

**RECREATION THROUGH THE EYES OF TRANS MEN IN NL**

by © Janna K Walsh

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is limited research available for researchers and recreation practitioners surrounding the needs of those who identify as transgender (Lewis & Johnson, 2011). The purpose of the current study was designed to describe the recreational experiences of trans men in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Qualitative methods were employed and the findings are based on the stories of six trans men living in NL. The findings suggest that providing equal, inclusive recreation opportunities and spaces for transgender men in the province of NL is an area that requires greater awareness and further research attention. Specifically, it is critical that additional attention be paid to the ways in which recreation programs, clubs, or spaces register and group participants, how changing areas are designed, and how the attitudes of desk staff can all act as barriers and facilitators for transgender men. Three main themes emerged: gender expression, recreation constraints and facilitators, and cisnormative privilege. All participants emphasized the importance of educating recreation practitioners and providers on ways to build gender inclusive environments.

**Keywords: transgender, gender identity, recreation, inclusion**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1    INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.11 <i>Gendering Recreation</i> .....	2
1.12 <i>Researching in NL</i> .....	3
1.2    POSITIONALITY.....	5
1.3    PURPOSE.....	8
1.4    THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
1.5    RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	12
1.6    THESIS FORMAT.....	13
1.7    CO-AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT.....	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1    INTRODUCTION.....	15
2.2    DEFINING KEY TERMS.....	15
2.2.1 <i>Terminology</i> .....	16
2.3    REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	18
2.3.1 <i>LGBTQ Community</i> .....	18
2.3.2 <i>The (T) is Different from Sexual Orientation (LGB&amp;Q)</i> .....	19
2.3.3 <i>Trans men</i> .....	20
2.3.4 <i>Recreation</i> .....	21
2.3.5 <i>Context of Newfoundland and Labrador</i> .....	23
2.3.6 <i>Summary</i> .....	24
<b>CHAPTER THREE: MANUSCRIPT.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3.1    ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.2    INTRODUCTION.....	25
3.2.1 <i>Gendering Recreation</i> .....	28
3.2.2 <i>Researching in the Context of NL</i> .....	28
3.2.3 <i>Defining Key Terms</i> .....	30
3.2.4 <i>Recreation and Inclusion</i> .....	31
3.2.5 <i>LGBTQ &amp; Transgender Communities</i> .....	32
3.3    RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS.....	34
3.4.1 <i>Interviews</i> .....	37
3.4.2 <i>Journaling</i> .....	38
3.5    DATA ANALYSIS.....	39
3.6    FINDINGS.....	40
3.6.2 <i>Gender Identity &amp; Expression</i> .....	41
3.6.3 <i>Recreation Constraints</i> .....	43
3.6.4 <i>Cisgender Privilege</i> .....	45
3.6.5 <i>Coming Out in Newfoundland</i> .....	46
3.7    DISCUSSION.....	47
3.7.2 <i>Trans men see sexism from both sides</i> .....	49
3.8    FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS.....	50

3.9	LIMITATIONS .....	51
3.11	REFERENCES .....	53
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: EXTENDED RESULTS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>		<b>60</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE .....	60
4.2	RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	60
4.3	STUDY PARTICIPANTS.....	62
4.4	METHODS.....	66
4.5	DATA COLLECTION .....	67
4.5.1	<i>Interviews</i> .....	67
4.5.2	<i>Journaling</i> .....	68
4.6	DATA ANALYSIS .....	68
4.7	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	70
4.7.1	<i>Storage of Data</i> .....	71
4.8	EXPANDED RESULTS .....	72
4.8.1	<i>Three Major Themes</i> .....	73
4.8.2	<i>Additional Limitations</i> .....	74
4.9	FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS .....	75
4.10	CONCLUSION .....	76
<b>APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....</b>		<b>88</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....</b>		<b>94</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Little is known about how trans men experience leisure (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). Specifically, this study focused on the leisure constraints and facilitators trans men experienced in recreation and leisure participation. With the recent focus on practicing inclusion in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015), it is important to understand how to adapt practices to include all marginalized groups, inclusive of trans men. Participation in recreation and leisure is essential to our mental, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing (Allen, 1990; Driver, Brown & Peterson, 1991; Kivel & Kleiber, 2010). Through recreation and leisure, we develop life skills, improve our communities, and maintain healthy, independent lives (Driver, Brown & Peterson, 1991; Kleiber, 1999). This research is necessary to fully understand the barriers and needs of the transgender community in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Their experiences with gendered clubs, teams, washrooms, and cultural norms, highlighted in this study, emphasize the need to remove the barrier of being either female or male from recreation. The present study employed qualitative methods to examine the experiences of transgender (trans) men participating in recreation and leisure in NL. This study employed transgender theory (Nagoshi & Bruzuz, 2010) as well aspects of a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 2017) to tell real life stories that will help to uncover ways to create inclusive recreation environments for members of the lesbian, gay, transgender, questioning/queer (LGBTQ community in NL, specifically trans men.

### ***1.11 Gendering Recreation***

When we attribute characteristics of masculinity or femininity to an activity or sport, we are gendering it (Grossman, O’Connell & D’Augelli, 2005). Ballet, for example, is still in Western society, commonly considered a feminine activity. Ballerinas are shown wearing pink shoes and tutus and little girls are conditioned by the world around them to feel supported if they want to become a ballerina; whereas little boys are not. Boys and men are encouraged to wrestle while girls and women are guided more towards the sidelines to cheer them on. Structured recreation is commonly gendered as well. Leagues are created for women and men separately and even co-ed leagues use gender to determine who can play at the same time. Recreation provides us all with the opportunity for self-expression (Kivel & Kleiber, 2010). Through participation in recreation, we learn about our strengths and weaknesses as well as our likes and dislikes. Many transgender individuals oppress certain attributes or likes, their self-expression, for large portions of their lives (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Sport and recreation therefore, are, important outlets for self-discovery and expression for trans people (Elling-Machartzki, 2017). Limiting recreational opportunities to a specific gender (example: women’s sewing group, men’s hockey) creates barriers for transgender or non-binary (also described by participants as “gender queer”) folks. If a participant’s previous recreation groups, and/or teammates belonged to the opposite gender, once they transition, they may have to change teams, leagues, recreational settings or spaces and often decide to stop recreating. Throughout western society’s history we have segregated and separated by gender. Tourism NL writes that, in this province, specifically, you may often still find

women in one room and men in another at larger social gatherings (Tourism Newfoundland, 2016).

### ***1.12 Researching in NL***

Newfoundland and Labrador's isolated location on the eastern edge of North America, work patterns, and social relationships developed in the fishing economy contribute to its resistance to change and acceptance of outsiders (Tourism NL, 2016). Isolation has brought our province a variety of accents, as well as different culture and traditional values that are quite unique from the rest of Canada. NL's conservative morals and history is especially apparent in the lack of acceptance of non-binary gender issues. Development of these traditions can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century when first settlers arrived in St. John's (Hiscock, 1999).

According to Statistics Canada, NL has the oldest population in the nation at an average of 44.2 years (Statistics Canada, 2017). Over 89% of NL's population in 2016 were born here. Many residents in the province are seniors (36%) and their families have lived in NL for generations. This makes new initiatives and non-traditional gender roles difficult to accept. Resistance to change in this province stems from traditional cultural lifestyles that still influence NL's society today.

NL has also been labelled as a religious province, with less than three percent identifying as non-religious (Statistics Canada, 2017). It was not until 1997 that Premier Tobin announced the end of denominational schooling. Until that time, it was considered the norm for schools, clubs, and groups to segregate based on religion. It is very common still today to see religious segregation evident in many smaller communities in NL. Though it is no longer formal segregation it still causes many barriers to various

experiences for those who are not part of the majority group. NL was also the very last province to join Canada in 1949. It took an economic crash and a great depression for NL to join this democracy. This unique place has its own practices and tendencies. Research here may be applicable to other parts of North America with similar cultural and traditional values. Regardless, the need for research with specific marginalized social groups is evident. While researchers suggest that approximately 10% of the world's population identifies as LGBTQ, there is no record of percentages of trans men or even the overall LGBTQ community in NL. There is persistent homogeneity in the population of NL (Rahaman, et. al, 2003). Statistics Canada shows that only 5,720 people, approximately 1.5 % belong to minority groups in NL. Canada is home to 5,068,095 or 23% of the total population, people who identify as a visible minority (2017). Recent research indicates that between one and three percent of the world population is trans, and 0.2% of the population may transition at some point in their lives (Conron, Scott, Stowell, & Landers, 2012; Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES), 2011). Provincial and national statistics on gender identity or transgender identify specifically are not available. Newfoundland and Labrador is like the other provinces in Atlantic Canada in that almost half of our population resides in rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2017). In provinces like Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia less than 15% of the population are considered rural. This small population, with little diversity within, means that minority populations are further underrepresented and that differences are more noticeable. This study investigated how transgender people in NL, enact their genders within different recreational contexts and corresponding stresses that minority groups

face.

## 1.2 POSITIONALITY

I have hetero-privilege and cis-privilege: I am privileged because my birth sex aligns with my gender identity as a woman, and because I am primarily attracted to those whose birth sex aligns with their gender identity as men (Davidson, 2015). Thus, I have the privilege of living in a society that was built around the idea that people like me are the “norm,” while gay, lesbian, transgender, and many other people are not. These privileges allow me to be viewed as “normal” when it comes to my sexuality and physical appearance. Society does not reprimand me for the partners that I choose and allows me to proudly display both my gender identity and my significant other(s) in public. These types of privileges have allowed me to live in a world where my self-worth is never challenged based on how my gender differentiates from my biological sex. No one has ever suggested to me that I should change what gender I identify with. I did not however, work to earn these privileges. Privileges like these, among others were bestowed upon me by the heteronormative, cisnormative world I was born into.

Broido (2000) defined allies as “members of dominant social groups who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership” (p. 3). Dwyer and Buckle (2009), researchers from Memorial University of Newfoundland, identify what it takes to become an LGBTQ ally. An individual who belongs to the majority group in relation to their gender and sexual orientation must learn to recognize the structure of privilege and heterosexism, validate the experiences of LGBTQ individuals, challenge attitudes and behaviours, and

try to create social equity for LGBTQ persons. With these ideas in mind, I would like to position myself in relation to the topic at hand.

As a ciswoman with my interests and life experiences, most would place me well outside the walls of an insider point of view. I have however, within my own friend circles, and recreation and leisure experiences, been confronted with LGBTQ and trans issues from both a bystander and ally's point of view. Growing up in Newfoundland I played competitive hockey on female teams and formed lasting relationships with my teammates. Many of these women now identify as lesbians, some bisexual, others are heterosexual while others prefer not to use labels or categories to describe their sexual orientation at all. Some of these women now identify as men, some women, while some prefer androgynous pronouns and reject the gender binary society forces upon us. As a friend and a teammate who has witnessed people around me struggle with barriers that sometimes inhibit participation in activities they once enjoyed, I became more aware of the impact gender has on recreation. I became more aware of the attitudes of others and I recognize my own privileges as a ciswoman. Rules and regulations vary from sport to sport and level of play in terms of at what point in my friends' transitions that they might not be permitted to play on an all-female team anymore. In 2010 a friend of mine, the goalie of my semi-elite ball hockey squad, began transitioning from female to male (FTM). At that time, there was very little in terms of rules and regulations determining if and at what point they would no longer be able to travel and compete with my squad. This uncertainty was difficult for him and in my mind, wasn't fair. It was not fair that someone could tell him he wasn't allowed to play with us anymore and also not fair that he had to go through the humiliation of being talked about and used as an example. In a world

where more people like my dear friend are transitioning, policies and supports in sports and recreation need to be implemented. These rules may look different within different sports, age groups, and levels of play, but change needs to start.

As a child, I remember challenging the notion of gendering recreation. I begged my parents to sign me up for adventure filled “boy scout program” (cubs) instead of “girl guides” (brownies). I quit ballet to pick up basketball and traded my figure skates for my first beloved hockey stick. As an adult, I often reflect on situations like these. They provided me a place to wonder and hope that a more inclusive world might exist someday where everyone can experience a healthy transition in leisure, sport, and everyday life, no matter how they choose to express their gender.

Before I make suggestions to my colleagues in recreation, I should highlight my own identity as a recreation provider. I have been studying, coaching, practicing and providing recreational activities for over a decade. While I completed a bachelor’s degree in therapeutic recreation at Memorial University, my passion lies within community recreation and inclusion. I have experience volunteering and working as a physical activity coordinator with Recreation NL. The suggestions for recreation professionals found in this report, are therefore, also lessons for myself.

I do not wish to suggest that I can identify with the transgender experience. I fully acknowledge that the experiences reported in this study are not my own, and never will be. I do however feel that researching from “the space in between” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) allows me to borrow the lens of both insider and outsider and paint a more complete picture in this thesis. An outsider can see the population they do not belong to from an unbiased, objective point of view. An insider belongs to the population in

question and has a greater understanding of their position before any research takes place. The space in between has been described as a researcher's perspective, as neither a member of the population nor a complete outsider, which is often ideal. As a friend and ally I can be tuned in and sensitive to the trans population all the while being aware of my own preconceptions and biases.

### **1.3 PURPOSE**

As a society in general, adults often treat children differently based on their biological sex, and we assume a person's gender based on how masculine or feminine they appear (Grossman et al., 2005). Recreation and leisure activities are strongly cisnormative (Elling-Machartzki, 2017). It is commonly assumed that gender is binary and we all identify as either male or female, whichever one we were initially assigned at birth (Adair, 2015). It is because of cisnormativity that researchers and practitioners often forget, or are unaware that a portion of our population, is *transgender* or *non-binary* (see Chapter 2; list of terminology) and that they may wish to participate in recreation and leisure. The stories and opinions of transgender people in NL are necessary to paint a complete picture of how to improve inclusive practice and policy in our province.

Society commonly assumes that participants can check one box or another. For androgynous (non-binary) or transgender participants in the transitioning process, this may be difficult or simply not applicable (Rotondi et al., 2012). This puts recreation providers in a position of defining gender and/or determining where participants belong. Transgender participants are less likely to participate in physical activity or strenuous exercise than cisgender participants (Travers, 2006). It is important for us as practitioners

to design public recreation programs and opportunities for all people within our communities. Listening to the experiences of transgender participants may show us the way towards removing barriers and increasing facilitators for this population.

In 2008, the US National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force formed a groundbreaking research partnership to better understand the needs of this population, launching the first comprehensive national transgender discrimination study. Although this study along with other smaller scale studies concentrated on health and healthcare, many of the findings are applicable to other services including recreation (Grant et al., 2011). In 2013, the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH) launched a similar study and developed a strategic plan to work towards a more inclusive, equitable nation. Transgender participants in both the US National study and the Canadian National Study highlighted experiencing disrespect and harassment, violence and outright denial of service. These experiences, combined with widespread service provider ignorance about the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming people, deter them from seeking both health care and recreational services (Grant et al., 2011).

Research with transgender participants favors male to female (MTF) over female-to-male (FTM). In the media, we see MTF celebrities and professional athletes highlighted significantly more than FTM people (Rotondi et al., 2012). The present study focuses specifically on trans men or FTM. FTM transgender people are men that were assigned the female gender at birth. In the media and the research world alike, the predominant focus is on trans women (MTF) (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). For example, elite level sport trans research is drastically focused on the MTF population (Ridgeway &

Corell, 2004). Therefore, there is considerably less research done with participants belonging to the trans men population and more research like the present study is needed (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). The research about the needs of trans people, surrounding their participation in recreation (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), especially female to male (FTM) (Lewis & Johnson, 2011), is limited and therefore, this study adds to the literature in these areas.

#### **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Transgender theorists center their understanding of gender on the lived experience of transgender individuals. Transgender theory views gender as both socially constructed and embodied (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). The present study follows this theoretical framework to complement grounded theory.

For this qualitative, exploratory study, transgender theory was useful for understanding the ways trans men in NL negotiate recreation experiences. Transgender theory is a newer emerging framework that is based on the nature of gender and gender identity. It surrounds the lived experiences of transgender people. It places an emphasis on the distinction between sex and gender (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). To understand transgender experience, we must first distinguish the terms sex and gender. Sex refers to a person's biological characteristics (e.g., genitalia, hormone levels, chromosomal makeup), and most cultures recognize two sex categories: male and female (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Gender, conversely, is socially constructed based on standards of behaviour and appearance for males and females (Unger & Crawford, 1993). Western culture endorses two gender categories: masculine and feminine. There is a common, incorrect assumption that these gender categories emerge naturally from binary sex

categories, even though sex and gender exist independently of each other (West & Fenstermaker, 1995).

Transgender theory provides a theoretical basis that integrates feminist and queer theories with a focus in advocacy and social practice. Its regard is not only for those who identify as transgender, but also to help us understand issues surrounding other marginalized groups and social oppression. Trans theorists understand intersectionality, which considers that the various aspects of humanity, such as class, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender, do not exist separately from each other, but are complexly interwoven, and that their relationships are essential to an understanding of the human condition (Alter, 2016). The Trans PULSE Canada project states that transgender people experience discrimination and violence that can result in exclusion from social spaces, unemployment, avoidance of health care, and poor mental health (2015). The current Canadian government funded project also states that 35% of transgender people consider suicide each year. The project (2015) extrapolates that it is likely that “similar processes play out in systems that we have not studied in detail, such as education and social services” (p.15), but more research is needed in these areas. They encourage the increase use of trans theory by Canadian researchers. This area is a relatively new and under researched area.

A grounded theory approach was also useful in combination with the transgender theory approach. Grounded theory, while still young in relation to many theoretical frameworks (Glaser, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), has been used in a variety of qualitative research areas and it complemented transgender theory. Grounded theory isn't simply abstract theorizing; it is rooted or “grounded” in observation. It begins with the

raising of generative, non-confining research questions such as those listed in section 1.5. Following with grounded theory principles, primary codes, secondary codes and eventually core themes are discerned. Analyzing with a grounded theory approach encourages the interviewer to refine questions as interviews progressed. Grounded theory encouraged the understanding of specific aspects of experience that combine as a representation of a more complete understanding.

I also kept a journal throughout the entire research process. Journaling, also known as memoing to many transgender and grounded theorists, is a common practice that aids the researcher in assessing and limiting their influence on the data collection and analysis. It allowed the researcher and committee the opportunity to acknowledge any biases and limit the influence on data collection and interpretation. This process is discussed further in the methodology section of this study.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The umbrella research question below guided the development of interview questions and areas of research in this study. It relates to the overall goal to promote gender awareness and inclusive action within the recreation and leisure community in Newfoundland.

### **Research Question:**

*How do transgender men experience participation in leisure in Newfoundland and Labrador?*

- 1) Are the recreation and leisure opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador being provided inclusive of transgender men?

- 2) Are there ways to make them more inclusive?
- 3) What are the constraints to recreation and leisure for trans men in Newfoundland and Labrador?

## **1.6 THESIS FORMAT**

This thesis is formatted in manuscript style and is organized into four chapters. Choosing this style of formatting will facilitate the process of preparing to submit for potential publication. Chapter one was written to introduce the research and provide a rationale for researching this area. Chapter two is a review of recent literature surrounding the important issues that informed the present research. Chapter three is written as a manuscript that can be extracted from the thesis to stand on its own. It is written in a format that could be published in an academic journal, specifically *Leisure/Loisir*. Chapter four gives a further explanation of the methodology and research design as well as a conclusive summary of the key themes and results of this study. Chapter four also explains how recreation providers can use this research in their work.

## **1.7 CO-AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT**

The manuscript presented in Chapter three of this thesis is based on the research I conducted for my graduate degree. I have developed the research with input from my research supervisor, Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan and my committee member, Dr. Angela Loucks-Atkinson. My supervisor has read the manuscript several times and provided suggestions as well as completed editing throughout. My committee member has reviewed the manuscript once as part of the final approval of the thesis before

examination. It is my intention to include my supervisor as the second author on the manuscript while my committee member will be acknowledged in the submission.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED CONCEPTS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews literature pertaining to transgender studies, recreation, and the culture of the island of Newfoundland and Labrador. The combination of these research areas provides the framework for this thesis. As transgender studies is a new area of research, literature is limited (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). Before formally introducing the literature, a list of key terms is provided for the reader. Many of these terms are not only new to the research community but also to the greater society (Dean et al., 2000). It is therefore important to have the basic understanding of the research provided in this chapter to understand and appreciate the present study.

### **2.2 DEFINING KEY TERMS**

As is the case with all language, terminology within the LGBTQ community changes over time. It is used differently within different research areas, as well as different parts of the world (Kivel, 1994). For example, the acronym LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer) was formerly more commonly written in western society as LGBT without the Q and progressed in some circles and societies to LGBPTTQQIIAA+ (meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, intergender, asexual, ally and beyond). Others simply use queer, a term that was once used in a derogatory sense in the 1950s and 60s, as a reclaimed, umbrella term, that includes all identities (Egale, 2017). In this study, the acronym

LGBTQ was chosen as it has been most commonly used throughout the literature reviewed in preparation for this study.

It is most important to use terminology that the people spoken about prefer. The word transgender is used in this thesis as it is represented most commonly in the literature; an umbrella term for those whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned to them at birth. As transgender experiences are becoming increasingly visible in the public eye, our word choices surrounding gender are becoming more complicated, visible and important (Davidson, 2015). As recreation and leisure providers we may not always know the right words to choose. In response to the ever-changing discourse, below are some terms as they are intended to be presented within this thesis.

The present study uses transgender/trans as a broad, umbrella term which, refers to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs in whole or in part from stereotypical cultural expectations based on the person's sex assigned at birth. This may include people who identify as transgender, transsexual, two-spirit trans, transitioned, bigender, genderqueer, or simply as a man or woman who has a medical history of transitioning. This definition as well as the list to follow, are adapted from the Trans PULSE project (2015) and The Canadian Professional Organization for Transgender Health (CPATH, 2018).

### **2.2.1 Terminology<sup>1</sup>**

- *Androgynous*, also known as *non-binary*. Includes those who may identify being both male and female; hermaphroditic OR having both masculine and feminine

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology adapted from : <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology> (CPATH and WPATH)

characteristics, OR having an ambiguous sexual identity (Trans PULSE project, 2015).

- *Cisgender* otherwise known as non-transgender; refers to those whose gender identity is aligned with their birth sex (CPATH, 2018).
- *Cisnormativity* is the assumption that all, or almost all, individuals are cisgender. Although transgender-identified people comprise a small percentage of the human population, many trans people and allies consider it to be offensive to presume that everyone is cisgender unless otherwise specified (Trans PULSE project, 2015).
- *Gender Identity* is an individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others (Trans PULSE project, 2015).
- *Passing* primarily used by people who identify as transgender when describing temporary measures, they take to conceal their transgender status in situations where they feel uncomfortable or unsafe (CPATH, 2018).
- *Trans man (FTM)* A transgender, transsexual or transitioned person, assigned female at birth who now identifies as male or masculine (CPATH, 2018).
- *Transition or Transitioning period* refers to the time when a person begins to live as the gender with which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth, which often includes changing one's first name and dressing and grooming differently. Transitioning may or may not also include medical and legal aspects, including taking hormones, having surgery, or changing identity

documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security record) to reflect one's gender identity (Trans PULSE project, 2015).

## **2.3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.3.1 *LGBTQ Community***

The number of people identifying as lesbian, gay, trans, bisexual or other group within the LGBTQ community is increasing. Although there is no exact number, it is estimated that between one and three percent of the world's population is thought to currently identify as transgender (Conron, Scott, Stowell, & Landers, 2012; GIRES, 2011). Findings from the 2015 report by the Public Religion Research Institute on the sexual attitudes of Millennials say that at least, "seven percent of millennials identify either as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender" (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015, p.11). This tells us when compared to older studies that North American, Millennials are nearly twice as likely to identify as part of the LGBTQ community as other previous generations of adults. LGBTQ centres are increasingly prevalent on college and university campuses (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Despite this evident increase in prevalence, marginalization of LGBTQ communities continues to exist. This has been found to be particularly true in public recreation and leisure settings where the LGBTQ identity may be seen as deviating from the beliefs of our dominant heterosexual culture (Kivel, 1994; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Muchicko, Lepp, & Barkley., 2014). A myriad of challenges are presented to recreation and leisure providers to promote inclusive environments for the LGBTQ community.

People who identify as LGBTQ often turn to coping strategies to negotiate stigmatization (Muchicko et al., 2014; Oakleaf, 2013). This coping sadly often results in reduced participation in meaningful leisure (Bockting et al., 2013; James, 2000). However higher rates of participation in negative recreational activities are found within the LGBTQ communities; 20-30% versus only 9% of the larger population (Reding, 2013). The cause and effect of these high rates of substance abuse in LGBTQ populations has been examined by researchers (Kivel & Kleiber, 2010; Muchicko, et al., 2014; Theriault, 2014). One common factor has been noted; minority stress from facing obstacles such as discrimination, stigma, and rejection. Coping with heterosexism and/or cisgenderism has also been reported to involve selective avoidance of heterosexist individuals or situations (Bryce et al., 2008). Considering that trans people are a minority and that community recreational spaces are predominantly occupied by the majority cisgender population, it is common for trans people to avoid community recreation (Della, Wilson, & Miler, 2002).

### ***2.3.2 The (T) is Different from Sexual Orientation (LGB&Q)***

It is important for researchers and practitioners to understand that the LGBTQ community while often kept together for research purposes, is not a homogenous group. It has been stated that researchers should move towards recognizing each of the various groups that fall under the LGBTQ label independently, particularly with health-related behaviours such as recreation and leisure (Dean et al., 2000). This may help increase our understanding of the specific psychological and physical health needs. Unfortunately,

much of our limited health research groups transgender people with other LGB persons even though sexual orientation and gender identity are very different (Muchucko .et al., 2014). Cisnormative societal structures, for instance, would not affect members of the LGBTQ community who identify as cisgender. The T, otherwise known as the transgender population within the LGBTQ community should not be combined with the rest of the community in all research areas (Lewis & Johnson, 2011).

### **2.3.3 *Trans men***

The term transgender is commonly used to refer to people who do not conform to societal expectations about gender and represent themselves in genders other than the one assigned at birth OR genders that may not be readily intelligible in terms of traditional male or female categories of gender. Trans men may identify as transsexual, as transgender, neither, or both (Rowniak & Chesla, 2013).

Trans man is used as a short form for identities including transsexual man and transgender man. They are both commonly referred to as female-to-male (FTM or F2M). Transgender man is an umbrella term that may include anybody who was assigned female at birth, but identifies as male. Trans men in the media have expressed that they find it easier than trans women to be “low-disclosure” or go unnoticed. This makes cultural sexism more visible to trans men (Della et al., 2002). Therefore, trans men may hold an extremely rare, valuable perspective, that could help the larger population illuminate and perhaps eliminate sexism, transphobia, homophobia, and other forms of oppressive ideas.

Trans men in previous research have discussed such oppressive behaviours in previous research (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017).

Trans people in Canada, according to the Ontario based PULSE Project, are estimated to be trans 45% masculine versus 35% feminine and 20% both/neither. Therefore, there are measurably more FTM people than MTF yet more attention and research focuses on the MTF population. This study attempts to address this gap. Until the year 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) classified transgender individuals as having “gender identity disorder”. In the updated DSM-5 it is listed as “gender dysphoria”. We no longer classify transgender as a pathological condition. However, this categorization still leads us to the problematic idea that they are abnormal, or to many, mentally ill (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

#### **2.3.4 Recreation**

Recreation is an essential part of our lives. Through involvement in satisfying recreation activities, we can gain a sense of freedom, control, creativity and achievement (Allen, 1990; Siegenthaler, 1997). The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council recently released the Framework for Recreation in Canada which was endorsed by government in 2015. As part of this framework a revitalized definition of recreation has been presented as “the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing” (CPRA & IPRC, 2015, p. 8) It creates opportunities for socialization and contributes to social

cohesion by allowing people to connect and network with others (Caldwell, Smith, & Weissinger, 1992). Recreation gives us the chance to develop friendships, skills, and self-confidence. It allows us to enjoy new experiences and challenges, and positively effects our overall wellbeing (Driver, 1990). According to the World Health Organization (2003), we can learn social skills and etiquette through leisure which transfer into other life domains. Recreation positively affects, all the dimensions of wellness including physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing (Driver, 1990; McCarville & Mackay, 2007; WHO, 2003). As citizens of society we all deserve an equal opportunity to participate in positive recreation and leisure free of unnecessary barriers and constraints.

Recreation, interacts with, and in many ways, determines our identities (Kelly & Godbey, 1993). “Recreation contributes to one’s social wellbeing by providing people with a sense of identity and personal autonomy” (Driver et al., 1991, p.29). It does so by offering the opportunity to experiment and explore. Through the process of trying new things and gauging our reactions and the reactions of others our individual identities emerge (Kelly & Godbey, 1993). While recreation leads us to develop our identities, it can also constrain individual identity formation (McCarville & Mackay, 2007). Gender role expectations and stereotypes may limit perceptions of acceptable recreation experiences (Shaw, 1999). LGBTQ persons may avoid experiences that reinforce sexuality or stereotypical gender roles (Kivel & Kleiber, 2010).

### ***2.3.5 Context of Newfoundland and Labrador***

The island of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) covers 111,390 square kilometers (43,008 square miles) an area larger than the size of the three maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island combined (Statistics Canada, 2017). However, its population of 510,000 people and its location on the isolated edge of North America give reason for the distinct culture. Newfoundlanders have been described as unique people with attitudes and beliefs that still differentiate from other parts of Canada and the world. This unique culture spreads into the social attitudes and ideals of Newfoundland and Labradoreans. Not all popular Canadian ideals are transferable to NL and vice versa.

As previously noted, NL was the last province to join Canada, and this did not occur until 1949 (Waite, 2013). Further, it was not until 1998 that Premier Tobin announced the end to denominational schooling. Until that time, it was the norm for public schools as well as recreation and leisure groups and clubs to segregate based on religion (Waite, 2013). This was also the case for informal gatherings. For example, it was not uncommon for children not to be permitted to play with children not from their own religion so the divide in many communities was quite problematic.

Newfoundland and Labrador has been described by locals, celebrities and researchers as totally unique. Our small-scale and intimate society, and the importance of oral tradition has contributed to a culture unlike anywhere else in the world (Kennedy, 2008). Many of the traditions and cultural tendencies here are also gendered. Even today, young men in rural Newfoundland often hunt or fish with their grandfathers and fathers

while young women learn to bake or knit from their mothers and grandmothers (Waite, 2013).

Much of NL's economy was traditionally based on the fishery, which continues to be dominated by men (Hiscock, 1999). The economic transformation in this province that took place over the last twenty years was largely due to developments in the male-dominated oil and mining industries (Waite, 2013). This economy is one where men work in higher paying positions and continues to contribute to the gender role separation in this province.

### **2.3.6 Summary**

Literature surrounding the LGBTQ community is limited. This study aims to add to the limited research in this area. It is often important, however, to separate each letter L G B T Q for the differences within this community are as vast as the differences between them and outsiders. Transgender people are different from homosexual people in that their label refers to their gender not necessarily their sexual orientation. Trans men are again, also different from trans women. Our recreation places, providers and policies should be designed to be inclusive of all. The history and culture of the province of Newfoundland indicates that gendered traditions may be even more difficult to change than in other parts of the world.

## **CHAPTER THREE: MANUSCRIPT**

### **3.1 ABSTRACT**

Participation in meaningful recreation is essential for all individuals and meeting the needs of all diverse populous has received a great deal of attention recently. All too often marginalized groups have more difficulties accessing these services and research is needed that focuses on these groups to better provide inclusive services. This study intends to promote awareness of the transgender community and contribute to action towards more inclusive opportunities and services within our recreation and leisure community. To explore their experience, six transgender men who have lived in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), are asked to discuss their personal experiences with recreation in this province. Three main themes discerned; gender expression, recreation constraints and facilitators, and cisnormative privilege. The results of this study suggest the need for further research, education, and awareness surrounding the LGBTQ (queer community) population, specifically regarding the transgender population and the need for inclusive recreation in NL.

**Keywords: transgender, gender identity, recreation, inclusion**

### **3.2 INTRODUCTION**

Researchers have described the various benefits of recreation since the 1980s (Kleiber, Walker & Mannell, 2011; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997 & 2013). Recreation is an essential part of our personal, social, economic, and environmental wellbeing (Driver, 1990). While the benefits are well understood for the general population, there has been little research surrounding the needs of transgender people in recreation settings (Lewis &

Johnson, 2011; Oakleaf & Redmond, 2017). Recreation providers, especially in the public sector, are responsible for providing equitable, inclusive, recreational opportunities for all people. Recreation allows us to discover our identities and find ways to express them (Duerden, Widmer, Taniguchi, & McCoy, 2009), and it is imperative that people are given equal opportunity to utilize recreation as a means for self-discovery and affirmation. Even though the research does not yet reflect it, there is a huge opportunity for transgender participants to express themselves through recreation (Elling-Machartzki, 2017). As recreation has been a proven channel to resist, reinforce or confirm a person's gender identity, (Kleiber, 1999; Lewis & Johnson, 2011) thoughtful research on the topic of transgender experiences in recreation is long overdue.

Gender plays a major force in our lives. Gendered norms and prescribed identities have been center to the function of societies long before research began being documenting gender's impact. These labels, man/woman, masculine/feminine, male/female have become a primary method of social organization (Risman, 2004). These categories have measurable influence upon how people are treated and influence their behaviours (Ridgeway & Corell, 2004). Transgender men have a unique perspective on gender. At one point in their lives, although they may not have identified with the category, they were labeled female. As a result, the participants in this study could speak to recreational experiences from the perspectives of both genders. As noted, little is known about how trans men experience leisure (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). While it was the purpose of this study to initiate a dialogue around the experiences of trans men in leisure, more research is required to support marginalized populations, including trans men and the LGBTQ community (Johnson & Waldron, 2010; Theriault, 2014).

It is necessary to break down barriers and create facilitators to recreation for all people as society moves towards more inclusive practices. The present study adds to the depth of research in this area through the lived experiences of trans men. The findings provide important information that can guide more inclusive policies and procedures for recreation spaces and organizations.

The study takes place in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). The participant criteria specified that participants must have lived and experienced recreation in this province for at least a year. Researching this small eastern place is important to understanding the social aspects of the community and how it affects certain social groups such as transgender men. Recreation NL (RNL), the provincial recreation association, provides a voice of promoting and fostering recreation for all. Through communication, advocacy, education and training RNL has worked to improve the quality of recreation for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for over 40 years. RNL works closely with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador towards the goal of providing recreation for all community members since 1971. “At that time, Recreation NL may not have recognized the number of marginalized groups that they do today” (P. Mills, personal communication, April, 2016), but their intentions remain the same. Pam further explained that their vision is “a province of engaged communities where all people embrace the benefits of recreation to enhance their quality of life”. Such a commitment reminds us that recreation should be accessible and welcoming to everyone. The research question guiding the present study was *How do transgender men experience participation in recreation in Newfoundland and Labrador?*

### ***3.2.1 Gendering Recreation***

When the characteristics of masculinity or femininity are prescribed to an activity or sport, it is gendered (Grossman, O'Connell & D'Augelli, 2005). Recreation providers use gender as a common grouping strategy for service delivery. As a result, gendered teams are the norm once children reach primary school age (Gillard, Buzuviz, & Bialeschki, 2014). It is often the case that activities such as dance, music, and arts and crafts primarily target girls, while hockey and football primarily target boys, and most teams and clubs are separated into gendered leagues with strict one-gender-only rules. Over time, largely because of the rise of feminism and increased women's rights, there are now more co-ed leagues and decreased limitations on what type of recreation is deemed appropriate for one's gender (Ridgeway & Corell, 2004). Of concern is that continued separation according to gender will result in the exclusion of those who do not fit the gender norms that society has created. This results in an unwelcoming space which can prohibit individuals from participating. Limiting recreational opportunities to a specific gender creates barriers for transgender and non-binary people (Gillard et al, 2014).

### ***3.2.2 Researching in the Context of NL***

An important factor to note in this study was the setting. It took place in St. John's, NL and interview questions led participants to describe their recreational experiences within in the province. NL is an isolated island province in Canada that has unique traditions and a culture that distinguishes it from other parts of North America (Waite, 2013). There is resistance to change in the province that stems from long standing

traditions, work patterns and social relationships. The development of these traditions can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century (Hiscock, 1999). NL was the last province to join the Confederation of Canada in 1949 (Waite, 2013). According to Statistics Canada (2017), Newfoundland houses the second oldest population in the nation, with 16.6% being seniors. Many residents of NL remember life before confederation, and their families have lived in NL for generations. This makes new initiatives and non-traditional gender roles difficult to accept for some communities. It contributes to the barriers that emerging LGBTQ communities in this province have and continue to face (Waite, 2013). Traditional gender roles continue to play a pivotal role in the fabric of society in NL.

NL's economy was traditionally based on the fishery, which was and continues to be dominated by men (Hiscock, 1999). In the last two decades, the economy of NL has transformed significantly. This transformation was largely due to developments in the male-dominated oil and mining industries (Waite, 2013). This economy is one where men work in higher paying positions and continues to contribute to the gender role separation in this province.

Statistics Canada (2015) shows that only 5,720 identify as belonging to minority groups in NL. NL's Atlantic Canadian neighbor, Nova Scotia, represents 37,685 minority people and Canada is home to 5,068,095 of them. NL is like the other provinces in Atlantic Canada in that almost half of our population resides in rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2015). In provinces like Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia less than 15% of the population are considered rural. Newfoundland's small population, with minimal diversity, means that minority populations are further underrepresented and differences are more noticeable.

The province of NL has also been labelled as a religious province, with less than three percent identifying as non-religious (Statistics Canada, 2015). It was not until 1997 that Premier Tobin announced the end of denominational schooling in the public system. Until that time, it was considered the norm for schools, clubs and groups to segregate based on religion. This unique place has its own cultural practices and tendencies. Research here may not be applicable to other parts of North America but the need for research with specific marginalized social groups is evident. There may be other unique places that could be informed by this study. NL's emphasis on gender roles and value of religion, an aging population, and its small population all contribute to our resistance to changing attitudes and practices toward inclusion.

### ***3.2.3 Defining Key Terms***

Terminology within the LGBTQ community changes over time. It is used differently within different research areas, as well as different parts of the world. In response to the ever-changing discourse, below are some terms as they were employed in the present study. The word transgender is used as it is represented most commonly, an umbrella term for those whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned to them at birth. As transgender experiences are becoming increasingly visible in the public eye, our word choices surrounding gender are becoming more complicated, visible, and important (Davidson, 2015). Because terminology within the LGBTQ community is always changing, it is sometimes difficult to keep up with the proliferation of queer and trans language (Egale, 2017). As researchers, and recreation providers we may not always know the right words to choose. To understand terminology used in this study including

words such as cisgender, cisnormativity, passing, trans man, gender identity, transition; please see The National Center for Transgender Equality website; Egale Canada, Human Rights Trust (link: [www.transequality.org](http://www.transequality.org)).

### ***3.2.4 Recreation and Inclusion***

The present study sought to understand experiences in recreational activities therefore, recreation is an important term to define. The Canadian Park and Recreation Association/Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (2015) defined recreation as “the experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing” (p.8). The multitude of benefits that recreation gives people has been noted by many researchers (Allen, 1990; Driver, 1991; Kleiber, 1999). Recreation brings people together, is enjoyable and it normally happens outside of obligatory tasks (Kivel & Kleiber, 2010). Many recreational activities are social and therefore require cooperation among the different players, including other participants and recreation staff. Participation in these programs and activities has the potential to facilitate the development of personal capacities, attitudes and beliefs that support inclusion (Siegenthaler, 1997). Further, recreation can be a channel for educating people, where practitioners can practice and advocate for inclusion (Driver, Brown & Peterson, 1991).

Recreation offers an opportunity for social interaction and inclusion where other aspects of life may not (Driver, 1991). Social inclusion is defined as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect

for rights” (United Nations, 2010, p.17). It is grounded in the principle that every person should get to experience the benefits of prosperity and there should be wellbeing for all. Social inclusion in this study was discussed at not merely the absence of social exclusion, defined as “multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live” (United Nations, 2010, p.18). Social inclusion is also the actions taken to reverse social exclusion. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2005) also explains that; socially inclusive recreation development needs to be a longer term strategic policy rather than project-based. An inclusive society is one where there is no discrimination, and there is increased overall health and wellbeing of its people. Providing recreational opportunities more inclusive of trans people is an intended outcome of this study.

### ***3.2.5 LGBTQ & Transgender Communities***

While research concerning the LGBTQ community has evolved considerably in the last decade (Stryker, 2017), these groups have existed since the ancient times. This increased interest has come about due to changing social themes (Davidson, 2015). Recreation practitioners and researchers acknowledge the differences between each group within this community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning), yet they are all often combined in research and for advocacy. One’s sexuality describes their physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person (Stryker, 2017). Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people, are defined based on

their gender identity.

Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Our gender identities and expressions are separate from our sexual preferences (Stryker, 2017). In Western society, we commonly consider there to be only two sexes, although some researchers argue there are as many as twelve (Davidson, 2015). To unpack the male/female duality, Fausto-Sterling (2006) uses the term *intersex* to refer to those who embody a mixture of male and female characteristics. In this study participants used *gender queer* to refer to *non-binary*; therefore the term *non-binary* is used to describe people who fall in the middle (i.e., somewhere in-between or outside) of the gender spectrum. Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe anyone who's gender identity does not match the one they were assigned at birth (Davidson, 2015; Stryker, 2017). Some members of the transgender community further identify as transsexual, non-binary, gender queer or several other labels.

Athletes who identify as transgender have begun to garner more media attention in recent years, particularly with the 2004 International Olympic Committee's ruling allowing transgender athletes to participate in the Olympics (Cavanagh & Sykes, 2006). Despite this increasing media attention, there is a lack of academic research focusing on the experiences of transgender athletes, and even less on transgender participants and their experiences in public and community recreation (Stryker, 2017).

This study focuses specifically on trans men or FTM (female-to-male). FTM transgender people are men that were assigned the female gender at birth. In the media

and the research world alike, the predominant focus is on trans women (MTF) (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). Elite level sport trans research is drastically focused on the MTF population (Ridgeway & Corell, 2004). There is considerably less research done with participants belonging to the trans men population and more research similar to the present study is needed (Factor & Rothblum, 2008).

It is also much easier for trans men to “pass” (Alter, 2016). In the context of gender, passing refers to a trans person being perceived as cisgender. A person who was a tall woman, after transitioning, might likely become an average sized man. Julia Serano describes in her world known novel, *Whipping Girl*, how it is much easier for a 5’5 trans man to “pass” or go unnoticed as being a transgender person than a 6’3 trans woman to (2016). Trans women also get this type of often unwanted attention simply because women in general get this type of attention (Henderson, 1991, 1993). People care much more about what type of dress a female celebrity wears than what suit the male counterpart has on. The transgender author of the novel *Whipping Girl*, stated in her 2016 interview with TIME Magazine, “The female body is scrutinized more and their actions are critiqued more than a man’s, it just makes sense that people focus more on trans women than they do trans men” (p.2).

### **3.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Data was gathered over a six-month period (January – July 2017). It consisted of in-depth interviews with six self-identified trans men, and the researcher’s on-going reflective journal entries. Because of the sensitive nature of this research, word of mouth

was the most discrete and appropriate method used to recruit men in St. John's, NL. Therefore, snowball sampling was used and the first participant is the individual who connected me with the other five participants.

The participants ranged in age from 21-27 years and they all identified as Caucasian Newfoundlanders. They noted "coming out" between one and four years ago. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they identified as a trans man, (2) they live or have lived in the province of NL both before and after transitioning for at least one year, and (3) they must have participated in some form of recreation within NL prior to and since their transition. The trans men in the present study were all assigned the female gender when they were born. Most of them did not identify with their assigned gender throughout their lives. They always identified with masculine ideas and activities. It was not until adulthood however, that any of the participants "came out" as trans.

Participants were recruited primarily through word of mouth. The initial participant was a friend of mine and was interested in my project. He decided that he wanted to participate to share his story in this research. As a trans man, he helped me connect to other potential participants. It was common for participants to know each other because of overlapping social networks and the small number of trans men living in the St. John's area. After interviews were conducted with six men, we concluded that theoretical saturation (Glaser, 2017) was achieved because of the homogeneity of the group and no new information was emerging by the sixth interview. There was extensive consensus and similarities among the responses of all participants. The overall goal was

to provide some understanding of their experiences around recreation participation and the six interviews allowed for this (Marshall, 1996). These men provided rich, heartfelt stories that were transcribed verbatim so their experiences could be fully captured.

Without their courageous consent and trust in myself as a researcher, they may never have had this type of avenue to speak out and potentially inform recreation practitioners and researchers about the barriers and facilitators of recreation experience in NL. Dane's name is the only one that is not a pseudo name created for confidentiality reasons. He preferred his own name to be associated with any of his responses.

### **3.4 METHOD**

Researching the experience of people who are trying to “pass” or keep their gender differences out of public scrutiny was challenging. Recruiting for this study meant finding trans men that were comfortable speaking about their experiences in recreation, some of which could be distressing. The methodological design was therefore extremely important. Abrahams (2010) discusses in their work, how to study hard-to-reach populations. Recommendations include snowball sampling techniques, partnering with organizations and ensuring confidentiality. Researchers also recommend allowing for higher resource costs and longer recruitment and research timeframes (Abrahams, 2010). All participants were given pseudonyms (participant A through F) and any characteristics that could lead to their identification were omitted. For this qualitative study, ethical approval was obtained from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICHER).

The data collected for this study included: a) The researcher's personal journal and observational notes, and b) transcripts derived from six open-ended in-depth interviews. A combined approach of both transgender and grounded theories were applied to the design of this study. The data was analyzed with a transgender theorist framework. Transgender theory argues that gender is both a social construct and an embodied reality (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). This theory blends a relatively new concept of a gender spectrum with borrowed feminist theory concepts like the social constructions of gender. Gender, as trans theorists describe, is fluid; it is a social construction, completely distinct from sex. Whereas sex refers to genital anatomy, gender is a schema that, independently of sex, regulates appearance, dress, behaviour, relationships, speech, aspirations, and virtually every other aspect of social being.

Grounded theory guided several aspects of the research and was used heavily in the analysis of this study. Each line in each interview was examined and carefully coded and categorized (Glaser, 2017). The systematic process kept the data organized so that the framework of transgender theory could guide the presentation of results. A combined approach of transgender theory and grounded theory allowed for a complete understanding and description of data from this exploratory study.

### ***3.4.1 Interviews***

Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary form of data. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Instead of just meeting for an interview, I met with each of the participants for coffee and spent a few minutes at the start chatting about non-interview related topics and getting comfortable. This was important in

establishing rapport and making sure that the participant was at ease. One participant noted, “I’m glad we got to meet beforehand, I probably wouldn’t be as comfortable telling just anyone this stuff”. Researching marginalized populations can be difficult from an outsider’s perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This connection to participants allowed for the collection of rich meaningful data.

### **3.4.2 Journaling**

The second form of data collected were my own personal journal writings. I began keeping a reflective journal in May 2016 and I journaled throughout the research process. The journaling began long before data collection so that I could learn about gender, and consider my own position as a researcher. This enabled me to better understand my lens as it developed throughout my graduate experience. Writings were initially about trans issues in the current media and my perceptions and opinions sounding them. As a cis-woman with minimal research experience, becoming aware of my own researcher’s lens was important. It was necessary to know how to use appropriate language and become as informed as possible. This allowed me to track my own perceptions of the interviews and I captured the things that influenced me as I engaged in this research. For example, during this time transgender celebrities including Kaitlyn Jenner (previously known as a famous as a male Olympian) and Laverne Cox (*Orange is the New Black* actor) were at the forefront of media articles. I wrote about these media stories because I knew these stories would influence my thoughts and opinions about the research topic. I wrote anything and everything exactly as it came to me. Journaling as a supplemental form of research can highlight researcher bias and increases transparency in qualitative research (Ortlip, 2008).

I also included all written observations throughout each interview in my journal. It was a space to jot down things like the participant's stature, appearance or tone of voice that proved to be relevant in some research findings and may have been overlooked without the journal as a secondary data source.

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

An informed data analysis using ideas from a grounded theory approach as well as a transgender theoretical approach was employed. A thematic style of analysis is commonly used with grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking relationships within the data (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). Using a thematic analysis involves analyzing data guided by a theoretical framework and determining themes that arise from the research data. As done in the work of Norman (2013), data was transcribed through participants "idiomatic language practices" (p.413) to portray cultural nuances.

In qualitative research, thematic analysis is the process of studying the data to extract codes, develop categories and central ideas, and move from categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2010). To keep with a specific pattern of analysis, Lichtman's three C's approach was applied. This technique, beginning with general codes, then grouping into categories and finally using more specific concepts is straightforward with little room for error (Lichtman, 2010). This style of analysis is content driven, and particularly suitable for exploratory studies such as this (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall, 1996). Once the three steps were carefully completed, the data was transformed from transcriptions into

meaningful concepts.

### **3.6 FINDINGS**

The concepts were grouped and analyzed by both the researcher and the researcher's supervisor who is an experienced researcher to ensure authenticity in the findings. Participants spoke positively about recreation spaces in general and expressed that they felt safe in the places they normally recreate. However, each participant also discussed things they do to keep themselves safe, strategies they have used to negotiate constraints and feelings of "otherness". While every participant had their own unique way of explaining their ideas, the similarities between each interviewee's responses were evident. Although some of the word choice differed due to the different participant backgrounds and personalities, they were often explaining the same, or similar ideas, but using different words. For example, one participant explained that "non-binary folks may find gendered programs extremely exclusive", while another stated "some people aren't male or female, and like, how do you join a man's or woman's club then?"

Three major themes were discerned from the data; all six participants spoke about the following topics: gender identity and expression; recreation constraints and facilitators; and cis-normative privilege. The first theme emerged as participants spoke about recreation as a tool for discovering and embodying gender. Lifting weights, for example, allowed them to express masculinity freely. Their gender identity could be both discovered more deeply and expressed more freely through participation in recreation. The second theme, recreation constraints and facilitators, encompassed a multitude of concepts that should be understood by recreation practitioners in our province. Recreation

constraints was a major topic of discussion throughout every interview. Facilitators, however, were discussed in even greater detail than barriers to recreation. Participants preferred to speak about how practitioners could make spaces gender neutral, safe, private and welcoming than discuss ways in which they were not presently doing so. Cis-normative privilege was another topic. This type of privilege is defined as the effects of cis-normativity, which is the presumption that everyone's gender matches the gender they were assigned at birth and that it is unchangeable (Lewis & Johnson, 2011). Each of these themes will be described in more detail in the following sections.

### ***3.6.2 Gender Identity & Expression***

A person's gender identity is their internal sense of gender. This code was highlighted in all the interviews in this study. The words *gender* and *identity*, were evidently important. A person's gender identity may or may not correspond directly with their outward gender expression. A person's gender is for example, expressed outwardly through their name, preferred pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, or body characteristics (Oakleaf, 2013). Charles said he had become a better person with a more positive outlook on life since his transition. He "always felt trapped" but now feels that he has found how he wanted to express himself. His gender identity now matches his gender expression. After transitioning some transgender people have "described a profound lived experience of an embodied gender that matches their internal sense of gender" (Girshick, 2008 p.6).

Embodying gender also means that you show the world who you are. It means that you must be willing to alter relationships with friends, family, work or recreational

environments. Ben said that it took a while for people he loved the most to become accustomed to how he now outwardly expresses his gender identity. “Even Mom and Dad had trouble at first with things like the way I dress, and calling me son, stuff like that. But now they couldn’t be more accepting of my masculinity”.

Three of the participants spoke about identifying as feminists, even though, in the interviews none of them were outwardly asked whether they did or not. Dane spoke about privileges he experienced differently as a man. “Not having to worry the same about someone walking in a dark alley behind me, that stuff is really great about being a dude” (Dane, interview). This perspective has been noted to be very exclusive to transgender people. Being able to talk about experiences from the perspective of both genders is valuable (Lewis & Johnson, 2011). It removes biases that cis-gender individuals may never experience. Cis-gender men have never had the experience of living as women. A trans man knows from experience how life is, from a female perspective. Felix said he didn’t even have the vocabulary or the knowledge of how to express his own gender identity until recently. He explained that “it takes time, education and effort for other people to learn how to appropriately interact with trans people. The main thing for me is to be patient and advocate for other trans people” (Felix, interview).

Although, expressing themselves as trans men came with difficulties and risks, all of the participants reported that they were happy that they chose to transition. They expressed increased confidence and self-esteem. Most participants described recreational facilities and people as being “unintentionally unaware” or “ignorant” but almost always “not trying to be offensive or exclusive”. They stated that most recreational leagues didn’t

have policies in place specifically for them but that many of them “might not have had a trans person playing before” (Niall, 2018)

### ***3.6.3 Recreation Constraints***

Three main categories of constraints conceptualized by Crawford and Godbey (1987) are used to describe the types of constraints faced by participants in numerous recreation studies (White, 2008). Structural constraints are the type of constraint that is most obvious to others or physical in nature. They arise when the desire or motivation to recreate exists but there is something prohibiting participation. This type has been defined as the various political, economic, social and cultural factors limiting individual decision-making ability (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). For example, Ben and Niall were hockey players. They defined locker rooms and restrooms as the most dangerous recreational territory for trans men, highlighting arenas in our province that had toilets with no stall doors. Ben also described an experience when there was no place to go adjacent to the locker room for him to put his under layer of compression clothing on that he said was needed to compress breasts.

Interpersonal constraints form a second type of constraint that refers to difficulties in relationships with others that prohibit leisure. Worrying about social acceptance was commonly discussed throughout all interviews. One participant explained that “everyday transphobia” was not as blatant or noticeable as yelling transphobic slurs. It might even be hidden to those of us who don’t belong to the trans community. Ben explained that he feels people who haven’t experienced homophobia or transphobia themselves, might only be aware of the “blatant vocal kind.” He said that a cisgender best friend sitting next to

him might not feel the cold shoulder, unequal treatment, or the dozens of curious glares that he feels in many social situations. Felix said he lost his interest in recreational kickboxing when coaches battled in front of him about putting him in a female or male division. He did not like the attention and has not practiced kickboxing in the years since his transition.

In contrast to interpersonal constraints were interpersonal facilitators. Participants reported scanning their environments for allies and continuously assessing the acceptance level of providers and other participants in recreational settings. They all seemed to be very tuned in to other people's perceptions of them. Niall described an ally without using the term like the others did: "I look for warm people. The ones that welcome us. The ones that would pick up a sword and help fight a battle that they aren't even fighting themselves."

A third type of constraint was perhaps the most hesitantly talked about in each interview. This type includes internal conflict and personal feelings that prohibit participation. These intrapersonal constraints were explained by Will as decreasing significantly post transition. He said that in the past (pre-transition) his low self-esteem might have kept him from trying things he knew he would love. Now he says he is much more likely to get over any of his "fears". The fear of harassment was most intense for all six participants throughout the transitioning process.

The transitioning process, means different things to each individual trans person. Even within the small sample of participants within this study, the process for some was a major recreation constraint itself. The transitioning process itself can be a recreation constraint. In these participant's cases, it involved medical procedures and hormones but

such medical interventions are not a requirement of a transgender identity. The individual may focus more on changing names or preferred pronouns, appearance and dress and often involves coming out to friends and family. Transitioning can be a long and ongoing process, or it can be something that happens over a short period. “Know that the transitioning process is experienced differently by everyone”, said Niall.

Felix and Dane referenced substance abuse before the transitioning period. They said that they turned to unhealthy practices to cope with their internal struggles. They both knew that the LGBTQ community had higher rates of substance abuse, such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs than the larger population. Felix said he had friends who warned him about the dangers the “things I got into” could bring. They emphasized that before and throughout their transition they used recreational drugs.

#### ***3.6.4 Cisgender Privilege***

Cisgender privilege is defined as a set of unearned advantages that individuals who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth accrue solely due to having a cisgender identity (Taylor, 2010). Two of the participants used this term directly to explain how cisgender individuals may not even notice constraints that apply specifically to trans people. Will explained this concept to me with a simple common phrase, “You don’t know what you’ve got til it’s gone.” He says that he didn’t realize how many activities we gender unnecessarily, how recreation revolves around the male/female categorization, until he started identifying as a man. What Will refers to as having lost is his cisnormative privilege. Dane explained this privilege to me as often being invisible to

a cisgender person. He said that he was happy to participate in the study, because “most people don’t even know what cisgender privilege is, how are we supposed to work towards an equitable society, if no one tells this story, or if no one listens”.

### ***3.6.5 Coming Out in Newfoundland***

All participants discussed NL’s societal differences from the rest of Canada. “Yeah, of course it’s different here. I think that anyone from Newfoundland would say that. You don’t have to be gay or black or either bit different a’tall to know that minorities here are even more...minor.” It was discussed that perhaps the population size was a major reason that being outside the majority was challenging and directly inhibited participation. C said, “I’m sure that there are small towns in other parts of the world where everyone knows everyone’s business but there is something about the culture of Newfoundland that really separates it from other places I have been.” While population size certainly contributed to some of the challenges, it was more complex. The lack of diversity in NL and the continuation of segregation based on religion also contribute greatly to the experience of the men in this study.

Participants also noted positive attributes about the people of Newfoundland. They said that for the most part people were compassionate and tried to be accepting once they found out that they were trans. However, they said that people here aren’t exposed to trans folk often, and that lack of exposure means lack of awareness. Niall said, “Even in the city it’s hard to be an outsider, let alone out around the bay.<sup>2</sup>” Four of six of the

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<sup>2</sup> “around the bay” is an expression used in NL to refer to any community outside of the greater St. John’s metro area.

participants were originally from towns with less than 8,000 people. All of them said that it wasn't until they moved away from their hometowns that they decided to come out to the world as transgender.

### **3.7 DISCUSSION**

The themes that developed in this study describe how transgender men in Newfoundland and Labrador experience leisure. Their non-mutually-exclusive existence painted a picture of a world of recreation that was very different from the one that cisgender people often take for granted. The six men interviewed in this study all spoke positively about recreation in this province. They explained that, more often than not, they felt safe and felt supported by their friends and family. Then, at the same time, they often made remarks that made it obvious they chose non-participation because they were trans. N said: "No I would never go swimming before I had surgery. It's just something completely out of the question for a guy with boobs." Statements such as these suggested that the men in this study, like the trans men in similar studies (Norton & Herek, 2012; Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017), felt much better in their bodies, living as their preferred gender. They gained improved confidence from transitioning, they were willing to negotiate whatever constraints they had to, to live as men. C stated in his interview, "It isn't really enough to just not be mean or transphobic, people should also be educated and kind, and put stuff there to make places more welcoming. People think they're being inclusive because they would let everyone join if they wanted to, but it's why everyone doesn't want to that they should think about." Researchers have unpacked the reasons people choose not to participate (Driver, 1991). The barriers and constraints to

participation these researchers highlight all hold another vital component, perception. As recreation providers, we strive to include all, to offer community services to the whole community. A trans person's perception of how and what services are offered may not always coincide with the intentions of the provider (Kivel, 1994). The following discussion explains how the trans men in this study experience recreation in NL.

The TransPULSE project in Ontario reported that two thirds of transgender people avoided public settings, because of the fear of being “outed” as trans and/or harassment (Rotondi, et al., 2012). Worrying about social acceptance is common with most young adults regardless of their differing gender experiences. For transgender people this worry is magnified as 96% of transgender people reported “experiencing some form of everyday transphobia” (p.3). According to the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health (CPATH) transitioning is an ongoing process for many transgender people (2018). Self-consciousness or a lack of confidence throughout transitioning prevented the men in this study from fully enjoying recreation in some public spaces. Transitioning is a period where many transgender people feel the most vulnerable (CPATH, 2018) and often when they need support the most.

Research shows people within the LGBTQ community use some substances, such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, at a rate two to four times more than that of the broader population (Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2009). The TransPULSE study of 433 trans people in Ontario is among the only current official study that reports on the specific substance use rates of Transgender people in Canada. They state that transgender youth are twice as likely as cisgender youth to use harmful substances like drugs and alcohol (Rotondi, et al., 2012).

### ***3.7.1 Cisnormative Privilege***

All six men described being cisgender as something they sacrificed to be able to express themselves as masculine. Cisgender is a term that describes a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (Egale, 2017). Cisgenderism is a prejudice alike racism and sexism. It denies, ignores, or stigmatizes non-cisgender forms of expression, sexual activity, behaviour, relationship, or community (Egale, 2017). The concept of cisgender privilege surfaced in academic literature in 2010. It was defined as a set of unearned advantages that individuals who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth accrue solely due to having a cisgender identity (Taylor, 2010). Carefully examining the fundamental assumptions, we make as a society can help us identify and eliminate cisgenderism (Girshick, 2008). Unfortunately, the association of gender with genitals is deeply rooted in our society and societal change takes an abundance of time. Ben says: “Deciding to transition is like signing up to be part of a marginalized group, like waving a giant red flag that says I’m different. That can be frightening.” Felix said that people in NL seem to have trouble with anyone that’s different in general. He says that it might be because of the lack of diversity here that anyone outside the norm “sticks out”.

### ***3.7.2 Trans men see sexism from both sides***

Participants in this study talked about the cisgender privileges they gave up when they came out as transgender as previously noted. However, they also spoke about the

privileges they gained. These privileges came with passing as a man. Felix's response to the question "How are things different for you since your transition?" explains: "I can walk home alone now... in this city with very little fear. As a woman, I called a cab, everytime." Both Dane and William discussed how their identities as feminists changed after transitioning. They have both identified as feminists for as long as they could remember, both before and after transitioning, but recently adopted more of an activist role. For instance, they have both walked in Take Back the Night, a march to bring awareness of violence against women. Felix says that a lot of people speak and act differently around him as a man, versus how they did before transitioning. "They shake your hand harder, they pat you on the back, they grunt, fart and swear more in my presence. And these are just like little things." In 1983 Peggy McIntosh brought the notion of male-privilege into her sociological research. Since then researchers have noted special privileges and status' that are granted to males in patriarchal societies.

### **3.8 FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS**

This research offers three main recommendations based on the findings in this study. First, the quantity of research surrounding the transgender community in general is limited (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). Research involving the needs of trans men specifically, is even more limited than with trans women (Lewis & Johnson, 2011). Therefore, more research is needed to fully understand the experiences of trans men within recreational spaces. The second recommendation is that this research should include participants with a range of backgrounds from other age cohorts. This study explains the experiences of trans men in their twenties but does not expand to other age

ranges. Lastly it is recommended that future researchers engage in action research to further explore other populations within the LGBTQ segment of the population to better appreciate this experience within the context of NL and use these findings to initiate meaningful change in government policy. Much of the literature surrounding this topic comes from the United States and other parts of the world. Canadian, specifically Atlantic Canadian researchers should elaborate on these studies and add to the limited research here in Canada.

### **3.9 LIMITATIONS**

There are limitations within this research that should be acknowledged. To discover the recreational experiences of transgender men in NL, this study relied on participants' views. Their recollection or versions of the truth may have changed over time. The qualitative nature of the study means that no objective measures were taken, quantify, or otherwise verify the information respondents provided in the interviews. The goal of this study was to explore individual narrative experiences of transgender men with recreation in NL.

All the participants were Caucasian, trans men, in their twenties. These restrictions are more than likely related to the similarity of responses between participants. While the homogenous nature of the group made it easier to confidently define the findings, it limited the diversity of results. The findings may not be generalizable to trans men in other places, of different backgrounds, ages and/or cultures. Future research should be carried out to better understand the experiences of trans men of other age cohorts, with alternate backgrounds. To maintain a manageable research area

for this master's level thesis, transgender women were also left out of the study. Research with trans women (MTF) is much more common than research with FTM participants (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017). It was deemed more appropriate to work with FTM participants to add to the lack of research with this specific population. A small sample size of 6 was deemed sufficient for this study, however, it may have limited some findings.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

Gender identity and expression, recreation constraints and facilitators, and cis-normative privilege were three themes that explain the experiences with recreation for transgender men in NL. Positive recreation experiences led to a greater sense of identity. Transitioning into a preferred gender led to a confidence in their gender expression that these men could proudly portray within recreational circles. The typology of constraints described in Crawford and Godbey's constraints to recreation in 1993 appropriately categorized the constraints that these men described as interpersonal, intrapersonal and structural. All of these constraints were the most difficult to overcome throughout the transitioning process. Once each participant felt like they could "pass" as a cisgender man their confidence increased and willingness to participate expanded. Cisgender privilege, alike other privileges, is an advantage that is granted to us. More research and education are needed surrounding transgender needs in recreation spaces to make recreation inclusive for all.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR: EXTENDED RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

This study used qualitative approaches to describe how transgender men experience leisure in Newfoundland Labrador (NL). “Studying people who are trying to ‘pass’ or hide their gender differences in public recreation settings is challenging” (Oakleaf & Richmond, 2017, p. 111). It was challenging to recruit participants from such a small demographic who also wanted to share their personal life experiences with the primary researcher. This study also helps us emphasize the need for research with marginalized, minority populations, who are difficult to reach, like the transgender men in this study. With limited research in this area, a broad grounded theory approach was deemed suitable. Barney Glaser and Ansaem Strauss developed grounded theory initially called the constant comparative method. Constantly comparing the small number of transcripts helped uncover the results that will be discussed in this chapter. While designing all methods for this study, specifically research questions, sensitive language was used.

In this chapter, the research questions are revisited and the participants will be described. The conduction and coding of interviews will then be discussed. I will elaborate on my research ethics and describe results that can be translated into practice.

### **4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As listed in previous chapters, the guiding questions are outlined below: The umbrella research question below guided the development of interview questions and areas of research in this study. It relates to the overall goal to promote gender awareness

and inclusive action within the recreation and leisure community in NL.

**Research Question:**

*How do transgender men experience participation in leisure in Newfoundland and Labrador?*

The umbrella question was discussed with the research committee to come up with a series of open ended sub questions listed below. These research questions helped the researcher and their committee to create a list of sub-questions that helped guide the interviews.

- 1) Are the recreation and leisure opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador being provided inclusive of transgender men?
- 2) Are there ways to make them more inclusive?
- 3) What are the constraints to recreation and leisure for trans men in NL?

These questions were designed to examine how transgender men experience their own respective leisure activities. While each participant brought their own distinct interests and leisure style, their responses overlapped considerably when looking at the broader research questions. All sequential questions stemmed from the purpose statement or the umbrella question: “How do transgender men experience participation in leisure in Newfoundland & Labrador”.

The first question “Are the recreation and leisure opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador being provided inclusive of transgender men?”, initiated the in-depth interview with each participant. It opened the floor for them to describe their own leisure patterns and their experiences within those settings. It allowed them to talk freely about

themselves without them feeling as if their gender was becoming immediately scrutinized. Learning about their leisure patterns before and after transitioning also led me to use probes such as “why did you stop playing basketball?” later in the questioning.

The second question “Are there ways to make recreation and leisure opportunities more inclusive?”, gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions without unnecessary influence. The question was open ended to an extent that the participant was left to interpret the question and respond as they saw fit. Rather than them being guided to discuss specific barriers or inequities. This style of question presented the researcher with suggestions straight from the participant. There was no room for error in researcher interpretation. When participant Charles said “I think using locked stalls in all change rooms would make spaces more inclusive for trans folk”. He meant exactly that.

The third question “What are the constraints to recreation and leisure for trans men in Newfoundland and Labrador?”, wasn’t needed as a direct question or probe in most interviews. Participants discussed constraints without being directly asked about them. This is important to note as one of the feared limitations to this study was that participants would discuss what they thought the researcher, or the reader, may want to hear.

### **4.3 STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

There is no official report on the number of transgender people in Canada. Although the Canadian census now included the option of ‘other’ in categorization of sex, the census does not ask further questions pertaining to one’s gender identity. It is, however, estimated that approximately three percent of the world’s population is

transgender (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). This would suggest that around 1500 people in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador identify as transgender. Given the demographics in NL, it is difficult to determine how accurate this estimate is. Participants in this study range in age from 21-27. All participants note “coming out” between one and four years ago. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they identified as a trans man, (2) they live or have lived in the province of NL both before and after transitioning for at least one year, and (3) they must have participated in some form of recreation within NL prior to and since their transition.

These criteria were established prior to the recruitment of participants. Due to the primary researcher’s relationship with some participants, recruitment in the form of word of mouth, and the small available sample size, participant’s ages and recreational circles often overlapped. This limiting factor alone may have aided theoretical saturation, “the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed”, to occur more rapidly (Morse, 2004, p. 1123).

Data was gathered over a six-month period (January – June 2017). It took longer to recruit participants and schedule interviews than was initially projected. This was likely a result of the small demographic size and the nature of the research. Data consisted of in-depth interviews with six self-identified trans men, and on-going reflective journal entries kept by the primary researcher. Having a friendship with Dane allowed the researcher to meet other members of the trans community. These men provided rich, personal data and I am thankful for the connections I have made with them. I am thankful for the assistance of my dear friend Dane, for without his assistance I believe this in-depth

level of data would have been impossible to obtain. Dane's name is the only one that is not a pseudo name created for confidentiality reasons. He preferred his own name to be associated with any of his responses.

Dane was 25 years old. He was a huge supporter of this study, much of the language used in the discussion and results sections of this study came from in vivo codes used originally in his transcript. Dane described coming out as a transgender man two and a half years before the interview took place. He came to the province's capital city, St. John's (population: 110,000), from his hometown of Corner Brook (population: 19,000) for schooling seven years ago. Dane was an activist, an athlete, and an ally to many other members of the trans community. He was a spokesperson. He was tall with a muscular build, exuberated confidence, and sounded prepared for every question that I proposed.

William was introduced to me through Dane. They were both self-identified feminists. He liked to workout but preferred his own gym at home over public ones. Will was 5'4 he said jokingly, but only when he wore his two-inch boots. He was positive, hopeful and eager to participate. He came from a small town in NL, Port aux Basques (population: 4,000). He attended the Memorial Campus in Corner Brook and lived there for seven years. He acknowledged that he was trans around the year 2012 but didn't decide to transition fully until he moved to St. John's three years ago.

Felix didn't speak of his life much before his transition. He worked in the kitchen of different restaurants in St. John's (population: 112,000,) where he grew up. He had a small frame and was the both the youngest (21) and the smallest in stature of the participants in this study. He told me he was eager to participate, but not because he knew

much about the topic. He wasn't well versed in LGBTQ terminology, he stated, but he wanted to help because he simply liked helping people. He hadn't had any surgeries yet but had one booked to take place a couple of months after our interview. He had begun taking hormone replacements almost six years prior.

Benjamin was a hockey player before and after his transition, that's all I really knew about him before we arranged an interview. He was 26 and had lived in NL since he was two years old. He grew up in a small central NL town (population: 2,000) and moved to the city nine years ago. He had identified as a man for four years now. Ben was a carpenter, a hockey coach, and had eight brand new puppies. He was average for a man in both size and build and sported a baseball cap often.

Charles was a quiet guy. He moved to St. John's over a decade ago from his hometown (population: 3,500) in central NL. He was working as a chef at a locally owned restaurant in St. John's. He enjoyed gaming, pizza and movies. Charles had lots of friends in the LGBTQ community in the city and occasionally participated in events organized through them. He was a firm believer in equality but preferred spending time with his fiancé over rallying for rights. He was funny, easy going and very likeable. His friends and coworkers thought he was kind, genuine and caring. They spoke very highly of him.

Niall had a funny demeanor. He was a 23-year-old, small-town (population: 3,000) guy who knew how to make light of any situation. He didn't speak with perfect diction or use expansive terminology like most of the others but he spoke with conviction. He was a hockey player. Niall was short and stinky with oversized glasses and wore a smile the entire interview. He came to St. John's in 2011.

#### 4.4 METHODS

Researching the experience of people who are trying to “pass” or keep their gender differences out of public scrutiny is challenging. Recruiting for this study meant finding trans men that were comfortable speaking about their experiences in recreation. Some of which may have possibly been distressing. Appropriate methodological design was therefore extremely important. Abrahams (2010) discusses in their work, how to study hard-to-reach populations. Abrahams discussed different sampling techniques used to recruit hard-to-reach populations including the approach that developed in this study, snowball sampling. Initial participants who had discovered the study’s social media recruitment blurb, and came forward themselves, introduced the researcher to other participants and the collection snowballed from there. Participants identity protection and confidentiality was also important in the creation of the methods and reporting style. An informed consent form created according to the standards of the Memorial University’s Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICHER) can be found in Appendix B of this report. All participants were therefore also given pseudonyms and any characteristics that could lead to their identification were omitted. This study received ethics approval from ICHER.

The data collected for this study included: a) the researcher’s personal journal and observational notes, and b) transcripts derived from six open-ended in-depth interviews. A combined approach of both transgender and grounded theories was applied to the design of this study. The data was analyzed with a transgender theorist framework. Transgender theory argues that gender is both a social construct and an embodied reality

(Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). This theory blends a relatively new concept of a gender spectrum and blends it with borrowed feminist theory concepts like the social constructions of gender. Gender, as trans theorists describe, is fluid; it is a social construction, completely distinct from sex. Whereas sex refers to genital anatomy, gender is a schema that, independently of sex, regulates appearance, dress, behaviour, relationships, speech, aspirations, and virtually every other aspect of social being.

## **4.5 DATA COLLECTION**

### **4.5.1 Interviews**

Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary form of data. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Instead of just meeting for an interview, I met with each of the participants for coffee and spent a few minutes at the start chatting about non-interview related topics and getting comfortable. This was important in establishing rapport and making sure that the participant was at ease. One participant noted, "I'm glad we got to meet beforehand, I probably wouldn't be as comfortable telling just anyone this stuff". Researching marginalized populations can be difficult from an outsider's perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Another participant commented "You must be learning a lot too, I think it's awesome that you picked something you haven't [experienced] personally, but still know friends that have." This connection to participants allowed for the collection of rich meaningful data. A loose guide that includes opened ended interview questions can be found in Appendix C of this report.

### **4.5.2 Journaling**

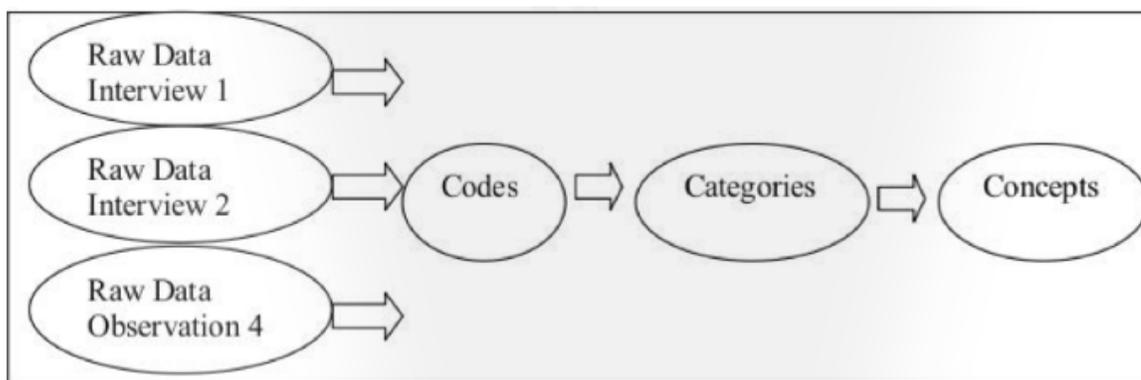
The second form of data collected were my own personal journal writings. I began journaling May 2016 to track my own ideas about gender, and to examine my own lens as a researcher. I wrote about trans issues in the media and my perceptions and opinions surrounding them. As a cis-woman with minimal research experience, becoming aware of my own researcher's lens was important. As a new researcher, it was necessary to pay attention to language and become as informed as possible. This allowed me to track my own perceptions of the interviews and I was able to consider my influences me as I engaged in this research. For example, early in my research process, transgender celebrities including Kaitlyn Jenner (previously known as a famous as a male Olympian) and Laverne Cox (*Orange is the New Black* star) were a focus in media. I was fascinated and I considered my thoughts and opinions about this news in the context of my research. I wrote anything and everything exactly as it came to me. Journaling as a supplemental form of research can highlight researcher bias and increases transparency in qualitative research (Ortlip, 2008). I also used my journal to record details throughout each interview. It was a space to capture nonverbal communication such as the participant's stature, appearance or tone of voice that proved to be relevant in some research findings and may have been overlooked without the journal as a secondary data source.

## **4.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and I typed my hand-written journal notes for analysis purposes. From there, an informed data analysis using ideas from a grounded theory approach as well as a transgender theoretical approach was employed. A

thematic style of analysis is commonly used with grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking relationships within the data (Mills et al., 2010). Using a thematic analysis involves analyzing data guided by a theoretical framework and determining themes that emerge from the research data.

In qualitative research, thematic analysis is the process of studying the data to extract codes, develop categories and central ideas, and move from categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2010). To keep with a specific pattern of analysis, Lichtman's three C's approach was applied. This technique, beginning with general codes, then grouping into categories and finally using more specific concepts, is straightforward with little room for error (see Figure 1; Lichtman, 2010). This content driven analysis is especially suitable for exploratory studies such as this (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall, 1996). Once the three steps were carefully completed, the data was transformed from transcriptions into meaningful concepts.



*Figure 1.* Three C's of Data Analysis: Codes, categories, and Concepts (Lichtman, 2010)

The first step in the data analysis was to do an initial coding of the data to help identify the central ideas of the participants. In this step, an initial coding was completed (36 codes) on the printed copies of all the interviews. In the second stage of the analysis, further coding was implied as the initial codes were refined into 18 refined codes. With the assistance of the researcher's supervisor these codes were grouped into five initial categories. With much review, the final three themes (concepts) were then developed.

#### **4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In the preparation for the present study serious ethical considerations were taken to prevent any emotional harm. As a cis-woman the researcher's main concerns were 1) misrepresenting participants' statements, 2) accidentally offending or causing participants emotional harm and 3) the participants' identities would be unwillingly discovered. The researcher therefore took precautions to decrease the possibility of these potential concerns. The coded transcripts from each interview were redistributed to their corresponding interviewee to ensure their authenticity. The researcher also met with two transgender acquaintances not involved in this study to discuss appropriate questioning word choice and terminology. Both individuals identified as trans women, however they both worked and volunteered with LGBTQ organizations. All participants were given pseudonyms and any characteristics that could lead to their identification were omitted. This study was approved by Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICHER).

In an effort to locate participants willing to partake in the study, without any forceful connotations, I devised the following social media blurb:

*SEEKING TRANSGENDER MALES TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY AT  
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY*

*Hi! I am a Graduate Student with the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation at Memorial University. As part of my Master's thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan, I am conducting research titled "How Trans Men Experience Leisure in Newfoundland". The study was formed from the combination of my interests in recreation and leisure and friendships within the LGBTQ and trans communities in Newfoundland, as well as the need for research in the area.*

*I am looking for interviewees to answer a series of interview questions in a one-on-one setting. The commitment required will be one 30-45 minute interview session. This is an opportunity to participate in academic research that could change recreation and leisure atmospheres and opportunities for transgender people in NL. This research data will remain confidential, as no personal information will be shared in the dissemination of the research. The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy.*

**4.7.1 Storage of Data**

Only the primary researcher and supervisor had direct access to the raw data during the study and they assumed the responsibility for data storage. All transcripts were deemed confidential material and were held in a locked filing cabinet at Memorial University. All electronic files (i.e., digital audio recordings, researcher notes) were password protected and stored on both the researcher and supervisor's computers. The

digital recordings and transcripts were stored separately from the master sheet identifying participant names and pseudonyms. Any paper copies of the data will be shredded after the completion of my final thesis for submission to the School of Graduate Studies.

Electronic data will be kept for five years, by the researcher and supervisor as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

#### **4.8 EXPANDED RESULTS**

The concepts were grouped and analyzed by both the researcher and the researcher's supervisor, an experienced researcher, to ensure authenticity of the findings. Participants spoke positively about recreation spaces in general and expressed that they felt safe in the places they normally recreate. However, each participant also discussed things they do to keep themselves safe, strategies they have used to negotiate constraints and feelings of "otherness". While every participant had their own unique way of explaining their ideas, the similarities between each interviewee's responses were abundant. Although some of the word choice differed due to the different participant backgrounds and personalities, they were often explaining the same, or similar ideas, with different words. For example, one participant explained that "non-binary folks may find gendered programs extremely exclusive", while another stated "some people aren't male or female, and like, how do you join a man's or woman's club then?"

#### ***4.8.1 Three Major Themes***

Three major themes emerged from the data. All six participants spoke about the following topics: gender identity and expression, recreation constraints and facilitators, and cis-normative privilege.

The first theme emerged as participants spoke about recreation as a tool for discovering and embodying gender. Lifting weights, for example, allowed them to express masculinity freely. Their gender identity could be both discovered more deeply and expressed more freely through participation in recreation. Confidence, self-esteem, well-being and courage were some of the primary codes that reoccurred under this major theme. Recreation was described as a pathway to self-discovery as well as an outlet for gender expression.

The second theme, recreation constraints and facilitators, encompassed a multitude of ideas that should be understood by recreation practitioners in our province. Recreation constraints were believed to become a topic of discussion. Facilitators, however, were discussed in even greater detail than barriers to recreation. Participants preferred to speak about how practitioners could make spaces gender neutral, safe, private and welcoming than discuss ways in which they were not presently doing so. Policies and practices that led to marginalization were often not as obvious as outsiders may believe.

The third theme cis-normative privilege, was another topic that was as predominantly discussed as the two other major themes in this study. This type of privilege is defined as the effects of cis-normativity, which is the presumption that everyone's gender matches the gender they were assigned at birth and that it is unchangeable (Lewis & Johnson, 2011). Becoming aware of cis-normative privilege begins with acknowledgement. Without first, recognizing barriers created by gendered spaces and attitudes we cannot begin to address them.

#### ***4.8.2 Additional Limitations***

All the participants were Caucasian, trans men, in their twenties. This likely explains the similarity of responses between participants. While it made it easier to confidently define the findings it limited the results. The findings may not be generalizable to trans men in other parts of the world, of different backgrounds, ages and/or cultures. To maintain a manageable research area for this master's level thesis, transgender women were also left out of the qualifications. A small sample size of six was deemed sufficient for this study, however, it may have limited some findings.

As discussed in the methods section of this thesis, the sampling method originally used (the social media study recruitment blurb) turned into a snowball sampling method commonly used by researchers researching minority and/or marginalized, hard-to-reach populations (Abrahams, 2010). The use of this method means that sampling was non-random in nature. The sample of six men obtained for this study, indeed cannot, fully represent the larger population of trans men in St. John's, NL. Hence, the major limitation

of this study is that it cannot tell us anything definitive about this larger population of trans men, outside of those who participated in this study.

#### **4.9 FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

Recreation providers/practitioners need to provide additional education for staff around issues of diversity and encourage greater social acceptance and understanding of how their language and attitudes can contribute to exclusivity in recreation services. They should focus on both removing structural and interpersonal constraints, as well as look for strategies to foster participation by all community members. It is important to note that while much of the reporting from participants highlighted that improvements and change were needed, the men in this study spoke highly of most recreation spaces within the province and community. At the end of each interview participants in this study were asked to describe how they imagined ideal, trans inclusive, recreation spaces. Suggestions included; develop a gender variant inclusion policy, provide trans-inclusivity training to staff, include additional gender options on registration forms, and install single stall change rooms where possible. Figure 2.0 below, is an example of gender neutral signage that should be used in recreational spaces. Places of recreation provide us with opportunity to express ourselves and illuminate socially exclusive practices. Positive change begins with listening an understanding what needs to be done and is achieved when people are truly heard.



*Figure 2.0 Gender Neutral Change Room Signage (CPATH,2017)*

#### **4.10 CONCLUSION**

This study was intended to promote awareness of the transgender community and contribute to action towards more inclusive opportunities and services within our recreation and leisure community in Newfoundland and Labrador. The results of this study suggested that recreation programs, clubs, and spaces examine their registration procedures and their changing areas. Presently changing rooms segregate by gender, and while some agencies provide family change rooms, these spaces tend not to be welcoming to individuals without children. Additionally, how recreation staff address participants can act as both recreation barriers or facilitators for transgender men. Providing equal, inclusive recreation opportunities and spaces for transgender men in the province of NL is an area that requires greater awareness and further research attention. All six transgender men from NL described from their personal experience, the importance of educating recreation providers on ways to build more gender inclusive environments. The use of both grounded theory and transgender theory allowed for the exploration of three main themes: gender expression, recreation constraints and facilitators, and cis-normative

privilege. Transitioning into a preferred gender led to a confidence in their gender expression that these men could proudly portray within recreational circles. Three types of constraints interpersonal, structural and intrapersonal constraints were used in this study to highlight the recreational constraints described by participants. Cis-gender privilege, like other privileges, is an advantage that is granted to many. Those who have this privilege are often unaware that others are discriminated against because they do not fit within the majority. More research and education are needed surrounding transgender needs in recreation spaces to make recreation inclusive for all.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### Informed Consent Form

Title: **How Trans men Experience Leisure in Newfoundland**

Researcher: Janna Kathleen (Kate) Walsh, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, Phone: 709.427.1476 E-mail: jkw643@mun.ca

Supervisor(s): Dr. Anne Marie Sullivan, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, Phone: 709.864.4453; Email: asulliva@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “*How Trans men Experience Leisure in Newfoundland.*”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Kate Walsh, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

#### **Introduction**

I am a Graduate student with the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation at Memorial University. As part of my degree requirements I am completing research for my Master’s thesis under the supervision of Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan.

The proposed study is formed from a combination of my interests in recreation and leisure and friendships within the LGBTQ and Trans Communities in Newfoundland. There is also a need for research in this area.

**Purpose of study:**

As is the case for most minorities, the research focusing on Transgender issues highlight issues of stigma and barriers to participate in various life domains. New directions in research are needed to examine the extent and type of vulnerability that transgendered people face in today's society. This study will focus on Trans men and their experience of recreation and leisure opportunities in Newfoundland.

This study aims to enhance research and programming related to Transgendered people's participation in recreation and leisure activities. The core objective will be to tell the stories of Trans men focusing on their involvement in recreation and leisure throughout different stages of their transitions. These stories will hopefully lead to recommendations for Recreation and Leisure providers. The experiences of Trans men will inform professionals about the genuine concerns and constraints of the LGBTQ population. The findings may be applicable to other parts of Canada and contribute to the limited scholarly literature focusing on people who identify as Transgender, particularly related to their leisure engagement.

**What you will do in this study:**

You will be asked to answer a series of interview questions in a one on one setting with the researcher. At any point you may wish to refrain from commenting on a question and/or add additional thoughts or opinions. NO personal identifying information will be included in any released documents, related to this study.

**Recording of Data:**

All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

**Length of time:**

The commitment required from you will be one interview session that should last no longer than 30-60 minutes.

**Withdrawal from the study:**

You can withdraw from the study at anytime up until all interviews have been completed and participants have confirmed the accuracy of their data via member-checking. A **member check**, is a technique used by researchers to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability. Your coded interview transcript will be given back to you to re-read and/or make any changes that you see fit. Once you agree that the transcript is appropriate and reflective of your experience, data analysis will commence and your individual transcript cannot be removed without impacting the study.

There will be no impact on the you, the participant if you choose to withdraw before the time noted above.

You will be reminded at the start of the interview that you can stop the interview at any time or choose not to respond to any questions. You will also be reminded that you can withdraw when transcripts are shared for member-checking purposes.

**Possible benefits:**

It is unlikely that the individual participants like yourself will experience any benefit from participation other than sharing your story in the hopes that it will result in change.

It is anticipated that the results will be used by community recreation practitioners in modifying the delivery of recreation programs and facility management to make programming more accessible to a diverse population.

**Possible risks:** During the interview, it is possible that the you may become uncomfortable with the nature of the topic being discussed. Given some of the interview will surround issues of sexuality, the PI will be very sensitive to your right as a participant not to answer questions or withdraw at any time. Additionally, the PI is aware of many aspects of the transition process and will be respectful not to probe beyond what you are comfortable with. The PI acknowledges her privileges that come from identifying as a cis-gendered, heterosexual person. She has family and friends that belong to the LGBTQ community in St. John's, NL and she describes herself as an ally. Finally, if you do become uncomfortable during the interview, you will be given the number for the Trans Needs Committee, counselling services and mental health hotline.

**Trans Needs Committee of NL (Chair's #) : 709 - 749 - 5145**

**MUN Student Wellness and Counselling Center : 864-8874**

**Mental Health Hotline : 1-888-737-4668**

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is ensuring that identities of participants are accessible only to those authorized to have access. All signed consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Physical Education building at Memorial University under the control of my academic supervisor, Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan. Only the PI, the supervisor, and committee member Dr. Angela Loucks-Atkinson will have access to the data. No personal information will be shared in the dissemination of the research.

**Anonymity:**

Anonymity refers to not disclosing participant's identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. There are no limits to anonymity in this study. Participants will be interviewed individually and no identifying information will be shared in the thesis or any publications/presentations stemming from this research. None of the participant's identifying characteristics will be collected for this study. As the Trans men population is likely quite small in Newfoundland, all efforts will be made to protect the identity of participants; for example, home communities will not be mentioned in any way.

**Storage of Data:**

All signed consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the PE building under the control of my academic supervisor, Dr. Anne-Marie Sullivan.

Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

**Reporting of Results:**

The results of the study will be presented in the form of a Master's Thesis. It is intended to also be presented in the form of a journal article, conference presentation and/or informative report to the Inclusion Advisory Council of Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador (RNL).

**Sharing of Results with Participants:**

Each participant will also receive an electronic copy of the report to be shared with RNL.

**Questions:**

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research.

If you  
would like more information about this study, please contact: Kate Walsh, School of  
Human

Kinetics and Recreation, Phone: 709.427.1476 Email: jkw643@mun.ca

Or her supervisor: Dr. Anne Marie Sullivan, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation,  
Phone: 709.864.4453; Email: asulliva@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the

ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861

**Counselling Center Contact Information:**

MUN Student Wellness and Councelling Center : 864-8874

Clinical Sexologist – Waterford Hospital : (888) 382-4474

Mental Health Hotline : 1-888-737-4668

Trans Needs Committee of NL (Chair's #) : 709 - 749 - 5145

The Yellow Door Group, Psychological & Support Services Ltd. (TYDG)

10 Pippy Place, St. John's, NL, A1B 3M7 : 709-770-4274

**Consent:**

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview, and can withdraw and/or change data up to the point at which you submit your 'member checked' transcript.
- You are not required to give a reason and doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you after member checked by you and analysis has begun will be retained by the researcher for use in the research study.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview  Yes  No  
I agree to the use of quotations.  Yes  No

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Researcher's Signature:**

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

*\*Questions varied from this guide according to the flow of conversation. This guide was used to probe participants and to keep interviews on track. Participants were however, encouraged to discuss whatever they felt was important.*

### Interview Guide – How Trans men Experience Leisure in Newfoundland

**All interview questions will stem from the umbrella question:**

**What is the experience of Transgender people regarding participation in leisure?**

**\*\*The umbrella question and the chosen definitions of recreation and leisure will be shared with each participant before the interview takes place\*\***

**Recreation:**

**Leisure:**

**Introduction Questions aim to give us an understanding of the participant's background.**

*These questions will help develop rapport and gain some understanding of the participant's background.*

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

How old are you?

How many years have you lived in Newfoundland? St. Johns?

Tell me about your journey with your gender identity?

How do you identify now?

How long have you used this identity?

What are your preferred pronouns?

*These questions will provide an understanding of recreation and leisure opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador that are being provided are inclusive of transgender men?*

Can you tell me how you currently spend your free time?

Do you play any sports? Engage in any other physical activities?

Have you ever experienced any difficulties/challenges when trying to do the things you want to do in your free time? What facilitates your participation?

Have the things you do in your free time changed since your transition?

How have they changed? (Is it easier to participate in \_\_\_\_\_ or more difficult now?)  
This can be a prompt if they don't go deeper with the first part of the question

***These questions will help us understand if there are things recreation and leisure providers could do to make them more inclusive and what they might be.***

How would you imagine your ideal space to participate in the activities you do in your free time?

How could owners or providers achieve this?

***These questions will help uncover what the barriers to recreation and leisure for Transgender Men in Newfoundland and Labrador are?***

What are some of the things that make it difficult for you to do the things you like to do?

Are they different now than before you transitioned?

***These questions will tell us if the barriers or constraints in this province differ from others and how so.***

How do you think the culture of Newfoundland plays a role in how you experience these activities?

Since you have transitioned, have you participate in these activities outside of the province? How was this different or the same?

***These questions will help explain what the current language and attitude is faced by trans men?***

Is there anything that people have said to you since your transition that sticks out in your mind?

How do strangers commonly address you?

How do people you know speak to you? (ie. Are people willing to use your preferred pronouns?)

Have you found any trans friendly language/wording in local recreation/leisure providers communications? (i.e. website, brochures, facilities)

**These will help us understand if there are other prominent exclusive factors.**