

Playing in between the Lines:

The Everyday Experiences of Nonbinary Athletes Competing in Competitive Team Sports in the Netherlands



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Abstract

This thesis examines the everyday experiences of young adult nonbinary athletes who participate in a competitive team sport in the Netherlands. Sport has always been of exclusionary nature and dominated by men. There does not seem to be a place for nonbinary athletes in binary gender segregated sport competition. However, little research has been done on the topic of nonbinary people in sport. The central question of this thesis, therefore is: "How do nonbinary young adult athletes navigate their gender identity while playing competitive team sports in the Netherlands?" The research was conducted through two rounds of interviews. The first interviews were exploratory and unstructured, while the second round of interviews were semi-structured through the use of an interview guide. My analysis showed that the queer inclusive climate participants experienced while playing sport, the experiences of gender euphoria, and being seen as part of the team were experienced as positives. Gender dysphoria and little visibility of nonbinary athletes were seen as challenges by the participants. I concluded that while theory makes us think that the Netherlands is an inclusive and considerate policy, the practice shows that this is not always the case. Regulations on fair play and trans* athletes are not clear. Furthermore, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach or solution for nonbinary athletes. It is person dependent what nonbinary athletes face and need. What was important for all participants, however, is that they are given space to come out and that they are seen as part of the team.

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Introduction

“Timothy LeDuc is the first openly nonbinary Olympic athlete¹,” popular Dutch magazine *Linda* writes about American professional figure skater Timothy LeDuc (van Broekhoven 2022). Timothy’s gender identity in combination with them being a professional athlete is newsworthy enough for the magazine to report on. A quick Google search makes it clear why this is the case. Few results pop up on professional nonbinary athletes and professional Dutch nonbinary athletes do not seem to exist at all. Do they really not exist or are they just hard to find? A look at the paper headlines about nonbinary people participating in sports in the Netherlands gives us an idea why Dutch nonbinary athletes seem to be absent. Dutch society does not seem to know how to handle gender diverse people in sports. The headlines read: “Playing sports fairly together (m/f/x): how on earth do you arrange that?²” (Scholten 2023), “Spit on and verbally abused: many trans people do not dare to go to the gym³” (Geels 2020), and “Non-cisgender people in Nijmegen feel less safe and avoid sports⁴” (Mediapartner RN7 2022). Why do people react this hesitant or hostile towards nonbinary people participating in sports?

Sport is known for excluding anyone who is not cisgender, white, heterosexual, abled and male. Looking back at the history of sport and analysing contemporary sport, several examples of this exclusionary nature can be named. Sport is and has always been a male dominated world. The origin of contemporary sport can be found at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in Brittain and North America (Theberge 2000). In Brittain, the main development happened at boy’s public schools, where they were influenced by a Victorian idea of masculinity. This masculinity focused on competitiveness, toughness, and physical dominance for boys. Girls were seen as physically weak, which meant that less women participated in sports (Theberge 2000). This example of male athleticism from Britian also came to North America (Theberge 2000) and further developed between 1890 and 1930 (Messner 2007). Due to industrial capitalism, the position of many men as breadwinners became unstable in America, and men were spending more time away from home. Together with the growth of public schooling, boys were spending more time with their mothers and female teachers (Theberge 2000). People spoke of a ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Messner 2007). Sport became a place for men to surround themselves with other men, break free from the ‘feminization

¹ Translated from Dutch by me. The original title reads: “Timothy LeDuc is de eerste openlijk non-binaire Olympische atleet” (van Broekhoven 2022).

² Translated from Dutch by me. The original title reads: “Eerlijk samen sporten (m/v/x): hoe regel je dat in vredesnaam?” (Scholten 2023).

³ Translated from Dutch by me. The original title reads: “Bespuugd en uitgescholden: veel transpersonen durven niet naar de sportschool” (Geels 2020).

⁴ Translated from Dutch by me. The original title reads: “Niet-cisgender personen in Nijmegen voelen zich minder veilig, mijden sporten” (Mediapartner RN7 2022).

of society,' and 'be masculine.' Furthermore, it provided men with the proof of their 'natural superiority' over women (Messner 2007). The ending of the 19th century also marks the development of major international sporting events in the Western world (Heggie 2010). These events were in first place developed for men, as women were discouraged from participating in sports. Arguments that were used to exclude women were, for example that women were 'not supposed to' display their body, be immodest, be muscular, or compete. People also spoke of a risk of women becoming infertile through playing sports (Heggie 2010). If women were to compete, facing men was not an option and the segregated women's category was, therefore, born. The first significant women's programme in the Olympics, for example, took place in 1924 (Heggie 2010). For the women's category to remain segregated from the men's, sport associations started 'sex testing' female athletes in the 1960s (Bohuon 2015). These tests started from women posing naked in front of doctors and eventually resulted in the testing of testosterone levels. The IOC (International Olympic Committee) and World Athletics stopped testing in 2000 (Bohuon 2015). This resulted, however, in a practice where athletes were tested if there was 'a suspicion.' Any woman that did not fit the aesthetic requirements of 'what a woman looks like,' was targeted (Bohuon 2015). Not fulfilling the requirements of 'what a woman looks like' in practice meant not meeting a Western, white idea of a 'woman' (Pieper 2014). These 'suspicions' were, therefore, disproportionately directed towards non-Western women. An example of a female athlete that has been accused of not being a woman because of her appearance is South-African sprinter Caster Semenya (Pieper 2014). After testing, it was deemed that her testosterone levels are too high for a female athlete. World Athletics only allows women with Caster Semenya's condition to compete in the women's category if they use medication to lower their testosterone level (Bohuon 2015). The level of testosterone a woman – including trans* women and women with an intersex experience - produces thus remains one of the most important indicators whether someone is allowed to compete in the women's category.

The exclusionary nature of sport makes it difficult for nonbinary people to participate. Nonbinary gender identities are becoming more visible in contemporary society. Research by knowledge centre Rutgers shows that 1,8% of people over 16 years old identify as nonbinary in the Netherlands (Joemmanbaks and de Graaf 2023). There is not one fixed way of what a nonbinary gender identity looks like. What being nonbinary means depends on the nonbinary person you are asking. Dutch national knowledge institute for social issues, Movisie, define nonbinary as not fitting within the normative binary man/woman dichotomy (Movisie 2023). Dutch actor Thorn de Vries and their partner Mandy Woelkens describe nonbinary gender identities similarly in their book 'FAQ gender.' They describe it as an umbrella term. The nonbinary gender identity includes everyone who is not

completely 'man' or 'woman' (Woelkens and de Vries 2021). I will further discuss what a nonbinary gender identity entails in the theoretical framework.

Nonbinary people who want to participate in sport must choose between two mutually exclusionary categories – the male and female category – both of which they do not feel at home in. As a reaction to this, some nonbinary people started to establish their own exercise spaces. Examples of these in the Netherlands are queer sport association Tijgertje (n.d.), Queer gym We Are Queer (n.d) in Amsterdam, and Queer Gym Rotterdam (2023). The reality is that nonbinary and transgender people participate in sport less than their cisgender peers (Rowello 2021). Yet, the reasons behind this and the experiences of nonbinary athletes in sports are under-researched. Existing research focusses on the English (Whitehouse 2021; Barras 2021) and Scottish context (Erikainen, Vincent, and Hopkins 2022). These research show that nonbinary athletes both face struggles and positively gain from participating in sport. Examples of the difficulties they face are: having to face gender segregated spaces (e.g. dressing rooms, toilets) (Erikainen, Vincent, and Hopkins 2022; Barras 2021), people not seeing them as nonbinary (but as a man or woman) (Barras 2021), having to choose between binary competitions, facing testosterone regulations, their body being 'seen' as different from the norm (through revealing clothing or mirrors) (Erikainen, Vincent, and Hopkins 2022), and worries about inclusion after medically changing their body (Whitehouse 2021). The benefits the nonbinary athletes in these researches experienced were: experiencing positive emotions from feeling their body move, alleviating mental health struggles (Whitehouse 2021; Barras 2021), using sport as a way to change their body, experiencing a sense of belonging in their community (Whitehouse 2021), and experiencing support and allyship from their teammates (Barras 2021).

My focus in this thesis is on nonbinary young adults who participate in organized team sports. This means that I will look at nonbinary people aged 18-25 who play a team sport that has an organized competition. My scope will, therefore, exclude individual sports or team sports that do not have a competitive character like fitness, yoga, or playing football outside of an organized competition. I will also not be looking at sport places specially established for LGBTQ+ players, as my aim is to look at sport places that are not designed to include nonbinary people. The research question I will answer in my thesis is: "How do nonbinary young adult athletes navigate their gender identity while playing competitive team sports in the Netherlands?" I have drafted several sub-questions that will help me in answering my research question: "What challenges and positives do nonbinary athletes encounter when playing their sport?", "What rules and regulations are in place for nonbinary athletes in the Netherlands?", "How does the nonbinary body play a part in nonbinary athletes' and society's view of nonbinary athletes' participation in sports?", "What role does the idea of fair play in sport play in the experiences and treatment of nonbinary athletes?",

and “How can sport become a more inclusive and welcoming space for nonbinary athletes?”. A guiding question that I will keep in mind while writing the thesis – without having the false expectation of finding a conclusive answer to it – is “What is the purpose of sport?” or “What is sport intended for?”

Readers Guide

I start the thesis in chapter 1 by giving a theoretical framework consisting of an explanation of what it means to be nonbinary and a description of the rules and regulations in place for trans* and nonbinary athletes in the Netherlands, which includes a discussion on fairness in sport. Chapter 2 consists of the method and methodology I use in this thesis. First, I will go into the process of finding interviewees and I will give a description of the three final participants. Then I will go into feminist-in-depth interviewing, grounded theory, and the process of interviewing I chose. Lastly, I will explain how the analysis took place and I will reflect on myself as a nonbinary athlete and researcher. Chapter 3 is the analysis, in which I critically engage with the different themes I constructed from the transcribed interviews. Finally, chapter 4 consists of the conclusion of this thesis. In this chapter, I answer the research question, discuss the implications and limitations of this research, and give recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

What it means to be nonbinary

Before delving deeper into nonbinary people participating in sport, it is important to get a clearer understanding of gender and nonbinary gender identities. Society works with a binary and essentialist understanding of gender. This is described by Butler (1990, 151) as the *heterosexual matrix*, which consist of the "grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized." The grid first consists of a dichotomy between the 'male' and 'female' body. This dichotomy refers to the biological sexed body that is divided by society into two exclusionary and oppositional sexes, 'male' and 'female.' 'Male' and 'female' are stable and essentialist terms in the heterosexual matrix. The 'male' and 'female' sex are expressed through gender. Gender is the second dichotomy and consists of 'man' and 'woman,' which are the terms used to refer to the social position or gender identity of people. 'Man' and 'woman,' are oppositional and hierarchical, meaning that 'man' is seen as superior to 'woman.' These gender identities are inextricably linked to the 'male' and 'female' sex in the heterosexual matrix. This means that a 'male' body automatically relates to someone being seen as a 'man' and a 'female' body automatically relates to someone being seen as a 'woman.' These connections between sex and gender are seen as natural. Furthermore, in the heterosexual matrix 'man' and 'woman' are only attracted to each other and, therefore, heterosexual (Butler 1990).

However, unlike the heterosexual matrix makes us believe, gender is not the same as or naturally connected to sex. Gender is a social construct and therefore dependent on time, place, and culture. Butler (1988, 519) explains the social characteristic of gender in their term *performativity*. Gender is constructed by people repeatedly performing gender. Butler (1988, 519) defines it as "a stylized repetition of acts." There is no such thing as an essential form of gender. Butler (1988, 522) argues that "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis." What society views as a gender expression that naturally belongs to a man, or a 'masculine' gender expression, therefore, is not essentially connected to a man. Only because men repeatedly perform their gender in the same way, does society regard it as 'masculine.' The same principle is true for women and 'femininity.' This means that gender is what you make of it (Butler 1988). There is not one way of being, expressing or behaving like a man, woman, or nonbinary person.

Nonbinary can be seen as an umbrella term that encompasses people who do not completely feel like a man or a woman (Woelkens and de Vries 2021). Examples of this are people who place themselves between a male and female gender identity, place themselves

outside of the gender binary, or experience a fluid gender that changes. Nonbinary identities are closely related to or part of the transgender identity, but not every nonbinary person identifies themselves as transgender. Nonbinary people do not identify with the sex and gender they are born with. They were assigned either male or female at birth, but do not identify as such (Woelkens and de Vries 2021).

Some nonbinary people prefer not to be referred to with the male pronouns (he/him) or the female pronouns (she/her). Examples of gender-neutral pronouns are they/them or the use of neo-pronouns, such as xe/xem/zyr (Woelkens and de Vries 2021). People can find it very bothersome if they are unintentionally or intentionally referred to with the wrong pronouns or name. This is termed misgendering. By misgendering someone, you invalidate their identity (Woelkens and de Vries 2021). It again depends per person which pronouns they prefer to use. Like gender neutral pronouns, some nonbinary people also prefer to express their gender in an androgynous way. An androgynous gender expression is characterized by typical features that cannot be ascribed to 'men' or 'women' or is made up by a combination of 'male' and 'female' characteristics. Other nonbinary people prefer to express their gender in a more 'masculine' or 'feminine' way (Woelkens and de Vries 2021). What is seen as 'masculine,' 'feminine,' and 'androgynous' is, like I said before, dependent on time, place, and culture.

Research by Galupo, Cusack, and Morris (2021) found that many of their nonbinary participants had an androgynous or fluid body ideal. This ideal was connected to other people reading them as male or female and a desire for this not to happen. Some nonbinary people experience gender dysphoria. They experience a feeling of distress that stems from the conflict between their gender identity and their physical body and sex characteristics (Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, and Pehl 2021). Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, and Pehl (2021) examined how nonbinary people experience gender dysphoria. They found that their participants described gender dysphoria "in relation to the body both generally (e.g., body shape) and in reference to specific body parts (e.g., genitals, chest, secondary sex characteristics) and functions (e.g., hormones, reproductive capability)" (Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, and Pehl 2021, 107). Examples of this can be a nonbinary person that is assigned female at birth (AFAB) who feels gender dysphoria about their breasts and tries to hide them with a compressive vest, called a binder. Another instance could be someone who is assigned male at birth (AMAB) who experiences discomfort from their angular jawline.

The direct opposite of gender dysphoria is gender euphoria. Beischel, Gauvin, and van Anders (2022, 274) describe gender euphoria as "powerfully positive experiences of gender." They made a distinction between three types of gender euphoric experiences: external or physical, internal or psychological, and social. External or physical euphoric experiences include changes in people's sexed bodies, which are often made through the use of hormones or surgery. Examples of internal or psychological gender euphoric

experiences are referring to oneself with the correct name and pronouns or reading about being nonbinary. Social euphoric experiences entail societal interactions, such as others using the right name and pronouns, or the confusion people have when trying to identify someone as man or woman (Beischel, Gauvin, and van Anders 2022). What someone experiences as gender dysphoria or gender euphoria are person dependent. Some people experience only one of the two or experience one more than the other (Ashley and Ells 2018). Research by Barras and Frith (2023) found examples of clothing feeling too tight and gender dysphoric for some nonbinary people, while it was gender euphoric to others.

Rules, regulations, and fair play

Sport is a place in which the gender binary emerges very clearly. As Butler (1990, 151) describes in the heterosexual matrix, men and women are seen as polar opposites. Furthermore, men and the men's category in sport are seen as superior to women and the women's category in sport. The male and female category are strictly apart and exclusionary. Thus, looking at the categories there are, there seems to be no place for nonbinary people in sport. As nonbinary people are becoming more visible in society, it looks like sport stays behind. The discussion surrounding nonbinary athletes is, therefore, not as advanced as say the discussion surrounding female to male and male to female transgender athletes in sport.

As discussed in the introduction, sport has always been a hostile place for everyone who is not white, cisgender, heterosexual, abled and male. This summary is not finite, as other intersecting characteristics could be added to this list. The discussion about trans* athletes is particularly loud in the United States, where several states have introduced bills to ban transgender people from participating in sport (Murib 2022). These proposed laws specifically apply to transgender girls, with 15 new laws being passed between 2020 and 2022. The bills include laws prohibiting transgender athletes from competing in the gender category that corresponds with their gender identity and laws requiring for transgender youth to medically transition before being allowed to compete. The medical transition mostly entails a hormone replacement therapy for at least one year (Murib 2022). Little research exists on experiences and treatment of trans* athletes in Europe. However, Hartmann-Tews, Menzel, and Braumüller (2022) analysed a European survey on the experiences of LGBTQ people in sports. Their research showed that 90% of their respondents reported negative behaviour towards trans* people and homosexual people in sport. This behaviour was most often in the form of negative language, and negativity against trans* athletes was seen as a bigger problem than negativity against homosexual athletes (Hartmann-Tews, Menzel, and Braumüller 2022).

One of the arguments people pose against transgender people participating in sports, is that they have a physical advantage, which makes their participation unfair.

Cooky and Dworkin (2023) critique this argument in their research. Firstly, they argue that sport is not fair as it is right now. For sport to be fair, there must be a level playing field, they explain. However, a level playing field is impossible in contemporary sport due to social inequality. Moreover, this social inequality is tolerated in sport as “the historic and contemporary structure and culture of sport institutions often reproduces hegemonic masculinity, racism, classism, gender inequalities, and nationalism” (Cooky and Dworking 2023, 107). Secondly, the discussion surrounding transgender people in sport is mainly focussed on their testosterone levels or their previously higher testosterone levels before medically intervening. Jordan-Young and Karkazis (2019, 10) coined the term ‘T talk’ to refer to “the web of direct claims and indirect associations that circulate around testosterone both as a material substance and as a multivalent cultural symbol.” The way in which testosterone is framed has many similarities with the heterosexual matrix as explained by Butler (1990). Testosterone is seen as the primary hormone for men. Oestrogen is believed to be the female variant of testosterone. Just like the ‘male’/ ‘female’ and ‘masculine’/ ‘feminine’ dichotomies, testosterone can also be placed into this matrix. Jordan-Young and Karkazis (2019, 10) explain it as testosterone and oestrogen being framed “as a heteronormative pair: binary, dichotomous, and exclusive, each belonging to one sex or the other, and locked into an inevitable and natural “war of sexes”.” One persistent misinterpretation about testosterone is, for example, that it is a foreign hormone for women, while women produce testosterone themselves for healthy functions that go beyond reproduction and physiology (Jordan-Young and Karkazis 2019). Cooky and Dworkin (2023) call out the obsession with testosterone in sport. If athletes’ testosterone levels were tested in order to ensure a fair competition, then sport organisations should also test for other “performance enhancing genes that predispose them to be athletically superior” (Cooky and Dworkin 2023, 107). An example of a condition that is beneficial for basketballers is acromegaly, which results in excessive tallness. Sport organisations do not, however, test athletes on these genes, which makes you question whether it is really fairness they are after (Cooky and Dworkin 2023).

There are rules and regulations in place in the Netherlands for trans* and nonbinary people who want to participate in a sport. The NOC*NSF⁵ has made a ‘Guideline for gender- and sex diverse people’⁶ (Temmerman, Ekvall, and de Leeuw 2023). Sport federations that reviewed this document include the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB), Rugby Netherlands, the Royal Dutch Baseball and Softball Association, and the Athletics Union. In this document, NOC*NSF argue that they “stand for an inclusive and socially safe sport in which everyone feels welcome regardless of sex, gender identity, ethnicity, age, disability

⁵ The Dutch Olympic Committee and the Dutch Sport Federation

⁶ The Guideline is published in Dutch (‘Handreiking gender- en seksediverse personen’). Quotes are translated by me.

or religion” (Temmerman, Ekvall, and de Leeuw 2023, 7). They repeatedly note that it is their ambition for everyone to be able to play a sport conform the gender they identify with. The document also contains explanations of important concepts, descriptions of what kind of steps a sport club can take to support athletes who are trans*, and examples of how to accommodate and communicate in order to facilitate a socially safe and inclusive sports culture. NOC*NSF suggestions are, for example, to use inclusive language, support trans* players in choosing a team and division (e.g., asking for compensation, emotional support, etc.), and provide multiple options in team apparel. Trans* athletes can apply for dispensation if they want to participate in a competition that does not match their gender assigned at birth (Temmerman, Ekvall, and de Leeuw 2023).

It is difficult to review this current policy, as it was published in 2023 and it also consists for a large part of intentions and targets for the future. NOC*NSF policy seems to prioritize participation in recreational sport in relation to trans* athletes. The discussion of fair play becomes more apparent in their approach to professional athletes. National sports associations make the decisions whether a trans* athlete can compete in Dutch competitions and national championships. NOC*NSF encourages national sport associations to investigate whether international rules are proportionate and result in fair competition or cause unnecessary exclusion. A recent example of NOC*NSF’s policy is the treatment of trans* darts player Noa-Lynn van Leuven. Two other female darts players left the Dutch national team, because they did not want to play in a team with a transgender athlete. The director of the darts association, Paul Engelbertink, responded by saying there are rules and guidelines that have been made together with the world federation and NOC*NSF years before. Noa-Lynn van Leuven follows these rules and had been part of the national team since 2021 (NOS Sport 2024).

The dart’s association’s response surprised me. Professional sports are not known for being very trans* inclusive or welcoming. Yet, it seems like NOC*NSF’s policy is very inclusive and considerate of the wishes of trans* athletes themselves. There are, however, some unclear points in their guideline. For example, they do not specify in which instances someone needs to apply for dispensation, nor do they state where sports organisations base their decision regarding dispensation on. I am not fully convinced by NOC*NSF’s guideline. Is the sports world as welcoming to trans* and nonbinary athletes in practice as NOC*NSF has us believe?

Chapter 2: Method and Methodology

My research focusses on the lived experiences of nonbinary athletes. Therefore, I chose to use the qualitative research method of feminist in-depth interviewing (Hesse-Biber 2011) in combination with certain principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). In discussing my method and methodology I will talk about the process of finding interviewees, the interviewees, principles of feminist in-depth interviewing, grounded theory, the set-up of the interviews, thematic analysis, and reflexivity.

Interviewees

The interviewees were found through putting up physical flyers⁷, online distributing flyers, e-mailing sport clubs directly and asking around in my social network. Interviews took place in and around coffee shops or private university cubicles in Utrecht and Amsterdam. I stopped looking for participants after having found 3 people, who identify as nonbinary, are between 18 and 25 years old, and participate in a team sport. This number of interviewees was most feasible, given the 10-week time period and the research design of doing every interview twice – which I will elaborate on when talking about the interviews.

The first interviewee I found is Lou⁸, who is 20 years old. They currently live and study in Amsterdam, but they are originally from Slovakia. Lou played football but stopped before coming to the Netherlands. They started playing rugby this academic year and currently play in a women's team. The second interviewee is Noah. They are 25 years old and from the Netherlands. Noah lives and studies in Utrecht. They participate in different sports, including gymnastics, running, fitness, and football. For this thesis I mainly focused on their experiences playing football in a women's team. The third interviewee is Moos. They are 23 years old and Dutch. Moos lives and studies in Amsterdam. They also play football in a women's team and have some experiences with other team sports before coming out as nonbinary. The interview with Lou was in English, while the interviews with Noah and Moos were in Dutch.⁹

Without specifically looking for it, all the participants I have found are, like myself, AFAB. As I have explained in the theoretical framework, this does not automatically mean that all my participants experience or express their gender identity in the same way. It could, however, be the case that they gravitate a bit more towards a more 'masculine' expression of their gender as research by Galupo, Cusack, and Morris (2021) found that

⁷ The flyers I made can be seen in appendix 1.

⁸ The names of the participants are anonymized. As it is personal - and socially and culturally determined - whether someone finds a name 'feminine', 'masculine', or 'androgynous', I did not want to ascribe names to the participants which they do not feel comfortable with. Therefore, I have asked the participants whether they have a preferred pseudonym or wanted me to come up with a name for them.

⁹ The interviews in Dutch were both for the participants and for me in our first language, while the interviews with Lou in English were for both of us in our second language.

their nonbinary participants had an androgynous or fluid body ideal. This ideal was a reaction to the desire to not be read as male or female by others. As all the participants are AFAB, there is a possibility that they experience gender dysphoria from body parts that are seen as 'feminine' by society – such as pronounced hips or breasts. This, however, does not apply to every nonbinary person that is AFAB. Another important aspect is that all the participants play in a women's team. The change of them facing difficulties with rules regarding their physique is small, as they are AFAB, and most rules apply to people who are AMAB and want to play in a women's team. This could change, however, if the participants choose to medically transition and still want to compete in a women's competition.

Feminist in-depth interviewing

I used a feminist in-depth interviewing method while preparing and conducting the interviews. Hesse-Biber (2011) describes feminist interviewing as "research that gets an understanding of women's lives and those of other oppressed groups, research that promotes social justice and social change, and research that is mindful of the research-researched relationship and the power and authority imbued in the researcher's role." I am seeking to gain a better understanding of the lives of nonbinary athletes by analysing their day-to-day lived experiences. By looking at their social situation, unjust practices might become known and the need for social change may become evident. This focus on 'lived experiences' and problem-orientation goes well together with in-depth interviewing. The goal of in-depth interviewing is not to generalize, but to create a thorough understanding of how people look at certain social situations. Furthermore, the practice of interviewing allows for interviewees to express themselves in their own way, rather than a researcher speaking for them (Hesse-Biber 2011). In this case, the focus is on how nonbinary athletes navigate their gender identity while playing a sport and their own understanding of this is best expressed and conveyed through their own words. I will later elaborate more on the final aspect of feminist interviewing, which is the research-researched relationship and my role as researcher, when talking about reflexivity.

Grounded theory

Grounded theory knows multiple definitions and approaches, which makes it difficult to use grounded theory in research (Flick 2019). Charmaz (2006) states that grounded theory guides you to start collecting data from the beginning of your research. Instead of using theory to analyse your data, in grounded theory your data form the foundation of your theory. By analysing while collecting data, the lines between these components become less strict. The aim is "to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz 2006, 2). The conventional approach to interviews would be to use a theoretical framework

to structure interview questions or an interview guide. However, influenced by grounded theory, I chose to conduct my first round of interviews before writing a theoretical framework. This approach logically emerged after I found that there is little literature available on nonbinary athletes in general and in the Netherlands in particular.

Interviews

The first interviews I conducted were unstructured and exploratory. They were focused on the general experiences the athletes have as nonbinary athletes participating in a competitive team sport. The unstructured nature of the interviews meant that I did not prepare any questions apart from an opening question. This question was about how the interviewee experiences playing a team sport as a nonbinary athlete. The focus of the first meeting was on the interviewee's experiences as a nonbinary athlete. I followed their lead in what they wanted to tell me about their experiences. This meant that I had little control over the trajectory of the interview (Hesse-Biber 2011). These first interviews formed the basis for the interview guide¹⁰ I used in the second round of interviews.

After I transcribed the first round of interviews and made the interview guide, I interviewed every interviewee again. This approach of interviewing every participant twice meant that the second round of interviews for me felt less tense. The conversations flowed more easily, as the participants and I had already met and talked before. This feeling of familiarity aided in the ease of the conversation. The second interviews had a semi-structured character. The topics that emerged in the previous interviews formed the structure of this interview and a basis for the questions I wrote down in the interview guide. The semi-structured nature of these interviews meant that I did prepare questions, but the sequence of these questions was not set. This approach allowed me to have some more control in the interview, compared to the first unstructured interviews. It also provided me the freedom to come up with new questions during the interview (Hesse-Biber 2011). The second round of interviews were used for the analysis.

Thematic analysis

I used a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data collected through the second round of interviews. They describe six different phases of thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the report. This does not mean, however, that you can only move through these phases consecutively. The different phases should be seen as a guide and recursive process, in which you can move back and forth between them. The analysis begins "when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential

¹⁰ For the interview guide, see appendix 2.

interest in the data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 86). My thematic analysis, therefore, started during the first interviews and the successive analysis of these interviews.

The first phase of familiarizing myself with the data consisted of first transcribing the recorded audio from the interviews. I then repeatedly read the transcripts and started looking for meaning and patterns. This phase also consisted of noting down initial ideas. In phase two I generated initial codes by highlighting sections I found important in the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006, 88) define codes in that they "identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst." The code points out the most basic part of my transcript that has meaning for my research (Braun and Clarke 2006). By coding, you organize your data in relevant groups. The choice between semantic content or latent depends on the level of analysis you want to do. I have chosen to do a latent thematic analysis, as this analysis goes a step further than the semantic level of analysis. It involves the interpretation and theorization of the data, where a semantic analysis does not look at the underlying ideas and processes that colour the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Charmaz (2006) describes the importance in grounded theory of including what is happening during the interview while coding the data. She, therefore, argues for an analysis that surpasses the semantic level. After having coded the data, phase three consisted of grouping the different codes into themes. "This is when you start thinking about the relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes ([e.g.], main overarching themes and sub-themes within them)" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 89-90). I selected an inductive thematic analysis opposed to a theoretical as the former has some connection to grounded theory. The themes that emerge from this 'bottom up' method have a strong connection to the data, while the themes in a theoretical thematic analysis are more closely related to the existing theoretical framework (Braun and Clark 2006). I then reviewed the themes that emerged in phase three in phase four. Individual themes were read to determine they are coherent, accurate and valid for the research. The different themes were also reviewed together to determine there is a clear and justifiable distinction between them. My initial 8 themes were reduced to 6 themes in this phase. Phase five consisted of defining what part of the data each theme comprises and writing the analysis of the theme. Finally, in phase six I wrote the concluding analysis.

Reflexivity

An important aspect of feminist interviewing is reflecting on my own position within the research. Hesse-Biber (2011, 129) defines reflexivity as "taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived reality and experiences." By reflecting on this, you provide an insight into how you produce knowledge. Gender Studies scholar Donna Haraway (1988) advocates for making the position from which you produce knowledge. Haraway argues that there exists an idea in academia that knowledge can be produced from a neutral or

objective position, a 'view from nowhere.' The neutrality of this position is, however, an illusion, according to her. It is a position occupied by white men who, from a position of power, claim to objectively see everything. Haraway proposes a feminist objectivity against this idea of knowledge being produced from a neutral position. She argues for a way of producing knowledge whilst making your position known. Haraway (1988) calls this 'situated knowledges.' Reflexivity fits in nicely with this, as it goes against the positivist idea of knowledge as objective or researchers being able to provide a 'view from nowhere,' through the process of making your position visible (Pillow 2003).

Various aspects of my lived experiences are important in this research. I am an insider within my research in that I identify as nonbinary, play football, and enjoy watching sports (Hesse-Biber 2011). I will use this insider position by including my own experiences in the analysis to critically note my findings. Furthermore, in having mutual recognition – through sharing my own gender identity and affinity with sport – I have the opportunity to create a situation where I am more easily able to understand my interviewees. I found that this did happen during the interviews. In the first interview with Noah, for example, I apologized for continuously saying I found the things they were saying recognizable. Noah responded by saying "that is absolutely fine, also nice."¹¹ I found that me acknowledging I understood their struggles made the conversation move more naturally. Noah seemed to find it comforting that I shared some experiences with them and expressed an understanding of their situation.

A difficulty with being an insider is, however, that in finding commonalities within my own story and that of the interviewee, I (unintentionally) steer the conversation in a direction that reflects my own experiences or opinion. My awareness of this, however, meant that I could take this risk into consideration while conducting the interview. Additionally, I am not only an insider, but also an outsider within the interview, as I am conducting the interviews. This means that I inherently have more agency than the interviewees. I decide what I choose to include in the research, what I focus on, and I include my interpretation of what the interviewee says into the thesis. I tried to make the power relations more equal by my choice of interview approaches. The unstructured and semi-structured approaches ideally give some agency to the interviewee. By not having any or having little questions, the interviewee is given more freedom to decide what to talk about. This does not mean that these approaches take away a power difference altogether. Creating a false idea of there not being a power relation result in a situation in which the interviewee is more vulnerable and encouraged to share more than they would otherwise feel comfortable with (Hesse-Biber 2011).

¹¹ Original quote in Dutch from the first interview with Noah: "Dat is helemaal oké, ook fijn."

Chapter 3: Analysis

After having conducted the interviews, I started generating themes while reading and analysing the transcripts of the interviews. After having formulated eight initial themes, I started to regroup the codes to find the clearest themes. The first round of eight themes were eventually narrowed down to six. The codes from the two themes of the original eight ('aims to do sport' and 'coming out') were divided among the six remaining themes. The final six themes are: a queer inclusive climate, team spirit, gender dysphoria, the gendered body, visibility, and gender euphoria. Throughout the analysis I will be using quotes by the interviewees. I translated the quotes from the interviews with Noah and Moos to English, as these interviews were in Dutch. I did not make direct translations but tried to stay close to the original meaning in Dutch. The original quotes in Dutch can be found in the footnote of each translated quote. The quotes from Lou are not translated, as the interview took place in English. I will analyse each theme with a critical perspective using both theory and my own experience as a nonbinary athlete.

A queer inclusive climate

The first theme is about the queer inclusive climate that surrounds a sport or club. This climate is illustrated through the athletes (subconsciously) choosing an inclusive sport or club, them feeling at home in the 'masculine' character of their sport, and the space their team and club provides in coming out as nonbinary.

None of the athletes explicitly chose their sport for the queer inclusive reputation it has. They do all, however, mention how this queer inclusive image could subconsciously have had an influence in them choosing their sport. Moos and Noah both mention following a friend or classmate to their current team. Noah explains: "I came to [my sport club] through a classmate of mine who identifies as lesbian. Well, in that way I already knew it was safe and I already knew that I was really looking for that situation, you know, and that I wanted that safety. But I had not consciously looked for it. But I also think that this is because I already subconsciously knew that it was safe, because she also plays there."¹² The participants also mention that they would not have chosen different sports that have less of a queer inclusive character. Moos comments on this when they say that "I had indeed assumed that in football that chance [of having a queer team] is somewhat greater because there is simply a stigma surrounding football women who are more often queer, you know, a little less in hockey for example. [...] so that did indeed play a role in why I

¹² "Ik ben bij [mijn sport club] gekomen via een klasgenootje van mij die zich identificeert als lesbisch. Nou ja, op die manier wist ik al dat het veilig was en ik wist wel dat ik heel erg die situatie zocht, zeg maar, en dat ik die veiligheid wilde. Maar ik had er niet bewust naar gekeken. Maar ik denk ook dat het dus is omdat ik al onbewust wist dat het veilig was, omdat zij daar ook speelt." (Noah)

wanted to play football and not a different kind of sport, I think yes.”¹³ The queer inclusive character of a sport therefore does play a role in nonbinary athletes choosing their sport. Like Moos, Noah also mentions their hope of not being the only queer player in the team. “But I did really like it that I ended up in a team in which I was certainly not the only one who was queer. That I though, oh, there are a lot more than I am used to having around me”¹⁴ (Noah). It is important to emphasize the fact that Moos and Noah are talking about the female category in football. In the Netherlands, women’s football has the reputation of having more queer women than other sports. For Moos and Noah, this results in them expecting to not be the only LGBTQIA+ person and accepted by the team. Moos also makes the comparison with them not expecting there to be as many queer players in women’s hockey, as in the Netherlands hockey has the reputation of having more heterosexual women. Men’s football does not, however, have this queer inclusive reputation. A nonbinary athlete who is AMAB and wants to join a male team will therefore most likely have a different expectation about being accepted.

All three athletes also mentioned feeling comfortable in the ‘masculine’ character their sport has. Noah explains how it may have subconsciously influenced them in choosing football as a sport. “I think I found that aspect of the sport really appealing when I started playing football. Precisely that masculine, tough image that really attracted me. I doubt whether I necessarily behave differently within the sport because of this, but I do think that it has helped me in some way to express myself in the way I want to express myself and that I have dared to develop that more, precisely because that image is there.”¹⁵ Moos gave the same answer, in that they do not think they necessarily behave differently, but that the masculine image does make them feel more at home. “[It ensures] that it is really masculine, which makes me feel more comfortable with it than perhaps with other sports. It just has that because it has something tough and because that is such a thing, I do feel more comfortable expressing myself in that way”¹⁶ (Moos). Whether people attribute a ‘masculine,’ ‘feminine’ or ‘gender-neutral’ quality to a sport is socially and culturally dependent. Moos and Noah, for example, find that football has a ‘masculine’ character. This could be because football historically is a sport mostly played by men in the Netherlands,

¹³ “Ik had wel inderdaad aangenomen dat bij voetbal die kans wat groter is omdat er gewoon wel een stigma hangt om voetbalvrouwen die snel queers zijn, zeg maar wat minder dan bij hockey bijvoorbeeld. [...] dus dat woog inderdaad wel mee in waarom ik dan op voetbal wilde en niet op een andere soort sport, denk ik ja.” (Moos)

¹⁴ “Maar ik vond het wel heel prettig dat ik een team terecht kwam waar ik zeker niet de enige was die queer was. Dat ik wel dacht van oh, het is veel meer dan ik gewend ben om me heen.” (Noah)

¹⁵ “Ik denk ook dat ik dat aspect heel aantrekkelijk vond van de sport, toen ik begon met voetbal. Juist dat masculiene stoere imago dat dat wel heel erg trok. Of ik me per sé anders gedraag binnen de sport daardoor, twijfel ik, maar ik denk wel dat het me ergens heeft geholpen om me te uiten als hoe ik me wil uiten en dat ik dat meer heb durven ontwikkelen, juist doordat dat imago er is.” (Noah)

¹⁶ “[Het zorgt] ervoor dat het erg masculine is, waardoor ik me er eerder in voel passen dan in andere sporten misschien. Het heeft gewoon dat omdat het wat stoers heeft en omdat dat zo erg een ding is voel ik me wel comfortabeler om het zo te uiten.” (Moos)

although this is now changing. Exemplary for this is that women were banned from joining football clubs in the Netherlands until 1971 (Boere and van Miert 2024). If we look at research done by Sobal and Milgrim (2019) in the United States, however, their participants found that football (or soccer as they call it in the US) is mostly a 'gender-neutral' sport.

Finally, the queer inclusive image of the clubs and sports is reflected in the space the teams and clubs provide for nonbinary athletes to come out. All three of the participants have come out to their team as nonbinary, while they also describe the difficulties of doing so. Moos for example explains how they do not usually feel the need to come out. They did decide to come out to their team to avoid confusion around their pronouns. One of Moos's friends is also a player in the team and refers to them using gender-neutral pronouns. The team would, therefore, hear this friend referring to Moos with these pronouns instead of female pronouns. Noah recalls how they did not want to come out at first because it felt safer. The inclusive atmosphere in the team meant that all three of the athletes did come out. For Lou it happened without them thinking about it beforehand, as everyone said their pronouns when introducing themselves. Lou then introduced themselves using they/them pronouns. "I don't know, like the decision has just been made, like I didn't think about it. Just yeah, we were just going through the circle and I was just like, okay. But I don't think if that didn't happen like if no. Like, we didn't do the introduction around. I don't think I would tell them" (Lou). Being given this opening by people to come out as nonbinary is seen as helpful by the athletes. Options for providing an opening are everyone saying their pronouns, there already being another nonbinary player, or being able to register as nonbinary at the club. This last example does remain difficult, however. Moos would like the option as it would mean that "that club acknowledges that [being nonbinary] exists and that it is okay and that it is possible in a women's team and such things."¹⁷ While Lou also sees the difficulties in registering before knowing your teammates or coaches. "But I also don't know if I would register like that. There's also a way because then you are putting it up there and you don't even know like who your coach is going to be and maybe. Maybe your coach is, I don't know, not the best person to, to share this information with." Noah also finds it a difficult matter. They argue that it could be a nice question to ask as it illustrates that the club is safe for nonbinary athletes and illustrates that the board stands behind you. However, it should never be a mandatory question. "If that would be a mandatory question, it could also be the case that I don't register because I need to fill that in"¹⁸ (Noah).

This clearly illustrates that coming out as nonbinary remains difficult, even with a queer inclusive climate. I can speak from experience when I say that coming out as

¹⁷ "die club erkent dat [non-binair zijn] bestaat en dat dat oké is en dat dat mogelijk is in een vrouwenteam en dat soort dingen." (Moos)

¹⁸ "Als dat een verplichte vraag zou zijn, zou het ook prima zijn dat ik me niet ga aanmelden omdat ik dat moet invullen." (Noah)

nonbinary is nerve-wracking, even if you expect your team to be accepting. I expected my team to be accepting, as there were already some openly queer women and a teammate who openly identifies as nonbinary. My team already was aware of the importance of pronouns and paid attention to how the team got addressed, because of my nonbinary teammate. It is nice and helpful when your team or club is inclusive and welcoming towards nonbinary athletes and provides openings for you to come out through the use of pronouns or a nonbinary option on the application form. The reality is also, however, that in the end nonbinary athletes themselves have to take the step to come out or create an opening to do so.

Team spirit

Within the second theme, the nonbinary athletes emphasize the importance of being part of the team and the team spirit or feeling. The importance of being seen as a part of the team repeatedly came back but was most clear when talking about gendered language use and the changing rooms. In referring to the whole team, the athletes gave examples of being called 'ladies' or 'dames' in Dutch. Being seen as part of the team weighed more heavily in these instances than correcting people for being misgendered. Moos explained this by saying "I don't want to be singled out in that. [...] But then again, we are an equal group together, so it is nice if we are just addressed with one word or one way. And not people always saying, ladies ánd [Moos]. That, I just find that unnecessary and that then for me surpasses the purpose of addressing the group, so to speak."¹⁹ Noah also mentions this idea of not wanting to be the centre of attention in these instances.

When talking about the changing rooms, the participants explained that although some of them did find it difficult to undress, they found being together more important. Noah tells for example that "it of course remains to be a difficult situation, because it is of course very uncomfortable to expose yourself to a, yes to a whole group, while you do not feel comfortable about your body."²⁰ Noah experiences gender dysphoria from certain parts of their body, such as their breasts. Their feeling of discomfort with their body is emphasized when others can see these parts of their body. This makes changing and showering in a changing room with other people confrontational and uncomfortable. At the same time, the participants do not want to isolate themselves from their team. "But if I choose to leave, then yeah, so then I miss the whole part of social contact²¹" (Noah). The

¹⁹ "Ik wil daar niet in apart worden gezet. [...] Maar ja, we zijn samen gelijkwaardig een groep dus dan is het fijn als we gewoon met één woord of één manier daarmee worden aangesproken en niet dat er steeds wordt gezegd, dames én [Moos]. Dat, dat vind ik gewoon onnodig en dat gaat dan voor mij dan te ver voor wat het doel is van het aanspreken zeg maar." (Moos)

²⁰ "Het blijft natuurlijk een lastige situatie, want het is natuurlijk ergens heel oncomfortabel om je bloot te geven in een, ja in een hele groep, terwijl jij je niet prettig voelt over je lichaam." (Noah)

²¹ "Maar als ik ervoor kies om weg te gaan dan ja, dan mis ik dus dat hele stuk sociale contact." (Noah)

changing room is seen as a place where the team spirit becomes stronger and a place of social connection. Changing in another changing room or at home is, therefore, for all the participants not an option. Being seen as part of the team and not as different was the most important reason.

For there to be a good team spirit, it is crucial that the team is accepting and is able to form a safe space. However, what makes this difficult is that what is experienced as a safe space is person dependent. Before I came out as nonbinary, people discussing their pronouns could make me feel very unsafe as them asking me about my pronouns felt scary. I was not confident in my gender identity and did not know how to answer this question. Yet, these (cisgender) people discussing pronouns probably came from the intention of creating a safe space for others to share theirs. The participants describe their team as a safe space in that they have a group of people that has their back when outsiders find out about their nonbinary identity. This means that they feel safer and do not have to face difficult interactions with opponents and referees alone. "I somehow think that I feel safer because I am with a team, that I also dare to express more easily, because I know that the whole team is behind me,"²² Noah explains. Moos also describes the benefits of feeling safe and supported in a team as a nonbinary player. They explain that as a team it is easier to stand up against opponents or a referee who judge them. To ensure this to happen, it is of course crucial that the team knows the player is nonbinary. This is then also a factor Moos talked about when deciding to come out. In coming out, the team created space for them and were able to take their wishes as a nonbinary player into account.

The other side of the coin is, however, the worry that Moos had in taken up too much space. All the athletes described the team as a place where there is a greater emphasis on gender. The three respondents all play in a women's team. They explain how them being the only non-cisgender woman in the team results in them experiencing an emphasis on this gender difference. Moos worried that them coming out as nonbinary would place too much of an emphasis on this difference, which would result in people negatively reacting to Moos and thinking Moos took up too much space in the team. Noah describes how they experience playing in a team as confrontational sometimes. "I do notice that I sometimes find [being different] very difficult, because I always have this idea of oh, I fall outside of the group, I am different."²³ Moos also describes the difference in playing an individual sport versus playing a team sport. "Well, an individual sport simply doesn't have that social interaction and here you are very much one team. And specifically a women's team in which gender plays a bigger role than when you are alone. And therefore, about

²² "Ik denk ergens dat ik me veiliger voel omdat ik met een team ben, dat ik ook makkelijker durf te uiten, omdat ik weet dat het hele team achter me staat." (Noah)

²³ "Ik merk wel dat ik [anders zijn] soms heel lastig vind, omdat ik dus elke keer het idee heb van oh, ik val buiten de groep, ik ben anders." (Noah)

how people look at you or talk about you”²⁴ (Moos). None of the athletes describe gender being more emphasized in a team as holding them back, but more as something that stands out to them.

Wanting to be part of the team is something that is especially important for the three athletes. Interestingly I often hear very practical solutions for clubs and sports to be welcoming and accepting towards nonbinary athletes, like gender-neutral changing rooms. While these options are nice and helpful for many nonbinary athletes, being a part of a team is as important in a team sport. The solutions, therefore, may not lie in providing ‘a separate option’ (like a private changing room) for nonbinary athletes who play in a team, but a solution in which they are included in the team. For addressing the whole team, my own experience is, for example, that you can easily refer to the team with your club’s name. Thus “come one Red’s” instead of “come on ladies.” That way you address every member of your team while also including everyone. Furthermore, it may take away the concern of some nonbinary people who are afraid to take up too much space, as there is no need for a separate way to address them.

Gender dysphoria

While nonbinary athletes experience positive feelings because of their sport, the inclusive climate, and the team spirit, the opposite also occurs. The third theme deals with nonbinary athletes experiencing gender dysphoria from or while playing their sport. This feeling of distress between their gender identity and their physical body (Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, and Pehl 2021) occurs both on the physical and mental level. On the physical level, the athletes describe having difficulty with their body while exercising. All three of the athletes experience discomfort from the experience of other people reading them as female or from their female body parts – with breasts in particular. Noah describes how not being able to wear a binder while exercising, makes it more difficult for them to play freely. A binder would normally flatten their chest. However, binders can be unsafe to wear while exercising, as they are tight and could restrict breathing. Clothing plays a role in the participants dealing with gender dysphoria. Moos and Noah, who play football, describe always choosing the bigger size in shirts available. A larger shirt helps them to hide the parts of their body they do not feel comfortable with. Noah explains that it helps that the team uniform is unisex. There is little difference with the men’s team and their uniform. The ‘androgynous’ look of the team uniform makes Noah feel more comfortable than a ‘feminine’ team uniform would. The idea of a more tight-fitting women’s shirt makes Noah

²⁴ “Nou individuele sport heeft dus gewoon niet, minder die sociale interactie en hier ben je heel erg samen één team. En dan specifiek een vrouwenteam waarin dus gender wel een grotere rol speelt dan wanneer je alleen bent. En dus over hoe d’r naar je wordt gekeken of over je wordt gepraat.” (Moos)

unhappy. "Yes, that would really make me angry. I would really find that nonsensical"²⁵ (Noah). Moos and Noah both mention that medical procedures would change their experience of sport. Moos explains how if they were to choose to use testosterone, that would probably change how others look at them and in which category they belong. Noah describes how surgically removing their breasts would aid them in feeling more comfortable in their body.

While talking about the chance of being misgendered while playing rugby, Lou explains that they do not have these experiences, as they do not understand Dutch. They would, therefore, not know if someone referred to them incorrectly. Lou also explains that they are less inclined to correct people when they misgender them. This is because Lou's native language is very gendered. They explain that "back at home, there is no way of people calling me by the gender-neutral pronoun, so I also use like the she/her pronoun and then in English I kind of use it as well, because it's like the way they would call me at home."

Moos and Noah do have experiences with being misgendered while playing football. The opponent is most often the person that misgenders them. This happens when they refer to the nonbinary athlete as their person to mark. "Because it does happen often enough that they say: 'I am marking her or pay attention, she walks over there' or I don't know what,"²⁶ Moos explains. Moos and Noah both also describe how they try to positively react to an opponent misgendering them. They try to use it as a form of motivation. Noah, for example, describes how "when they say, 'that is my woman,' I then only really think, I am not. Good luck, I am going to run. I will see you trying to come after me. Like, try your best. And in a way it may even help me because I then feel like, I am going to make it really difficult for you. Because you are acting so ***ty."²⁷ The most comfortable situation is, however, still when the misgendering is being prevented. Noah describes how they actively avoid situations in which it is difficult to correct people on using the wrong pronouns. They, for example, try to not be included in the explanation of an exercise during training, in order to avoid a situation in which their coach has to use their pronouns. Moos and Noah both formulate solutions to people misgendering others in sport. An option they name is respectfully using other physical characteristics to mark a play. Another option is calling someone by the number on their shirt. "It is really easy to say," Moos says, "you mark number 3."²⁸

²⁵ "Ja, dan zou ik echt boos worden. Dat zou ik echt onzinnig vinden." (Noah)

²⁶ "Want het gebeurt inderdaad wel vaak genoeg dat ze zeggen: ik heb haar of let ja, zij loopt daar of weet ik veel wat. (Moos)

²⁷ "Als ze dan zeggen, 'dat is mijn vrouw,' dan denk ik echt alleen maar dat ben ik niet. Succes, ik ga wel rennen. Ik zie jou wel achter mij aan komen. Van doe je best maar. En ergens kan het me misschien ook wel helpen, omdat ik dan zoiets heb en dat ik denk, ik ga het je mooi moeilijk maken. Omdat jij zo *** doet." (Noah)

²⁸ "Het is heel makkelijk om te zeggen, jij hebt nummer 3." (Moos)

While Noah and Moos do face gender dysphoria while playing football, they do not place an emphasis on the medical intervention they could choose to undertake. Instead, they try to elevate their discomfort in other ways. They choose to wear bigger shirts to hide their breasts, for example. While I do not often deal with gender dysphoria whilst playing football, I do understand Moos and Noah's feelings of discomfort. Gender dysphoria and misgendering are feelings that go very deep. Misgendering does not just affect me or the participants on a level an (other) honest mistake would. In my conversation with Lou, we reflect on how specific this feeling is. It is not a feeling that is easy to explain to someone who does not experience it. I reflect on it as a feeling as if your heart makes a short free fall, a sharp breath in, and then it goes away as quickly as it arrived. The feeling sometimes feels paradoxical as I am able to move on quite quickly, while I am also left with a stinging feeling. This does not mean, however, that every nonbinary person experiences misgendering in this way. It is a person dependent and situation dependent feeling. Lou does not seem to mind language as much, as their mother tongue does not have a nonbinary pronoun option. While Noah has a stronger mental reaction to being misgendered, where they seem to want to prove something against the person who misgenders them.

The gendered body

The fourth theme is about the contradiction based on the gendered body. This contradiction is based on the importance of gender on the physical body in sports. On the one hand the three athletes find it difficult to see sport and the categories in sport apart from gender. Lou finds it different to imagine rugby without gender categories. "Yeah, there's the thing that rugby is such a, yeah, it's such a like specific sport for this because it's very physical." It specifically becomes more difficult according to Lou when there is competition involved. "But if you are talking about like competition, [...] this world just doesn't work this way yet" (Lou). The participants find it easier to imagine individual sports or sport with little physical contact, like baseball, without a binary gender division. "Now team sports may still mean that you have the physical aspect and that it could possibly be unsafe, [that] is different. But if you look at another sport. [...] or something like athletics or so. That could very well be the case in theory,"²⁹ Noah explains.

The importance of gender in the current sporting climate would make it more difficult for Noah and Moos to make certain medical decisions regarding the use of hormone replacement therapy or the removal of breasts. They both describe that not being able to compete in their current team or category would be a reason to rethink medical procedures

²⁹ "Nu is teamsport misschien nog wel dat je juist het fysieke hebt en dat het eventueel onveilig zou kunnen zijn, [dat] is anders. Maar als je kijkt naar een andere sport. [...] of iets van atletiek of zo. Dat zou in theorie gewoon heel goed kunnen." (Noah)

or to stop playing football. Moos draws the line for participating in their current women's team at the use of hormone replacement therapy. "Yes, actually only hormones, because I think that the testosterone will make me, or so, stronger more easily, or so, more suitable for, yes, the male category. So that will have an influence from which I can understand that other women, who have low testosterone, find that unfair, because then I may get better purely because of my hormones and not because of my talent or something." This is a clear example of what Jordan-Young and Karkazis (2019) define as 'T talk.' Testosterone is made such an important hormone in contemporary sport, that the idea of someone taking more testosterone must result in a drastic change. Their continuation in sport as it was before, would therefore not be possible.

On the other hand of the contradiction, however, the athletes do not find gender the most important aspect of the physical body in sport. Both Moos and Noah describe how sport and its categorisation by only gender cannot be seen as physically fair. Noah explains that "[sport] will always be unfair. That's why you have people who play well and people who play badly. Why some people play in the premier league and some people play in the sixth division."³⁰ There would not be a difference between someone playing in the premier league of the sixth division if sport had a level playing field. There is, however, a difference in people's talents and, as Cooky and Dworkin (2013) argue, there is social inequality. Noah and Moos see skill and ability as more important than gender in the search for a categorization in sport that is as fair as possible. To illustrate this, Moos explains how the various levels of competition that currently already exist, could be used. "Because if you were only to do talent, for example, that would be possible and then you would have the first and second division mainly being men or something like that. That is also fine and that yes, that will also be possible and that it is simply mixed and that a woman who is very good can also be in the first team and participate with a men's team. That in itself could be possible"³¹ (Moos).

Finally, when asked about the purpose of sport, none of the athletes mentioned gender, fairness, or competition. The argument of trans* or nonbinary athletes having an unfair advantage in sport, therefore is not something the participants are often confronted with. When they did mention the physical body, they were referring to keeping their body and mind healthy. Staying physically and mentally healthy was mentioned by all three of the participants. This was also the case with the social aspect of sport. All three of the athletes mentioned wanting to meet new people – with Noah specifically referring to queer

³⁰ "[Sport] het blijft altijd oneerlijk. Dat is waarom je goede en slechte mensen hebt. Waarom er sommige mensen in de eredivisie spelen en sommige mensen in de zesde klassen." (Noah)

³¹ "Want als je alleen maar talent bijvoorbeeld zou doen, dat zou op zich wel kunnen en dan heb je dus dat de eerste en tweede klasse voornamelijk mannen gaan zijn ofzo. Dat is ook prima en dat ja, dat zal dus ook wel kunnen en dat het gewoon gemengd is en dat dus een vrouw die heel goed is, ook bij 1 kan zitten en met een mannenteam mee kan doen. Dat zou op zich wel kunnen." (Moos)

people – and having social interactions. Other goals for participating in a sport that were brought up were having fun, relaxing, releasing and gaining energy and personal growth in the form of trying new things or having discipline.

Gender is so intertwined in sport that it is difficult for anyone to imagine a sports world without a division in a male and female category. It does become easier when thinking about individual sports or sports with little physical contact. Gender and the gender binary are so important to society that changing physically in a way that society sees as you transversing from your assigned gender, brings you trouble. Your 'deviating' gender identity and want to participate in sport is not a societal problem that must be solved by society as a whole, but an individual problem. At least, that is what society makes us think. People quickly bring in that it would not be fair anymore. But why are there other physical differences that are not seen as unfair? As Cooky and Dworkin (2013) point out, that if it was only fair competition sport organisations were after, then they would also test for other 'performance enhancing genes.' They do not do this, however. And that means that while none of the participants focussed on the competitive aspect or the fairness of sport when talking about their motives to play sport, they are the once who possible face exclusion.

Visibility

The fifth theme deals with the visibility of nonbinary athletes, or the lack thereof. Visibility in this theme refers both to the visibility of a person as nonbinary and the broader social and cultural visibility of nonbinary athletes. Lou explains how they find it strange that they do not know of any professional nonbinary athletes. "It's just crazy that I really don't know. And it's not that I am not searching for that information, you know. Like I wouldn't Google it probably, but it is the information that probably I would attract in a way, you know?" This lack of visibility on the level of professional nonbinary athletes is also mentioned by Noah. All three athletes describe that having more nonbinary athletes visible on any level would be positive. It would mean they could have an example. This could be in the sense that it is nice that you are not the only one in your club, as Noah describes. "I think it would certainly have helped me if there had been an example in the team, for example. [...] That you are not the first in your team, but it did help that there were more people within [the sports club] who also identify that way"³² (Noah). Noah also explains that it would help them in starting a conversation about nonbinary athletes. "I just think it would be a very easy conversation starter, but also yes, it would be helpful in every aspect, plus the fact

³² "Ik denk dat het me zeker had geholpen als er bijvoorbeeld in het team een voorbeeld was geweest. [...] Dat je niet de eerste bent in je team, maar het hielp wel dat er binnen [sport club] al meer mensen waren die zich ook zo identificeren." (Noah)

that you might have an example”³³ (Noah). It could also be nice on the level of being able to idolise or be a fan of a nonbinary athlete. Lou describes how they are “looking forward to seeing more nonbinary athletes out there.”

This visibility could also result in nonbinary people participating in sport becoming a topic of conversation. All three athletes describe how this could help them. It could make it easier to start a conversation about the topic. It could create more acceptance and result in the normalization of nonbinary athletes. This possible discussion does also frighten the participants. All of them mention the inevitability of negative reactions when this discussion takes place. Lou and Noah describe how this discussion will be unavoidable, to eventually result into more knowledge, normalisation, and acceptance. “I think it would be such a strange discussions with people about this that I would probably not want to talk to them about. But I think it will be good. There will be a discussion because that, I think that’s like the first step into making something, I don’t know, like more acceptable or normalized,” Lou explains.

For me, the combination of nonbinary people being little visible in the cultural and social sense, and someone else in my team being nonbinary brought new difficulties. The idea that my teammates would keep comparing me to the other nonbinary teammate or that they would think I would think the same about things as they do, made me anxious. At the same time, I would welcome every new nonbinary athlete in my team and the world of sport. It seems like the conversation about nonbinary people participating in sport in the Netherlands is now slowly starting to happen. At the time of writing this thesis, a nonbinary footballer is suspended by the KNVB from participating in a recreational women’s competition. The player is AFAB and changed the gender marker in their passport from ‘Female’ to ‘Male’ after starting a medical transition. They now identify as nonbinary and play in a women’s team in Amsterdam (Roele 2024). The KNVB suspended the player, based only on the gender marker in their passport (Brammer 2024). They did not look at the player’s story or wants, like NOC*NSF asks sports associations to do. The KNVB is one of the sport associations who reviewed NOC*NSF’s ‘Guideline for gender- and sex diverse people.’³⁴ However, NOC*NSF’s statement that they “stand for an inclusive and socially safe sport in which everyone feels welcome regardless of sex, gender identity, ethnicity, age, disability or religion” (Temmerman, Ekvall, and de Leeuw 2023, 7), remains to be nothing more than a false promise for the KNVB. The same can be said about NOC*NSF’s ambition for everyone to be able to play a sport conform the gender they identify with. While there is no competition specifically meant for nonbinary athletes, the nonbinary footballer has

³³ “Ik denk dat het gewoon een hele makkelijke gespreksopening is, maar ook ja, in alle opzichten dat me dat wel zou helpen, plus het feit dat je misschien een voorbeeld hebt.” (Noah)

³⁴ The Guideline is published in Dutch (‘Handreiking gender- en seksediverse personen’). Quotes are translated by me.

expressed the discomfort they felt while playing in a men's team (Roele 2024). It makes me wonder whether the KNVB has even read NOC*NSF's guideline.

Gender euphoria

The last theme is about the gender euphoria nonbinary athletes experience from or while playing their sport. Two of the athletes explain how sport helps them to feel gender euphoria. Lou and Moos experience an external or physical type of gender euphoria (Beischel, Gauvin, and van Anders 2022). Sport helps them to change their body in a gender affirming way. When talking about the challenges clothing can cause for nonbinary athletes, Lou explains how the tight shirt in rugby gives them a gender affirming feeling. Instead of the clothes hindering them in their sport or causing gender dysphoria, they make them feel more muscular. "I think it's nice because I feel I have a wide shoulders in a tight shirt. I feel pumped." For Lou, feeling muscular is gender affirming. Moos uses exercise to get rid of their curves and fat, which they associate with "being more woman."³⁵ They explain that "so that's why I always have that slight obsession with a lot of sports and looking as muscular as possible in order to be a bit more masculine"³⁶ (Moos).

Moos experiences social gender euphoria when encountering opponents (Beischel, Gauvin, and van Anders 2022). They experience the confusion opponents express when encountering them as gender affirming. Being misgendered is difficult, as I discussed before when talking about gender dysphoria. Moos explains, however, how the confusion opponents express can also give them a positive feeling of gender euphoria. "So, in general, I always like all that confusion, because then I think yes, that's also how it should be, you know, because you shouldn't be able to just place me anywhere"³⁷ (Moos).

Both athletes experience gender euphoria from feeling less feminine and more masculine. To me it seems like Noah and Moos experience 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in some ways as polar opposites. By trying to present more 'masculine' they want to move away from being perceived as 'feminine.' In doing this, Noah and Moos use society's understanding of gender and the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). The polar opposition between 'man' and 'woman' (and 'masculine' and 'feminine'), ensures that by performing their gender 'masculine,' Noah and Moos move further away from a 'feminine woman' in society's eyes. Moos explains how they experience gender euphoria from the confusion others have. This to me illustrates the diversity and variation of nonbinary gender identities and expressions. Nonbinary people are sometimes reduced to existing somewhere in the middle of man and woman. Moos seems to want to move away from terms like 'femininity'

³⁵ "meer vrouw zijn." (Moos)

³⁶ "Dus daardoor heb ik altijd wel die ja lichte obsessie in veel sporten en zo spier mogelijk eruit zien om om dus wat masculiner te zijn." (Moos)

³⁷ "Dat vind ik dus in het algemeen altijd al wel fijn al die verwarring, want dan denk ik ja dan, dat hoort ook, weet je wel, want je hoort me niet zomaar ergens te kunnen plaatsen." (Moos)

or 'masculinity' and creates their own space in which they are not graspable by other. Moos cannot be contained by 'femininity' or 'masculinity' or put into a box.

Chapter 4: Conclusive remarks

Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed the everyday experiences of three young adult nonbinary athletes in team sports. Through interviews, I have researched how they navigate their gender identity while playing their sport. I analysed the various difficulties they face, but also the possibilities sports provide for them. For my first sub-question I examined what challenges and positives nonbinary athletes encounter when playing their sport. The three participants face multiple challenges as they play their sport. Firstly, they describe having to deal with gender dysphoria while playing and how clothing can help to handle the dysphoria. Secondly, the three participants all have to deal with other people misgendering them. In the case of opponents, they react to this in numerous ways. One participant, for example, often does not notice being misgendered as they do not speak Dutch, while another participant experiences being misgendered very deeply and results in them using it as a motivation. Thirdly, there are instances in which some type of discomfort is taken for granted by the participants in order to be or feel a part of the team.

The participants also have positive experiences from playing their sport. Firstly, they describe feeling at home in the 'masculine' character of their sport and accepted by their team. The teams provided space for the nonbinary athletes to come out as nonbinary. The participants describe this as helpful. The teams also provide a feeling of safety for the participants, as they can support the participants in difficult situations. Secondly, participants describe feelings of gender euphoria they experience from playing sport, both on a social and a physical level. Lastly, the participants express a wish for more nonbinary athletes to be visible. This visibility could then result in the start of a conversation about nonbinary people in sport.

The second sub-question is about how the nonbinary body plays a part in nonbinary athletes' and society's view of nonbinary athletes' participation in sport. For the participants, their body does not seem to play as big of a part in their participation in sport as I had anticipated. When talking about their body, they do not immediately discuss the possible medical interventions they could take. Instead, the participants discuss other steps they take to make themselves more comfortable in their body (while playing sport). These steps involve choosing certain clothing or exercising to change their body. When the participants do talk about medically changing their body, they focus on the implications the use of testosterone would have. Testosterone, therefore, remains to be an important topic. Society does not seem to have a clear idea of nonbinary athletes or their bodies. On the one hand, NOC*NSF preaches for a sport world in which everyone can participate. How the body of a nonbinary athlete looks seems to be less important. However, on the other hand, the recent example of the suspended nonbinary footballer tells us otherwise.

This conflicting situation in which NOC*NSF claims to be accepting, while in practice it seems that this is not the case, is exemplary for my third sub-question. This question is about the rules and regulations in place for nonbinary athletes in the Netherlands. NOC*NSF's policy seems to be very inclusive and considerate of the wishes of nonbinary athletes. However, the vagueness of when someone is actually allowed to participate in a competition makes examples like the nonbinary footballer possible to happen. This is also where my fourth sub-question emerges as fair play starts playing a role. The idea of fair play does not seem to play a significant role in the experiences and treatment of the participants. All the participants are AFAB and play in a women's competition. The role of the idea of fair play does change, however, when a nonbinary athlete starts a medical transition or changes their gender marker in their passport, as demonstrated by the KNVB suspending a nonbinary footballer. Although the exact regulations on when a trans* or nonbinary athletes is allowed to compete in which category remain unclear. The participants themselves find other aims such as health, social connections and having fun more important than fairness or competition. This could, however, also be the case because the three participants are all AFAB and not medically transitioning. Their body is, therefore, not used against them as a 'fair play argument.' Fair play could become more important to concern themselves with if they start medically changing their bodies.

Broadly speaking we can see that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach or solution for what nonbinary athletes need to be able to fully be themselves and play their sport. What a nonbinary athlete faces or needs is very person dependent. Choice of clothing is an example of this, as one participant experiences tight fitting shirts as gender dysphoric, while another participant finds them gender affirming. Another example is how differently people react to being misgendered and how it affects them. A second general conclusion is that it is helpful for nonbinary athletes to be given space to come out as nonbinary. This space can be provided in multiple ways, such as everyone sharing pronouns when introducing themselves or providing a nonbinary gender option on the application form. Important with this is that the space is provided for nonbinary people, but that they are not obliged to or pushed to come out. A third general conclusion is that while many solutions for nonbinary athletes focus on providing alternative options (like gender neutral locker rooms), the participants themselves emphasize their want to be part of the team. Nonbinary athletes being seen as and feeling a part of the team, therefore is a crucial factor in creating an inclusive and welcoming sport climate in team sports.

Limitations

The first limitation of this thesis is that there were only 3 people who participated. With this came that all the participants are AFAB. This means that I could not research the width

of nonbinary gender identities and expressions that exist. For example, nonbinary athletes who are AMAB will experience things differently in sport. Another limitation to this research is that none of the participants have taken any medical steps. The importance of medical transitions in the discussion surrounding the idea of fair play in sports could therefore not be fully investigated. Particularly the question surrounding the importance of testosterone is crucial in this discussion. The argument of fair play posed against trans* and nonbinary athletes would, therefore, probably play a bigger role if the questions surrounding testosterone could be researched. Lastly, a limitation of this research is that all the participants in this thesis are white. Race plays a key role in society's view of gender. As I explained in the introduction, non-Western athletes are more often accused of not belonging in the women's category in sport. Nonbinary athletes of colour could, therefore, face some other difficult situations than white nonbinary athletes do. Would nonbinary athletes of colour who are AFAB, for example, feel less comfortable with expressing 'more masculine' as there is a higher chance of being accused of not belonging in the women's category?

Implications

The last sub-question of my thesis is: "How can sport become a more inclusive and welcoming space for nonbinary athletes?" The participants gave some examples of how sport can be transformed into a more inclusive and more welcoming space for them. Firstly, they emphasized the importance of inclusive language, both to address the whole group and the words used to refer to them individually. For the whole group, it is helpful to use gender-neutral terms, such as the name of the club or the word 'team.' The participants were most often misgendered by their opponents. They, therefore, came up with alternatives to mark a player other than using pronouns. People can use the number that is on someone's shirt or respectfully name physical characteristics or clothing to identify a player, such as "the one with short hair" or "the one with the orange shoes." Secondly, the participants addressed how helpful it is when their team provided an opening for them to come out. Examples of this are everyone introducing themselves with pronouns or providing a nonbinary option on the registration form. Lastly, after coming out as nonbinary, the participants describe the importance of the club and teams having an inclusive stance. This open attitude towards the nonbinary athlete's needs allows for them to make different choices in their team clothing, for example. Important with this is still that there remains to be a focus on inclusion instead of differentiation, as the participant expressed their wish to be part of the team.

Future research

In this thesis I found that nonbinary athletes find being a part of the team particularly important. Future research could, therefore, look further into this importance, or compare it to athletes participating in an individual sport. Many individual athletes do train with a group. Is their want to be part of this group as pronounced as nonbinary athletes who play a team sport? Other recommendations for future research are research that studies (AFAB) nonbinary athletes who did medically change their body; research that studies AMAB nonbinary athletes, and analyses whether and how their experiences differ from AFAB nonbinary athletes; and research that studies nonbinary athletes of colour. Lastly, it remains to be important for future research to question what the purpose of sport is. Nonbinary people exist and want to participate in sport. It may be time, therefore, for the discussion to change from a question about fairness towards a question about how nonbinary athletes enrich and improve the world of sports as it is right now.

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Appendix 1: Flyer for finding interviewees (in Dutch and English)



The flyer features a colorful background with a gradient from pink to light blue. At the top, the word 'INTERVIEW' is written in large, orange, stylized letters. Below it, the text 'OP ZOEK NAAR' is centered. The flyer is decorated with illustrations of athletes: a volleyball player on the top left, a soccer player on the top right, a basketball player on the middle right, and a soccer player on the bottom. The word 'OPROEP' is written vertically in large, orange letters on both the left and right sides. The central text is framed by these vertical letters. The bottom section contains the text 'WIE BEN IK?' and 'EMAIL ME' in large, orange, stylized letters, followed by contact information and a call to action.

INTERVIEW

OP ZOEK NAAR

Studenten
(±18-25 jaar)
die zich identificeren als
non-binair
en een competitieve
team sport
doen
(of gedaan hebben)

OPROEP

OPROEP

WIE BEN IK ?

Ik ben Lotte (die/diens) en voor mijn MA Gender Studies scriptie wil ik analyseren hoe non-binaire atleten hun gender identiteit navigeren terwijl zij een sport beoefenen

EMAIL ME
als je interesse hebt

L.p.m.malcontent@uu.nl
twijfel niet om bij vragen een mail te sturen!

OPROEP



LOOKING FOR

(University) students

(±18-25 yo)

who identify as

nonbinary

and participate

(or used to)

in a competitive

team sport



WHO AM I?

I am Lotte (they/them) and for my MA Gender Studies thesis I want to analyse how nonbinary athletes navigate their gender identity while playing a sport

EMAIL ME

if you are interested

L.p.m.malcontent@uu.nl

don't hesitate to send me questions!



Appendix 2: Interview guide

Opening questions

- Is there something you started thinking about after our **previous conversation**?
Something you would like to **continue on**?

The team

- Did you **choose your club or sport** based on how they express themselves on **themes concerning LGBTQ+**?
- What effect does **playing in a team sport** have on you as a nonbinary player?
- How does it **help** you?
- How does it **hold you back**? (example: addressing the whole team with 'ladies')
- What would change for you, you expressing your gender, difficulties, concerns, or positives, if you were to participate in an **individual sport**?

Coming out as nonbinary

- What were your **considerations** in deciding to **come out** as nonbinary or not? (What did you want to gain? What did you fear losing or having to face?)
- Are there ways of **making it easier to come out** to your (new) team or club?
- Would it be easier if you could tell you are nonbinary when **registering** for the club? (Meaning that the trainers already know, for example).
- What holds you back when trying to **advocate** for yourself? (For example: calling people out on using the right pronouns, addressing gendered language ('woman of the match,' 'ladies')
What if they do not like you addressing these things or do not want to change it?

Clothing

- Does the **clothing** you wear **influence your ability to play** your sport (physically/mentally)?
- Where do you make the decision on wanting to 'fit in' and be seen as **part of your team** by others or opponents and **expressing your gender** in the way you want to?

Gendered spaces

- Would you prefer to change and/or shower in a **private changing room** (or **public gender-neutral changing room**?) or in a changing room with your team? What would be the positives and negatives of both options?
- (Why does E. not like to go to the gender-neutral changing room, but chooses to go to the women's public changing room?)
- Does your **sport's image as feminine or masculine** influence you in your gender expression? (Does it make it easier to express yourself the way you want? Are you afraid of certain stereotypes? Does it help that there are others (who are not NB) who act or dress more feminine/masculine than average?)

Opponent

- How does an **opponent misgendering** you affect you and your **ability to play** your sport? (Does it make you play less well?)
- Do you see a (future) **solution** for opponents misgendering you?

Role model/more visibility

- What would change for you if there were **more professional nonbinary athletes**?
- What would it mean if nonbinary athletes were **more 'visible'** in recreational sports? How would that affect you? (What if the initial reaction is negative?)

Physical differences

- What would need to change in order for you to **play more freely**, without needing to concern yourself with your own body? (example: binder, clothing, medical procedures)
- Is there a point in which **medical interventions** will **intervene** with your sport?
- What would be a **reason not to take a medical step** because of your sport? (having to leave the team, being seen as not belonging in your team or category, uncertainty regarding the rules)
- When do you feel it is **no longer 'fair'** to participate in your current category?
- Would you want to/ feel (more) comfortable to participate in the **other gender category**?
- Could sports be **classified in other ways** than gender? What would that look like? (mixed team competition, would you want this?)
- Does this depend on the **type of sport**? (football/basketball vs. baseball)
- Can sport be **physically fair**?
- What do you find more important, a **physically fair sport** or the **abolition of gendered categories**? Can both be attained?
- What is for you the **aim of sport**? (And what do you think others see as the aim of sport?)
- (Is a **third category** in sport an option?)