinking in terms of a dichotomous comparison between men’s and women’s sports. This process deconstructs the gender binary in sport and opens a space in which sport and gender can be reconstructed. While Kane does not include trans athletes in her discussion, the continuum definitely allows room for trans identities, as trans people have been considered to be the most visible people inhabiting the overlap between genders (Prosser, 1998; Stryker, 2008).

Throughout my interviews Harvey continually talked about simply playing and abolishing gender segregation. His conceptualizations of playing sports seem to fall in line with Kane’s continuum conceptualization. When asked about possible guidelines for trans people’s involvement in sport, he responded,

There are just so many different levels you could play. And its like, I just feel like if they were all being used there would be a place for people like me to play sports. Maybe there are out there, and I’m just never in a city long enough to find them.

But really, I don’t think there could even be guidelines. Especially with trans folk, I mean we come in so many different forms and so many different medical, you know. I think for me to change my gender legally I’d have to get a hysterectomy, I don’t want a hysterectomy, I want a baby. I feel like I don’t even know how you would even begin to
do that in a way that felt good to everybody. Unless you just said it doesn’t matter and if you want to play on this team and you identify as this and that feels good to you and we are not going to judge you on how you identify, I think that’s the only rule you could put in (laughing).

Harvey’s arguments are similar to Kane’s in that sporting ability is not linked to gender, and, therefore, it does not matter what your gender identity is. Ryan suggested another strategy to help deconstruct the gender binary in sport and to reveal sport as a continuum. He suggests that over-the-top competition and the emphasis on winning contribute to many problems that trans athletes face. He said,

I’m not really sure how other sports deal with people who do not go with the strict gender heterosexual thing. I feel more comfortable now I guess about (long pause). I guess the military has this “don’t ask don’t tell thing,” I think that’s what goes on in sport for the most part. I’d imagine that removing competition to some degree would help with that. But if sport was more about, focused more about body consciousness or healthy movement; if the goals were pointed toward peoples bodies or healthy emotional states maybe a little bit more than actually winning the game… the same with aikido, if it’s geared more toward our health than making sure that everyone is pinned down to the ground, I think that’s better. It allows for more freedom of expression, and I imagine that people might think, “oh if we get rid of standards of sexual identity, what are we going to do?” Well, probably find something else to do that might be better off (laughing). So, if we got rid of competition in spots it may seem like this huge vacuum, but it will get filled with something else, maybe health consciousness.
Now how to go about doing that I’m not really sure, but I think one aspect of it would be to not have an investment in winning. So we can have the points, I wasn’t ever trying to be anti-points. I never said “well I don’t care if we win, so I’m going to just run the other way.” I might try to get the ball over the line, but if I don’t I’m still practicing myself, so it’s fine if the ball doesn’t get over the line.

And that might be a good transition perhaps, for all of us to get comfortable with the game and the points and all the structures, and maybe MVP, you still you want to recognize exceptional things, but get it away from having to win. That might help a lot. Because then if we are not needing to win, maybe we don’t need to be a standard heterosexual male whatever. You could do what you need to do, whether it be this or this or that or neither or both (emphasis his).

Achievement goal theory, a sport psychology concept, is useful to examine Ryan’s suggestion. According to Duda and Treasure (2006) achievement goal theory is a motivational theory that articulates people’s desire to feel competent. Yet, people define competence differently. Some people feel competent when they perceive they have improved or have learned new skills. These people would be described as having a task orientation. Other people judge their competence via social comparison and winning. These people would be described as having an ego orientation.

The major goals of task and ego oriented people differ as well (Duda & Treasure, 2006). Task oriented people tend to want to improve and give full effort every time they compete. Ego oriented people tend to want to show that they are better than other people and want to make winning look easy. Everyone has varying levels of both task and ego orientation. The importance of this theory is that orientations can be altered depending on the environment (REF). Sporting climates that promotes task involvement can be created by making all the athletes feel valued,
emphasizing improvement, reinforcing effort, and ensuring that everyone perceives they contribute to the team. If a task-oriented climate is created, Ryan’s suggestion of taking competition out of sport, or at least reducing the emphasis on winning, may work well. However, if a task-oriented climate is not created, elimination of competition may actually produce negative effects for sport participants. An ego involved climate is draining on the athletes with high task orientation and the athletes with high ego orientation and low perceived competence. These athletes are more likely to have low self-efficacy, low enjoyment, and will probably drop out of the sport. (Duda & Treasure, 2006). Therefore, creation of a task-oriented climate where everyone feels welcomed and valued is critical in developing spaces where people of all genders can succeed (Krane, 2008).

Some alternative sports such as surfing, rock climbing, and wind surfing have cultivated task-oriented climates that are based on technique and skill development rather than winning and competition (Beal, 1996; Wheaton, 2000). However, researchers have found mixed results with respect to simultaneously cultivating welcoming spaces receptive to people of different genders/gender identities. Wheaton (2000) found that some wind surfing communities were effective in creating spaces where cooperation was the norm and alternative masculinities and pro-feminist men were valued. On the other hand, she also found some wind surfing communities developed a hierarchical structure with the men who completed the riskiest stunts taking over what were considered better practice areas.

Theberge (1998) found similar results when exploring Kane’s continuum as it relates to ice hockey. She found that much of the dialogue in ice hockey is wrapped up in the gender binary, placing women as inferior to men. Additionally, contestation over the rules, namely the ban on body checking in women’s hockey reinforces binary logic. However, Theberge points to
recreational leagues as a space in which the most cross gender participation occurs. Kane (1995) uses marathon running to argue a similar point. Kane argued that women and men compete side-by-side throughout the marathon race; however, commentators highlight the finishing times of the winning men and women, reinforcing the notion that the women are slower than the men. Lidiya Grigoryeva finished the 2008 Chicago Marathon in two hours and twenty-seven minutes. She won the women’s race and finished in twenty-third place overall. What we fail to recognize, Kane would argue, is while Grigoryeva finished behind twenty two men, she beat seventeen thousand other men to the finish line. Additionally, non-elite women and men finish together hours after the leaders have finished. Kane argued that only a shift in conceptualization is needed to expose the sport continuum because it already exists.

The sport gender binary reinforces the notion that trans people are absent from sport, yet Harvey, Jake, and Ryan found safe spaces for sport participation. Their participation exposes the inability of the gender binary to fully explain the diversity of gender and the inability of segregation by gender in sport to fully meet the needs of all athletes. The uncomfortable situations, such as Harvey’s high school teammates picking on him, Jake’s locker room “boy’s club,” and Ryan’s isolation from his football team, are rooted in the segregation of people in sport by gender. Their experiences demonstrate that trans athletes are already participating. Sport studies needs to stop ignoring them and begin to discuss the sport gender binary in new ways (i.e., Kane, 1995) to trouble the sport gender binary.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Research such as this study helps trouble the ways in which we conceptualize gender in sport. Previously, only men’s and women’s sport were considered. Transsexual athletes were assumed to play sport because they have changed from one gender to another, but non-transsexual trans athletes have not even been part of the dialogue in sport. Ryan’s, Harvey’s, and Jake’s narratives demonstrate that non-transsexual trans athletes are participating in sport. Further, their participation disrupts the automatic categorization of sports as either men’s or women’s. This disruption allows for re-conceptualization of gender in sport. Harvey’s transgender and Ryan’s non-gender force those involved in sport to see that more than two genders exist, and therefore invite sport administrators and coaches to organize sports teams and competitions in new ways.

One outcome of troubling gender in sport is to deconstruct the gender binary in sport. The experiences of Ryan, Harvey, and Jake, combined with theoretical dialogue, help expose the gender binary’s fiction. In this study, mechanisms by which the gender binary in sport is reinforced, such as the mythical trans narrative, discriminatory policies, gender segregation, and the current dialogue on fairness were explored. Misunderstandings of transgender identities, coupled with the deeply rooted gender binary in sport, lead to various forms of discrimination and prejudice ranging from name calling, to outright physical harassment targeting trans athletes. Pockets of resistance to the gender binary in sport were found, and Ryan, Harvey, and Jake all found sporting spaces where they were valued. However, it should not be up to the trans athletes to find safe spaces. I contend researchers should continue to critically analyze the gender binary in sport and expose its shortcomings.
Theoretical Implications

Ryan’s, Harvey’s, and Jake’s experiences show that trans people are playing and thriving in sports, yet they have been ignored for far too long. Semerjian and Cohen’s (2006) work heavily influenced this study and provides an exemplary model for future research. They created a space in which the participants could self-identify and were involved in the knowledge production. Their queer framework provided a space in which knowledge could be grappled with and de/reconstructed, and new ways of thinking were developed. Like Ryan, Harvey, and Jake, the athletes Semerjian and Cohen interviewed discussed feeling transgendered rather than transsexual and the subsequent lack of spaces for them to compete. The authors encouraged researchers to further examine the experiences of trans athletes using a queer-feminist lens.

The current study took up this challenge and created a space in which Ryan, Harvey, and Jake could tell their stories. Ryan, Harvey, and Jake participated in different sports, both individual and team, at different competitive levels throughout their lives. This study was able to provide a snapshot of their lives and sport experiences. However, the study would have been incomplete without critical examination of their experiences. Using a queer-feminist lens allowed me to centralize Harvey’s, Ryan’s, and Jake’s gender identities and interrogate their experiences with gender as the lens through which their stories were interpreted and explained.

The most important underlying concept explored in this study, and in need of further interrogation, is the gender binary in sport and the underlying assumptions that reinforce it. Trans athletes will continue to find sport a generally hostile terrain and will have to search out safe spaces until the faulty assumptions of the gender binary in sport are challenged. For example, MTF athletes are considered to have an unfair advantage because they went through puberty as males and may have participated in boys’ or men’s sports. Competent women athletes are
labeled as masculine and may be subject to gender verification, while FTM athletes’ are not considered threatening unless their testosterone levels are greater than the men they compete against. These notions, deeply rooted in the gender binary in sport, reinforce the notion that men are “naturally” better athletes than women and that any woman who is good at sports is not actually a woman.

Dichotomous thinking about gender continually is reinforced throughout sport and society. It is difficult to convince people to think about gender in ways that clash with everything they have ever been told (and are being told). However, as Foucault (1977) reminds us, power is relational. Oppressive forces are always shifting, which means that resistance is also always shifting. This study explored several spaces where the gender binary in sport was challenged. Situations such as Harvey’s and Jake’s teammates calling them “he” while calling the team a “women’s team” expose the shortcomings of the gender binary in sport and reveal the necessity of expanding gendered expectations in sport. In fact, both teams had more than one trans player on the team, and both teams remained the “women’s team.” Clearly, the categorization of their teams as “women’s teams” does not fully reflect the team’s gender diversity. This example exposes gender in sport to lie on a continuum. Capitalizing on this extension of Kane’s continuum (1995), sport scholars can de/re/construction the gender binary in sport with new vigor.

Harvey’s and Jake’s participation on women’s teams also troubled the understandings of queer resistance. Some queer communities within sport operate on traditional notions of gender that are assumed to be divorced from sexuality (Broad, 2001; Travers, 2006). Several lesbian softball leagues Travers (2006) examined excluded trans athletes while allowing butch lesbians and dykes to participate. For these teams, the gender identification of FTM people was seen as
problematic even though the gender expressions of FTM people and butch lesbians were very similar. They failed to understand that gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation are all interwoven. Butler (2004) argued that an individual’s gender is undone by those around him/her. For Butler, gender expression and the ways in which one’s gender is read by others are critical to assessing one’s gender. Therefore, Butler may argue that the gender of the FTM people and butch lesbians is undone in similar ways by other people: that is both might be read as androgynous or as male.

Interestingly, traditional homophobic language and behavior has been used against people who do not conform to gender expectations within sport rather than giving any indications of preferred sexual orientation (Griffin, 1998; Krane, 2001; Messner, 2002). For example, Jennifer Harris was dismissed from the Penn State women’s basketball team by Coach Rene Portland due to Portland’s perception that Harris was a lesbian based partially on Harris’ style of dress (Newhall & Buzuvis, 2008). Butler (1990) argued that a heterosexual matrix exists in which sexuality is mapped onto gender. That is, normative gender identities are directly tied to dominant notions of heterosexuality. Therefore, being a normal man or woman entails participating in heterosexual behavior and identity formation. And, non-normative gender and sexuality both mark an individual as an abnormal man or woman. Hale (2006) explored Wittig’s famous assertion that lesbians are not women. He examined the medical and cultural discourses about women and lesbians, ultimately concluding that answering whether lesbians are women is complicated by the “fuzzy” gender definitions in contemporary North American culture. Gender and sexuality are too nuanced to be defined within a structure that allows only two possibilities (i.e., male/female and homo/heterosexual). Hale argues that the system does not provide enough space for identification and self-definition.
Therefore, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation must be thought of together to fully interrogate them within a sport context. Such research might examine the athlete’s self-identity and the perceptions of teammates, opposing players, and others to explore how gender identity and sexual orientation intersect and are manifested in gender expressions. Further, this intersection must be examined within queer sport spaces. For example, the “boys club” on Jake’s team could be examined more closely to investigate the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity of the “boys club” members since they included both trans people and masculine identified women.

This study also illustrated the inability of the mythical trans narrative and common definitions of “transgender athlete” (e.g., as in the Stockholm Consensus) to describe trans athletes. None of the participants in this study would qualify for participation in IOC events, nor were their experiences reflective of the mythical trans narrative. More importantly, following the appropriate steps (full SRS, HRT, and legal gender change) to participate in IOC sanctioned events would not truly reflect their gender identity. Ryan’s non-identification challenges the common definitions of “transgender athlete” differently than Harvey’s and Jake’s identifications. Ryan’s gender identity lies outside of the categorization structure itself. His non-identification challenges everyone involved to grapple with gender and categorization. The term transgender is opened to be understood as an umbrella term for people who identify outside of the gender binary, rather than describing a certain gender identity. Therefore, “transgender athlete” becomes an umbrella term for athletes whose gender identity lies outside of the gender binary rather than describing an athlete with a specific gender identity.

Harvey, Ryan, and Jake were able to find spaces in which they could safely participate in sport. They developed strong resiliency from the various uncomfortable situations and less-than-
warm treatment they experienced. However, not all trans athletes will find such accepting settings, and may not be able to endure discrimination from peers, coaches, or administrators. It is important for sport psychology researchers to further explore the psychological effects of sport on trans athletes.

Krane, Waldron, Kauer, and Semerjian (in press) argued that heterosexism is a health compromising behavior. Therefore it is unhealthy for trans athletes to be subjected to mechanisms that reinforce the gender binary in sport. For example, the common strategy of providing separate locker room space for trans athletes, while seemingly supportive, also has been shown to be problematic as described by Jake. Although sport psychological research has demonstrated that positive sport spaces can positively affect lesbian and gay athletes, additional research is needed to address the experiences and psychological well being of trans athletes.

Reflections on the Researcher’s Lens

My queer-feminist framework served as a guiding beacon throughout this research process. An integral piece of this framework is a commitment to reflexivity and thoroughly interrogating my place in the research process. Through reflexive journals and continual self-questioning I was able to work through many challenges posed by my own assumptions and ontological and epistemological biases.

Several times throughout the process I found my own ideas troubled by the responses of the participants. For example, Ryan did not overtly claim an identity, referring to his gender and gendered experiences rather abstractly. As he was responding to my questions, I found myself wanting him to respond in certain ways: I wanted him to tell me what his gender identity really was. As he gave me different examples and evaded my questions, I grew frustrated. After several journal entries and reflections on the interviews, I came to understand that he troubled my
definition of transgender in the same way I wanted to trouble the definitions of gender within
sport.

As I continued to reflect on the interviews I asked myself why Ryan’s (non)identity so
troubling while Harvey’s and Jake’s were not. Harvey and Jake both clearly articulated their
identities in ways that I was used to hearing(?). Additionally, playing rugby in college and
participating in the queer community on campus, I interacted with people whose gender
identities were similar to Harvey’s and Jake’s more than I interacted with people whose
(non)identity was similar to Ryan’s. Ryan forced me to grapple with my own definition of
transgender. I want to use transgender as an umbrella for the variety of gender non-conforming
or transformative people, but I was having trouble accepting the way Ryan defined (or rather, did
not define) his gender. He exemplifies fluidity and troubling transgender embodiment, but there
were times during the interview that I questioned his position under the umbrella. One major
reason for using a postmodern queer-feminist framework was to trouble the common ways of
thinking, and I found my own ways of thinking troubled in the process. His entire interview
troubled the ways in which I defined and understood transgender participation in sport. I wanted
him to conform to my definition of transgender and to succinctly tell me what his life was like.
But he pushed and bent my definitions and evaded my expectations. He talked about his
gendered experiences without defining his gender and included dance, guitar, and other body
practices in his understanding of sport. Because the ways in which he understands gender and
sport are central to the ways in which he understands himself, I had to thoroughly interrogate my
definitions and expectations. I engaged in continual negotiation of theory, ontology,
epistemology, and self-understanding throughout the research process.
My experiences in this process illustrated the importance of being reflexive. We, as researchers, must explore our own biases and definitions. We must be troubled before we can trouble gender and sport. It is important for researchers to continually revisit their assumptions and expectations throughout the research process because definitions and expectations can shift throughout the research process. My expectations certainly shifted over the five month period of data collection and narrative analysis. As researchers we can never prevent our assumptions from affecting our research, however we can be aware of them and interrogate the ways in which we influence the research and data.

Reflections on a Narrative Approach

Qualitative researchers have greatly expanded the expectations of research writing. New creative writing methods have been forwarded. The layered narrative approach has become an excellent means by which to discuss research findings. This approach allowed me to present the stories of transgender athletes in an evocative manner while simultaneously discussing current theoretical concepts. The participants told me stories about their lives, sport participation, and gender identity; however, a layered narrative approach involves much more than simply presenting stories. As Markula and Denison (2005) argued, narrative inquiry involves description, interpretation, and explanation. Therefore, it was important to both present and interrogate the ways in which they understand gender and sport. To use Ryan’s words, the participants were in a “sport/gender soup,” while not realizing they are in a soup. Their experiences reinforced their own interpretations of the world. Jake’s playing on both boy’s and girl’s teams greatly contributed to his suggestion of finding physiologically similar people to compete with/against while Ryan’s participation in football and Aikido helped shape his ideas about gender, competition, and winning. Juxtaposing their narratives with theoretical discussion
allowed for direct dialogue between the two. For example, Ryan, Harvey, and Jake had suggested several strategies for reorganizing sport. However, Harvey failed to see the diversity of gendered bodies in rugby and Jake’s suggestion of finding other athletes similar to an individual’s hormonal and physiological status fails to recognize that this might increase surveillance of trans people. These suggestions were grounded in traditional notions about the “nature” of men and women athletes. The layered narrative approach became a vehicle for exploration as I discussed the “sport/gender soup” in which the athletes existed.

Despite its effectiveness, the process was not easy. I grappled with many questions and challenges throughout the narrative construction process. Traditionally, narratives are presented chronologically, but I wanted to privilege the participants’ experiences, not simply put them in chronological order because that is the traditional way to present a narrative. The contested history between trans people and life history research often has led to the presentation of their narratives as abnormal and pathological. I am committed to presenting their narratives as closely as possible to the ways in which they told them. So in the beginning of the writing process, I thought I would simply arrange the narratives in the same way that they told them to me; however, it was important for me to consider that they were still answering my questions no matter how open I made the interview process. While I structured the interviews and made Ryan, Harvey, and Jake aware that they were guiding the first interview and were free to talk about anything they felt was important, they still were expecting that I was expecting something in particular. For example, after the first interview was completed, Ryan apologized for not telling the stories he thought I was looking for. My position as researcher, and therefore my expectations, greatly shaped the interview process. Presenting their narratives in the order in which they were told would simply put a veil over the process and reinforced my position as
researcher. So, I read and re-read the transcripts and allowed themes and narratives to emerge from them.

As I began the narrative formation process, I reassessed my assumptions about the study and wrote in my reflexive journal extensively. I allowed the narratives to emerge on their own, and purposefully did not look for any specific stories or experiences. However, as the layered narrative began to come together, I put my research hat on and inevitably made decisions about the order of narratives and adjusted the overall structure of the results. As with many concepts covered in this study, writing qualitatively is a continually negotiated process. I did my best to privilege Ryan’s, Harvey’s, and Jake’s voices and respectfully interpret their narratives to better interrogate the ways in which the gender binary in sport has affected their lives and the ways in which the participants understand their experiences.

Practical Implications

I believe completing this research was truly the easy part of working toward expanding conceptualizations of gender and sport. Trans athletes like Harvey, Ryan, and Jake are in the sports world doing the dirty work, so to speak. We, as academics, need to support them, to speak out against homophobic and transphobic language and behavior, and imagine new (non)structures that provide a safe space for all people to play sports.

It seems that the biggest obstacle facing trans athletes is a serious lack of understanding and compassion from teammates, coaches, and fans. The people on Harvey’s, Ryan’s, and Jake’s teams were troubled by their presence and had to work through it. The participants’ teammates negotiated for themselves what it meant that a trans person was on their team. For some it meant resisting the athlete’s transition. For others it was re-learning how to associate and converse with the athlete. Trans people’s participation in sport alters what many people think they know about
gender and sport. There is an education process and an adjustment period that many people undergo.

Unfortunately, many coaches, parents, sport psychologists, and administrators are ill-equipped to create welcoming spaces for trans athletes and they simply reinforce old stereotypes. However, when coaches, parents, sport psychologists, and administrators are able to create positive task-oriented climates, trans athletes can be welcomed onto teams and be fully valued. Educational programs such as It Takes A Team (ITAT) can help coaches, parents, and administrators learn how to react and respond positively to diverse athletes (WSF, 2008). People’s ideas about gender and sport need to be troubled in a safe environment where they can grapple with stereotypes and alternative definitions.

Only medical and physiological researchers were consulted to develop the Stockholm Consensus, resulting in a policy that does not fully consider its affects on all trans athletes. This study challenged the IOC’s Stockholm Consensus and broadened the definition of “transgender athlete.” Additional sport governing bodies may enact policies similar to the IOC’s without considering the implications for non-transsexual trans athletes, and sports will become even less accessible to trans people. For example, the NCAA has yet to enact a policy regarding participation of transgender athletes. Capitalizing on the findings of this study, NCAA policy makers need to reconsider the criteria for “transgender participation” and create inclusive trans policies. Sport psychological research focused on the well-being of trans athletes, such as Semerjian and Cohen (2006) and this study, would greatly inform the policy formation process. With this research, combined with the implementation of the more inclusive WIAA policy, NCAA policy makers have a precedent to look towards. I encourage other sport governing bodies, regardless of competition level, to broaden their definitions of “transgender athlete” and
enact inclusive polices as well as implementing safeguards for trans and gender non-conforming athletes.

Final Remarks

Trans athletes have been ignored far too long, and further research that centralizes their experiences needs to be done. This study focused on the experiences of three trans athletes and demonstrated that they were able to find supportive atmospheres for participation. Therefore, this study provided the groundwork for further sport psychology research on trans athletes’ well-being.

Overall, this study exposed the inability of the gender binary in sport to fully and safely include trans athletes. The common definition of “transgender athlete” as a person who has fully transitioned was challenged and redefined as a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression lie outside of the normative gender categories. Subsequently, the notion of a gender continuum in sport was forwarded. This extension of Kane’s (1995) sport continuum can help researchers further investigate gender in sport.

As more trans athletes become visible, trans focused sport psychology research must develop accordingly. While the dearth of information available about the lives of transgender athletes made the completion of this study difficult, it also reveals the promising future of trans studies within sport. Research possibilities are abundant, from destabilizing the gender binary in sport to investigating trans athletes’ well-being to investigating the perceptions of those around them. I encourage sport psychologists to begin thinking queerly and to take up these research challenges.

Researchers and practitioners need to join together to abolish transphobia and homophobia in sport. Creation of safe, welcoming spaces is critical not only to the well-being of
trans athletes, but to the well-being of all athletes. The future is bright; however, to achieve that future, all people involved in sport must re-evaluate their definitions of gender. Doing so destabilizes the gender binary in sport and alternatives can then be imagined.
NOTES

1. T: Common term for testosterone HRT.
2. Shim: Derogatory term for someone with an ambiguous gender expression.
3. Top surgery: SRS procedure to alter the chest. For FTM people this includes mastectomy. For MTF this may include breast enlargement, although many MTF do not opt for surgery.
4. Bottom surgery: SRS procedure to alter the genitals. For FTM people this may include hysterectomy and phalloplasty (construction of a penis). For MTF people this may include vaginoplasty (construction of a vagina).
5. Pansexual: An individual attracted to all genders and people of varying gender expressions.
6. Testicular Feminization Syndrome: Now commonly known as complete androgen insensitivity syndrome, this syndrome affects people born with XY chromosomes but female looking genitals.
7. Artificial Imposition: An aikido practice strategy in which a teacher creates a situation within which the students must work. Ryan gave the basic example of putting your arms at your side and moving only your legs during a session.
8. Body consciousness: The practice of tuning into one’s own body. The practice includes kinesthetic awareness as well as controlling movements. Ryan talked about participating in physical activity because he liked the way it felt when he would push himself to run, lift weights, etc.
9. Binding: Compressing the breasts using extremely tight bras, tape, or elastic bandages. The practice is often done to pass a man.
10. Camp Trans: In 1994, a group of trans people camped outside the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival to protest the womyn born womyn policy. The policy forbids MTF transsexuals from entering the festival. Camp Trans has grown in size since its inception in 1994 and is now an annual event to celebrate womyn of all kinds. Visit http://www.camp-trans.org/ for more information.
REFERENCES


Troubling Sport


Troubling Sport


Krane, V. (2008). Gendered social dynamics in sport. In M. Beauchamp & M. Eys (Eds.),

*Group dynamics advances in sport and exercise psychology: Contemporary themes* (pp. 159-176). New York: Routledge.


Chicago: University of Chicago Press


New York: St. Martin’s Press.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview # 1,
Unstructured Interview Guide

Thank you for participating. I would like to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and we will move on.

A. Background Information

1. How old are you?
2. With which race/ethnicity do you identify?
3. Where did you grow up and where do you live now?
4. Do you have a religious affiliation? If so, what?
5. Briefly describe your sport background (what sports, at what age, what type of league or competitive level).
6. Do you currently play a sport? If so, can you describe the sport and league?
7. How do you prefer to describe your identity in terms of gender? What pronoun do you prefer?
8. Is there a specific nickname or pseudonym that you would like me to use in my writing?

B. General areas of interest - with possible follow up questions

Tell me about your sport experiences, particularly as a trans athlete
Probe topics:
   a. Describe your relationships with your teammates
   b. Did/do your teammates know about your gender identity?
   c. Why did you/didn’t you tell them you are trans?
   d. Did your transitioning influence your sport experiences? How?

Can you talk about the development of your gender identity
   a. When did you first identify as trans?
   b. Are you taking hormones? Why/Why not?
   c. Do you plan on surgery? If so, what kind. Why/Why not?
   d. How will that affect your future sport participation?
Interview #2,
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

If not addressed in the first interview, these questions will be asked. Additionally, this interview will specifically request clarification, additional details, or more examples of issues raised in the first interview.

1. Can you talk about any challenges you have encountered as a trans athlete?

2. How have you coped with or overcome them?

3. Can you talk about any positive experiences that you have encountered as a trans athlete?

4. What advice would you give to other trans athletes?

5. If you could create a policy about trans athletes in sport, what guidelines would you suggest?

6. Is there anything else you’d like to cover that I have not asked you?
APPENDIX B: INTEREST FORM AND INFORMED CONSENT

School of Human Movement, Sport and Leisure Studies

Interest Form

I am interested in communicating with Cathryn Lucas to learn more about her study. After gaining more knowledge about her study, I will decide if I would like to be interviewed about my own experiences as a transgender athlete. By providing the following information, I am indicating that I am willing to talk to Cathryn Lucas about participating in an interview for her study.

Please fill out the following information.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                    Print Name

_________________________________________
Phone Number

_________________________________________
Email Address

If you would like to contact the researcher directly, her information is below.
Cathryn Lucas
cblucas@bgsu.edu
630-926-3318
Title of Project: Troubling Sport or Troubled by Sport: Experiences of Transgender Athletes

Investigator: Cathryn Lucas

The purpose of this study is to examine how transgender athletes experience sport. This study is being conducted for a master’s thesis. Your participation will allow you the opportunity to openly discuss and examine your experiences in sport.

Your involvement in this study includes participation in 2-3 interview sessions. These sessions will each last approximately 90 minutes and will focus on your sport experiences. The interviews will be audio recorded. Interviews may be conducted via telephone, skype, or email. Please realize that these forms of communication are not 100% secure. If you use one of these forms of communication, you can enhance security by clearing the browser cache and page history.

Risks of participation are minimal. My procedures are designed to safeguard your confidentiality. To maintain this confidentiality, your name, names of other people, and any identifying information you mention will be removed or coded in the printed transcripts of the interview. I will be the only person to listen to the audio-recording. The interview transcript may be read by my advisor who also will maintain your confidentiality. The audio-recording and transcripts will be kept secured and will only be accessible to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, the audio-recording will be deleted and the original transcriptions that include identifying information will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study at any time, your decision will not affect your relationship with any individual involved with the research or institution. If you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without prejudice or affect on your relationship with the investigators or Bowling Green State University. Should topics come up that make you emotionally uncomfortable, you may choose to not respond to the question and move on to the next question.

Additional questions about this study can be directed to Cathryn Lucas (620-926-3318 or cblucas@bgsu.edu) or my advisor Vikki Krane (419-372-2620 or vkrane@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University (419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu) about any questions or concerns.

My signature below indicates that I have been informed

- I am over the age of 18,
- I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice,
- I can ask questions about any of the procedures, and
- the information about me obtained during the course of this study will be kept confidential.

I have read the informed consent document, and all of my questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this study.
APPENDIX C: SELECTIONS FROM REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

>>> Creating the participant profiles was hard. I thought it would be super easy, I mean they all pretty much told me their growing up and sports stories, but there is so much more to it. I mean what order should I put them in? Most narratives are done chronologically, but I would rather privilege their experiences and not just put them in chronological order because that is the way it has always been done. There is such a contested history with trans people and life histories, often they are indicted as abnormal and pathological.

So I thought I would just arrange it in the way that they presented it to me, but they were answering my questions. While it is true that they were free to arrange it in whichever means they wanted, they were still expecting that I was expecting something in particular. It was to that expectation that they were responding. So, I’m back to square one… how do I arrange these narratives? I need to take some creative license so that their stories are evocative and easily understood… or should they be easily understood. Should they be presented as discovering pieces to a puzzle? Can I continue that theme throughout the thesis? Or is that a project for another day?

Ok, something that flows but flows in and out as river does, not a timeline of events, but a quilt of stories that together expresses their lived experiences.

>>> As the profiles have been coming together, ideas about the arrangement of the section have been floating around in my head. Perhaps the best possible way to attack this is to frame it as a serious challenge to the existing sports structure… both the segregation by gender and the IOC’s current policy on transsexual athletes. There is a lot here about both, not to mention the daily ins and outs of being a trans athlete on a gender segregated team. I can start with the good and the
bad then turn to the ugly. I can show that the athletes have been affirmed in who they are by their teams and then discuss how even this environment can be challenging, then turn to the serious discussion of policy and structure. They have a LOT to say and I’m thinking that the thesis is taking on its own directions. Right off the bat I can challenge the medical discourse and establish these athletes as fully embodying their own trans identities.

>>> Throughout this discussion I am confused about my own definition of transgender. I want to use the term as an umbrella for the variety of gender non conforming or transformative people, but how do they define themselves? We have consistently been told what transgender is, how does that jive with how people understand their own lives. Ryan is perhaps the best example of fluidity and troubling transgender embodiment, but there are times during the interview that I questioned his position under the umbrella. I think it is a struggle to practice the kinds of postmodern theorizing that is pretty easy to think up. Sure transgender is fluidity, people defying the gender norms, but what do I do when Ryan does just that? I question his place, question his positionality. I must interrogate that. I must grapple with it, I must write it in. Because the whole point of my postmodern queer-fem-trans theory is to trouble our ways of thinking… even the ones that we thought would give us room to value a variety of subject positions.

I think I am having so much trouble with Ryan’s narrative because I am trying to write it in a way that does not suit his positionality. His entire interview troubles the ways in which I define and continue to understand transgender and sport. I wanted to remain within these set categories, but he pushes and bends them. He includes dance, guitar, and other body practices in his understanding of sport. What do I do with that. Some researchers would simply toss the data… it doesn’t fit into the predescribed categories. But, the ways in which he understands
gender and sport are central to the ways in which he understands himself. So, I cannot simply throw it out because he doesn’t fit into my conception of sport and gender. I think my challenge is again to grapple with it, write it in. Use the thesis as an open canvas for the creation of new personal knowledge. This thesis is not just here is what I did and here is what I found. It is itself the interplay of theory, practice, and my own learning. It is the embodiment of my continual negotiation of theory, ontology, epistemology, and self-understanding. The ways in which I interacted with Harvey, Jake, and Ryan have fundamentally changed the ways I think about research. I didn’t just interview them to get answers, they shared their lives. I was able to get a brief glance into their world, albeit through my own lens.

In doing this research project I have come face to face with the rather ugly way in which we as a research community have treated non-conforming athletes. Generally, they are treated like a side show act, freaks to be ogled. Often times the research is approached as to answer the question, “what should we do about them?” Then every once is a very long while we are reminded that they are people, people with feelings. Perhaps we should work on research that values them, values the ways in which they operate in an environment. What can we do to change this environment so it is more comfortable for you? Many trans people have never played sports because of the overt gender segregation. Many have been gender non conforming for their entire lives and have felt the pain of bullying on the playground and in PE class. The most important question that I didn’t even think of when I started this project was, Where do we go from here? How do we make things better? How can we change this shotty system so that everyone feels welcomed, valued, and loved?
APPENDIX D: FREQUENTLY USED TRANS TERMS*

Androgyny (also andrognous, bi-gendered, no-gendered): A person [a] who identifies as both or neither of the two culturally defined genders; and/or [b] who expresses and/or presents merged culturally/stereotypically feminine and masculine characteristics, or mainly neutral characteristics. May or may not express dual gender identity.

Assigned Gender: The announcement by doctors (It's a boy/girl) based on what your physical anatomy looks like. Based on this, you are supposed to grow up, to be and exist within a certain set of gender roles.

Binary Gender System: A culturally defined code of acceptable behaviors which teach that there are men and women, who are masculine and feminine, and that there is nothing outside this system. The problem that occurs when we talk about gender is that everything is set in the binary system, but the gender issues that we are talking about exist in a multi-gender system and do not neatly fit into a binary system.

Binding: The practice of taping or compressing the chest or "breast tissue" so that one can pass as a man, this is done with extremely tight bras, elastic bandages, and other methods.

Bottom Surgery: "below the waist", to either create a vagina (for a male-to-female, MTF) or a penis and testicles (for a female-to-male, FTM). There are many different issues that cause each person to make the decision to either have or not have the surgeries. Some factors include: desire, expense, physical health, age, and access to medical care and information. There are also many difficulties that can occur with these surgeries, which will factor into each individual's decision-making.

Butch: Used to identify a person who expresses and/or presents culturally/stereotypically masculine characteristics. Often a person who self-identifies to a great degree with the stereotypically masculine end of a gender characteristic spectrum. Can be used either as a positive or negative term.

Coming Out: The process of becoming aware of and understanding and accepting one's own sexual orientation/gender identity. Also the ongoing process of decision-making about the level of openness a person feels in disclosing this information to another person or people.

Cross-Dressing (Also Transvestite, Transvestitism): A person who wears the clothing considered typical for another gender on occasion, but does not desire to change their gender. Reasons for cross-dressing can range from a need to express a feminine or masculine side to attainment of erotic/sexual/fetish gratification. Cross-dressers can be of any sexual orientation, but within this community, there is a large percentage of heterosexually/straight-identified individuals.

Cross-Living: Cross-living is cross-dressing full-time (which is also referred to as 24/7), and living as the gender which you perceive yourself to be.
**Drag (also Drag King, Drag Queen, Female/Male Impersonator):** Wearing the clothing of another gender, often with exaggerated cultural/stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as Drag Kings (female in drag) or Drag Queens (male in drag). Drag often refers to dressing for functional purposes such as entertainment/performance or social gatherings. Drag has held a significant place in GLBT history and community.

**Dyke (also Femme Dyke, Butch Dyke, Bi Dyke):** A "female-bodied" person or a woman who identifies with other women, and is attracted to women; this is a term that is used by many different types of people often taken back in a positive way for self-identification; can be political; and a term historically used only in a negative context to ridicule and label lesbians who were perceived to express and/or present culturally/stereotypically masculine characteristics.

**Effeminate:** Used to identify a person (usually male) who expresses and/or presents culturally/stereotypically feminine characteristics. This is often viewed as a culturally negative term.

**F2M/FTM (Female to Male):** Used to identify a person who was female bodied at birth and who identifies as male, lives as a man, or identifies as masculine.

**FAG:** A "male-bodied" person or a man who identifies with other men or who is attracted to men; this is a term that is used by many different types of people often taken back in a positive way for self-identification; can be political; and a term historically used only in a negative context to ridicule and label gays who are perceived to express and/or present culturally/stereotypically feminine characteristics.

**Female Bodied:** A person who was assigned a female gender at birth, or a person who has had their genitals surgically altered to be a woman.

**Femme:** A person who identifies with being a woman, who understands the power and seduction of the feminine spirit and one who is willing to be powerful as a woman. Can be used to identify a person who expresses and/or presents culturally/stereotypically feminine characteristics. Can be used either as a positive or negative term.

**Gender-Bender (also Gender-Blender):** A person who merges characteristics of all genders in subtle ways or intentionally flaunts merged/blurred cultural/stereotypical gender nonms for the purpose of shocking others, without concern for passing.

**Gender Dysphoria:** An intense continuous discomfort resulting from an individual's belief in the inappropriateness of their assigned gender at birth and resulting gender role expectations. Also, clinical psychological diagnosis, which offends many in transgender communities, but is often required to receive hormones and/or surgery.

**Genderqueer:** A term which is used by some people who may or may not fit on the spectrum of trans, or be labeled as trans, but who identify their gender and their sexual orientation to be outside the assumed norm.
Gender Reassignment Surgery--GRS (also Sex Reassignment Surgery--SRS): Permanent surgical refashioning of genitalia to resemble the genitalia of the desired gender. Sought to attain congruence between one's body and one's gender identity.

Hir: Used in place of him/her, a new pronoun for those folks who stand outside the binary system that we have in this society.

Homophobia (also Biphobia): The irrational fear of love, affection, and erotic behavior between people of the same gender. Expressed as negative feelings, attitudes, actions or behaviors against those perceived as non-heterosexuals. Often directed at those perceived as expressing and/or presenting culturally/stereotypically non-heterosexual characteristics and/or blurred gender roles. Biphobia also includes refuting the existence of bisexuality by believing every individual is either homosexual or heterosexual.

Homosexual: An individual who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted primarily to those of the same gender.

Hormone Therapy (also Hormone Replacement Therapy, HRT, Hormonal Sex Reassignment): Administration of hormones to affect the development of secondary sex characteristics of the opposite assigned gender; this is a process, possibly lifelong, of using hormones to change the internal body chemistry. Androgens (testosterone) are used for female-to-males, and Estrogens are used for male-to-females.

In the Closet: Not disclosing (coming out) or being secretive about an individual's own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Intersexed (also Hermaphrodite): An individual born with full or partial genitalia of both genders, or with underdeveloped or ambiguous genitalia. Surgery is common in infancy, when a singular gender is assigned. Many who have surgery develop feeling a sense of loss of an essential part of themselves.

M2F, MTF, Male-to-Female: Used to identify a person who was male bodied at birth and who identifies as a female, lives as a woman, or identifies as feminine.

Male Bodied: A person who was assigned a male gender at birth, or a person who has had their genitals surgically altered to be a man.

Non-Op: Individuals who have not attained and may not desire to attain gender reassignment surgery, and may or may not take hormone therapy. For many individuals, self-identification and self-expression, through cross-living or other methods of gender identity achieve harmony or congruence between one's body and one's gender identity and there is no need felt for surgical reconstruction.

Passing: The ability for a person to present themselves in another gender than which they live full-time or in which they were assigned at birth.
Pre-Op (also Pre-Operative): Transsexual individuals who have not attained gender reassignment surgery, but who desire to and are seeking that as an option. They may or may not cross-live full time and may or may not take hormone therapy. They may also seek surgery to change secondary sex characteristics.

Post-Op (also Post-operative): Transsexual individuals who have attained gender reassignment surgery, and/or other surgeries to change secondary sex characteristics.

Presentation: The totality of one's appearance when dressing, including voice, behavior, appropriateness of clothing for the situation, etc.

Queer: Used to identify someone who aligns themselves with the trans, bisexual, lesbian, and gay (GLBT) community, a term which is often taken back in a positive way for self-identification, and a term historically used only in a negative context to ridicule and label anyone not conforming to heterosexual persons and societal gender expectations.

Real Life Test (also Life Test): A period of time required of individuals seeking gender reassignment surgery during which they must live full-time expressing and presenting the gender in which they identify. Many doctors require a Real-Life Test of two or more years before advancing to surgery.

Secondary Sex Characteristics: The changes that occur when a person reaches puberty. They include but are not limited to: facial and body hair growth, muscle development, voice changes, breast development, and the ability to reproduce.

Sex Assignment: The declaration, by doctors, based on what your external genitalia looks like, which gender you are; therefore you are supposed to grow up and exist within a certain set of gender roles.

Standards of Care: A set of minimum guidelines formulated by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc. (HBIGDA) for care of transsexual individuals and providing requirements for consumers and service providers.

Shape Shifter (also Metamorph): Used by some people who choose not to identify as transsexuals, to express their belief they are not changing their gender, but changing their body to reflect their inner feelings and gender identity.

Top Surgery: Surgery "above the waist," usually breast augmentation for MTFs and breast reduction for FTMs. There are many different issues that cause each person to make the decision either to have or not have the surgeries, some factors include: desire, expense, physical health, age, and access to medical care and information. There are also many difficulties that can occur with these surgeries, which will factor into each individual's decision-making process.

Trans (also Transgender): Those who transgress societal gender norms; often used as an umbrella term to mean those who defy rigid, bipolar gender constructions, and who express or
present a breaking and/or blurring of cultural/stereotypical gender roles. This includes: androgynes, cross-dressers, gender-benders, intersexed individuals, shape-shifters, transvestites, and transsexuals.

**Transgenderist:** People who choose to cross-live full time, but who choose not to have Sex Reassignment Surgery/Gender Reassignment Surgery. They may or may not have some surgeries, and they may or may not use hormones.

**Transition:** The period during which a transgender individual (usually transsexual) begins to live a new life in their gender. Also, includes the period of full-time living (Real Life Test) required before gender reassignment surgery.

**Transsexual (also Female-to-Male (FTM/F2M), Male-to-Female (MTF/M2F), Pre-Operative, Post-Operative, Non-Operative):** A person who, through experiencing an intense long-term discomfort resulting from feeling the inappropriateness of their assigned gender at birth and discomfort of their body, adapts their gender role and body in order to reflect and be congruent with their gender identity. This may include cross-living, synthesized sex hormones, surgery and other body modification which may or may not lead to the feeling of harmony between a person's body and gender identity.

**Tuck:** A technique of hiding male genitals.

**Ze:** Used in place of she/he, a new pronoun when you need to talk about an individual whose gender does not neatly fit into a particular box.

* This list was adapted from a list developed Aaron Hans of the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League.