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## **Benefits and Constraints of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services for Trans-Identifying Students**

Jennifer Pecoraro

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, Benefits and Constraints of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services for Trans-Identifying Students, by Jennifer A. Pecoraro, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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# BENEFITS AND CONSTRAINTS OF PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGIATE RECREATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR TRANS-IDENTIFYING STUDENTS

by

**JENNIFER A. PECORARO**

Under the Direction of Dr. Brenda G. Pitts and Dr. Deborah Shapiro

## **ABSTRACT**

In the continued pursuit of providing a means of attaining wellbeing for all members of the campus community, collegiate recreation professional organizations encourage practitioners in the field to recognize the inequities influencing underrepresentation and make conscious, strategic actions towards alleviation of constraints. Students with marginalized identities—such as trans-identities—can experience barriers and constraints that complicate and sometimes entirely prevent them from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services (CRS). Research consistently demonstrates that students who participate in CRS experience a multitude of benefits (Artinger, et al., 2006; Belch et al., 2001; Forrester, 2015; Haines, 2001; Lower, Turner, & Petersen, 2013). However, limited and barred participation in CRS inhibits students' ability to attain the benefits of involvement. Studies reliably identify constraining and barring factors that complicate and block transgender students from experiencing positive benefits of their campus-life experience at the same level as their non-marginalized, cisgender counterparts. These factors include genderism, discrimination, and harassment (Beemyn, 2008; Beemyn et al.,

2005; Blumenfeld and Youth, 2005; Carter, 2000; Daly et al., 2015; Rankin, 2004). Research specific to transgender students' unique collegiate recreation experience is severely lacking (Daly et al., 2015; Patchett and Foster, 2015). This disparity means that practitioners in the field are making programming and policy decisions that lack data-driven or theory illustrative sources of foundational information on which to best promote benefit attainment. The purpose of this study was to explore the intersection of three factors: benefits of CRS involvement, constraints and barriers to participation in CRS, and transgender identities. In seeking to explore this intersection, this study utilized nine participants who identify as transgender ( $n=9$ ). Participants took part in a one-hour, open-ended, semi-structured interview. The resulting transcripts underwent a two-part, cyclical analysis to identify and explore common themes and phenomenological essence. The results of this intersection's exploration addressed a gap in literature regarding trans-inclusivity and collegiate recreation; these results may aid NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation and collegiate recreation practitioners in better understanding an underserved population in CRS.

INDEX WORDS: Transgender, Collegiate Recreation, Gender Identity, Inclusion



BENEFITS AND CONSTRAINTS OF PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGIATE RECREATION  
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR TRANS-IDENTIFYING STUDNETS

by

JENNIFER A. PECORARO

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in

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in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

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## **DEDICATION**

This disseratation is dedicated to those who always imagined more.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my appreciation for those whom I could not achieve this without; it is my hope that in this together, we can best promote social equity for all people regardless of their various identity standards. I would like to thank the individuals who took the time and care to speak with me and participate in this study. Without their insight and guidance, this project could not exist. Their perspectives, experiences, and passion for social justice will serve to address social inequities in relation to gender identity. To you all, I give you my upmost respect and gratitude for your contribution. Thank you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations .....	v
List of Tables .....	vi
Chapter One .....	1
Preface .....	1
Personal Bias and Subjectivities .....	1
Introduction .....	3
Statement of Problem.....	4
Purpose of Study .....	5
Statement of Significance.....	6
Theoretical Foundation.....	7
Key Terms .....	9
Organization of Dissertation .....	10
Chapter Two.....	11
Review of Literature .....	11
A Brief History of Collegiate Recreation. ....	11
Benefits of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services.....	12
Physical and Physiological Achievement. ....	12
Social Development.....	15
Academic Success.. ....	18
Marginalized Groups as Consumers of CRS and Identity Standards.....	25
The Transgender Experience .....	27
Negative Experiences of Transgender Students. ....	28
Place Identity.....	34
Summary and Evaluation.....	35
Chapter Three .....	41
Methods.....	41
Methodological Approach .....	41
Participants .....	43
Selection Criteria.....	44
Recruitment Procedure.....	45
Interview Guide .....	46
Procedures.....	48

<b>Participant Background .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>Table 1 Study Sample Gender Identity Demographics and CRS Participation.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<b>Benefits of CRS Participation .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>Table 2 - Benefits of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-Themes, and</i>	
<i>Examples of Codes.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<b>Benefitting Physically .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Benefitting Mentally.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Benefitting Socially.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Constraints and Barriers to CRS Participation .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<i>Table 3 - Constraints and Barriers of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-</i>	
<i>Themes, and Examples of Codes.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<b>Experiencing Gender Dysphoria.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Seeking Self-Preservation.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Navigating Social Constructs.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chapter 5 .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Benefits of Participation .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Constraints and Barriers of Participation .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Implications.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Limitations and Future Research .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>120</b>

### **List of Abbreviations**

AFAB.....Assigned Female at Birth

AMAB.....Assigned Male at Birth

CRS.....Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services

HBCU.....Historically Black College and University

POC..... People of Color

SRC.....Student Recreation Center

### **List of Tables**

Table 1 – Study Sample Gender Identity Demographics and CRS Participation .....	54
Table 2 – Benefits of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-Themes, and Examples of Codes ....	55
Table 3 – Constraints and Barriers of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-Themes, and Examples of Codes.....	68



## **Chapter One**

### **Preface**

Nine years ago, I walked into Georgia State University's Student Recreation Center (SRC) and unknowingly began a journey in collegiate recreation that far surpassed anticipated direction. After joining the competitive rock climbing club, I quickly became more and more involved in collegiate recreation programs and services (CRS). I soon sought employment and was hired as a student assistant in outdoor recreation. My experience in that program would forever shape my career path. I aimed to become an outdoor recreation coordinator and consequentially applied for graduate school. Under the guidance of socially-conscious and equity driven professors, I learned about social inequities in sport as well as about the leading collegiate recreation professional organization, NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation. The intersection of CRS and social equity in sport evoked a passion within me; it sparked the desire to further explore social inequity in collegiate recreation with a focus on alleviating constraints and barriers to participation amongst marginalized groups.

### **Personal Bias and Subjectivities**

The complex journey that has led to my current place within my professional career has certainly been diverse and multifaceted. My interest in research—aimed at promoting social equity in sport—stems largely from personal, lived experiences. At a young age, I was first confronted with the notion of social constructs in the form of race and ethnicity. Having been born in the Virgin Islands, my perception of race did not align with normalized, American standards. Though I was born on the islands governed by America, the social world in which I was initially raised differed greatly than that of the continental United States. After moving to the United States, I began to experience socialization in a manner that sought to pull me from my non-white counterparts. An American normalization of race sought to divide people based on

color differentiations of their skin in a manner that promoted discrimination and harassment. Having not originated under this normalized notion, I often found myself aiming to disassociate from such hateful social constructions in favor of promoting equity instead. During my undergraduate studies, I caught an interest for outdoor recreation as a sub-sector of collegiate recreation. This interest—paired with a growing passion for instruction—was fostered over the years by various collegiate recreation practitioners and sport management professors. Consequentially, I find myself with a passion for identifying social inequities in collegiate recreation, developing and conducting related research, and participating in the dissemination of subsequent findings in a manner that positively influences practitioner decisions. I am often asked why I research the topics that I do. Over the years, I have largely researched people of color (POC) and trans-identifying individuals. However, I am neither of these. Additionally, I am painfully aware of white-savior complex—in which white people act to aid POC in self-serving manners—and believe a similar complex to exist regarding cisgenderism. I colloquially refer to this phenomenon as cis-savior complex. I state that I am painfully aware because I am aware of my own subjectivities and firmly believe that much attention should be given to these notions during my own reflections as a researcher. I am not of the marginalized groups that my research aims to benefit; thus, I reflect on my own subjectivities and motives to combat the aforementioned complexes. I often state that it is not my quest to “give a voice” to marginalized groups. These individuals have their own voices and nothing of theirs is mine to give. Instead, it is my quest to provide the room in which these voices may be heard in a means that combats historic and systematic disadvantages against their identity standards. Careful assessment of the privileges connected to my own subjectivities and identity standards allows me to best promote equity in collegiate recreation for marginalized groups.

## Introduction

In the continued pursuit of providing a means of attaining wellbeing for all members of the campus community, collegiate recreation professional organizations encourage practitioners in the field to recognize the inequities influencing underrepresentation and make conscious, strategic actions towards alleviation. NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation—the leading collegiate recreation professional organization in North America—illustrates this dedication to social justice via its featured strategic value of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (“NIRSA’s Strategic Values,” n.d.). This value states that its member institutions and professional members should “be prepared to address the environmental factors that influence performance and affect overall wellbeing” (“NIRSA’s Strategic Values,” para. 2). This value illustrates the need to better understand marginalized groups in collegiate recreation programs and services (CRS) in a manner that identifies the unique characteristics and needs of such identities.

Students with marginalized identities can experience barriers and constraints that complicate and sometimes entirely prevent them from CRS involvement. Limited and barred participation in CRS inhibits students’ ability to attain the benefits of involvement. Studies reliably identify constraining and barring factors that complicate and block marginalized students from experiencing positive benefits of their campus-life experience at the same level as their non-marginalized counterparts. These factors include genderism, discrimination, and harassment (Beemyn, 2008; Beemyn et al., 2005; Blumenfeld and Youth, 2005; Carter, 2000; Daly et al., 2015; Rankin, 2004).

Research consistently demonstrates that students who participate in CRS experience a multitude of benefits (Artinger, et al., 2006; Belch et al., 2001; Forrester, 2015; Haines, 2001; Lower, Turner, & Petersen, 2013). These benefits include physical achievement, social

development, and academic success. Inquiry in support of the existence of benefits attained through CRS involvement is largely rooted in a justification of value; scholars and practitioners use this research to illustrate the value that collegiate recreation departments add to both individuals and to universities. Consequentially, the resulting research aims to explore not only what benefits are individually experienced and obtained through involvement in CRS but also what benefits the university or institute at large may also attain through a justifiable contribution of collegiate recreation to university prowess.

### **Statement of Problem**

Practitioners are increasingly faced with the challenge of promoting equity throughout all facets of their programs and services. With an ever diversifying campus community, the ability to identify and meet the unique characteristics and needs of marginalized students has become an ever important and sometimes daunting task (Carter, 2000). Tasked with such a feat, practitioners often turn towards their professional organization for resources and guidance.

NIRSA's origins provide an insight into its emphasized importance on the promotion of equity in sport. Founded in 1950, NIRSA began with collegiate recreation representatives originating from 11 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (About NIRSA, n.d.). This foundation provides insight as to why equity holds such power within the organization's values; with roots in marginalization and historic discrimination, the organization seeks equity for the underrepresented and the underserved. This organization—upon which practitioners seek aid from—bears the responsibility to provide for its members. Such provisions that would meet practitioner needs include the cultivation and dissemination of timely and scholarly inquiry. The subsequent results may be utilized by practitioners in decision making scenarios regarding addressing marginalized students in CRS.

Marginalized students—as an underrepresented population in collegiate recreation—do not experience the positive benefits gained through participation in CRS and may experience these benefits differently than their cisgender counterparts. While some attention has been given to the overall climate for marginalized students on university campuses, research specific to these students’ unique collegiate recreation experiences—associated with their various identities—is severely lacking (Daly et al., 2015; Patchett and Foster, 2015). This disparity means that practitioners in the field are making programming and policy decisions that lack data-driven or theory illustrative sources of foundational information on which to best promote benefit attainment. Limited research has been cultivated to explore the intersection of benefits and constraints of participation in collegiate recreation among transgender students.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the intersection of three factors: benefits of CRS involvement, constraints and barriers to participation in CRS, and transgender identities. The exploration of this intersection—which severely lacks existence in scholarly inquiry—may aid NIRSA and collegiate recreation practitioners in better understanding an underserved population in CRS. Furthermore, inquiry seeking transgender voice regarding CRS is virtually non-existent or problematically accessible for practitioners (Pecoraro & Pitts, 2018). Existing scholarly inquiry, whose subject matter includes transgender identities and collegiate recreation, lacks transgender representation. Consequentially, this study aimed to address this critique by exploring the aforementioned intersection through the voices of transgender students. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
2. In what ways do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?

3. Do trans-identifying students encounter constraints and barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
4. In what ways do trans-identifying students experience constraints or barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?

### **Statement of Significance**

The findings of this study have the potential to significantly impact collegiate recreation's quest to promote equity in sport. As members of NIRSA, many practitioners of collegiate recreation have access to the leading scholarly journal, *Recreational Sports Journal*. This journal subscription, included in membership, is additionally often paired with NIRSA generated content featuring a synthesis of findings, implications, and applicability. This unique attention given to scholarly works by a practitioner organization best provides professionals with the resources needed to understand and apply research. However, such resources cannot be cultivated and disseminated by NIRSA if the scholarly inquiry does not exist. This study—potentially serving as a seminal work in its content area—has the potential to inform inaugural resources that support transgender inclusive policies and practices as backed by data.

Additionally, this study sought its data from transgender students. Such an exploration and inclusionary intent does not—to the best knowledge of the researchers—exist in published, scholarly work. This study will pioneer the inclusion of transgender voice in CRS research. The inclusion of transgender voices while researching transgender inclusivity is undeniably important. The exclusion of the marginalized group under inquiry commits a gross disservice to the particular community. Identity standards—self-perceived roles associated with a person's understanding of the self—are complex notions that are inherently tied to a person's subjectivities (Stryker & Burke, 2000). An individual's limitations to comprehend another's identity is constrained by their own; research incorporating ethnographic strategies recognizes

this restriction and addresses it through seeking knowledge from people with differing identity standards (Crotty, 1998; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This study has the potential to have significance in its pioneering inclusion of transgender voice in CRS research.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This study used a marriage of social constructionism and phenomena specific theories as a theoretical framework. Social constructionism explores how a constructed notion or shared understanding is jointly related to how another notion or concept is understood. This framework positions these constructs under ideas of shared, reality based assumptions. Meaning is given to a particular notion through experiences (Crotty, 1998; Walker, 2015). The focus on how truth is understood allows social constructionists to claim that the understood world and subsequent truth is “created [...] by the mind” (Walker, 2015, p. 38). This concept is important regarding the manner in which social constructs obtain meaning and the subsequent consequences of that meaning on individual identity standards.

Socialization—as a process—establishes roles, expectations, insider codes, and unwritten rules by which certain behaviors become favored in conjunction with the support of normalized identities. The manner in which various marginalized groups are socialized into collegiate recreation differs in association with larger cultural implications. Transgender students are socialized into collegiate recreation differently dependent on their identity standard and interrelated disadvantages; this problematically reinforces stereotypes and creates a pressure to adhere to certain normalized standards. Muchicko (2014) found that the magnitude of engagement in physical activity among transgender participants was less than their cisgender counterparts; factors such as socialization, social support, and self-perception mediated the relationship between trans-identities and physical activities. The manner in which marginalized

identities are socialized into collegiate recreation programs and services—as well as surrounding or related sectors of sport—is a necessary consideration when discussing participation of marginalized groups. Unique to their identity standards, transgender students experience the pressure to adhere to socialized expectations in ways that their privileged, cisgender counterparts do not.

Research historically looks to the Ethnicity and Subculture theory, particular to the manner in which differences in socialization is attributed to cultural distinction, to examine the socialization process among marginalized groups (Stanfield et al., 2005; Washburne 1980). The desire to adhere to socialized and normalized standards associated with a particular culture—in accompaniment with the fear of opposing social norms—affects the socialization process into CRS. The application of this theory suggests that identity standards, within the cultural context, are subject and reactive to both normalized societal expectations and culture-specific expectations. In addition, the identity standard of “transgender” as an umbrella identity further unpacks into additional identity standards; each standard is subject to its own application of constructed meaning and consequential expectations.

Additionally, Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement has been a longstanding theoretical approach to CRS involvement inquiry both in historical and recent literature (Astin, 1984; Forrester, 2015; Henchy, 2013). This theory suggests that the magnitude of benefits experienced by an individual through CRS participation is influenced by the depth of involvement. The application of this theory suggests that benefits of participation in CRS are subject to an analysis of magnitude. The depth of involvement must be considered when examining benefits of participation in collegiate recreation.



The combination of social constructionism, the Ethnicity and Subculture theory, and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement creates an appropriate theoretical foundation for this inquiry. Social constructionism is largely applicable to the content of this inquiry as it lends to a foundational understanding of socialization and the social construct of gender. An application of the Ethnicity and Subculture theory lends foundation in understanding how differing identity standards are subject to culture specific social constructs. Astin's Theory of Student Involvement lends foundation in understanding the influence of depth of CRS involvement on the magnitude of received benefits. This framework best informs the structure of this inquiry to aptly explore the given phenomena.

### **Key Terms**

The following key terms will be used throughout this document. First, an identity standard is a self-claimed identity associated with a perceived role the individual has within a given context. Multiple—and often complex—identity standards are associated with individuals and are subject to self-perception.

Marginalized groups are comprised of individuals that share similar identity standards and connect over shared life experiences. These experiences are often influenced by discrimination related to having an identity standard that does not match the privileged or preferred identity standard within a cultural context.

An individual may identify as transgender if their sex assigned at birth does not align their gender identity. An individual may identify as cisgender if their sex assigned at birth aligns with their gender identity. Gender identity is not inherently linked to genitalia and may not adhere to a binary construct of gender.

## **Organization of Dissertation**

The remainder of this dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 2, a review of literature provides as synthesis of the literature surrounding the benefits of CRS involvement and the intersection of transgender identities and collegiate recreation. This literature review first explores the benefits of CRS involvement through a breakdown between physical and physiological achievement, social development, and academic success. Next, the college experience of trans-identities is examined as it pertains to marginalized identity standards and constraints that may affect involvement in campus life. Lastly, Chapter 2 critically evaluates and identifies gaps in literature to promote scholarly inquiry. Each component of the review of literature provides the necessary foundation on which this study's research method may be conducted.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation establishes the research method. The study's research method for this study is qualitative in nature. This qualitative inquiry utilized phenomenology as a methodology to explore each participant's unique life experiences as related to their particular identity standards. Chapter 3 details this study's design which includes semi-structured in-person or telephone interviews of transgender students.

Additionally, Chapter 4 presents the results from the semi-structured interviewed conducted with the trans-identifying students. Chapter 4 is centrally organized around addressing each research question via a broad, life essence exploration of transgender student life. Additionally, notations regarding notable differences between each gender category and binary v. non-binary trans-identities are preliminarily presented and further discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents an overall discussion regarding the results of the research as they relate to previously conducted scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, the implications of this study

will be highlighted with a specific focus on practitioner utilization. Lastly, the limitations of this study will be noted and suggestions for future research will be presented.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **A Brief History of Collegiate Recreation.**

Origin programs of collegiate recreation were called intramurals; Mitchel (1939) defines this term as activities that occurred “within the walls.” These activities have their origins in physical education programs and grew in popularity beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mitchel, 1939). Since then, collegiate recreation—as a unique sector of sport—has become an established stronghold in higher education. Modern collegiate recreation programs “typically include intramural and sport clubs, fitness and wellness programs, aquatics, outdoor and adventure pursuits, informal recreation, instructional and adaptive programs, and community programs” (Franklin, 2013, p. 3). This organization is reflective of common structure and illustrates the diversity in collegiate recreational program and services.

The underlying purpose of collegiate recreation similarly has its foundations in physical education programs. Sargent (1908) asserted physical education programs improved personal conduct of students and aided in the development of character. The benefits thought to have been gained through participation established CRS as a useful utilization of leisure time (Draper, 1930; Mitchell, 1939). The perceived usefulness of participation is inherently reflective to the perception of value. Mitchell (1939) further asserted that CRS participation results in the attainment of additional benefits; these benefits include physical prowess, social development, and academic success. Recognizing the received benefits of participation in CRS, intramural programs in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century began focusing on fostering personal growth that aligns closely

with community, social wellbeing, and honing physical achievements (Means, 1973; Mueller, 1971). As the sport sector matured, its focus developed to emphasize play as a key component of CRS and leisure sport; additionally, the concept of equity—as an emerging focus—began to take its place at the forefront of the purpose of collegiate recreation (Bayless, 1983). Since then, collegiate recreation continues to promote a holistic understanding of wellbeing with particular emphasis on promoting equity for all members of the campus community.

### **Benefits of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services.**

**Physical and Physiological Achievement.** Much research documents the benefits of consistent physical activity (Keating et al., 2005; Howley & Franks, 2007; American College of Sports Medicine, 2003). By means to promote physical activity on campus, much research has called for the support of CRS involvement (Blanchard et al., 2008; Buckworth & Nigg, 2004; Jung, Bray, & Ginis, 2008). The recognition of the positive benefits of physical activity and the consequential call for CRS promotion suggests that collegiate recreation is a viable and utilizable vehicle by which student physical and physiological achievement may be fostered.

Students participating in CRS experience physical and physiological achievement as a benefit of involvement. Forrester (2014) found that 75% of students reported benefitting from CRS participation in some manner related to physical wellbeing. These benefits were distinguishable as represented in the following categories: feelings of wellbeing, overall health, fitness level, physical strength, stress management, athletic ability, weight control, self-confidence, balance/coordination, and concentration (Forrester, 2014). These categories are illustrative of the distinct and vast multitude of physical benefits to participation in CRS. Forrester's (2014) results illustrated that 90% of students reported fitness level benefits, 86% reported stress management benefits, and 84% reported weight control benefits casually related

to CRS involvement. These responses indicate that students greatly benefit from CRS participation at significant levels regarding areas of physical and physiological achievement. Todd, Czyszczonek, Carr, and Pratt (2009) sought to explore the physical and physiological benefits of CRS involvement through the assessment of BMI, health behaviors, and sedentariness. Results illustrated that students involved in CRS had “lower BMI, engaged more in desirable health behaviors, and had more limited involvement in sedentary behaviors” (Todd et al., 2009, p. 51). These results support previous findings and that CRS involvement is beneficial to student physical and physiological achievement.

Much research indicates that there exists a longstanding and strong relationship between stress management and leisure sport participation (Caltabiano, 1995; Chalip, Thomas, & Voyle, 1992; Ragheb & McKinney, 1993; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Strauss-Blasche, Ekmekcioglu, & Marktl, 2002; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002; Wheeler & Frank, 1988). Mitigating student stress has become a topic of utmost importance that can prove to be challenging to college administrators. Stress—and associated negative experiences and behaviors—complicates and hinders the student experience. Student entering the college experience face challenges that exceed the demands of their previous life experiences; this includes independent living, life management, and increased responsibilities associated with emerging adulthood (Sell & Robson, 1998; Teschendorf, 1993). This illustrates that the college community is a space in which students experience increased stress in response to a new climate and associated responsibilities. To address this stress, colleges implement programs aimed at alleviating stress and promoting coping practices (Combs, 1972; Hensley, 1997; Todaro, 1993). CRS—as educational and developmental programs—provides a means by which students can cope with and better manage stress. Kanters (2000) found that students who participated in CRS experienced less stress-

related anxiety particular to exam and testing periods. In 2002, Kanter, Bristol, and Attarian sought to explore the benefits of participation in an outdoor experiential training (OET)—managed by college recreation—as it related to student stress management. Using a quasi-experimental design, Kanter et al. sought to test the hypothesis that participation in OET would serve as a stress-buffer (2002). Results of the study indicated that OET participation significantly influenced several mood states; Kanter et al. found that OET participation “was an effective moderator of students’ feelings of anxiety-tension and depression” (Kanter et al., 2002, p. 264). These findings show that participation in CRS provides students the means by which to manage stress and other physiological factors that may inhibit student and academic success. Research suggests that stress, anxiety, and experiences with depression can negatively influence student success (Johnson, Schwartz, & Bower, 2000; Yeaman-Janis, 1994). Student success, as the foundational pillar of higher education, must be positioned as a matter of great concern for college decision makers. Research inquiries and subsequent findings exploring CRS consistently supports collegiate recreation as a credible opportunity through which to foster student physical and physiological achievement.

Participation in leisure sport activities—such as CRS involvement—has been found to moderate stress; Wheeler and Frank (1988) found leisure activity to be a buffer that acted to combat the negative effects of stress. Research has found that leisure sport participation’s ability to moderate stress is founded in the facilitation of the individual’s sense of social support and self-determination (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Kanter, 2000; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). This assertion is closely relational to Deci and Ryan’s (1985) Self-Determination Theory. The three basic tenets of this theory state that individuals are motivated by a need to connect with others, the desire to function with effectiveness, and a need for personal accountability regarding

their participation in the leisure sport activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In further pursuit of examining participation as a stress buffer, Kimball and Freysinger (2003) found that participation in recreational sport is a “means of coping with or buffering the impact of life stress, thereby enhancing individual health and well-being” (p. 134). This is reflective of physical and physiological achievement via stress management as experienced through CRS involvement.

**Social Development.** Students participating in CRS experience and attain positive benefits pertaining to social development. These benefits include sense of belongingness, social integration, emotional development, and qualitative life skills (Dalgarn, 2001; Henchy, 2013; Miller, 2011). These social development—achieved through CRS involvement—are often interlinked with notions of academic success. This interlaced nature of student social development is reflective of its place setting within higher education. The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS, 2009) states that collegiate recreation programs “are viewed as essential components of higher education, supplementing the educational process” (p. 330). This viewpoint establishes CRS involvement as a vehicle towards academic success through which social development is additionally attained. Social development, as fostered by CRS involvement, manifests in various ways. This includes a sense of community, social integration, stress management, and place bonding.

In terms of creating a sense of community, Dalgarn (2001) found that CRS involvement fostered such social development. Additional research reliably shows that students participating in CRS report an increased sense of belonging as associated with a sense of community (Buccholz, 1993; Dalgarn, 2001; Miller, 2011; Wade, 1991). This sense of belonging has a subsequent impact on academic success in the form of retention (Wade, 1991). Buccholz (1993)

stated that students who participate in CRS are motivated by the desire to interact and connect with other students. In turn, this creates and fosters a sense of belonging to a particular community on campus. Exploring sense of belongingness through participation in CRS, Miller (2011) found that student responses indicated that collegiate recreation “was very important in creating a social bonding experience which increased their sense of social belonging to the student recreation center as well as to the university” (p. 124). This finding suggests that individuals experience an increased sense of belonging not only with other students but also in some connection to institutional belongingness as well. Community is fostered both among individuals and in expanse to the university as a whole.

Social integration is attained regarding CRS involvement in terms of social ties. Research suggests that involvement in extracurricular activities provides students with increased opportunities to create and foster social ties (Artinger et al., 2006; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Watson et al., 2006). These social ties provide students with the means of fostering social integration. Artinger et al. (2006) sought to examine the social benefits of CRS and differences in attained benefits based on binary gender and academic status. The findings of this inquiry supported previous research in illustrating that students who participate in CRS experience social benefits (Artinger et al., 2006). Additionally, Artinger et al. found that there was a significant difference regarding reported social benefits and the year of academic progression. First-year student reported higher amounts of experienced social benefits compared to their upperclassman counterparts (Artinger et al., 2006). This finding suggests that students benefit most from involvement in CRS at an earlier stage in their college experiences. Collegiate decision makers may greatly benefit from recognizing the value of CRS on student social development at an early stage in their scholarly pursuits.



Watson et al. (2006) sought to explore social integration through inquiry regarding the impact of CRS involvement and how CRS involvement influences perceptions of life on campus. Student responses indicated that participation in collegiate recreation fostered social integration. 64% of participants indicated that CRS involvement made them feel more at home (Watson et al., 2006). Additionally, social integration—as fostered by social ties—is reflective in the finding that 42% of participants indicated that CRS involvement aided them in making friends (Watson et al., 2006). Furthermore, Watson et al. asserted that “those who used the facility often were more likely to experience positive feelings than those who did not use the facility as often” (Watson et al., 2006, p. 16). These positive feelings aided in the process of social development. In all, the findings of this study support previous research and reiterates that social integration is attained through the establishment and fostering of social ties.

Additionally, extracurricular activities—such as CRS—positively influence social integration in other manners (Kilchenman, 2009). Kilchenman (2009) sought to explore the impact of facility renovation on CRS. During this inquiry, Kilchenman found that collegiate recreation users reported improvements in respect to their interpersonal skills (Kilchenman, 2009). These interpersonal skills involved an improvement of respect for others, and awareness of others’ cultures, and a sense of belonging. Involvement in CRS as a direct influencer suggests that participation in CRS and the consequential attained social benefits can be fostered and managed by collegiate recreation practitioners.

Social development is also fostered through place bonding. Sime (1995) describes the notion of place bonding as a phenomenon in which “a strong emotional tie, temporary or long lasting, between a person and a particular physical location” fosters an attachment (p. 26). Stokols and Shumaker (1981) further examined the notion of place bonding and noted that the phenomenon

was not exclusive to only physical characteristics of a place; a place's function and affective significance also influenced the process of attachment. This assertion suggests that students can create attachments with collegiate recreation centers in a manner that is affectively tied to perceived benefits and utilization beyond simple conception of the facility as a function.

**Academic Success.** A student's level of involvement in extracurricular activities on campus influences overall satisfaction regarding their college experience (Whipple, 1996). Satisfaction with college experience promotes an increased quality of student life and positively impacts student retention. Leafgran (1989) asserts that physical wellbeing increases the chance that students experience satisfaction in regards to their college experience. With physical wellbeing as an aforementioned and well established benefit of CRS, these findings suggest that students who participate in CRS are more likely to experience a heightened physical wellbeing; thus, they are consequentially more likely to be satisfied with their college experience.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) attribute social involvement and adjustment issues with attrition. This finding illustrates how social integration is related to student retention. Students not experiencing CRS benefits of social integration are more likely to withdraw from university by consequence of a lack of integration. Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) assert that "the process of becoming socially integrated into the fabric of the university has [...] been found to be both a cumulative and compounding process [...] that continues to building throughout one's college experience" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 9). This statement suggests that students lacking connection to the social fabric of the college experience are at higher risk for attrition; withdrawal from university bars students from receiving the benefits of graduation. Bryant, Banta, and Bradley (1995) note that "recreation may be the single common bond between students" (p. 158). This

emphasis of collegiate recreation as a sole connection into the social fabric of university life illustrates the importance of CRS involvement.

Multiple studies directly attribute involvement in CRS with a student's decision to retain at a given university. Miller (2011) examined CRS and found that involvement contributed to students' decisions to remain enrolled. Furthermore, Belch et al. (2001) found a significant and meaningful difference between the retention rates of students with varying amounts of CRS involvement. Similarly, Huesman et al. (2009) found that CRS—as measured by facility usage—positively correlated with student retention. CRS involvement positively influenced retention rates of first-year students.

Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975, 1987, 1997) serves as a seminal work that is often utilized when examining the benefits of CRS participation. This theory suggests that the likelihood that a student is retained at a university is predictable by the degree of which the student is integrated into both academic and social facets of the college experience. Tinto asserts that attrition—while not always unavoidable—may be combated and is unnecessary. In Tinto's (1993) Internationalist Model of Student Departure, the importance of student involvement is featured as being integral to the advancement and promotion of student academic success. Similarly, Christie and Dinham (1991) asserted that “students who become adequately integrated into the social and academic systems in their university through participation in extracurricular activities [...] develop or maintain strong commitments to attaining a college degree (p. 412-413). Understanding attrition as the negative result of weak or failed level of integration positions scholars and practitioners in higher education to identify and address the influencing contributors.

Research consistently demonstrates that retention is positively impacted by student involvement in extracurricular activities; these extracurricular activities include student involvement in collegiate recreation (Frauman, 2005; Sturts & Ross, 2013). Additionally, research calls for apt attention from practitioners regarding the strategic development and promotion of quality programing. Such attention is warranted to promote student participation in CRS to in turn positively impact retention and overall academic success.

When it comes to student selection of universities, Hesel (2000) stated that “opportunities to participate in intramural and recreational sports are of significantly greater importance to prospective college students than top-ranked national teams or big-time athletic programs in major sports” (p. 2). This assertion illustrates the extent of which universities benefit from collegiate recreation programs. Reflective of collegiate recreation in the early 1990s, Bryant, Banta, and Bradley (1995) found that the presence of a collegiate recreation program and anticipated quality of CRS influenced 30% of enrollment decisions. Modern research has found that 68% of enrollment decisions were influenced by the existence of collegiate recreation facilities and 62% of enrollment decisions were influenced by CRS (Forrester, 2014). With CRS involvement being a notable factor in student decision making, collegiate recreation holds significant value to universities.

**Magnitude of Benefits Attained in CRS Involvement.** While research consistently shows that students experience benefits consequential to their participation in CRS, it additionally asserts that an increased involvement proliferates the likelihood of obtaining such benefits. Forrester (2015) sought to further explore the multifaceted benefits of participation in collegiate recreation with a multi-institutional sample. Previous research—while certainly compelling and whose results consistently supported the findings of prior inquiry—is largely mono-institutional.

This decreases the generalizability of the findings beyond the particular scope of the single institution under inquiry. Forrester's (2015) inquiry sought to use an expanded sample to address this concern for generalizability and to better synthesize the findings in support of previous studies; the resulting study became one of only a handful to exist over the past couple of decades that takes a multi-institutional approach to examining the benefits of CRS participation.

Forrester found that "the greater students' depth and breadth of CRS involvement, the more they identified benefiting in outcomes related to retention, health and wellness, and student learning" (Forrester, 2015, p. 12). This finding illustrates an important distinction to be made regarding the manner in which students experience benefits of CRS participation. The magnitude of benefits attained via participation is a result of both the quantity and quality of student involvement in collegiate. This notion is reflective of Astin's (1984, 1993, 1999) Theory of Student Involvement. This theory asserts that the "amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (Astin, 1993, p. 298). Forrester's notation of depth and breadth as distinguishable factors suggests that the magnitude of benefit gained through participation in CRS far surpasses simple facility entry.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984, 1993, 1999) serves as a seminal work regarding the examination of CRS participation benefits. This theory suggests that the quantity and quality of time spent being involved in college programs has proportional value to received benefits; these benefits include both academic success and personal development. Astin defines involvement as referring to "the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 307). This definition suggests that

involvement is relational and subject to student effort. Forrester (2015) synthesizes the Theory of Student Involvement into five essential tenets:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various student experiences that range in degree of their specificity.
2. Involvement occurs along a continuum with students differing in their level of investment in various experiences at various times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.
4. 'The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program' (Astin, 1984, p. 298).
5. 'The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement' (Astin, 1984, p. 298).

(Forrester, 2015, p. 4)

These five tenets aid in emphasizing how benefits received by students is proportional to effort exerted regarding involvement in the specific college program. Application of this theory to CRS insinuates that high-quality collegiate recreation programs and services with repeat patronage proportionally promote magnified benefits of participation for the individuals involved.

Research suggests that gym facilities—as an outlet for sport-related physical activity—provides the means of establishing and maintaining mental and health benefits (De Moor et. al, 2006; Maltby & Day, 2001). Collegiate recreation centers, while certainly being much more than just campus gyms, are available outlets by which students may obtain these benefits. Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, and Haycraft (2017) suggest that it is “important to create an inclusive environment given the established [benefits] of physical activity and sport” (p. 702). In order to promote this inclusivity, however, the unique characteristics and needs of transgender identities must be better understood as it pertains to CRS participation.

### **The Intersection of Transgender Identities and Collegiate Recreation**

**Social Justice in Collegiate Recreation.** NIRSA—through the strategic value of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion—makes a call for its member institutes and practitioners to understand

the importance of social justice equity as it applies to all members of the campus community and their various, complex identities (“NIRSA’s Strategic Values,” n.d.). This organization’s apt attention to social justice matters may be a consequence of its origins. Founded in 1950 and formally known as the National Intramural Association, NIRSA began as a meeting of 20 practitioners from 11 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (About NIRSA, n.d.). This historical information lends itself in further explanation as to why the professional organization has such a keen eye on social justice. With origins rooted in marginalized identities, the prevailing importance of promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion manifests in various facets and practices.

Both practitioners and researchers alike—whom identify as invested parties regarding collegiate recreation as a means of social equity advocacy—are called to contribute to the cause. What exactly this contribution looks like is dependent on the knowledge, time, and various other resources of the individual. As an organization, NIRSA provides and promotes opportunities to be involved in social equity advocacy within collegiate recreation through professional development opportunities, conference educational sessions, and other task forces or volunteer positions within the organization. Furthermore, university and institute goals often call for such attention and pursuit of social equity. In alignment with both expectations from the prevailing professional organization and associated university principles regarding the promotion of social equity, collegiate recreation practitioners are thus called to *practice inclusion*. To *practice inclusion* in collegiate recreation, practitioners and researchers alike must seek to identify marginalized groups, unique characteristics and needs of those groups, and subsequent constraints or barriers to participation associated with their various identities. Practitioners and

researchers are further called to make strategic conscious actions aimed at promoting benefit attainment and disadvantage alleviation.

**Collegiate Recreation and Transgender Identities.** Collegiate recreation practitioners have largely rushed ahead of scholarly research regarding establishing industry practices particular to transgender participation in CRS. While some scholarly attention has been turned towards the intersection of transgender identities and collegiate recreation (Patchett & Foster, 2015), little research explores transgender students as unique consumers of CRS. Daley et al. (2015) noted a significant gap in literature as it pertains to research that examines transgender use of CRS as consumers. Subsequent research, aimed at filling this gap, has yet to explore this focused inquiry. Patchett and Foster (2015) crafted seminal work—specific to transgender identities and collegiate recreation—that examined transgender policies, facilities, programs, and trainings at NIRSA member institutes. The findings indicated that 80% of participants reported that they did not have transgender inclusive policy (Patchett & Foster, 2015). Furthermore, of these school lacking transgender inclusive policy, 45% of them had yet to begin discussing or developing transgender specific policy (Patchett & Foster, 2015). This disparity in trans-inclusive attention illustrates a marginalization of trans-identities as it pertains to CRS. While research continually urges proactivity for the creation and implementation of transgender inclusive content, collegiate recreation falls short of such aspirations while often being reactive (Carter, 2000; Patchett & Foster, 2015). Patchett & Foster (2015) found that “only 21% of participants affirmed the existence of transgender policies [despite] the sample as a whole moderately agree[ing that] their mission, vision, and values addressed diversity, and indicated their department has not displayed resistance to implementing such policies” (p. 90). This lack of action is illustrative of collegiate recreation’s shortcomings in leading the campus community in pursuit of social equity.



While collegiate recreation policy inclusivity falls short of scholarly hopes, facility inclusivity has increased as of late. Patchett & Foster (2015) hypothesize that the increase in transgender inclusive facility features may “be attributed to the amount of new or renovated recreation centers” (p. 89). This hypothesis suggests that inclusivity is at the forefront of facility design when changes are already in effect. However, the high costs associated with locker room conversions prompt practitioners to be dutifully aware of establishing transgender inclusive spaces within their facilities.

**Marginalized Groups as Consumers of CRS and Identity Standards.** Collegiate recreation—as a multi-faceted resource of programs and services—structurally provides consumers with differentiated opportunities to engage in the establishment and promotion of one’s holistic wellbeing. These opportunities can manifest in programs and services ranging in specialty from fitness to outdoor recreation. With this diversity comes subsequent differences in the identification of marginalized groups. Furthermore, the intersectionality of multiple identity standards complicates consumers’ experience with a CRS involvement in association with perceived benefits (Trail & James, 2015). An identity standard “is the self-perceived role that the individual has” within a given context (Trail & James, 2015, p. 56). This definition invokes the notion of self-identification and an awareness of positionality.

Previous research into marginalized groups as consumers of collegiate recreation identifies various factors that are inherently tied to the consumer’s multiple identity standards; these marginalized identity standards are associated with historical, discriminatory, and often systemic manifested disadvantages (Daly et al., 2015; Lindsey et al., 2009). This complex interconnection ultimately influences CRS involvement. Consumers belonging to marginalized groups in collegiate recreation interact in a socialized world that often normalizes social inequity.

Characteristics of this socialized world and a consumer's lived experiences within it influence the formation of various identity standards. The consumer forms identity standards in alignment with societal roles (Andre, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity theory supports the formation of identity standards in this manner through its definition of identity; in the context, identity is the "parts of a self-composed of the meanings that persons attach to multiple roles they typically play" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 284). The parameters of this definition suggest that a consumer may have multiple identities that are formed out of the complexities of their empirical experiences and characteristics (Olmedilla, et al., 2016).

It is important for collegiate recreation to acknowledge that marginalized consumers have developed various identity standards. These multiple identity standards exemplify intersectionality. In accordance to a consumer's identity standard, certain constraints and barriers may negatively affect CRS involvement and benefit attainment. The marriage of identity standards and subsequent constraints and barriers differ depending on multiple factors. Thus, a consumer's identity standard may negatively influence participation in one area of collegiate recreation but not another. For example, research has long claimed that the socialization into outdoor recreation participation differs greatly for people of color in juxtaposition to Anglo-white counterparts (Carr & Williams, 1993; Culp, 1998; Schwartz & Cokrery, 2011). Consumers with marginalized identity standards may consequentially experience constraints and barriers to participation in outdoor recreation but may not experience similar occurrences in other collegiate precreation programs. Therefore, close attention is warranted when considering the manner in which identity standards—particularly those in association with marginalized and underrepresented groups—influence CRS involvement and benefit attainment.

A consumer's identity standard is the foundation of participation in collegiate recreation programs and services. A consumer's perception of socialized role expectations informs the identification of various identity standards. These identity standards are inherently linked to historical and systematic disadvantages. These disadvantages negatively affect CRS involvement.

### **The Transgender Experience**

Transgender life experiences greatly differ from those of their cisgender counterparts. Trans-students experience heightened negative occurrences while on campus that are complexly associated with their non-cisgender normative gender identities (Rankin, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010; Sanlo, Rankin, & Shoenberg, 2002). Research furthermore indicates that these negative experiences are occurring within participation in collegiate recreation programming (Daly et al, 2015). These lived and anticipated negative experiences serve as constraints and possible barriers to CRS involvement and consequential benefit attainment.

As the number of transgender college students increases, collegiate recreation is called to better understand the unique characteristics of transgender, marginalized identities (Carter, 2000). Fausto-Sterling (2000) estimated that the transgender population “consists of an estimated 120 million intersex people worldwide and many times that number who identify themselves as ‘trans’ in some way” (Coakley, 2012, p. 205). This estimation is illustrative of the ambiguity regarding the presence of transgender students on campus. Since Fausto-Sterling's estimation in 2000, it is believed that transgender identification has increased (Jones et. al, 2017). The increase of individuals who identify as transgender may be partly explained by a visibility of transgenderism in broad (Aitken et. al, 2015; De Vries et. al, 2014). Bouman et. al (2016) assert that the visibility of transgenderism—as embodied by other visible or notable transgender

people—may prompt individuals to critically reflect on their own gender identity. This reflection consequentially may lead to an acknowledgement of one's own trans-identity. With the increased emergence of trans-identifying student visibility on campus, the importance of understanding the transgender experience is increasingly vital to higher education.

**Negative Experiences of Transgender Students.** Research consistently demonstrates that transgender students—as well as students belonging to the LGBTQ community—encounter negative experiences on campus (Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008). Rankin (2004) found that 20% of LGBTQ students conceal their queer status for fear of experiencing discrimination or harassment. This alarming phenomenon suggests that some transgender students may be living in hiding for fear of their own personal safety. Research consistently demonstrates that LGBTQ individuals in broad are not met with a warm, welcoming campus embrace (Dolan, 1998; Noack, 2004, Rankin, 2001, 2003, 2008). These experiences insinuate that LGBTQ students far too often experience a frigid chill of exclusion. Rankin et al. (2010) found that LGBTQ students were more likely to be targeted for derogatory remarks (61%) compared to their cis-hetero counterparts (29%) (Rankin et al., 2010). This finding illustrates that LGBTQ students are experiencing notable differences in the campus climate. These notable differences are negative in nature and do not foster positive development or academic success.

Transgender students may choose to affirm their gender identity through various facets of their life. Such affirmations may include social transitions, modifications to gender expression, and medical treatments (Coleman et. al, 2012; Wylie et. al, 2012). It is important to note, however, that gender affirmations are entirely dependent on the individual; gender affirming behavior is not inherently linked to 'passing' or the alignment of one's visual presentation with expected—and often binary—social constructs of gender (Jones et. al, 2017). Transgender

students may never choose to visually align with normalized expectations of binary gender. When an individual opposes the normalized ideology of a binary gender orthodox, they experience an increased risk of confronting transphobia. Much like homophobia prompts homosexual athletes into concealing their sexuality, transphobia similarly elicits shame and negative reciprocities associated with embodying non-cisgender identity standards (Coakley, 2012; Sartore & Cunningham, 2010).

Additionally, much research indicates that negative experiences are more prevalent for trans-identities in juxtaposition to their cisgender LGBTQ counterparts (Rankin et al., 2010). This assertion implies that trans-identifying students experience cumulative disadvantages and harassment that surpasses the experiences of other marginalized identities. Specific to transgender identities, Rankin et al. (2010) found that “harassment and discrimination continue to be concerns for many people who do not conform to the socially-constructed and enforced gender binary” (Rankin et al., 2010, p. 10). This finding shows that transgender students on campus are attempting to operate within a campus climate that structurally support social constructs that invalidate their gender identities. Merton’s (1988) Cumulative Disadvantage Theory asserts that individuals may experience significant disadvantages compared to others and that social systems generate social inequity. This theory additionally asserts that cumulative disadvantages increase the risk of harm for individuals that may consequentially contribute to premature mortality or other harm (Merton, 1988). This theory, as applied, provides scholars and practitioners with additional insight into the severity of negative experiences experienced by transgender students on campuses. Rankin et al. (2010) additionally found that transgender students experience an even higher rate of harassment based on their gender identity and gender expression. Gender identity and gender expression—as completely separate and individually

operating facets of gender—are often expected to align under a cisgender normative social construct. This means that an individual is expected to adhere to socially constructed practices of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) as it aligns to the notion that gender identity should fit binary understandings of masculine and feminine expressions of gender. Rankin et al. (2010) found that 69% of transfeminine participants reported feelings of exclusion based on their gender identity. This finding is reflective of cumulative disadvantages experienced by an individual with multiple marginalized identity standards. With each compounded marginalized identity, the individual experiences proportional amounts of negativities. When factoring in race and ethnicity, Rankin et al. (2010) found that transgender students of color were more likely to experience harassment in comparison to cisgender LGBTQ students of color. Again, the compounded identity standard associated with being transgender uniquely fosters increased negative experiences for transgender students on campus. Despite research suggesting that trans-identities experience harassment differently than other queer identifying students, much inquiry discusses the overall climate for LGBTQ students without a specific focus on transgender students (Barber & Krane, 2007; Blumenfeld & Youth, 2005). Further inquiry into the specific experiences of transgender students on campus is needed to best examine the unique characteristics and needs of the marginalized group.

With recognition of an increasing trans-identifying community of students, some attention has risen to the occasion and been turned specifically towards the transgender experiences on campus. Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith (2005) crafted a guide of suggested steps for making universities more trans-inclusive. This guide consisted of seven areas of concentration: health care, residence halls, bathrooms, locker rooms, gender and name

changes, public inclusion, and programming, training, and support;” each of these areas included begin, intermediate, and advanced suggestions (Beemyn et al., 2005, p. 89).

Notable suggestions that are applicable to collegiate recreation include suggestions regarding bathrooms and locker rooms. These suggestions call for collegiate recreation practitioners to conduct surveys regarding the usage of these areas and disseminate this information (Beemyn et al., 2005). These suggestions—at the beginning level—call for action. This encouragement of action supports NIRSA’s general prodding for strategic, active displays of transgender advocacy through intentional acts. Additionally, advanced suggestions state that policy should be critically amended to include terms such as “gender identity” or “gender expression” (Beemyn et al., 2005). This suggestion calls for practitioners to critically evaluate the cis-normative lexicon of collegiate recreation policy. These suggestions, among many others, serve as a guiding goals for practitioners in higher education to aim for in the quest for transgender advocacy. In following with these suggestions, some attention has focused on promoting a better experience for transgender students on campus (Beemyn, 2008). These efforts include gender-inclusive housing (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013), university supported nondiscriminatory policy regarding gender identity, and inclusive practices regarding medical gender affirmation (Campus Pride, n.d.). While these trans-inclusive changes are being implemented at increasing rates across campuses, additional scholarly and practitioner attention is needed to address the still continual negative experiences of transgender students at the university setting.

Perception is additionally important when examining the transgender experience on campus. As marginalized identities with prior experience of harassment and discrimination, transgender students are wary of campus climates by means of self-preservation and protection.

Ellis et al. (2014) found that transgender individuals strategically avoid situations that may promote opportunity for harassment or provide a means to be 'outed' as transgender. These actions occur in a way to preserve the self from experiencing harm. Mizock and Mueser (2014) suggest that transgender students additionally experience internalized transphobia. This transphobia is fed by the idea that "discrimination and violence [is] a consequence" of transgender identity (Jones et. al, 2017). Transgender students' propensity to seek self-preservation combats with internalized transphobia in a manner that only further fosters gender dysphoria (Bouman et. al, 2016). This further negatively impacts trans-students' quality of campus life.

Within the heteronormative, hyper-masculinized context of sport, transgender students may additionally experience dysphoria in regards to navigating participation in physical activity. In an inquiry focused on competitive sport, Semerjian and Cohen (2006) found that transgender individuals may feel anxiety when participating in sport; this anxiety is associated with a fear of being 'outed' via the reveal of genitalia. Fears associated with the reveal of genitalia constrain transgender students from engaging in particular forms of physical activity. Physical activity aligned with changing clothes, the use of a locker room, or showering serves as a vulnerable point of contention when navigating self-preservation. Consequentially, transgender students avoid cis-normative spaces that increase the likelihood of harassment or discrimination.

In broad, research demonstrates that LGBTQ students are impacted by organizations on campus that often adhere to cis-normative binary gender expectations; these organizations include Greek systems, religious groups, and collegiate recreation (Rankin, 2007; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001). These organizations have a longstanding history of cis-normative binary gender expectations in alignment with socially constructed ideas of femininity and



masculinity as embodied by bodies with particular genitalia. Collegiate recreation—as with other athletic programs and services—is reflective of enduring segregation between femininity and masculinity in support of a male, masculine dominated realm of sport (Coakley, 2009). With this understanding, transgender students approach perceptions of campus climate with caution.

Research suggests that transgender students have a more negative perception of campus climate in juxtaposition to their cisgender counterparts (Rankin et al., 2010). This distinction additionally illustrates notable differences in experiences as it pertains to transgender identity. Furthermore, a negative perception of campus climate is attributed to lived and anticipated harassment of themselves or others regarding transgender identity and gender expression (Rankin et al., 2010). The formative process through which this negative perception develops is largely rooted in empirical and experienced negativities. Reflective again of Cumulative Disadvantage Theory (Merton, 1988), transgender students of color had a higher negative perception and less comfortability regarding the campus climate in comparison to Anglo-white transgender students (Rankin et al., 2010). This phenomenon calls for distinguishable and thorough attention when examining the transgender experience on campus.

Careful consideration is warranted to promote a positive campus climate for at-risk transgender students (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). In response to lived, empirical, and institutional discrimination regarding their transgender identities, transgender students make decisions that ultimately negatively impacts their pursuit of academic success. Transgender students are more likely to consider withdraw from a university, fear for their own safety, and avoid disclosure of their gender identity for fear of negative ramifications (Rankin et al., 2010). This troubling finding illustrates how mitigated social development and academic success is relational marginalized transgender identities.

In all, research consistently demonstrates that the transgender experience on a university campus is overwhelmingly negative. The experienced negativities are largely associated with harassment and discrimination. This harassment and discrimination not only occurs on an individual basis but within systematic sects of oppression that endorse social constructs adhering to cisgender-normative notions of gender identity and expected gender expression.

Compounding identity standards further complicate transgender student experiences; this creates complex scenarios in which student development and academic success is even further at-risk or compromised. Transgender students have unique characteristics and needs that shape their experiences on campus. Close and apt attention is needed—by scholars and practitioners alike—to identify these characteristics with aims to best understand the experienced constraints and barriers that inhibit and bar transgender students from having a positive college experience.

**Place Identity.** Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) defined place identity as a “sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives” (p. 59). This definition connects the concept of establishing and fostering a sense of belongingness with self-identified identity standards. The reflective nature of understanding one’s own identity standards is inherently linked to the ability to establish place identity. This suggests that transgender identities may not as easily attain the benefit of increased sense of belongingness through participation in CRS. Studies show that place identity is substantially established through social involvement; with compounded disadvantages associated with marginalized identity standards, transgender students may not have similarly fostered social involvement and in turn may lack the ability to connect to place identity (Guest & Lee, 1983; Miller, 2011; St. John, Austin, & Baba, 1986). This notion suggests that transgender students—as an effect of their marginalized identity standards—may experience benefit attainment during CRS involvement differently than their cisgender counterparts.

## Summary and Evaluation

In summation, collegiate recreation provides the means by which members of the campus community may attain benefits. These benefits include physical and physiological, social development, and academic success. NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation encourages its members to promote and foster the attainment of such benefits through the upholding of equity. This upholding process involves the recognition, exploration, and alleviation of constraints and barriers that consequentially may inhibit and bar marginalized identities from participation in CRS. In response, researchers and practitioners have sought to accomplish this task through scholarly inquiry. Research regarding collegiate recreation has—in longstanding displays—concerned itself with value and utilization. Research explores the benefits attained through CRS participation in a way to justify the importance of collegiate recreation to the university at large. While this topic has been explored in quite sufficient and apt depth, its alignment with the socialized notion of a cis-centric binary gender system ignores possible findings unique to marginalized gender identities.

Research concerning the physical and physiological achievements of participation in CRS aptly illustrates that involvement is beneficial in these ways to students on campus. However, a more critical approach is needed to better explore these benefits. Forrester (2014) identified multiple categories of physical and physiological benefits attained through participation in CRS. The results indicated significantly high responses in whether student participants reported having experienced these benefits. While these results are certainly encouraging, they lack the further depth needed to make meaningful inferences. It is one thing for a student to respond that they have experienced physical and physiological benefits of participation. It is a completely different concept to inquire as to what extent the student has experienced physical and physiological

benefits. Much research, like Forrester (2014), largely ignores this depth and settles for the mere presence of benefit attainment as a low threshold of CRS involvement positivity. This largely ignores differences that may be present regarding the extent of which a student is involved in CRS and to what extent that may influence the attained benefits. A critiquing glance may suggest that improved alignment to Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984) is needed to best explore the magnitude of benefit attainment from CRS involvement as it pertains to physical and physiological achievements. Forrester's (2014) inquiry is reflective of synthesized literature with a collegiate recreation focus.

Additionally, research in collegiate recreation lacks longitudinal foundation to explore the perception of physical and physiological benefits over time. Research suggests that there are differences between first-year and upperclassman in terms of the perception of social and community benefit attainment (Artinger et al., 2006). Similarly, physical and physiological achievements may be reflective of an alike phenomenon. However, collegiate recreation focused research examining the physical and physiological benefits of participation in CRS lacks this differentiation. The inclusion of this differentiation may yield results that identify target markets, marginalized groups, or other significant findings.

Research examining physical benefits of CRS participation often use body mass index (BMI) as a measurement standard. This standard is an anthropometric measurement of weight divided by squared height. It is widely used as a screening tool and indicator of overweightness and obesity in research (Duncan, Duncan, & Schofield, 2009; Gallagher et al., 1996). However, in recent research, the accuracy of BMI as an indicator of physical health has become a question that prompts further inquiry (Himes, 2009; Mei et al., 2002; Romero-Corral et al., 2008; Prentice & Jebb, 2001). Such research suggests that the BMI measurement standard must include

reference points specific to identities. For example, Duncan et al. (2009) examine the accuracy of BMI with threshold reference points that account for differing ethnicities. The findings suggest that BMI as measurement standard is more accurate when the particular reference points—aligning with the identity in question—are used (Duncan et al., 2009). In this inquiry, “adjusting the BMI threshold parameters to the optimum diagnostic profile in each ethnic group resulted in significant improvements to sensitivity and specificity” (Duncan et al., 2009, p. 410). This finding is illustrative of the importance and utility of ethnic-specific BMI reference points when evaluating physicality across ethnicities. In CRS-centric research, a standard use of BMI without reference points is most often utilized; virtually no research exists that makes clear notations of reference point cut-offs as it may apply to ethnicity or gender identity. Additional care is needed for collegiate recreation research that uses identity pertinent reference points to more accurately determine BMI and physical benefits attained consequential to CRS involvement.

Much research explores the presence of stress for college students when emerging into the new and increasingly demanding world of campus life (Combs, 1972; Kanter, 2000; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). For example, Kanter et al. (2002) explore involvement in collegiate recreation as a stress-buffer for student Participants. In this study, Kanter et al. examined the intersection of CRS involvement and reported stress. Previously, Kanter (2000) examined participant responses regarding stress within time-frame contexts. Much research conclusively suggest that CRS involvement aids in stress management. However, little research accounts for varying stress levels of the participants as measurable points of reference. While participants made note of experiencing either increases or decreases in stress—and even sometimes within given timeframes—little research accounts for reference points and the magnitude of stress relief occurring when applicable.

Research concerning the social developmental aspects of CRS participation is reflective of various and diverse social benefits. These benefits are reflective of social developments associated with participation in leisure sport at large while adequately making differentiated notation on unique factors of collegiate recreational sport. Watson et al. (2006) examined social ties as a component of social integration and collegiate recreation. Subsequent results indicate that participation in CRS aids in further developing students in terms of social wellbeing. Watson et al.'s findings are reflective of supported collegiate recreation research (Artinger et al., 2006; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Nesbitt, 1998; Miller, 2011; Sturts & Ross, 2013). Critique regarding the examination of the intersection of CRS and social development lies in the notion of generalization. Prior research largely researches student social development by the threshold of participation. Some research makes note to differentiate findings by terms of cis-centric binary gender and academic progression. However, little research specific to collegiate recreation accounts for other factors that may influence social development such as gender identity, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity.

In consequence to the emphasis of collegiate recreation research to establish and showcase the value—both individually and institutionally experienced—of CRS, much research highlights academic success as a benefit of participation. From recruitment to retention, research consistently demonstrates that collegiate recreation facilities and CRS influence student decisions to attend and maintain at a university (Bryant, et al., 1995; Christie & Dinham, 1991; Hesel, 2000; Huesman, et al., 2009; Miller, 2011). However, some research opposes these findings in terms of academic performance. Zizzi et al. (2004) found that there were no significant differences regarding academic success as related to CRS involvement. Similarly, Watson et al. (2006) found that there were not significant differences in GPA related to facility

and program usage of students. These discrepancies in findings are reflective of an issue regarding GPA as the measurement standard for academic success. This occurrence illustrates that GPA is not adequately indicative of academic success as it does not provide a holistic picture. Even in cases where students reported having experienced perceived benefits of academic success as a result of CRS participation (Todd et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2006), GPA was not likewise reflective.

Similarly invested in academic success, Mayers, Wilson, and Potwarka (2017) sought to examine student engagement outcomes for students with lower GPAs. Mayers et al. (2017) asserted that CRS involvement significantly improved student engagement for students with lower GPAs and that participation in CRS “helped students who were not doing well academically by providing an outlet to involve themselves in campus life” (Mayers et al., 2017, p. 108). This intersection of academic success as determined by GPA and participation in CRS is reflective of prior and emerging research concerning student success (Jamelske, 2009; Kuh et al, 2008). Much like previous studies however, this inquiry only denotes student academic success via GPA. Denoting student academic success by GPA is problematic in that the measurement standard is not completely reflective of academic accomplishments and does not translate across other universities and institutes that may vary in academic rigor. Much like BMI has threshold reference points, GPA is in need of similarly constructed and utilized adjustments to measurement to better reflect academic success. Collegiate recreation focused research should embrace such reference points in better measuring what influence CRS involvement has on academic success.

The transgender experience has been diversely examined as it pertains to the campus climate. Research consistently shows that the lives of transgender students differs greatly from

their cisgender counterparts; this difference is intrinsically related to trans-identities as marginalized identities (Dolan, 1998; Noack, 2004, Rankin, 2001, 2003, 2008). Much research dissects individuals' multiple identities to provide further insight into their lived experiences with keen awareness of Cumulative Disadvantage Theory (Merton, 1988; Rankin, 2010). For example, Rankin (2010) found that transgender students with multiple other marginalized identities experienced higher dysphoria and harassment associated with their compounded and complex holistic self. While such research often includes and elaborates on the complexities and life experience differences regarding the intersectionality of multiple identities, the inclusion of academic classification is lacking. Research in collegiate recreation consistently promotes the need to differentiate the examination of campus life experiences between undergraduate and graduate students (Elkins, Forrester, & Noel-Elkins, 2011; Henchy, 2011; Henchy, 2013). Similarly, inquiry into the lived experiences of transgender students on campus should seek to make this much needed differentiation. Furthermore, additional research and growth is needed to better identify and recognize transgender identities that are non-binary; individuals with these trans-spectrum gender identities may experience and interact with the campus climate differently than their binary transgender counterparts.

Research particular to the intersection CRS involvement and transgender identities greatly lacking in existence. Virtually no research explores transgender identities in collegiate recreation by means of focusing on the marginalized identity itself as a subject for inquiry. Seminal research to this point examines transgender policies, facilities, and training (Daly et al., 2015; Patchett & Foster, 2015). This disparity illustrates a significant critique on transgender collegiate recreation research. These seminal works—while foundational in nature and much needed—do not consult transgender identities as participants. The exclusion of transgender



identity participation is reflective of the previously published research that provides only a state-of-affairs illustration regarding the intersection of CRS and trans-identities. The lack of inquiry including trans-identities as participants illustrates a gross disservice to collegiate recreation; without such inclusion, decision making practitioners are left without sufficient scholarly support to craft and implement data-driven decisions upon.

A critical analysis—in broad—into the literature and inquiries surrounding CRS involvement, benefits attained via participation, and the trans-identities and CRS participation intersection lends much room for improvement. While previous research is certainly broad reaching and illustrative of works sufficient in both breadth and depth, there is a need for emerging research to maintain development in alignment to the rapidly evolving campus community. This best promotes equity through well informed measurement standards, instruments, and study designs. These inquiries will best explore the phenomenon surrounding transgender identity participation in college recreation.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods**

#### **Methodological Approach**

This study used qualitative methods to explore the intersectionality of three factors: 1) benefits of CRS involvement, 2) constraints and barriers to participation in CRS, and 3) transgender identities. The semi-structured interviews were framed around the following four research questions:

1. Do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
2. In what ways do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?

3. Do trans-identifying students encounter constraints and barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
4. In what ways do trans-identifying students experience constraints or barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?

The results from this study may aid practitioners in better understanding transgender identities as a marginalized group in collegiate recreation. This understanding may better inform practitioners in the development and implementation of trans-inclusive policies and programming.

This inquiry used phenomenology as the research methodology. Phenomenological research seeks to create meaning through the analysis of multiple lived experiences had by participants (Van Manen, 1990). This approach sought to focus on commonalities across participant narratives; this reduces “individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). This implies that meaning is created through the understanding of human experiences. This approach allowed the researcher to look at a particular phenomenon that occurs within a given context and explore it through common connections.

In a historical discussion on phenomenology, Spiegelberg (1965) notes that the focus of phenomenological research requires direction “to the things themselves’ [...] to turn towards phenomena which have been blocked from sight by the theoretical patterns in front of them” (p. 658). An emphasized focus on the lived experiences of individuals with varying identity standards aptly reflects the aim of phenomenology regarding inquiry. Regardless of an individual’s CRS participation, collegiate recreation—as an organization—is a common facet of everyday student life. Phenomenology aptly fulfills the needs of collegiate recreation scholarly inquiry in that it allows for an exploration of how individuals experience their life-world; their life-world consists of “everyday life and social action” (Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2003, p. 71). This methodology best fits an exploration of the intersection of collegiate recreation and

transgender identities. As a product of this methodology, the resulting findings will present an essence of the participants' lived experiences that invokes an understanding as to what it feels like to have shared in those life experiences (Cresswell, 2007; Gallagher, 2012; Käufer & Chemero, 2015; Polkinghorn, 1995).

While this research methodology aptly positioned this study to best derive a shared understanding between participants with varying life experiences and identity standards, it comes with its limitations. One limitation of this methodology is that meaning may be crafted without proper consideration of non-common points of interest. This study is designed to address this limitation by consulting participants with interview transcripts and developed codes. Additionally, if not properly considered, research biases and subjectivities may negatively impact the interpretation and sequential proposed essence of the collective data. This limitation was addressed through the Epoché process. Moustakas (1994) historically defines this process as a “refrain from judgement” by which the researchers acknowledges and sets aside bias to revisit the phenomena under inquiry (p. 33). This consideration included a bracketing process in which the researcher reflects on pre-established bias.

## **Participants**

In seeking to answer the proposed research questions, this study utilized nine participants ( $n=9$ ). This study aims to gain qualitative, phenomenological data on a particular population—transgender students. The selection of nine participants allowed the study to utilize phenomenological methodologies while providing an apt amount of qualitative data for coding and subsequent discussion of essence. Each participant was categorized according to three broad gender identities: transgender man/masculine, transgender woman/feminine, and gender non-binary. This study utilized purposive sampling to select participants. Gender identity is complex,

and the corresponding language used to describe gender identity is quickly evolving both in scholarly inquiry and colloquial usage (Pecoraro & Pitts, 2018). Gender identities may occur along a trans-spectrum without easily fitting within gender categories. The formation of three categories—transgender man/masculine, transgender woman/feminine, and gender non-binary—was developed to best promote gender identity diversity within the sample. While each trans-spectrum gender identity has its own characteristics, the strategic and purposive inclusion of participants with varying gender identities best positioned the study to produce findings that illustrate the intersection of transgender student life experiences and collegiate recreation.

### **Selection Criteria**

Participants were included in this study if they 1) are at least 18 years of age, 2) have utilized the collegiate recreation center within the academic calendar, 3) self-identify as transgender, gender non-binary, or any other trans-spectrum identity, and 4) were enrolled at university. Interested parties that are not at least 18 years of age, do not self-identify as transgender (or any trans-spectrum identity), or were not enrolled at university do not meet the inclusion criteria and thus were excluded from this study.

### **Participant Demographics**

Much research notes the importance of collecting participant demographics as it may provide further insight regarding explored themes and phenomenological essence; however, the nature of this inquiry calls for additional consideration regarding the importance of protecting participant's anonymity (Merriam, 2009; Taylor, 2016). Transgender students regularly experience harassment and discrimination on campus in relation to their trans-identity (Scourfield, Roen, & McDermott, 2008; Rankin, 2004). This denotes the need for investigators, wishing to conduct transgender research, to carefully consider if the inquiry requires the collection and disclosure of

participant demographics. Depending on the inquiry, the collection and disclosure of participant demographics may compromise confidentiality. This breach of anonymity may vulnerably place the participation at a heightened risk to experience harassment and discrimination based on their trans-identity. The purpose and scope of this inquiry does not justify this risk. This study's design cannot aptly protect confidentiality to the fullest extent due to the select sample size and specific selection criteria. Therefore, this study elects not to collect nor disclose demographics that may be used to identify the participants.

### **Recruitment Procedure**

Merriam (2009) would assert that “the most appropriate sampling strategy [for this inquiry] is purposive” (p. 77). Historically, purposive—or purposeful—sampling has been utilized for qualitative researchers in order to best obtain data rich of information (Chein, 1981; Patton, 2002). Seeking information-rich data provides the researcher with the content needed to aptly develop an essence of the phenomenological, lived experiences of the participants in a manner that fosters a broader understanding of the social world.

Participants for this study were recruited using purposive, network sampling. First, a few key participants, easily meeting the selection criteria, were located through personal connections. At the conclusion of their interview, the initially recruited participants were asked to refer another potential participant for this study. Thus, I used personal networking to establish a set of initial participants and utilized these participants' network to recruit the remaining needed individuals. Patton (2002) asserts that this recruitment process produces an “accumul[ation] of new information-rich cases” (p. 237). This approach addressed two obstacles specific to this study. First, the obstacle of target population access was mitigated through this approach as it consults with key insider participants to identify other potential participants. Second, the obstacle

of obtaining sufficient data breadth and depth was addressed through this approach as it mitigates a smaller sample size with supplementation of a rich data set.

### **Interview Guide**

Each participant participated in open-ended, semi-structured interviews; participation took 60 minutes of time, once for a total of 1 hour per participant. This study sought to utilize semi-structured interviews to best explore the given topic. Merriam (2009) notes that semi-structured interviews “allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the participant, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 90). This type of interview allowed for flexibility of wording and question order to best explore the lived experiences of transgender students.

The questions for this semi-structured interviews were developed as modifications of previously conducted research that quantitatively explores benefits of participation in collegiate recreation and qualitatively explores barriers and constraints of participation among marginalized groups in recreation (Forrester, 2015; Henchy, 2013; Schwartz & Corkery, 2011). Questions were developed for this inquiry that model quantitative questions included in the Recreation and Wellness Benchmark. This instrument was first developed in 2005 by a collegiate recreation practitioner and has been analyzed and modified by various NIRSA-appointed work groups; the resulting instrument has been used in multiple collegiate recreation studies since (Forrester, 2015; NIRSA, 2010). The resulting interview guide for this inquiry is as follows:

### **Transgender Identity**

1. Let’s start with an introduction. Tell me about yourself, your gender identity, and your pronouns.
2. At what point did you identify as (insert gender identity)?
  - a. Probe: Can you tell me more about your particular gender identity?

- b. Probe: How is your gender identity different from other gender identities within the trans-spectrum?
3. Is there anything unique or notable about your gender identity that affects your college experience? Explain.

### **Benefits of Participation in CRS**

1. How often do recreation center on campus?
  - a. Probe: To what extent have you used it? Describe your usage of the recreation center.
2. In what ways do you use the recreation center?
  - a. Probe: What do you do? Where do you work out?
3. Have you used any programs or services at the recreation center such as personal training, lessons, locker services, et cetera?
  - a. Probe: Have you used a locker room at the recreation center? Which locker room did you use? Tell me about your experience.
  - b. Probe: Have you participated in any extra programming like sport clubs, intramurals, fitness classes, et cetera?
4. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding your overall health and wellness? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel differences in your feelings of health, physical achievement, stress management, or self-confidence?
5. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding social development? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel difference in your sense of belonging, association with the university, multicultural awareness, or intangible skill-sets?
6. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding academic success? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: In what ways do you think your academic success may be influenced by your participation in CRS?

### **Barriers and Constraints to Participation**

1. Do you experience any moments of discomfort while participating in CRS as it relates to your gender identity? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you have any particular concerns with participation?
2. In what ways does your socioeconomic status influence your participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel like your gender identity influences economic access to CRS?
3. In what ways does the way you were socialized into recreation influence your participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: How were you socialized into recreation? How did you know what preferred or normalized behavior in recreation looks like?

4. In what ways have you experienced discrimination—based on your gender identity—in your participation in CRS?
5. Can you identify any constraints to participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: Does anything make you feel uncomfortable about participating in CRS?
6. Can you identify any barriers to participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: Does anything make you not want to participate in CRS at all?

## Procedures

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant; participation took 60 minutes of time, once for a total of 1 hour per participant. The interviews were conducted via telephone. Each participant was instructed to situate themselves in a secluded, private room throughout the duration of the entire interview. The participant was instructed to find a space that ensures their own confidentiality, be alone within that space, and lock the entry point to their location. Likewise, I conducted the interview in a location that meets the same privacy criteria. These procedures provided the means of ensuring confidentiality and fostered comfort for each participant (Taylor, 2016). I conducted each interview personally. The participant did not interact with any other person as part of their participation. Participation in this study may have benefitted the participants personally by means of feelings of altruism and social justice contributions; however, there was no quantifiable benefits of participation. Participants did not experience any more risk than they would have in a normal day of life. Participants could elect to discontinue their participation in the proposed study at any time.

Qualitative data—in form of interview audio and subsequent transcripts—collected during these interviews was analyzed using qualitative content analysis procedures. Interview audio was collected using a digital recording device and transcribed. These recordings and transcriptions were kept digitally on a secure cloud storage that requires password protection. Each participant reviewed the informed consent form and verbally provided acknowledgement as



part of the recorded interview audio. No identifying information was kept on file to best protect the confidentiality of the participants. To further protect participant confidentiality and identity concealment, pseudonyms for each participant were used according to best practices (Taylor, 2016). Interview transcriptions were provided to each participant to ensure accuracy. These transcripts were delivered electronically to each participant and password protected. Each participant only had access to their own transcript. This practice best promotes research credibility and insures accuracy of the transcription with the participant (Merriam, 2009).

The data collected in this study was analyzed using NVivo. Interview transcripts underwent a two-part, cyclical analysis to identify and explore common themes (Crewswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). The investigator solo coded the transcripts of this study; however, an informed person was recruited and consulted with a selection of the data in order to establish coding validity and reliability. The resulting data from this study underwent two cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding used process coding. Process coding best provided a more illustrative essence as to the lived experiences of each participant; this particularly aligns well with the phenomenological research methodology (Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). The second cycle of coding used pattern coding to best identify shared patterns of participant experiences.

To validate the findings of this study, member checking was applied. In this process, the investigator consulted with the study participants during analysis to best promote validity of the findings (Ezzy, 2002; Saldaña, 2013). Any consultation occurring during the member checking process occurred electronically via email. Email communications occurred beyond password protected thresholds; thus, the participant's confidentiality was not compromised during member checking.

Transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the proposed study was strategically addressed. Transferability was addressed by ensuring that each phenomenon was explored in sufficient details to allow for future comparative analysis. This was accomplished through the development of the interview guide, conduction of the interview, and assurance that the phenomena were discussed in adequate detail to provide information-rich data (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2003). Dependability of the study was addressed through the participant selection criteria; this study used purposeful sampling to select multiple participants within each gender identity group. Each gender identity group included three participants. Confirmability was addressed through the provision of a detailed report of methodology so that future inquiry may aim to replicate the proposed study (Shenton, 2003). These measures aided in strengthening the credibility of the resulting findings and themes.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

#### **Organization of Results**

This chapter is centrally organized around addressing each research question via a broad, life essence exploration of transgender student life. Additionally, notations regarding notable differences between each gender category and binary v. non-binary trans-identities are preliminarily presented and further discussed in Chapter 5; while the primary purpose of this study was to capture the life essence of being a transgender student within the recreation setting in broad, unpredicted narratives and shared themes emerged regarding unique differences between each category and binary denotation.

Results of this study are presented per research question—as follows—with additional sectioned notations of inner-sample, gender category variances:

1. Do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
2. In what ways do trans-identifying students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
3. Do trans-identifying students encounter constraints and barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?
4. In what ways do trans-identifying students experience constraints or barriers to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services?

### **Study Participants**

Participants in this study were nine (9) persons who identify as transgender. While gender identities may occur along a trans-spectrum and may not necessarily fit easily into gendered categories, three groups were established in order to best promote transgender diversity within the sample: transgender man/masculine, transgender woman/feminine, and gender non-binary/agender. This strategic recruitment of trans-identifying students with diverse transgender identities served to best explore the lived experiences of transgender students when participating in CRS.

### **Participant Background**

Discussing gender identities outside of the cis-normative, binary gender orthodox presents multiple complexities that reflect a societal evolution of thought and language. The participants of this study—operating within a cis-normative society—face the task of opposing normalized ideologies that otherwise unapologetically denies the existence of their trans-identities. Despite this, each participant has successfully managed to navigate through two situations that address the nature of this study. First, each participant identifies as transgender. Minimally speaking, the participant has identified as transgender to themselves and the

researcher; they have accepted a self-perceived validity of their trans-identities and have taken on a label to best describe their trans-identities. Furthermore, they have believed in the ability for other people to validate and affirm their trans-identities as well. These participants use labels and language to best describe and communicate the unique characteristics associated with their identity. The corresponding language used to describe and label gender identity is quickly evolving both in scholarly inquiry and colloquial usage (Pecoraro & Pitts, 2018). This evolution complexes the conversation and exploration surrounding the transgender life narrative. Second, each participant has—at least minimally so—overcome constraints or barriers of CRS participation in a manner that qualified them for inclusion in this study. These conditions provide an illustration of a group of marginalized people operating within a setting that inherently places them in a realm of vulnerability. To best conceptualize the lived experiences of trans-identifying students, it is important to understand each participants' background information; the information of each participant is as follows:

First, Violet is a binary transwoman (she/her/hers). Violet has identified as a transwoman for approximately six years; Violet began non-medically presenting femininity in high school. Violet participated in CRS approximately once a month. She has maintained this consistency for approximately academic semesters. At the time of this study, Violet was an active participant in CRS.

Second, Evelyn is a non-binary transfeminine person (she/her/hers and they/them/theirs). Evelyn began identifying as transgender approximately 10 weeks prior to the interview's conduction. Evelyn participated in CRS three to four times per week. Immediately after she began questioning her gender identity, she stopped using CRS in totality. Within recent timing of

the interview's conduction, she began utilizing the recreation center at the same consistency as previous behavior. At the time of this study, Evelyn was an active participant in CRS.

Third, Viola is a binary transgender woman (she/her/hers). Viola began participating in CRS shortly after coming to university. Viola identified multiple points through her adolescence when she cyclically identified as transgender; the cumulative point of identification occurred at age 19, and she has been in the process of medically transitioning for two years. Viola participated in CRS approximately four to five times per month. At the time of this study, Viola was an active participant in CRS.

Fourth, Flynn is a non-binary transgender person (they/them/theirs). Flynn has identified as transgender for approximately five years. Flynn reported participating in CRS infrequently throughout the past semesters. They noted that they would only participate about once or twice per semester. At the time of this study, Flynn no longer participated in CRS.

Fifth, Asani is a non-binary genderqueer person (they/them/theirs). Asani first identified as transgender in early adulthood and has identified as such for four years. They used the term "boi" to denote themselves to be a transgender person of color. Asani participated in CRS regularly and almost daily. However, Asani reported no longer participating in CRS at the time of the study.

Sixth, Dorian is an agender, non-binary transgender person (they/them/theirs). Dorian first identified as agender, non-binary in older adolescence. Dorian participated in CRS approximately once or twice a week. At the time of this study, Dorian was an active participant in CRS.

Seventh, Max is a non-binary transmasculine person whose complex gender identity was described with question (he/him/his) and (they/them/theirs). Prior to attending university, Max identified as a transgender man. After further contemplating his ability to pass as a cisgender man, Max began identifying as non-binary. At the time of this study, Max described his gender identity as being a constant question. Max reported participating in CRS irradicably; on average, he participated once a month on average. At the time of this study, Max no longer participated in CRS.

Eighth, Tom is a binary transman (he/him/his). Within the past year, Tom had recently started transitioning. He reported participating at the recreation center approximately once or twice a week. At the time of this study, Tom no longer participated in CRS.

Last, Phoenix is a binary transman (he/him/his). Phoenix first identified as transgender mid-adolescence. He noted a time period in young adolescence in which he navigated his own internalized transphobia prior to identifying as transgender. Phoenix reported a high usage of CRS involvement, and—at the time of the study, he was an active participant in CRS.

Each of the aforementioned participants partook in a one-hour, semi-structured interview detailing their phenomenological, lived life experiences. The emphasis of this inquiry explored the intersection of the following three factors: their transgender identities, experienced benefits of participation in CRS, and experienced constraints and barriers of CRS involvement. Table 1 illustrates the study sample's characteristics regarding gender identity and each participant's CRS involvement.

Table 1				
<i>Study Sample Gender Identity Demographics and CRS Participation</i>				
<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Binary Distinction</u>	<u>Gender Identity</u>	<u>Pronouns</u>	<u>CRS Participation</u>

Violet Evelyn	Binary Non-Binary	Transwoman Transfeminine	she/her/hers she/her/hers and they/them/theirs	Active Active
Viola Flynn	Binary Non-Binary	Transwoman Non-Binary	she/her/hers they/them/theirs	Active Inactive
Asani	Non-Binary	Genderqueer	they/them/theirs	Inactive
Dorian	Non-Binary	Agender	they/them/theirs	Active
Max	Non-Binary	Transmasculine	he/him/his and they/them/theirs	Inactive
Tom	Binary	Transman	he/him/his	Inactive
Phoenix	Binary	Transman	he/him/his	Active

### Benefits of CRS Participation

Research consistently demonstrates that students benefit from participation in collegiate recreation; however, this research's cis-normative approach to inquiry largely ignores key gender identity demographics that may influence the process in which trans-identifying students experience benefits of CRS involvement (Forrester, 2014; 2015). This study aimed to examine the lived life experiences of trans-identifying students through understanding life as an intersectional web of processes. Each interview transcript was cyclically coded using process coding in order to best identify process themes; the selected manner of coding best pairs with the phenomenological approach to this study by means of providing a picture of the trans-experience in CRS.

Regarding how and to what extent trans-identifying students experience benefits from participation in CRS, three overarching themes were identified: benefiting physically, benefiting mentally, and benefitting socially. Table 2 illustrates each theme with related sub-themes.

Table 2

*Benefits of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-Themes, and Examples of Codes*

<p><u>Process Theme</u></p> <p>Benefitting Physically</p> <p><u>Sub-Theme(s)</u></p> <p>Improving Physique</p> <p>Validating Gender Identity (P)</p>	<p><u>Sample of Code</u></p> <p>I have become stronger not only in the exercises that I do but also in the rest of my life.</p> <p>It definitely helped me in the weight loss process. It gave me a decent facility to go to.</p> <p>I'm working out and I can look more muscular and that's going to make me feel better about my body, and I feel like that will continue to get better over time.</p>
<p><u>Process Theme</u></p> <p>Benefitting Mentally</p> <p><u>Sub-Theme(s)</u></p> <p>Mitigating Stress</p> <p>Validating Gender Identity (M)</p>	<p><u>Sample of Code</u></p> <p>Mentally, I feel better because I'm doing something good. I'm taking care of myself.</p> <p>For stress management, I would say yes. I know I mentioned not really liking cardio, but when I do get extremely stressed out, I will just go running until I basically can't anymore. It helps.</p> <p>In terms of working out, I feel much more confident socially to assert myself and to assert my identity where I was before I was much more meek about it.</p>
<p><u>Process Theme</u></p> <p>Benefitting Socially</p> <p><u>Sub-Theme(s)</u></p> <p>Strengthening Bonds</p>	<p><u>Sample of Code</u></p> <p>Yes, yes definitely. It's made me a little bit more social which has been cool.</p> <p>I definitely feel more connected with my friend group. It's really good and it really builds our friendship playing games and having a place to hang out.</p>



### **Benefitting Physically.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students benefit physically with attribution to their involvement in CRS. The following sections detail the results of each of the identified sub-themes. The parent theme of benefitting physically—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the benefit process of participation in CRS as experienced by trans-identifying students.

***Improving Physique.*** A common narrative amongst participants was that they experienced physical benefits regarding improving physique. Upon recounting the benefits of participation in CRS as it pertained to physical achievement, Viola noted, “[using the recreation facilities has] helped me in the weight loss process. It gave me a decent facility to go to. At second semester, if I recall, I was trying to lose weight for transition.” Viola’s narrative established that improving physique was a goal of participation that was directly tied to her gender identity. Similarly, Violet commented that she “want[s] to lose weight” when participating at the recreation center. Furthermore, her involvement in CRS—while reportedly minimal—contributed to an increased notion of improved physical well-being. Violet commented that “[she hasn’t] gone enough to see any drastic improvement.” Yet, she still identifies improved physique as a benefit of participation.

While not all participants’ physical goals were motivated by weight loss ambitions, this benefit still consistently occurred in the narratives of most trans-participants as it relates to an improved physique. When identifying experienced physical benefits particular to weight loss, Tom mentioned the following:

I have been working out last year and I lost 60 lbs. My friends are just really cool and supportive and say that I should go work out with them [...] So, I was just sort of interested to go and it's a pretty fun place, and it makes me just want to keep coming.

Tom's narrative recounted the experienced benefit of improving physique without identifying weight loss as a primary motivator. Instead of being driven by improved physique ideations, Tom identified a social group as a motivator that influenced his participation.

Similarly, Dorian commented, "I lost a little bit of weight. It kind-of fluctuates because I really like to cook and eat. But, I have lost weight and that's kind of cool." Again, Dorian identified improved physique as a benefit of participation but did not do so in a manner that emphasized its role in deciding to participate. Instead, the benefit of losing weight was positioned as a consequence of participation rather than an end-goal. Further along in the interview, Dorian stated, "I guess losing a little bit of weight makes me feel better but it's not something that I feel super pumped up or excited about. It's something like, oh cool." Again, Dorian reaffirmed that an improved physique was a benefit of participation. However, its existence was a mere consequence of CRS involvement.

Along a similar narrative, Phoenix recounted the following regarding his physique:

I am able to lift heavier weights over the course of the past few weeks. So, that's an improvement. And, physically, I do look a little bit different. Not too much different but yes. There's definitely a difference from what I was a month-and-a-half ago.

In this recount, Phoenix identified an improved physique as a benefit of participation. While only minimally detectable, Phoenix was able to recognize this benefit as a direct result of CRS participation. Likewise, Tom stated that "the time that I was working out, I did experience—not

just gains—but I just did feel healthier because I was working out.” Tom identified an improved physique as a benefit of participation and further extrapolated the concept of physicality and overall health and well-being.

In all, improving one’s physique became an established sub-theme when considering the process of how trans-identifying students benefit from CRS involvement. While some narratives vaguely suggest various motivations behind seeking to improve one’s physique, the collected data lacked clear and consistent commonalities with which to justify further codes and exploration. Future research may be conducted to better explore this phenomenon as it relates to the sub-theme of improving physique as a part of the benefit process. Further discussion regarding this possible inquiry will be addressed in Chapter 5.

***Validating Gender Identity – Physical.*** Additionally, the validation of gender identity in a physical sense was consistently noted across multiple trans-narratives; particularly, participants who identified as a transman or as transmasculine reported validating their gender identity through physical activity. This gender validation process—occurring as a sub-theme to benefiting physically—illustrated in what ways participants were able to address gender dysphoria and validate their gender identity as a benefit. In addressing gender dysphoria, Phoenix recounted the following:

A lot of my gender dysphoria is related to things that I cannot hide. Before I got my haircut, my hair would make me really dysphoric. And, my voice. I can't really hide my voice. And, so, now that I have started [testosterone] and cut my hair, those things have changed. But now, it's my overall body shape. I'm pretty curvy, and I don't like that about myself. And so, by going to the gym, and working out specifically upper body stuff, it off balances the bottom half of my body and makes it look more proportional as to a cis-man.

Phoenix identified experiencing gender dysphoria as part of the CRS participation process. Additionally, his narrative illustrated a chain of physical changes as a result of the desire to physically validate his gender identity. Phoenix identified CRS participation as a means to address a physical attribute, his overall body shape. His physical comparisons of his body structure to that of a cisgender man illustrated how his binary transman identity embraces an alignment of a masculine gender expression with a male identifying trans-identity. Phoenix further notes the following:

The longer that I work out and the longer that I am on testosterone, I am more comfortable in designated male spaces. I haven't been into the locker room yet, but I feel like I'm getting to a place that I could walk into the locker room and not feel bad.

Again, Phoenix identified validating gender identity in a physical sense as a benefit. Furthermore, this particular passage noted how the sub-theme of validating gender identity (P) is part of the larger process of the ways and extent of which trans-identifying students benefit from participation in CRS.

Similarly, Tom stated the following:

I've been on testosterone for a little over a year and being on testosterone, my weight distribution changes. So, it makes me look like I have a more masculine of a frame and it makes it easier to build muscle when you are on [testosterone]. So, I just wanted to work on that and help myself look a little more passing and it just makes me feel better about myself.

Tom's statement illustrated an intersection of multiple sub-themes that occurred through various narratives. With particular attention on the sub-theme of validating gender identity physically,

Tom described how building muscle can contribute to him gaining passing status. This status means that Tom would be clocked as a cisgender individual and largely be able to cloak his transgender identity.

The sub-theme of validating gender identity (P) was representative of a primarily transman/transmasculine narrative. This sub-theme provide insight into how transgender identities may be validated through physicality associated with CRS usage. Ultimately, this provided further insight into what the process looks like for trans-identifying students in regards to the manner in which they benefit from CRS participation.

### **Benefitting Mentally.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students benefit mentally with attribution to their involvement in CRS. In his recounts, Phoenix stated that “mentally, I feel better because I’m doing something good. I’m taking care of my body.” His statements were encompassing of a common narrative among various participants. In a likewise manner, Dorian stated the following:

Particularly since I started working out at the gym, I have been having a better mood. I definitely feel myself feeling happier after I leave the gym. After I work out for a while, I feel like I've accomplished something, and that's really nice. I really enjoy that feeling.

Dorian’s notation of their improved mental state is illustrative of mental benefice as part of the CRS participation process. The following sections detail the results of each of the identified sub-themes. The parent theme of benefitting mentally—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the benefit process of participation in CRS as experienced by trans-identifying students.

***Mitigating Stress.*** Almost all participants, sans one, reported the mitigation of stress as a benefit of participation in CRS. Of those participants who made this report, the majority closely associated the process of mitigating stress with mental health and well-being. Phoenix recounted “for stress management, I would say [I have benefitted.] I know I mentioned not really liking cardio, but when I do get extremely stressed out, I will just go running until I basically can’t anymore. It helps.” Phoenix’s statement directly accredited CRS involvement with the ability to alleviate stress to some degree. Similarly, Asani noted the following:

I really liked the indoor running track. And, I could run and listen to music and not really be bothered by anyone. Everybody was just kind-of in their own world doing their own thing. So, it was a big distressing event for me.

Asani’s description of their participation process was illustrative of stress mitigation.

Tom’s narrative similarly positioned the recreation center as a stress refuge that filled a need for him on campus. Tom noted the following:

I’m stressed out. Everyone is stressed out about school, but before I started hanging out with my friends there, I didn’t really have anywhere to chill after class or between classes.

But, like going there and participating in being active—it does, it really helps.

Tom described the recreation center as a place where destressing occurs, where stress is mitigated. This suggests that trans-identifying students are mitigating stress through the participation process and benefiting accordingly.

***Validating Gender Identity – Mental.*** Additionally, the validation of gender identity in a mental sense was consistently noted across multiple trans-narratives. Unlike the validation of gender identity in physical sense, this sub-theme was not bound by a particular trans-identity,

gender category. The process of validating gender identity via a mental vehicle was closely associated with the notion of self-confidence. Phoenix recounts the following:

In terms of working out, I feel much more confident to assert myself and to assert my identity. Before, I was much more meek about it. I would not correct people when they used the wrong pronouns. And now, I feel much more confident in doing so.

Phoenix illustrated a before and after image of what impact these experienced benefits had on him individually. Because of his participation in CRS, Phoenix experienced the benefit process of validating his gender identity in a mental capacity. Similar accounts across the sample supported the establishment of sub-theme along the narrative that an improved self-confidence allowed trans-identifying students to feel more validated in their own gender identity.

### **Benefiting Socially.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students benefit socially with attribution to their involvement in CRS. The following sections detail the results of each of the identified sub-themes. The parent theme of benefitting socially—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the benefit process of participation in CRS as experienced by trans-identifying students.

***Strengthening Bonds.*** A common narrative amongst all participants—regardless of their gender category—was that they experienced social benefits regarding strengthening bonds. This process and resulting sub-theme appeared in all participant interviews. Furthermore, this strengthening of bonds occurred in both personal and university level relationships. Regarding personal bonds, each participant identified an individual or group of personal connections that aided or influenced their participation in some manner. Evelyn noted the following:

Immediately after I began questioning my gender, I wasn't using the recreational facilities at all. I was pretty stressed out about this and was pretty insecure with myself. So, I was avoiding any potential interaction with people for a while. More recently, I have been using the fitness center more partially because of an emphasis from a friend but also because I have begun to feel more comfortable in my gender. Being comfortable in my skin, or at least feeling comfortable with who I am, and my identity has certainly made it easier to go to the fitness center.

Evelyn described the manner in which she navigated the intersection of questioning her gender identity and her level of participation in CRS. Her recounts illustrated a direct connection between her decision to reengage in CRS and an encouragement from a personal friendship. Evelyn further noted feeling closer to that individual when participating in CRS. Similarly, Tom noted the following:

On a day that maybe I felt like I didn't want to go to school because it takes me two hours to get to school because I commute—on a day that I didn't want to go to school but if my friends were like, hey let's go to the rec center or ping-pong or something, then I'll feel more inclined to go to, actually go to school.

Tom's narrative provided an additional example of the influence of a social bond. The social bond between Tom and his friend group was noted as an influencing factor in his decision to participate in CRS. Additionally, their bond as a group was strengthened through their shared experiences with CRS participation.

In a similar manner, this strengthening of bonds influenced the depth and diversity in which study participants were involved in CRS. Max noted that he “went swimming one time



and that was [...] just because of friends.” This illustrates that this social bonding influenced Max’s participation. The manner in which Max participated in CRS—in terms of what activities he participated in—was influenced by the suggestion of his friend group. Max further reported a strengthened relationship and sense of belongingness to that friend group when participating in CRS.

Another common narrative regarding the strengthening of bonds between friends involved the notion of vulnerability. Transgender students are a vulnerable and marginalized population when positioned in a highly gendered scenario reflective of a cisgender heteronormative society. Collegiate recreation, a viable environment for the perpetuation of such trans-discriminatory ideologies, can similarly place trans-students in a position of vulnerability. The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students also used their networks or bonds to mitigate, at least minimally so, some of the constraints and barriers to participation in CRS. These constraints and barriers, further discussed in this chapter, included a lack of knowledge systemic of gender socialization and discomfort associated with gender dysphoria. Phoenix described a bond between himself and his boyfriend as follows:

I had no experience for using gyms. I've always wanted to for both the gender dysphoria and it's good for your body. But, I had absolutely no clue how to use anything in the gym. [My boyfriend] is pretty well-educated on that stuff because he is super into it. It is a really big hobby of his. He gets super bummed if he misses the gym. So, I was just really clueless on how to do anything in the gym and I asked him to help me with it.

Phoenix’s narrative was reflective of a social bond being used to address a constraint related to a socialized lack of knowledge. In this way, Phoenix’s relationship aided him in alleviating a constraint that previously complicated CRS participation to an almost point of barring his

involvement in totality. Likewise, Tom navigated gender dysphoria and CRS participation through his bond with friends. He notes the following:

Some of my friends like to go, and I just wanted to come along with. And well, I've never really been comfortable with working out or anything like that in public up until last semester when I was feeling a little more comfortable with my body and stuff like that.

Tom's account of his social bonds illustrates how his relationships with friends were able to alleviate some constraints regarding gender dysphoria.

Additionally, participation in CRS was noted as being a platform through which relational bond could not only be strengthened, but established as well. Asani noted the following:

At the time that I was going every day, I was feeling better. I was feeling more energy. I would sometimes go with friends, and we would work together. So, it was also fun adventure that we could do together basically [...] I met a couple people at the gym and started friendships at the gym. I would work out with a friend or two at the gym. So, it was also meeting new people.

Asani's experience described how the recreation center was viewed as a space to establish new, personal connections. The results of this study noted that the recreation center—as a vehicle of introduction and facilitation—both established and strengthened bonds between the transgender study participants and other CRS involved parties.

The sub-theme of strengthened bonds also included the bond between the study participant and the university or sense of campus life. Viola noted the following:

Being able to interact with other students when we are not explicitly labeled as students, you got to be a student to get in there, we are not in class discussing content material. We are just coming from all different majors and areas and participating in a single event and it kind-of gives that sense of, oh yeah, I go to school with all of these people—not just the people in my classes.

Viola's experience was illustrative of a strengthened bond between herself and the campus community. Through participation in CRS, Viola was able to feel further connected to the university. Similarly, Tom noted the following regarding his experience in the recreation center:

I feel like I'm in a place where I am around a bunch of other fellow students and we are all just kind of doing stuff together but not quite together. Like, it does make me feel like I'm participating on campus.

Tom's noted presence of perceived togetherness was identifiable to him when viewing the recreation center as a place for place bonding; this perception means that Tom was able to identify feelings reflective of a strengthened bond to the campus because of the recreation center's ability to foster strengthening bonds. In all, the results of this study noted that trans-students socially benefitted in CRS participation with a particular emphasis on strengthened bonds.

### **Constraints and Barriers to CRS Participation**

Research consistently demonstrates that trans-identifying students experience campus life in an often unwelcoming and disadvantaged manner (Rankin, 2004; Rankin & Beemyn, 2008, Rankin et al., 2010). However, little research explores those experiences as it pertains to CRS involvement (Daly et al., 2015; Patchett & Foster, 2015). Regarding how and to what extent trans-identifying students experience constraints and barriers of participation in CRS, three

overarching themes were identified: experiencing gender dysphoria, seeking self-preservation, and navigating social constructs. Table 3 illustrates each theme with related sub-themes.

Table 3	
<i>Constraints and Barriers of Participation in CRS – Process Themes, Sub-Themes, and Examples of Codes</i>	
<u>Process Theme</u>	<u>Sample of Code</u>
Experiencing Gender Dysphoria	I experienced dysphoria to a much higher rate in the cardio area where there are many more women than in the weight room where there are many more men.
<u>Sub-Theme(s)</u>	
Heightening Self Awareness	So while dysphoria is certainly, for me at least in this moment, and internal feeling- it's sort of myself projecting my feelings of other people onto my own body.
Anticipating Others	I have to constantly remind myself that nobody is thinking about the bulge in my pants and no one is thinking about it. No one is wondering if it's real or not but I am.
<u>Process Theme</u>	<u>Sample of Code</u>
Seeking Self-Preservation	Somebody was going to come up—whether it was a dude or they might just say something or look at me wrong. I was just so afraid of other people's judgement.
<u>Sub-Theme(s)</u>	
Assessing Risk	You can still have people thinking that you are a predator or that you were trying to molest people or trying to rape people or some shit.
Passing	Somebody who identifies more along the lines of the gender binary [may have] a very, very strong desire to physically, as they would call it, pass amongst others at the rec center.

<u>Process Theme</u>	<u>Sample of Code</u>
Navigating Social Constructs	I felt like I could fit in with both [genders] but also sometimes fit in with neither. So, it was just a mix of where I fit in.
<u>Sub-Theme(s)</u>	
Experiencing Socialization	There is an unspoken nature of things that you can and cannot do.
Navigating a Gendered World	I am socialized to believe that you have to be super masc, that you have to be that, that guys have to lift more or something like that.

### **Experiencing Gender Dysphoria.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students experienced constraints and barriers to participation in CRS involvement in relation to manifestations of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria was a common narrative present in each interview as it inherently is connected to the definition of transgenderism. Gender dysphoria manifests differently per person and affects people differently based on their lived experiences, concept of self, and socialized environment. To some participants, the complexities of gender dysphoria served as a constraint to their participation. This means that their experienced gender dysphoria complicated but did not bar them from CRS involvement. Evelyn described her experiences with gender dysphoria while participating in CRS as follows:

I experienced dysphoria to a much higher rate in the cardio area where there are many more women than in the weight room where there are many more men. That has actively impacted my use. In fact, just the other day, I left before I was halfway done with my run on the treadmill because my dysphoria was too much to handle.

Evelyn's experience with gender dysphoria significantly constrained her participation in CRS to the extent of which she withdrew from the activity; however, her experiences with gender dysphoria did not completely bar her from continued CRS involvement.

Violet described her experiences with gender dysphoria as follows:

[Gender dysphoria] comes down to jealousy. Just feeling that all of these other people do not necessarily have the issues that I have. So, it definitely is that intense jealousy and feeling of less than. I don't know if you have ever experienced dysphoria but it is just this wrong, common, negative feeling that is a cocktail of self-loathing, jealousy, self-hatred, anger, depression, all of that stuff all at once.

Violet's description of gender dysphoria established her experiences as being ever-present and constant. As an inherent part of being transgender, Violet had to navigate and cope with her gender dysphoria in order to continue participating in CRS.

While this was a commonly shared narrative among the study participants, not all participants were able to successfully navigate nor mitigate their experienced gender dysphoria. Tom described his experience with gender dysphoria as follows:

The biggest thing that I experience in the gym would be bottom dysphoria and also top dysphoria because I wear a binder and you're really not supposed to be wearing a binder to work out, but I do. Because, I don't really want—there's a lot of mirrors. I don't like looking at my chest. So, that's honestly the cause that recently I stopped going to the gym. I haven't been working out. And, that's mostly because the dysphoria has gotten so bad that I just have no drive to go anymore.

Tom's experience with gender dysphoria completely barred him from further participation in CRS. At the time of the study, Tom no longer participated in CRS. Tom's inability to successfully mitigate, at least minimally enough to continue participation, his experienced gender dysphoria was also a commonly shared narrative among other study participants. The parent theme of experiencing gender dysphoria—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the participation process of CRS involvement for trans-identifying students.

***Heightening Self-Awareness.*** Every study participant described actions and thoughts that suggested an increased and heightened self-awareness. This self-awareness included the consideration of both physical and mental states of being. For trans-identifying students in transition, this heightened self-awareness often assessed one's physicality in juxtaposition to other cisgender students. Phoenix described his experiences as follows:

There are certain things physically. I have a toothpick body and my social anxiety flares up because I think I look like a little kid trying to lift weights. It looks a little funny. And, there's just the deal of being trans and feeling like I don't look enough like a college-aged man to go into the locker room without somebody possibly confronting me or worst case scenario resorting to violence.

Phoenix's description of his self-awareness illustrated to what degree trans-identifying students assess themselves in reference to a cis-normative socialized environment. Flynn provided a similar description:

Going into the recreation center as someone who's not very active, or kind of a very small frame I'd say, being around a bunch of people who were working out and doing all of that stuff, being very "macho" or whatever—

Flynn's description similarly reflected Phoenix's display of self-awareness. Both accounts involved an assessment of self with a comparison to cis-normative behavior. This sub-theme pairs closely with the concept of anticipating others' thoughts and actions. Viola described the manner in which she is self-aware while participating in CRS as follows:

[Gender dysphoria has] been present for a while. Probably since about eighth grade, but I didn't know necessarily hormone replacement therapy would get rid of it. And so, it's kind of been like that. That's the underlying element that I really think can be a dead giveaway. That, or my hands are more exposed and I'm very conscious about their size. If I wear shorts, I am sometimes conscious of how people might notice that my feet are so huge. And they might start looking more and they might start to notice more that I didn't even notice.

Viola's heightened self-awareness consequentially led her to anticipate others' actions and thoughts. This additionally identified sub-theme—discussed later in this chapter—is closely connected to self-assessment and various other phenomena regarding the process in which trans-identifying students navigate constraints and barriers in hopes of participating in CRS.

The extent of which a heightened self-awareness can constrain or bar CRS involvement is dependent on the individual. Tom particularly embodied a heightened self-awareness that ultimately contributed to his withdraw from CRS involvement in totality. Tom described his self-awareness as follows:

At the recreation center when I'm working out, I wear a packer—which a packer is basically like a prosthetic used to simulate a bulge in my pants. And that helps with bottom dysphoria, but it can be really nerve-racking when I'm working out because I'm



usually wearing shorts or something. And, it's pretty apparent that I have a bulge, but nobody is thinking that and I have to constantly remind myself that nobody is thinking about the bulge in my pants and no one is thinking about it. No one is wondering if it's real or not but I am [...] As I started to go [to the recreation center] during more busier times, there were more people. As I was seeing more and more people, who I assume are either a little bit younger than me or my age, and just seeing the I am nowhere near their level and how developed they are. Just kind of feeling that I am inadequate and that I'm not at that level. I don't know, it would just really stress me out. I don't want to be there anymore because I don't like feeling down about myself and making myself feel bad from something that I don't have control over.

Tom's decision to withdraw from CRS participation involved both a heightened self-awareness and a juxtaposition to others. Furthermore, Tom noted the following:

Working out gives me a lot of dysphoria. Just because the way that I look and there are a lot of mirrors. There are a lot of good-looking people there and so that definitely affects me that way. Everyone who goes to the gym—well not everyone but all the people that I noticed when I go to the gym—are all really like fit and they are really all hot and I feel just so like, so inadequate and I feel like I just look like a teenage boy. And I see guys who are my age, but I look like I am 15. I just look very—I'm short. I just don't look like I'm 24.

For Tom, a heightened self-awareness initially served as a constraint to participation and ultimately led to a complete withdrawal. Each participant of this study embodied and described this phenomenon in some manner; the fact if it was a constraint or a barrier depended on each person's ability or willingness to navigate the negativities associated with the process.

*Anticipating Others.* In an almost pairing to the sub-theme of heightening self-awareness, anticipating others' thoughts and actions often followed. Phoenix described this as follows:

I pass well as a 13 year old boy; however, it is highly unlikely in the college setting that there is a 13 year old boy. So, people think that I'm a very masculine woman. And that's not the case. And asserting yourself with a stranger is weird because you don't know how they're going to interact or react. So, I'm just like whatever and just try to get them to move on.

This occurrence illustrated that trans-identifying students are particularly attuned to other people and anticipate their behavior as it relates to assumed interactions. These assumed interactions are systemic of previously experienced interactions, others' narratives, and a sense of self-preservation.

The anticipation of others' behavior was sometimes described as irrational. Some trans-narratives recognized a perceived unlikelihood of the fruition of such anticipations. Max described the phenomenon as follows:

I was always afraid of the potential judgment or just the off-handed chance that somebody would decide and look at me the wrong way and I was just on my own. I was having a really hard time mentally. That whole fear of potentially somebody validating this thing that I hated about myself was something very difficult. And, I knew that the chances of somebody stepping up and saying something rude was not as likely as I thought it was but in my head, it was 100%. No matter what, somebody was going to come up—whether it was a dude or they might just say something or look at me wrong. I was just so afraid of other people's judgement.

Max recognized that—to them—the likelihood of experiencing negative interactions was imminent despite the chances. Yet, these fears and connected anticipation of others ultimately barred them from further CRS participation. The anticipation of others' behavior influenced trans-students' CRS involvement. Viola described similar fears and her participation as it related to factoring in the perceived perceptions and behaviors of others:

Like I mentioned, I am pre-op. And so, it's kind-of hard for me to find a swimsuit that allows me to hide that wicked, disgusting thing down there. I've tried swim skirts and they have just—a lot of them just fit awkwardly or I can't afford the good ones. I'm kind-of an awkward size. So, I guess in terms here, I'm scared of people seeing me.

Viola's description illustrated the extent of which this phenomenon can become a barrier that inhibits participation regarding a particular CRS activity. For Viola, anticipating others' behavior safeguards her from harm yet bars her from receiving the benefits of participation in CRS. Each participant of this study embodied and described this phenomenon in some manner. Similar to the aforementioned sub-theme under the process theme of experiencing gender dysphoria, this sub-theme can be a constraint or a barrier as is dependent on the trans-individual.

Despite trans-students' acknowledgement of reality, the feelings experienced by these students are quite real to them. Tom explained, “even though realistically people aren't thinking about me [...], it doesn't' really take away that initial anxiety I'm thinking that people are thinking about what I look like and trying to decide whether or not I am a guy.” This complex sub-theme is consequentially related to process themes and other sub-themes discussed further in this chapter.

### **Seeking Self-Preservation.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students experienced constraints and barriers to participation in CRS involvement in relation to seeking self-preservation. The parent theme of seeking self-preservation—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the participation process of CRS involvement for trans-identifying students.

***Assessing Risk.*** The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students consistently assessed risk when considering CRS participation; the common narrative illustrated that this tendency to assess risk is consequential to their lived experiences, learned narratives, vulnerability as a marginalized identity. These risk assessments were essential in each trans-students' decision regarding participation in CRS in totality or within specific activities. Viola described this process as follows:

When I played basketball, I presented male. And, I heard a lot of homophobic and transphobic remarks being made by the other people who I was playing with. And those same people are continuing to go [to the gym]. And oh, the track is just above the basketball courts and I still sometimes hear comments. About men in dresses, and don't be gay, gay being used as a pejorative, that sort of thing. “Girl” being used as an insult, that sort of stuff. I heard “futa” used once—something I've been called before.

This recount was illustrative of Viola's risk assessment and consequential decision to refrain from playing basketball; the fear that she would be called a derogatory name in association to her trans-identity was flagged as being too much of a risk. The possible benefits experienced via participation did not outweigh the assessed risk. The narrative of this process was consistent for nearly every study participant. This narrative of risk assessment regarding locker room usage

was by far the most common amongst the interviews. Flynn described his risk assessment as follows:

Since I'm in an AMAB person, it's safer for me to go into a male area than it would be for me to go into a woman's area, I guess. Because, a lot of the time, it could be intimidating for women to have a more male presenting person within their locker rooms for feelings of their own safety. So, I'd go into a male presenting locker room for my safety, so I wouldn't get reported for using the quote-unquote the "wrong locker room."

In this case, Flynn assessed the risk of being reported compared to their comfort when using a changing facility. Again, risk outweighed comfort. Max similarly described risk assessment regarding locker room usage; he described this process as follows:

It's just this odd thing that I knew I couldn't go into the locker room that I felt comfortable and because I didn't want the fight. I was just afraid. And just also, cis men can be scary sometimes. I've heard of way too many stories. And, I just wasn't walking into the men's changing room and doing that.

Max's narrative was illustrative of what varying sources of information can inform trans-students' risk assessments. Max heard narratives of negative occurrences—often violent—regarding transgender men using the locker room that aligns to their gender identity. These supplemental narratives were factored into the decision making process.

Often, the perceived risk could not be mitigated by the possible benefits of participation due to the extreme nature of possible harm for trans-identifying people. It is important to note that these assessments of risk were often rooted in personal experiences or shared narratives. While it may seem extreme, the results of this study do not suggest that they are unfounded. Violet noted the following when discussing using the aquatic center:

I don't want to be physically assaulted. I don't want to be sexually assaulted. I don't want somebody trying to fuck with me. That's not something that would work at all. That's the type of thing that if I were to try to do something like that—I don't want to get reported to the higher-ups and have a big issue. It's not something that I could do [...] I feel bad for making assumptions but you kind-of have to when you are in an unsafe position, probably not necessarily the most welcoming. So, you have to keep that in mind. You have to keep it in the back of your head that you have to be on extra defense.

Violet's assessment of risk served as a preventative protection practice for her. As with nearly every study participant, Violet's narrative was reflective of genuine fears that negatively impact CRS participation.

***Passing.*** An additional sub-theme that emerged under the process of seeking self-preservation concerned gender identity validation via passing. Passing is the ability for a person's gender identity to be assumed by outside parties in a manner that aligns to the person's intended presentation. Within this concept, gender expression and gender identity are often aligned to best communicate within a cis-normative society. Evelyn described the phenomenon as follows:

It is easier for a passing trans-person to interact with a person who is in a cis-normative society because they more closely fit the image that the cis-normative society expects to see. And, those of us who present non-binary or maybe try to present binary and don't pass, certainly have a tougher go of it because it is harder to blend in and just become another person in the crowd. Just another girl. Just another boy.

Evelyn's description of passing illustrated a method of self-preservation. The privilege experienced by a passing trans-person aid in both validating the person's gender identity and alleviating gender dysphoria. Additionally, passing offered safety. Tom justified his desire to pass as follows:

I want people to take me seriously. I want people to take my gender identity seriously because I do identify as a binary transman. It's important to me to feel integrated and it makes me feel safer. I'm safer the more that I pass. And, when people use the correct pronouns for me and don't assume that I am trans or that I am female or anything like that, that makes me feel more confident in the way that I look and kind-of takes the ease off of my mind so that I'm not constantly thinking about how I am trans which is something that myself and a lot of my friends go through. It's that almost every waking moment, I'm thinking about how I'm trans. And, the more that I pass with people, the less likely it is that I'll be thinking about that.

Tom's narrative illustrated how passing may be part of the self-preservation process and may aid in alleviating or eliminating constraints and barriers of CRS participation. However, this phenomenon only occurred with binary trans-identifying individuals. Max described what the absence of passing means for non-binary identities:

For a non passing trans person, any time you have to validate your own identity like, I'm particularly this, or like it's wrong that you called me a girl, it's this very intimate concept. It's a vulnerable thing and so, I fluctuate. I typically don't talk about it and just let them be wrong. It's not fun, but it's a lot simpler in my mind then the potential conflict of having to spend my emotional energy to make people think that I'm a real human.

Max's explanation provided further insight into why binary trans-identifying students may wish to pass as well as to what further constraints occur when a non-binary student fails to pass or does not wish to do so.

When a binary trans-person cannot pass and wishes to do so, the perceived validity of their gender identity was threatened. Consequentially, this affected CRS involvement. Tom explained how this affected participation as follows:

I don't identify as non-binary, if somebody can't figure out or decide what gender I am, then it feels like it makes me feel like I'm performing my gender incorrectly or I'm not passing good enough or that there is something wrong with me. Like, there's something that I'm not doing correctly or something that I am doing that is causing that.

Tom noted that these feelings of performing gender incorrectly consequentially led to withdrawal from CRS involvement in totality. Passing—as a form of self-preservation—can offer gender identity validation and safety in a cis-normative society; however, failure to pass or lack of desire consequentially served as a constraint and barrier to CRS participation.

### **Navigating Social Constructs.**

The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students experienced constraints and barriers to participation in CRS involvement in relation to navigating social constructs. The parent theme of navigating social constructs—as well as each related sub-themes—provide insight into the participation process of CRS involvement for trans-identifying students.

***Experiencing Socialization.*** Each study participant reported experiencing socialization into recreation in a means that aligned to the cis-normative binary gender orthodox. This form of socialization denies transgender identities and often promotes a cisgender, heterosexual norm.



Furthermore, the manner in which the study participants were socialized into performing gender in recreational activities often opposed their internal understanding of their own gender identity.

Viola described the manner in which she was socialized into recreation as follows:

I grew up in a household that was very intense on strict segregation of gender in terms of what they can like, what they can't like, what they are like, and so I grew up with this impression that to be a girl was to be something that was completely alien to me. I figured it out. Well, that's obviously bullshit. But, it took me a while [...] When I was eight, my parents got me doing all the sports. Once I was on the cusp of puberty, they were very eager to, I guess, introduce me to my gender role so to say.

Viola's narrative was reflective of a common narrative amongst the study participant responses. Nearly all of the study participants responded with narrative of similar upbringings and learned ideologies regarding what behavior was societally preferable for particular genders. Flynn noted their experience as follows:

It was just me feeling like it was a place that I don't belong. I don't belong doing sports. I don't belong in the gym and stuff like that. So, it's a place where I would avoid because I was more effeminate and I wasn't very good at sports. I wasn't athletic. So, I just avoided it all together. So, I guess my socialization was more effeminate, being socialized into being saying hey this is a place where you have to be strong, athletic, and do well at sports to be in here, if you're not doing that, it's not a place for you.

Flynn's description was illustrative of how socialization can impact behavior. Flynn noted that their socialization ultimately affected their CRS involvement. Phoenix's experiences resulted in similar outcomes:

As somebody who was raised as if I were female, a lot of the times I was told that the gym was not the place for a woman. And so, growing up like that changed my perception of the gym. It didn't influence me not to go. It just made me unaware of how to use the gym you know, I didn't know how gyms were. That's the biggest influence. Just the fact that I had never been to a gym and I didn't know any exercises or anything like that. I never walked into a professional gym before.

Because Phoenix was socialized into recreation differently than their gender identity, they experienced disadvantages, and it served as a constraints to participation in CRS.

Experiencing socialization is a phenomenon that every person shares. Within a cis-normative society, people are socialized into not questioning normalized behavior particular to gender roles or expectations. Max expressed his frustration with the concept of gendered socialization:

It's a lot of just, well growing up, it's just one of those things. You don't have the moment where you say oh, this is a statement. This is what these people do and this is what these people do. You just innately feel this way, well not innately. You don't really realize that you're growing up with these things until you start to question them.

Max noted questioning socialization as the point in which one may began to see the fallacy of a cis-normative, binary gender orthodox ideology.

***Navigating a Gendered World.*** Possibly one of the most complex constraints and barriers identified by trans-students concerned the navigation of gendered spaces. Largely systemic of hegemonic masculinity, gender roles, and false narratives emphasizing superiority of one gender over another, the collegiate recreation environment is closely connected to inequitable gym

narratives. Because of this, trans-students perceived the recreation center as being extremely gendered. With this understanding, the trans-students in this study were forced to accept the task of navigating a gendered world of CRS participation. Failure to accept the task resulted in withdraw from CRS participation in totality. Tom described navigating a gendered world as necessity:

Gender is a performance. The way that we experience gender—at least our society here—is constrained by the binary. So if I want to, if I want people to think that I'm a guy, I have to be overly masculine or I have to dress a certain way or act a certain way.

Tom's description of navigating a gendered world evoked images of being forced into conformity. Dorian responded similarly when describing gym culture. Their description is as follows:

Because I know I pass as a woman when I go to the gym, I try to put on something that I feel is stereotypical cutesy girl outfit. I'll put on little shorts and a t-shirt and be like oh, here's a gym selfie because that's what I feel like I should do. I feel like there are just things that have become, I don't know, aligned with gender [...] I think I have this motivation that if I'm going to be perceived as a woman, at least I should look cute while I'm being perceived that way.

Dorian's descriptions of gym culture similarly evoked an obligation to navigate a gendered environment in such a way or face the consequences.

### **Summary**

In summary, trans-identifying students discussed the ways in which they benefitted from participation in CRS and the ways in which they experienced constraints and barriers to participation in CRS. Regarding the process of benefitting via participation, trans-identifying

students benefitted physically, mentally, and socially. Some of these benefits addressed a key component and complexity of their transgender identity: gender dysphoria. In some cases, trans-students' gender dysphoria was alleviated through participation in CRS. Benefits experienced pertaining to gender dysphoria occurred both in a physical and mental sense. Furthermore, some trans-students reported an increase of their overall health and well-being. This notion was applicable both physically and mentally illustrated by an improved physique and an improved sense of self-confidence respectively. Additional benefits included a strengthening of bonds as it pertained to personal relationships and an abstracted sense of belongingness or association with the university. In all, the results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students benefit from CRS involvement and may significantly benefit dependent on their individual gender identity.

Regarding the process of experiencing constraints and barriers to participation in CRS, trans-identifying students had to navigate negative experiences both internal and external to themselves. These experiences revolved around gender dysphoria, self-preservation, and the necessity to navigate their trans-identity in a cis-normative, gendered world. These constraints and barriers were experienced differently by each trans-identifying student based on their particular gender identity and their willingness to accept risk. Common narratives illustrated that trans-students were constantly aware of their "otherness" in juxtaposition to their cisgender counterparts; furthermore, this awareness was rooted in a desire for self-preservation and was employed by means of risk management. Additionally, this process all occurred within a specific, gendered climate that fundamentally denies the validation of their trans-identities.

In chapter 5, conclusions will be further discussed and the aforementioned results will be explored as they relate to previously conducted scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, the implications

of this study are highlighted with a specific focus on practitioner utilization. Additionally, the limitations of this study will be noted and suggestions for future research will be presented.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The results of this study illustrate the lived experiences of trans-identifying students who participated in collegiate recreation. The interviews, subsequent codes, and developed themes provided a glimpse into what life looks like for a trans-identifying student as they experience the process of participating in CRS. These students experience CRS involvement differently than their cis-normative counterparts; this difference is attributed to the phenomenon surrounding their complex and marginalized identity standard.

Scholarly and practitioner inquiry regarding the intersection of trans-identities and the process of CRC participation must seek to discuss the experiences of transgender students in a holistic and process-approach manner. Attempting to identify benefits, constraints, or barriers without considering the entire lived, life experiences of transgender students' involvement in CRS fails to gain an apt understanding of the phenomenon. The identified benefits, constraints, and barriers for trans-identifying students regarding their participation in CRS are complexly interconnected. Failure to identify and discuss these connections does not provide researchers and practitioners with the needed information with which strategic, trans-inclusive actions may be implemented. This chapter will discuss each identified theme and position the explored themes and narratives within literature. Furthermore, suggestions for practitioner utilization will address the implications of this research. Last, this chapter concludes with a notation of limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

### **Benefits of Participation**

Trans-identifying students reported benefitting from participation in CRS. The manner and extent that transgender students discussed benefitting from CRS involvement was situational. These responses

depended on the particular trans-identity of the student and in what way the attained benefit alleviated or mitigated a constraint to participation. When considered with the findings of previously conducted research, the results of this study support some assertions while providing no additional insight to others. The following section discusses each process theme, identifies any connections to constraint narratives worth considering, and positions the results in tandem to literature.

**Benefitting Physically.** Trans-identifying students experience physical benefits from their participation in CRS. Regarding a marked beneficence in an improved physique, transgender students were able to identify that they had experienced a benefit. This narrative of an improved physique is present in the participant interviews as recounted by losing weight, making gains, feeling stronger, lifting more, and having more energy. The results of this study are reflective of the findings of previously conducted inquiries. Forrester (2014) found that students reported greatly benefitting from CRS participation in some manner related to physical well-being. The design of that study was quantitative in nature and collected self-reports of physical improvement. Positioned beside Forrester's (2014) study, this study reports alike findings. However, a quantifiable extent comparison is not feasible due to the qualitative nature of this study. Furthermore, this study's transgender participant responses noted an improved physique in a way that would suggest that physical beneficence—for its own sake—is not a primary motivator for CRS participation. When participants noted physique improvement, it was nearly in passing and often paired with other mentions of overall health, mental health, or satisfaction with experiencing improved physique as an outcome of CRS involvement.

Trans-identifying students also discussed benefitting physically in terms of the extent of which their gender dysphoria could be mitigated with CRS participation. This suggests that transgender students may be motivated to participate in CRS in attempts of addressing factors that trigger gender dysphoria. Reflective of the disparity of trans-inclusive research, virtually no research exists—to the knowledge of the investigator—that explores motivations of participation in CRS among trans-identifying people. The narrative of addressing gender dysphoria via participation was particularly present amongst binary trans-

identifying students. The distinction of binary status influenced transgender students to seek an alignment of gender expression and gender identity. The most inclusive interpretation of gender as a social construct would assert that gender expression and gender identity are completely separate entities; the expression of masculinity and femininity would have no expected ties, codes, or implied meanings as it pertains to the validation of gender identity (Cossman, 2018; Kirkup, 2018; Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Inquiries particular to trans-inclusive advocacy on college campuses particularly critique restrictive policy and programs that assume an alignment between gender identity and gender expression (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). This critique is particularly prevalent for trans-identifying people with multiple, marginalized identity standards such as POC trans-identifying students (Means & Jaegar, 2013; Patton 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). However, not all interpretations of gender as social construct grant this much freedom for expression and identity to operate entirely independent of each other. In a cis-normative societal context, the alignment of gender expression and gender identity can provide trans-identifying students with a sense of gender validation.

Gender validation aids in mitigating constraints and barriers systemic of simply being a trans-identifying person in a society not yet willing to legitimize their identities in a manner that eliminates unnecessary challenges (Ritchie, 2018). These challenges include the propensity for modern society to unnecessarily gender clothing, activities, and facilities. Binary participants of this study noted that physically benefiting from CRS aided in validating their gender identity; this concept aligns to societal expectations of masculinity as embodied and expressed by a person appearing to be male and the expectation of femininity as embodied and expressed by a person appearing to be female. The identified physical benefit of CRS participation intersects with multiple constraints and barriers of CRS involvement. Benefitting physically intersects with the ability to pass as a desired gender. Being able to pass mitigates a trans-identifying student's experienced gender dysphoria, better secures self-preservation in terms of safety and identity validation, and aids them in navigating overly gendered world-spaces. While trans-identifying students may experience gender validation via passing, some research asserts that

“the practice of passing is itself quite controversial, as it is based upon an underlying acceptance of gender as binary, the assumption that the goal is to emulate on half of the traditional dichotomy between masculine and feminine appearance” (Ritchie, 2018, p. 5). This notation of controversy further illustrates the complexities of the transgender, lived life experiences.

**Benefitting Mentally.** Trans-identifying students experience mental benefits from their participation in CRS. Regarding stress management, transgender students were able to clearly identify that CRS participation benefitted them in that way. This is largely reflective of previously conducted inquiries (Caltabiano, 1995; Chalip, Thomas, & Voyle, 1992; Ragheb & McKinney, 1993; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Strauss-Blasche, Ekmekcioglu, & Marktl, 2002; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002; Wheeler & Frank, 1988). This study’s results further support the findings and assertions of the aforementioned research exploring the relationship between stress management and leisure sport participation. The findings of this study suggest that transgender students benefit mentally from CRS participation and are able to manage their stress in attribution to—at least in part—this involvement. This is significant because, as having a marginalized identity, transgender students may be more inclined to experience hardships regarding stress and their mental health in a manner that inhibits them from seeking aid on campus. Collegiate recreation fulfills an emphasis on the importance of providing programs to students that are aimed at alleviating stress and promoting coping practices (Combs, 1972; Hensley, 1997; Todaro, 1993). Research consistently demonstrates that transgender students do not encounter a welcoming campus environment nor experience; thus, transgender students may be less likely to seek on-campus aid specifically associated with stress management (Ellis et al., 2014; Rankin et al., 2010). The results of this dissertation’s inquiry demonstrate that trans-identifying students have an on-campus outlet to alleviate stress. The possible likelihood of trans-identifying students aversion to seeking on-campus aid—directly specific to stress management—may be mitigated by CRS participation.

Additionally, trans-identifying students also discussed benefitting mentally in terms of the extent of which their gender dysphoria could be mitigated with CRS participation. This mitigation largely had to



do with self-confidence. The results of this study support the findings of Forrester (2014) by which students report an increased self-confidence when participating in CRS. Self-confidence as a mental benefit, as discussed by the trans-identifying student participants of this study, largely note that an increased self-confidence aids them in asserting their gender identity. The participants of this study described asserting gender identity by the act of correcting others' pronoun use when they were—either intentionally or mistakenly—misgendered. Doing so further validates their own sense of their trans-identities and aids in mitigating constraints and barriers associated with gender dysphoria.

**Benefitting Socially.** Trans-identifying students experience social benefits from their participation in CRS. Largely, social benefits were identified as experiencing a strengthened bond between themselves and other people or organizations. This strengthening occurred both with personal and university level relationships. This is aptly reflective of previously conducted research. Miller (2011) asserted that collegiate recreation centers facilitated social bonding and fostered an increased sense of social belonging. The results of this inquiry support Miller's findings and furthermore suggest that the recreation center has the potential to become an on-campus queer inclusive space. Because trans-identifying students consistently note the social benefits of CRS involvement, the results of this dissertation 's inquiry additionally support the findings of Artigner et al., (2006), Christie & Dinham, (1991), and Watson et al., (2006).

Though previously conducted research suggests that isolation may be a constraint or barrier to CRS participation amongst marginalized identities, the findings of this dissertation did not identify isolation as such (Rankin & Beemyn, 2008). This phenomenon may be reflective of a combination of the respondents' ability to identify social bonding as a benefit and the tendency to participate in activities along with others as a strategy for self-preservation and safety.

### **Constraints and Barriers of Participation**

Trans-identifying students reported experiencing constraints and barriers while participating in CRS. The manner and extend that transgender students discussed experiencing constraints and barriers

while participating in CRS was situational. These responses depended on the particular trans-identity of the student and in what way the constraint or barrier could be overcome, if possible. When considered with the findings of previously conducted research, the results of this study supports the minimally present, scholarly assertions. Furthermore, this study seminally explores constraints and barriers for trans-identifying students when participating in CRS. The following section discusses each process theme and positions the results in tandem to literature.

**Experiencing Gender Dysphoria.** Trans-identifying students reported experiencing gender dysphoria while participating in CRS. This gender dysphoria was unique to their gender identity and binary v. non-binary distinction. Additionally, gender dysphoria was reported differently dependent on if transitioning or passing was a priority to the individual. Little research in sport approaches gender dysphoria in a way that focuses on mental perceptions; research outside of sport management asserts that there is a complexity that exists around trying to understand gender dysphoria (Yardhouse, 2015). Such research suggest that this complexity is symptomatic of the reality that “while there are several theories for the etiology of gender dysphoria, the cause(s) is still unknown” (Yardhouse, 2015, p. 61). Without an apt understanding of the causes of gender dysphoria, it becomes more challenging for investigators to explore gender dysphoria as a constraint or barrier. Additionally, Yardhouse (2015) asserts that investigators much “ask if the phenomenon of gender incongruence itself is the concern and not only the emotional reaction to the gender incongruence” (p. 62). Reflective of this critique, the findings of this study approaches the emotive response to gender dysphoria—as described as inner turmoil—as a constraint and barrier to participation in CRS.

In the setting of collegiate recreation, trans-identifying students experienced a heightened sense of self-awareness. This sense of awareness was described as jealousy, confusion, and self-consciousness. Consequentially, a highly attuned notion of the self makes it easier to make comparisons. The results of this study indicated that trans-identifying students were likely to assess their physical bodies and presentations in comparison to seemingly cisgender students. This comparison evokes gender dysphoria

and may be unique dependent on the person's gender identity and binary v. non-binary gender distinction. For example, Tom and Violet both identified experiencing gender dysphoria as it relates to transition. Their desire to transition—coupled with their inability to partake in expensive medical, gender affirming surgeries—elicited dysphoria in a way that made them more attuned to themselves and others. In consequence of that occurrence, this comparison similarly elicited anticipating others thoughts and actions. In a manner that intersects with other constraints and barriers, this phenomenon occurs as a defensive move that aims to offer protection. Miller and Stiver (1997) historically describe this phenomenon as “strategies of disconnection” in which trans-identifying people “deny part of themselves that others may find objectionable or unacceptable” in order to stay connected to people and activities they may care about (Girshick, 2008, p. 155). Girshick (2008) asserts that this isolationism invisibility is reflective of a turmoil consequential of gender identity stigmatization.

**Seeking Self-Preservation.** Trans-identifying students seek self-preservation and prioritize this endeavor while participating in CRS. The results of this study suggest that transgender students assess risk as a form of self-preservation. Furthermore, the concept of passing plays a role in the validation and protection of one's transgender identity. These findings are reflective of previously conducted research. Ellis et al. (2014) found that transgender people avoid situations that promote opportunities for harassment. The results of this dissertation establish that the explored phenomenon explored by Ellis et al. (2014) transcends multiple environments and is present in the field of collegiate recreation. This avoidance is illustrative of risk assessment throughout CRS participation. Furthermore, the findings of this dissertation further support broad trans-inclusive research findings regarding risk assessment and internalized transphobia (Bouman et al., 2016; Ellis et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

By means to protect themselves, trans-identifying students are perpetuating the gendered nature of particular areas and activities in the collegiate recreation center in a manner that reinforces a cyclical reiteration of the cisgender binary orthodox and subsequent problematic ideologies regarding trans-

inclusivity. This perpetuation is seemingly a forced one in alignment to societal standards and sociologies. The motivations behind this perpetuation seem largely rooted in protecting the validity of their gender identity and protecting themselves from assessed risk. Dependent on the participant's willingness to navigate this constraint, this phenomenon has a significant impact on trans-identifying students. Tom, a binary identifying transman, withdrew his CRS involvement in totality in partial contribution to this—what would now be—barrier. While the notion of passing may be influenced by societally expected alignments of expression and identity, some binary trans-identifying students do not inherently link their concepts of masculinity or femininity to their identity. However, in terms of self-preservation, this phenomenon still occurred. Additionally, this phenomenon was reported in the findings of this study in an intersection of sexuality and gender identity. This occurred in one participant's need to “tone down the gay” in order to express a further embodiment of masculinity.

Additionally, some trans-identifying students sacrificed their family bonds, financial support, and overall well-being to embrace their trans-identity. Much research illustrates these types of sacrifices and the consequences of seeking personal authenticity (Girshick, 2008). Girshick (2008) asserts that “personal authenticity is at stake. Honest to oneself and in relationships drives [self-preservation]” (p. 98). The notion of self-preservation and the quest for personal authenticity manifests differently among trans-identifying people. This illustrates motivations behind the complexities of coming out as a transgender person. The findings of this study suggests that trans-identifying students are more likely to adjust their behavior for sake preserving the validity of their gender identity. This phenomenon may be reflective of a conviction to an idea of their true selves; this may be particularly prevalent when faced with living a lie or denying and invalidating one's gender identity. Aligning to cis-hetero binary gender orthodox expectations may be evaluated as a viably easier solution that poses the least amount of harm during the assessment of risk process.

**Navigating Social Constructs.** Trans-identifying students must forcibly navigate social constructs related to gender while participating in CRS. The results of this study found that transgender

students were raised in alignment to cisgender binary expectations; these expectations were proliferated by their upbringing and continually reinforced in a modern societal context. The results of this study are reflective of previously conducted inquiries. Semerjian and Cohen (2006) found that transgender individuals may feel an increased gender dysphoria when participating in sport. Intersecting with various other constraints and barriers, this flared gender dysphoria takes place in response to socialized sport. Furthermore, the findings of this dissertation's inquiry additionally support broad trans-inclusive research regarding socialization and navigating gender roles (Ellis et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Rankin, 2010).

Consequentially, trans-students must overcome the manner in which they were socialized into understanding the normative narrative regarding how people participate in recreational activities. The manner in which this is achieved is dependent on the individuals' trans-identities. For AFAB people, this constraint is linked to lack of knowledge or experience under the ideology that girls and women should not participate in sports. For AMAB people, this constraint is linked to the overmasculinization of sport under the ideology that boys and men should establish and display their masculinity via physical exertion, prowess and achievement. In process, this navigation alters the behavior of trans-identifying students. Each participant recounted a behavior modification in associated with navigating how their trans-identities intersect with the gendered facility and climate of the campus recreation center; this includes clothing choice, facility usage, activity usage, and extent of utilization.

## **Implications**

The implications of this research are twofold. First, there is a need for an increased scholarly interest in trans-inclusivity as it pertains to sport business in broad. This dissertation—to the best knowledge of the researchers—may possibly serve as one among few seminal works that aim to explore trans-identities in collegiate recreation with an emphasis on displaying trans-voice. This lack of previously existent research suggests that further inquiry is much needed. To accomplish this, additional scholars need to take up arms in the quest for trans-inclusivity. This may be accomplished through the strategic inclusion of transgender research into graduate and doctoral courses. Additionally, emerging

trans-inclusive research must continue to consult trans-voices as experts, participants, and fellow researchers. This collaboration and incorporation can be accomplished via strategic study design.

Second, the implication of this research suggest that collegiate recreation practitioners must make great strides in order to address the factors that inhibit and bar participation in CRS for the transgender community. As called upon by NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation, the implications of this research similarly place a duty upon practitioners to seek trans-equity. Trans-students are looking to the practitioners to achieve the following: seek out transgender participation in already established queer spaces, identify the recreation center as a trans-inclusive space, inform all patrons—regardless of gender identity—of trans-inclusive policies and procedures, and support trans-identifying students during anticipated moments of conflict. Without these efforts, trans-identifying students may continue to withdraw their CRS involvement in totality thus entirely preventing them from experiencing the benefits of CRS participation.

***Practical Implications.*** The findings of this research may aid practitioners in developing more trans-inclusive programs and policies for implementation within their own recreation departments; this may manifest in a variety of ways. First, the findings of this research suggest that trans-identifying students look to collegiate recreation practitioners for aid and support in addressing constraints and barriers to their participation in CRS. This means that practitioners should seek to promote transgender advocacy through the participation in an ally training program (ATP). The idea of allyship is tied to awareness, knowledge, and skills to support people with marginalized identities; this means that an ally must be aware of the surrounding issues experienced by marginalized populations, have overall wherewithal of the topic, and possess the skills needed to advocacy action (Woodford et al., 2014). To produce transgender allies, many colleges have developed and implemented LGBTQ training programs (Evans, 2002; Henquinet, Phibbs, & Skoglaund, 2000; Hothem & Keen, 1998; Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002; Tubbs, 2003). While not particularly and exclusively developed to address the

particular population, transgender advocacy is addressed as a part of these ally training programs in combination with general LGBTQ advocacy.

These ATPs generally take on one of two forms. They either are a program that seeks to “establish a visible network of extant LGBT-affirming students, staff and faculty” or they “educate interested individuals to become allies” (Woodford et al., 2014, p. 317). While both of these causes are certainly viable and worthwhile endeavors, this division in ATP design creates a complexity that complicates the evaluation of intervention efficacy. Furthermore, limited research is available that offers direction for the development and implementation of ATPs; thus, continuity of information and training between universities greatly differs. Much research has evaluated ATPs at individual universities and within individual programs (Bruno, 2005; Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele, & Samp; Schaefer, 2003; Woodford, Radeka, & Camp; Yu, 2011), little attention has been given to evaluating ATPs as a whole. This is reflective of a lack of continuity with ATPs across various universities. Despite these critiques, much research asserts that ally training programs promote allyship which consequentially affects the overall campus experience for trans-identifying students (Evans, 2002; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007). Therefore, campus recreation practitioners should seek to participate in ATPs. In addition to promoting transgender advocacy, participation in such an intervention will provide the practitioner with connections to on-campus resources that may aid them when developing trans-inclusive policies and procedures.

Practitioners should also carefully critique their transgender inclusive policy in a manner that consults credible sources that are sensitive to transgender specific diction. NIRSA, having thus far exhibited a strong reputation and advocacy for transgender rights, must push itself to truly be the leader in collegiate recreation by aggressively pursuing the practice of inclusion. The findings of this study illustrate that collegiate recreation professionals are in need of additional guidance when crafting and implementing transgender inclusive policy and programs; despite the

inclusive intent of policy and programs with corresponding collegiate recreation department standpoints, attempt at promoting inclusivity may fail to be adequately received by transgender students. In a like-wise manner, practitioners should review signage and posted announcements that may address transgender access and advocacy. NIRSA's Championship Series Transgender Athlete Participation Policy is a reflective display of transgender advocacy; however, it is only the beginning. In response to the United States Department of Health and Human Services' announcement of their intent to adopt a trans-exclusive definition of gender, NIRSA stated, "we know NIRSA members will rise to the challenge the same as they have on so many occasions before—supporting and advocating for health, wellbeing, and protection of all of our campus community members" (NIRSA, 2018). NIRSA must follow their own call through the development, assessment, and dissemination of a transgender inclusive policy guide of best practices for collegiate recreation practitioners. The practical implications for this research are vast. This is reflective of the underservice of transgender members of the campus community. Further development and implementation of trans-inclusive policies and programs will aid in actualizing transgender advocacy in collegiate recreation.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The generalizability of this inquiry's results is a limitation of this study. The transgender students in this study may not be representative of transgender students who live in another part of the country; geographic location—often associated with political climates—may shape the lived-experiences of the transgender student participants. Transgender students who participated in this study may have described different campus-life experiences in juxtaposition to transgender students at other universities. However, research consistently illustrates the presence of negative campus-life experiences for transgender students at various and geographically diverse universities (Noack, 2004; Rankin, 2004; Rankin & Beemyn, 2008).



These findings suggest that concerns regarding generalizability and geographic location certainly is a limitation of this study, but it may be mitigated.

Future inquiry is needed to explore trans-identities and geographic location in a manner that compares narratives and lived, life experiences. Such research should utilize a single form of trans-identity with participants in multiple geographic locations. Choosing to explore this hypothesized phenomenon with only a single embodiment of trans-identity would aid in eliminating the differences between trans-identities as an influencing factor. Additionally, this future research should consider the political climates of each represented geographic location. Geographic location—understood without its social contexts—does not inherently factor into anticipated differences in lived, live experiences alone. Instead, an analysis of the political climate and associated stereotypical narratives may provide scholars and practitioners with insight as to how and to what extent geographic location may influence the trans-life experiences and phenomena associated with CRS involvement.

Similarly, generalizability and sample selection may elicit some cause for concern. Transgender—used as an umbrella term—describes any gender identity in which an individual's sex assigned at birth does not align with their gender identity. The breadth of this diction encompasses gender identities that—while sharing in some key similarities—have unique characteristics. The life experiences of varying trans-spectrum identities may be quite different from one another. Comparisons across gender identities may be limited in generalizability because these identities can be profoundly distinct. The methodological approach of this study aimed to capture a phenomenological essence of what it is like to be transgender within the context of CRS involvement. This focus recognizes that individuals of various gender identities experience life differently. However, these transgender individuals may also have life experiences associated with transgenderism in broad—regardless of their particular gender identity—that is based on their shared, non-affiliation with cisgenderism. While the design of this study aided in mitigating some of the concern regarding generalizability, notable differences were present between the various gender categories.

In a similar alignment, the generalizability regarding sample selection may additionally be a limitation in regards to binary v. non-binary gender distinction. Even within the transgender community, some trans-identifying students may choose to identify as non-binary while also identifying as a transman/transmasculine or as a transwoman/transfeminine. This occurrence took place in this study's sample. Evelyn, a non-binary transfeminine person, identifies as such. Evelyn uses both she/her/hers and they/them/theirs pronouns. This form of trans-identity is different from a person who would identify as a binary transwoman such as Violet and Viola. The results of this study suggest that the distinction of binary v. non-binary identities may influence the lived, life experiences of trans-identifying students. This influence means that these particular students may navigate constraints and barriers to CRS participation differently. Thus, this generalization concern becomes a limitation of this study.

Future research should further explore these varying gender identities and binary v. non-binary distinctions. The design of such research could model this study and would differ in its selection and exclusion criteria depending on which factor is under inquiry. The findings of such future research may better aid scholars and practitioners in understanding the manner in which multiple factors make up a trans-identity and in what ways these factors may affect the life experiences of the person. Better understanding the trans experience would aid in better serving trans-students regarding the unique characteristics and needs associated with their gender identity and binary v. non-binary distinction.

Additionally, generalizability and sample size may be a limitation of this study. Mason (2010) argues that "more data does not necessarily lead to more information" (p. 8). This assertion suggests that researchers must critically evaluate saturation by means of not simply denoting quantity of participants as a preference in study design. Within a historical context, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that sampling should occur until saturation is achieved with additional considerations for redundancy. Similarly, modern discussion regarding sample size selection values the achievement of adequate saturation (Mason, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Guest et al. (2006) assert that 12 interviews—with participants sharing a homogenous characteristic or connection—achieves saturation. Furthermore, literature suggests that sample size and

saturation in qualitative research is ultimately reflective of the proposed study's purpose and ability to elicit rich data (Mason, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Mason (2010) asserts that "the sample size [of a study] becomes irrelevant as the quality of data is the measurement of its value" (p. 22). This claim suggests that a critical, emphasized consideration on a study design's ability to produce quality, rich data is of more note. As an exploratory study with modified instrumentation rooted in pre-established research, this proposed design mitigates the limitation regarding generalizability and sample size in a manner that fosters quality, rich data.

## **Conclusions**

Gender identity is a complex social construct that is quite present in our everyday lives. The process of socialization programs individuals into associating certain behaviors, thoughts, and expressions with certain genitalia. The binary cisgender orthodox ideology proliferates trans-exclusive narratives based on the premise that trans-identities opposes the socialized norm. This is problematic for transgender students as they seek gender validation. Transgender students are thus faced with having to navigate their own trans-identities in a societal climate that often denies the existence of their gender identities. Furthermore, transgender students may additionally experience inner-community criticisms from other trans-identifying individuals regarding the validity of the binary v. non-binary distinction. This accumulation of complexities positions trans-students in a place of vulnerability both in broad and in regards to participation in collegiate recreation programs and services as well.

The results of this study suggest that transgender students do benefit from CRS participation and may benefit differently than their cisgender counterparts. The central assertion in favor of believing that transgender students benefit differently than cisgender students is largely supported by this study's findings in which the concept of navigating gender dysphoria occurs in both the physical and mental benefit themes. Cisgender people—by definition of being cisgender—do not experience gender dysphoria. This unique transgender trait aids both scholars and practitioners in understanding that—simply put—the life experiences of a transgender students are different from other students.

Those who explore collegiate recreation phenomenon and those who are practitioners in the field of collegiate recreation are called not only to recognize that transgender students experience life differently—and often in a marginalized manner—but to address their unique characteristics and needs. This action is called for, not only by general altruistic motivations in the pursuit of social equity, but also by the leading professional organization. This organization, NIRSA: Leaders and Collegiate Recreation, has established a clear stance regarding social equity. Scholars and practitioners must make considerable efforts to promote the strategic value of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for all members of the campus community, regardless of gender identity.

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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Georgia State University  
Department of Kinesiology and Health  
**Interview Protocol**

Title: Benefits and Constraints of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services for Trans-Identifying Students

Principal Investigator: Deborah Shapiro, Ph.D.

Student Principal Investigator: Jennifer A. Pecoraro

#### **Contact Information**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Deborah Shapiro, Ph.D., [dshapiro@gsu.edu](mailto:dshapiro@gsu.edu)

Student Principal Investigator: Jennifer A. Pecoraro, M.S., [jjohnson196@student.gsu.edu](mailto:jjohnson196@student.gsu.edu) 470-393-9640

Consultant: Dr. Brenda G. Pitts, Ed.D., [bpitts@gsu.edu](mailto:bpitts@gsu.edu)

#### **Introduction and Purpose:**

Hello. My name is Jennifer (she/her/hers) and I will be facilitating this interview. The goal of this research is to investigate transgender identities and collegiate recreation participation as experienced by transgender students. Your unique opinions and insights associated with your gender identity are valuable. We want to know how and to what extent transgender students experience collegiate recreation. Ultimately, this study will inform inclusive practices developed and implemented by collegiate recreational professionals regarding gender identity.

You were selected for this study because you are a currently enrolled college student who self-identifies as transgender, gender non-binary, or as another trans-spectrum identity. Prior to this interview, you were sent a consent form for your review.

Let's review this consent form together and aloud prior to us beginning the interview (*copied distributed and consent form read aloud*). Do you have any questions?



If there are no further questions, let's get started with the interview.

**When responding to your questions, please remember that it is important not use any names or personal information that can identify other people as third parties. Refrain from saying anyone's name or personal information.**

*[Note: the research may use phrases such as "can you tell me more," "could you provide an example?", "would you explain that further" as prompts to solicit additional detail.]*

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## **Transgender Identity**

1. Let's start with an introduction. Tell me about yourself, your gender identity, and your pronouns.
2. At what point did you identify as (insert gender identity)?
  - a. Probe: Can you tell me more about your particular gender identity?
  - b. Probe: How is your gender identity different from other gender identities within the trans-spectrum?
3. Is there anything unique or notable about your gender identity that affects your college experience? Explain.

## **Benefits of Participation in CRS**

1. How often do recreation center on campus?
  - a. Probe: To what extent have you used it? Describe your usage of the recreation center.
2. In what ways (if at all) do you use the recreation center?
  - a. Probe: What do you do? Where do you work out?
3. Have you used any programs or services at the recreation center such as personal training, lessons, locker services, et cetera?
  - a. Probe: Have you used a locker room at the recreation center? Which locker room did you use? Tell me about your experience.
  - b. Probe: Have you participated in any extra programming like sport clubs, intramurals, fitness classes, et cetera?
4. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding your overall health and wellness? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel differences in your feelings of health, physical achievement, stress management, or self-confidence?
5. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding social development? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel difference in your sense of belonging, association with the university, multicultural awareness, or intangible skill-sets?
6. From your participation in CRS, have you experienced any increase or improvements regarding academic success? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: In what ways do you think your academic success may be influenced by your participation in CRS?

## **Barriers and Constraints to Participation**

1. Do you experience any moments of discomfort while participating in CRS as it relates to your gender identity? Can you tell me more?
  - a. Probe: Do you have any particular concerns with participation?
2. In what ways (if any) does your socioeconomic status influence your participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: Do you feel like your gender identity influences economic access to CRS?
3. In what ways (if any) does the way you were socialized into recreation influence your participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: How were you socialized into recreation? How did you know what preferred or normalized behavior in recreation looks like?
4. Have you experienced discrimination—based on your gender identity—while participating in CRS?
  - a. Probe: If yes, can you tell me more?
5. Have you experienced any constraints or barrier to participation in CRS?
  - a. Probe: If yes, can you tell me more?
6. Can you identify any constraints to participation in CRS as it pertains to your gender identity?
  - a. Probe: Does anything make you feel uncomfortable about participating in CRS?
7. Can you identify any barriers to participation in CRS as it pertains to your gender identity?
  - a. Probe: Does anything make you not want to participate in CRS at all?

## **Conclusions**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today to discuss this topic. Do you have any questions or concerns?

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## Appendix B – IRB Approval

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD



Mail: P.O. Box 3999

In Person: 3rd Floor

Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999

58 Edgewood

**Phone: 404/413-3500**

FWA: 00000129

March 18, 2019

Principal Investigator: Deborah Shapiro

Key Personnel: Pecoraro, Jennifer A; Pitts, Brenda; Shapiro, Deborah

Study Department: Kinesiology &amp; Health

Study Title: Benefits and Constraints of Participation in Collegiate Recreation Programs and Services for Trans-Identifying Students

Review Type: Expedited Category 6, 7

IRB Number: H19488

Reference Number: 354021

Approval Date: 03/15/2019

Status Check Due By: 03/14/2022

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. The IRB has reviewed and approved the study and any informed consent forms, recruitment materials, and other research materials that are marked as approved in the application. The approval period is listed above. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study (except to protect the safety of participants), an Amendment Application must be submitted to the IRB. The Amendment Application must be reviewed and approved before any changes can take place.

2. Any unanticipated problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Unanticipated Problem Form.
3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.
  - ☐ A Waiver of Documentation of Consent has been approved for this study in accordance with the requirements set forth in 45 CFR 46.117 c.
4. A Status Check must be submitted three years from the approval date indicated above.
5. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at <http://protocol.gsu.edu>. Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Chang".

Catherine Chang, IRB Member