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RESISTING GENDERED SPORT ROLES: A CRIMINOLOGICAL SPORTS ANALYSIS OF
WOMEN'S RUGBY IN THE U.S.

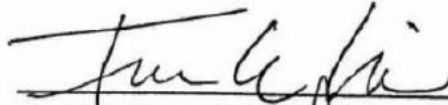
BY

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RESISTING GENDERED SPORT ROLES: A CRIMINOLOGICAL SPORTS ANALYSIS OF
WOMEN'S RUGBY IN THE U.S.

BY

KELSEY BASHAM

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

2018

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis research project to the women's club rugby program at Eastern Kentucky University. Without the last six years spent in the sport of rugby at my institution, growing both as a player and a coach, I would have never found the passion that fueled this research study. It is the confidence, pride, and unwavering dedication of the women I have met on my team that has molded me into the woman, academic, rugby player, teammate, and friend that I am today. I cannot express the level of gratitude I feel for the values and lessons I have taken from our time together, but my hope is that this project emulates the level of comradery and dedication we have to one another. Thank you.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my mother for ceaselessly encouraging my academic endeavors and my loving wife for her unparalleled support through this process.

ABSTRACT

The passing of Title IX has allowed women of all ages to begin engaging with contact sports in the United States. Although growing, women's participation in contact sports remains adolescent in comparison to men's. The elements of physicality, masculinity, and gendered expression often associated with rough sports may affect women's willingness to play them as well as others' perceptions of the women who play them. Rugby, a high-intensity contact sport played by both men and women throughout the world, is one of the fastest growing sports in the U.S. Rugby offers a unique opportunity for women to play against other women under the exact same rules as men's leagues. Studies have been completed on the ways that femininity, identity, and sexuality operate in the context of rugby in numerous countries around the world, but have yet to be performed in the U.S. Drawing on literature from the sociology of sport and sports criminology, the purpose of this study is to understand why women in the U.S. choose to play rugby, how rugby has impacted women's experiences with sexuality, gender, and identity, and what rugby provides women as one of the only available full contact sports. Utilizing an online anonymous survey instrument, 350 responses were collected for analysis.

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I: Introduction

"I tried to break her neck...I don't know what she's trying to prove. I'm out here trying to make a living and she's out prancing around making folly with a man's game," Wally Florence, a football player for the Bridgeport Jets, said of Patricia Palinkas, the first female professional football player, when she took the field for her inaugural game (Ryzek, 2014, p. 281). The year was 1970 when Palinkas became the first recorded female in the U.S. to play for a professional football team as the placekick holder (a player who holds the football for the kicker to attempt a conversion). Although her first hold failed in that game against the Jets, Palinkas went on to complete two successful holds out of three in their 26-7 win, making history for females in football (Ryzek, 2014).

Despite Palinkas' success in that first game, and the games she played to follow, negative reactions to women in sports were not unusual. Contact sports at the time, and most sports in general, were not a dominant space for women (Wilde, 2006). This is evident in the responses that followed Palinkas debut. For example, the coach for the Jets, Ray Mathews, said "this whole thing degrades football" and the commissioner for the Atlantic Coast Football League, Cosmo Iacovazzi, claimed "I just don't feel it's right for a woman to be on the football field" (Ryzek, 2014, p. 281). In fact, it is argued that Palinkas was only ever given the opportunity to become the first woman placekick holder to draw more fans out to the games of the financially dwindling Orlando Panther franchise. However, her participation, regardless of the circumstances, was a landmark for women in contact sports (Ryzek, 2014).

At the start of 1970, just one in 27 girls in the United States played high school sports (Women Sports Foundation, 2011). Only 310,000 women in total participated in sports at the high school and collegiate level in 1971 (New York Times, 2012). That is one tenth of one percent (.1%) of the total population for that year. Shortly after Patricia Palinkas took the field for the first time, the historical passage of Title IX in 1972 would drastically change the sporting world for women. Opportunities for advancement in sports have skyrocketed for women at the high school, collegiate, national, and coaching levels with more women taking a role in the athletic world than ever since the enacting of Title IX. In 2011, two in five girls participated in high school sports and nearly 3.4 million women nationwide took part in both high school and collegiate athletics (Women's Sports Foundation, 2011; New York Times, 2012). Furthermore, women's participation in football has grown immensely, with about 2000 girls reporting that they play the sport in 2017 (Gaines, 2016). One of those, Becca Longo, was the first to land a college football scholarship to Division II Adams State in Alamosa, Colorado (Skiver 2017). It is evident that there has been considerable advancement for women's inclusion in sports.

While these developments are paramount to the movement for gender equality, gender disparities are still prevalent in various forms today. According to a 2011 study by the Women's Sport Foundation (WSF), women receive 1.3 million fewer high school sport opportunities, 60,000 less scholarship opportunities, and only 22% of all collegiate coaching positions. Furthermore, the WSF states that only 25% of women

are getting sufficient physical activity which leads inactive women to disordered eating, depression, and low self-esteem linked to a poor body-image.

One of the most damaging issues for women in sports is their expectation to adhere to gender roles. Social gender constructions perpetuate problems for those that compete in sports who do not conform to typically accepted standards about gender, expression, and sexuality. Women who enter the sporting world, do so under the implication that sports were a social and physical space that belonged to men (Cunningham, 2012). Consequently, the more the sport is associated with masculinity, the more stereotypes and backlash women receive for their participation. Some of the widespread stereotypes about women in masculine sports include being too manly, mostly lesbian or bisexual, or inferior to men that play the same sport (Wilde, 2006). Gendered interpretations of women in sports hinder opportunities to participate in those that are most masculinized.

No area of sports is more masculinized than full-contact sports, where women experience the greatest disparities (Glover, 2011). Since full contact sports are dangerous, Title IX prohibits women from competing on men's teams at post-secondary institutions when women's teams are unavailable (Glover, 2011). Yet, contact intensive sports such as football, hockey, boxing, wrestling, or lacrosse are not typically offered for women or feature restrictive rules that eliminate the nature of contact from the game (Glover, 2011). However, the contact sport of rugby is providing women the opportunity to compete at all levels of play in the United States and by the same rules as the men's game. Rugby is one of the most masculinized

sports based on its aggressive qualities, but women increasingly play rugby in the United States, as it is one of the fastest growing sports in the country (World Rugby, 2016).

Since rugby is growing rapidly and serving women in a capacity unlike any other team sport in the United States, it provides an ideal subject matter for the study of the operation of gender in contact sports. The purpose of this research project therefore, is to understand why women increasingly play rugby in the United States. Additionally, I want to identify how playing rugby interacts with and is impacted by gender, sexuality, identity, and confidence for women while offering a form of resistance to social understandings of women in sports. Before providing an overview of the methods employed in this research I will first provide a review of the current and applicable literature from sociology, gender studies, and criminology on the topic as well as cover some key definitions related to gender as a concept.

II. Literature Review

Team sports with high levels of contact continue to offer lopsided opportunities for men and women in the United States. In 2016, females held only 1,992 high-school football positions versus over one million males (Statista, 2017). However, as members of most football teams, women are typically limited to the placekicker, placekick holder, and occasionally quarterback positions unless they are members of women only teams (McManus, 2011). In other team sports, such as lacrosse and ice hockey, the rules about body checking (when a player uses their body to knock an opponent and separate them from the puck or ball) vary for women, reducing or eliminating the full-contact factor found in the men's game (International Ice Hockey Federation, 2018; USA Lacrosse, 2018). Women are also expected to differentiate themselves from men in various sports such as tennis, gymnastics, volleyball, and track by wearing traditionally feminine clothing like skirts, skorts, bikinis, leotards, or tight spandex (Compton, 2016).

Unlike team contact sports such as football, lacrosse, and ice hockey, rugby is offered in the United States for both men (men against men) and women (women against women), with the same exact rules and expectations at all levels of play: youth, high school, collegiate, competitive club, professional, and national (USA Rugby, 2017). Although not available at every secondary school or college in the country, rugby was deemed the fastest growing sport by the Sports and Fitness Industry in 2014 with almost 120,000 registered members of USA Rugby, (the governing body for all things rugby in the United States), and about 1.5 million players in total in 2016 (World

Rugby, 2016). The gender gap in rugby is much narrower than other contact sports in the United States too. Women composed 25% of the total amount of registered USA Rugby players in 2016, as compared to just 0.2% of football players. Women's participation in rugby is also on the rise in the last four years, whereas football has declined (Andersen, 2017).

Besides being the only widespread full-contact team sport available for women at all levels, rugby is unique because it allows women to break the socially constructed and imposed standards of gender in sports and begin engaging in what is most typically believed to be a masculine space. Unlike women's ice hockey and lacrosse, women's rugby is played by the same rules as men (World Rugby, 2018). Unlike women's lacrosse, tennis, and field hockey, women's rugby players are not expected to wear skirts, or any type of varying clothing implemented simply because they are women. Furthermore, women's rugby does not require alternative equipment for their protection, simply some cleats and a mouthguard, which is optional (World Rugby, 2018).

Before delving into the current literature specific to gender in rugby, I will first define some key terms and offer a discussion of the sociological literature on gender in sports more generally.

Definitions: Key Concepts and Terms

Despite overwhelming belief that gender and sex are synonymous, Nobelius (2004) asserts that the two have different meanings. Where sex is the genitalia a person is born with, gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture

delineates as masculine or feminine (Nobelius, 2004). Gender identity then, is a person's internal identification with prescribed roles of gender but is often limited to social expectations rather than personal choice (Nobelius, 2004). A person who operates with a gender identity that is congruent with their sex is called cisgender and is perceived by society to be 'normal'. However, some people experience gender dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder which is known as a discomfort or sense of incongruity with the gender role associated with their biological sex (Nobelius, 2004).

Where biological sex is the genitalia a person is born with and gender identity is how a person operates within, or outside of, the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, the American Psychological Association [APA] (2018) states that gender expression is how one presents oneself through behavior, clothing, and appearance. Gender is often expected to be expressed along the boundaries associated with femininity and masculinity but APA (2018) claims that one may or may not conform to the socially defined behaviors and characteristics associated with either one.

When the borderline of gender expression between woman and man is crossed, sexual orientation is often called into question. Sexual orientation is how a person is sexually attracted to another person (APA, 2018). Heterosexuality is defined as a sexual attraction to the opposing sex. Homosexuality is defined as a sexual attraction to the same sex and is often referred to as 'gay' for men and 'lesbian' for women. Bisexuality is an attraction to both sexes. Queer refers to someone who is fluid in both identity and orientation, meaning attracted to whomever, regardless of gender and sexual orientation (APA, 2018).

A person whose gender identity is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth is known as transgender (APA, 2018). Transgender is an umbrella term to describe anyone that experiences gender dysphoria but does not require that they surgically transition. Being transgender also does not imply a sexual orientation. A transgender person may identify as any sexual orientation because gender and sexual orientation operate independently (APA, 2018).

Perceiving gender in terms of masculinity and femininity and as associated with a person's biological sex can be understood as operating in the gender binary (Tilsen, Nylund, & Grieves, 2007). This two-fold system is the mainstream in most societies, including the United States, and dictates expectations of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation for all people (Tilsen, Nylund, & Grieves, 2007). Although the binary is most widely accepted, it excludes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and any other person that does not identify precisely as one of the two prescribed genders, who often term themselves androgynous or non-binary (Tilsen, Nylund, & Grieves, 2007). An alternative to the binary is to view gender as fluid or on a spectrum. Fluidity and spectrum interpretations of gender encompass all sexes, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations, which operate independently from one another (Butler, 2004). The definitions described above are applicable for understanding the literature reviewed in the sections following.

Gender Roles in Sport

An understanding of the role of gender in sports is necessary to fully deconstruct the ways gender operates in rugby. There is an abundance of literature

from sports criminology and the sociology of sport summarizing the nature of gender in sports to include the masculinization of the sporting space (Akingbala & Kontogianni, 2013; Hylton & Totten, 2001; MacClancy, 1996; Wilde, 2006), gender stereotypes in sport (Krane, 2001; Wilde, 2006), gender otherization (Senne, 2013), non-conformist expressions of gender (Camporesi, 2017; Minichino, 2009), perceptions of sport and sexual orientation (Akingbala & Kontogianni, 2013; Blinde & Taub, 1992; Lenskyj, 1995), maintenance of social standards of gender in sport (Kane, 1988; Tuero, Gonzalez-Boto, Espartero, & Zapico, 2014), and transgender athlete issues in sport (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, and Haycraft, 2016; Tilsen, Nylund, & Grieves, 2007; Tuero, Gonzalez-Boto, Espartero, & Zapico, 2014).

Sports are a public space in which social values are openly expressed (MacClancy, 1996). Societal belief systems are reproduced in sport, like any social institution, injecting inequalities and discriminations about gender, sexuality, and body into the sport space (Hylton & Totten, 2001). Since sports were initially only intended for men, they are inherently constructed as a masculine space (Wilde, 2006). Accordingly, opportunities for boys and men in sports have allowed them to perform hypermasculine displays of physical power and aggression without opposition because it aligns with social expectations of masculinity (Akingbala & Kontogianni, 2013). Consequently, strength and athleticism are viewed positively for males whereas females are expected to take on soft, nurturing roles that do not allow for participation in rough sports (Wilde, 2006). For this reason, women entering the space of sports are limited to feminized sports or risk becoming stereotyped negatively if

they play masculine ones. Senne (2016) adds that male athletes are viewed as the norm while women in sports are otherized. For example, a male soccer team is labeled as “the soccer team,” and a women’s soccer team would be labeled “the women’s soccer team,” or the *other* soccer team (Senne, 2016).

To avoid appearing too masculine, women are expected to dress differently than men or accentuate feminine qualities when playing sports. In an analysis of the techniques used to ensure women adhere to social norms about gender expression, Krane (2001) argues that women in sport are often expected to dress in alternative uniforms than men, such as skirts, skorts, or spandex, that delineates their femininity or sexualizes their figures. Additionally, Krane (2001) states that there are constraints of traditional femininity that lead to campaigns to show that women “can be athletes and feminine too” (p. 116). In example, women athletes are asked to appear on makeup and hair magazines, in shampoo commercials, and in bathing suit spreads to ensure the public that athleticism will not negate their femininity (Krane, 2011).

Not only are women expected to adhere to social cues about their outward expression in sports. Ideal body types are set forth for women by the social body and reified in the media which can lead to negative stereotypes, or even the questioning of the validity of a women’s gender if she does not look or perform like a ‘typical’ woman (Camporesi, 2017). When a woman exhibits an extraordinary performance – often associated with heightened strength, speed, agility, and aggressiveness which are socially prescribed masculine traits, Camporesi (2017) claims that gender verification could be required to prove that she is a legitimate competitor. In addition, Minichino

(2009) argues that gender specific rules in sport are used to attempt to keep women from crossing the borderline of masculine body types and performance. Based on an outdated idea of femininity, rules in sports such as hockey or lacrosse are altered to reduce or eliminate bodily contact because it is a masculine performance characteristic (Minichino, 2009).

When a person behaves, dresses, appears, or performs in non-conformist ways to their socially assigned gender role, Lenskyj (1995) and Blinde and Taub (1992) contend that they become vulnerable to sexual discrimination and stereotypes as gay or lesbian, regardless of their legitimate sexual orientation. Consequently, there is an overwhelming stereotype of women who engage in sports, especially the most masculine associated sports, to be lesbian or bisexual (Lenskyj, 1995; Blinde & Taub, 1992). Akingbala and Kontogianni (2013) performed interviews with various lesbian and transgender athletes on their experiences with discrimination and stereotyping in the most masculinized sports. They found that discrimination and stereotypes led the interviewees to acts of self-policing their gender identity and expression when engaging in sports, especially the most masculinized.

Gender roles and stereotypes in sports are maintained by the social body in various ways, warranting extreme difficulty for non-conforming athletes to operate comfortably in the sport space. One of the most influential institutions by which gender roles in sport are defined is the media. In research analyzing media coverage of female athletes before, during, and after Title IX, Kane (1988) argues that the media continued to enforce stereotypes about “gender appropriate sports” almost twenty

years after the law's passage by increasing coverage of females in sports like tennis but failing to cover women in sports like rugby. Tuero, Gonzalez-Boto, Espartero, and Zapico (2014) found that these socializations of sport and gender start during childhood and are reified in school settings. Their research analyzed a population of 3,506 children, finding that boys' overall participation was in activities most associated with male traits such as strength, stamina, aggressiveness, and risk taking, and girls' with rhythm, expression, flexibility, and coordination. While most of society operates by these unwritten rules regarding gender roles and expectations in sport without question, Tilsen, Nylund and Grieves (2007) emphasize that these misconceptions create problems for anyone that wants to play sports but does not adhere to the socially accepted standards about heteronormative gender.

For those that do not identify as the gender they are assigned at birth, or even a gender within the binary, playing sports is complicated by misunderstandings which often leads to their total exclusion from the sporting world (Tilsen, Nylund & Grieves, 2007). Transgender athletes face complex issues in the realm of sports. In a study of the literature on transgender athletes, Jones, Arcelus, Bouman, and Haycraft (2016) explain that transgender females (male to female) are perceived to hold an advantage in sports due to high levels of androgenic hormones like testosterone. However, transgender men (female to male) are not typically believed to have an advantage, although they receive hormone treatments when transitioning. Additionally, most sport laws require a certain amount of time on prescribed cross-sex hormones, usually a couple of years, and in many cases require complete gender-confirming surgery

(Tuero, Gonzalez-Boto, Espartero, & Zapico, 2014). Policies like these, though attempting to become more inclusive, limit or exclude transgender athletes who are in the process of transitioning, experience genital dysphoria, or cannot have gender-confirming surgery – a very expensive and encompassing process (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman & Haycraft, 2016). The authors conclude that a lack of research has been performed on hormonal advantages in transgender athletes and most laws concerning transgender participation in sports are overinterpreted based on misinformation. Transgender athletes are left with few options to participate in sports and often experience negative stigmas associated with their perceived advantages (Jones, Arcelus, Bouman & Haycraft, 2016).

The constructions of gender and body in sport are incredibly complex and set the stage for the experiences of every athlete. The space of key interest to this study is contact sports, specifically rugby. The next section will include literature available on the relations of gender, sexuality, identity, and body as they intersect with rugby.

Rugby as Resistance

Rugby has been dominated by men since its foundation in the early 1800s and carries with it the hegemonic masculinities of sport. A rough, aggressive, high-contact, and brutal game, rugby is not the socially ideal space for women based on perceptions of hegemonic femininity (Camporesi, 2017; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Krane, 2001; Little, 2001; Minichino, 2009; Senne, 2016; Wilde, 2006). However, rugby provides a space for resistance to the gendered roles in sport (Hudson, 2010; Joncheray, Level, & Richard, 2016; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Laurin, 2017), and to the expectations of

body, strength, and beauty (Chase, 2006; Liston, 2005; Madrigal, Robbins, Gill, & Wurst, 2015; Paul, 2015; Russell, 2004;).

Around the world in the early 1900s, women began attempting to play rugby as it gained popularity internationally. In Australia, for example, women played rugby as early as the 1920s. However, they were met with extreme outrage and calls to leave the sport of rugby to men. In a research study of the first ever case of Australian women staging a rugby league match, Little (2001) found that women were ridiculed by cartoonists and other media personnel, medical circles, and the public for rugby's disdain of traditional feminine roles. He explains that their bodies were assumed incompetent to handle the strenuousness of the contact, with claims that their reproductive organs would likely be ruined and their primary roles as mothers threatened. In addition, the media portrayed these women as fat or unattractive, foolish and unknowledgeable of the game, more concerned with their hair and makeup techniques than their performance, lacking competitive will, and too emotional to handle the intensity of the game (Little, 2006). Although widespread international perceptions like those in 1920s Australia were the strongest during the emergence of women in rugby, hegemonic roles of masculinity and femininity are still relevant for understanding gender roles in rugby today. Specifically, it is important to understand how dominant constructions of gender and body have led to resistance through rugby.

Resistance in rugby occurs in multiple forms. The first of these is resistance to gendered roles associated with dominant ideology about femininity and masculinity in

sport. In a study of twelve French players from the women's national team, Joncheray, Level and Richard (2012) found that some players felt they had to engage in socially defined feminine activities to offset the masculine identity associated with the sport of rugby. However, more than half of the team felt they did not have to adhere to feminine social norms and played without any regard to them. In a similar study, using focus groups with women rugby players at Cambridge University of England, Hudson (2010) discussed topics of gender identity, contexts of violence, sexualization of women, and the challenges women face as rugby players. The results of the conversations provided that women in rugby both rely on the sport as an outlet to express their disdain for typical representations of femininity and for displaying their 'true selves' unlike before they found the sport. Women also expressed feelings of ambivalence regarding gender, claiming they do not fall in the categories as "just manly" or "just womanly" (Hudson, 2010).

When studying the French women's team performance behaviors during rugby training, Laurin (2017) assessed how women respond when men are present during their practices. The purpose of the study was to find out if women were affected by a stereotype threat, or the awareness that a negative stereotype can be used as a basis for interpreting their behaviors. The author's results showed that the more a woman was aware of the stereotypes associated with her performance in rugby, the more she de-identified from the group and the behaviors she perceived to be associated with the negative stereotypes (Laurin, 2017). Occupying a space not intended for oneself can lead to added pressures that may individualize performance rather than unite it.

In a similar study, Liston (2005) found that women who play soccer, rugby, and Gaelic football in Ireland experienced treatment as an outsider group, becoming otherized by both their male counterparts and Irish social body. However, despite negative perceptions from others, the women interviewed said that they felt a sense of emancipation and embraced confidence in their participation in male dominated sports, which has weakened social pretenses in their country around their athleticism and physicality.

In countries with more highly enforced patriarchal values such as Fiji, Kanemasu and Molnar (2015) explain that women acting outside of the social roles and boundaries of gender are at risk for more severe sanctions than general stereotyping. They assert that women may experience social banishment, transphobic or homophobic bullying, and familial condemnation including beatings or evictions from their homes if they refuse to stop playing. However, rather than individualizing and deidentifying with the rugby group, Fijian women found refuge, agency, and resistance in rugby and its community (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2015). The authors interviewed women who sought resistance to the social standards about women in sports and found that “players, coaches, and supporters (mainly the players’ close friends and partners) form close-knit communities, centered around their clubs, that provide a sense of safety and compensate for the absence of institutional and family support” (p. 8). Furthermore, gay women who were unable to find refuge elsewhere, felt welcomed to the rugby community (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2015).

In addition to resistance against gender roles, Chase (2006), Liston (2005), Madrigal, Robbins, Gill, and Wurst (2015), Paul (2015), and Russell (2004) assess the ways in which rugby offers a form of resistance to gendered body standards. Where variations in body size, strength, and toughness are traditional values for men, rugby provides a space for those traits to be embraced and experienced by women. For example, in a study of satisfaction among ten female rugby players, ten female cricketers, and ten female netballers in the United Kingdom, Russell (2004) found that the women's rugby players specifically were encouraged by the physicality, strength, and power of the game. The women claimed that they felt positively about their bodies as tools for an effective performance, especially when body types that were not always preferable in other sports or activities were required for success in rugby. One of the players stated that the necessity of various body sizes in rugby made her feel more positive and confident about herself, in turn helping her engage more positively with exercise. Although the women of the study felt positively about their bodies when engaging with rugby, they still felt unconfident off the field where such body types are not socially preferred.

Using ethnographic methods such as interviews and on sight observation of women who play rugby for four midwestern teams in the United States, Chase (2006) found that women were drawn to rugby because their physicality was too abrasive for other women's sports or they were unable to find a comfortable place in other highly physical sports such as football. The interviewees stated that the element of contact in rugby made them feel powerful. When discussing the impact of contact on their

bodies, many of the interviewees also pointed to the pride they felt when they found they had bruises or black eyes because it stood for their toughness.

Much of the critique of women's rugby players come from the socially constructed idea that women's bodies are not built for 'hard' activity like men's. It is expected that women would be turned away or unwilling to participate in contact sports for this reason. In interviews with five male and six female players, Madrigal, Robbins, Gill, and Wurst (2015) addressed how and why they choose to play through pain and injury. The results of the study found that players are inherently drawn to the sacrifice of one's own body for the game, team, and sport. Additionally, there was no significant difference between the male and female players and their willingness to play through the pain and injury they experienced in rugby (Madrigal, Robbins, Gill, & Wurst, 2015).

Paul (2015) also completed a study that provided results disproving the theory that women's bodies are incapable of withstanding high levels of physicality. By analyzing women's experiences in roller derby, mixed-martial arts, and rugby, Paul (2015) found that their experiences generated three outcomes: physical empowerment from finding previously unrecognized physical abilities; healthy and positive body image through redefining of body standards; and growth in confidence and self-expression outside of the sport. Moreover, the women in the study generally expressed an increase in bodily agency, explaining that they could perform and handle much more than they previously thought (Paul, 2015).

Transgender Athletes: Challenging the Gender Binary

One of the areas of gender that necessitates more research, discussion, and analysis in rugby is the participation of transgender athletes. According to Athlete Ally (2017) transgender athletes lack inclusion and protection in rugby worldwide. Since all sports operate on the assumption of the gender binary, finding a place for transgender athletes is seen as increasingly difficult. However, much of the little research that does exist on transgender athletes competing in contact sports is distorted or misinformed. World Rugby (2018) operates on the outdated Stockholm Consensus from the former International Olympic Committee (IOC) policy (that no longer exists), requiring transgender athletes to have complete genital surgery and gonadectomy for participation with their identified gender. However, the IOC removed this requirement from their policy in 2016 but World Rugby has yet to adhere to the new requirements. Furthermore, transgender athletes that have taken hormone replacements for a certain period, usually two years, are no longer allowed to participate with their biologically assigned sex. This means that transgender athletes who do not wish to have transformative genital surgery, cannot afford the costs, or are unable to complete the surgical process for any other reason, are forced to completely stop playing rugby. Numerous calls have been made to change the discriminatory policy by World Rugby (2018), especially from Athlete Ally (2017) but no clear changes have been made to move towards inclusivity.

The totality of this literature encompasses the multitude of information available for understanding gender in sport and resistance to traditional gender roles

in rugby. While there is significant information on women's engagement with rugby and how that intersects with the traditionally masculine sporting space, there remains a lack of in-depth research on women's perceptions and experiences with the sport in the United States. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to start to fill the void in the literature by exploring why women play rugby in the United States and how expressions of gender, sexuality, body, and confidence are performed and perceived through women who play rugby. This will be done through the employment of a cross-sectional survey. In the next section, I introduce a theoretical framework to form a basis for analyzing the results of the study.

III: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is a three-part combination of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), unapologetic feminism (Hardy, 2015), and queer resistance theory (Broad, 2001). The theory of cultural hegemony provides that the ruling class has the power to socially construct values, morals, and ideology. Once a belief system is constructed by the powerful, society is manipulated into adhering to those projected principles (Gramsci, 1971). In the United States, the dominant hegemonic constructions of gender, masculinity, femininity, and heterosexuality permeate every social dimension, including sports (Camporesi, 2017; Minichino, 2009; Senne, 2016; Wright & Clark, 1999) which are the primary focus of this study. I will use Antonio Gramsci's hegemony as a framework for deconstructing gender roles within rugby in the United States.

The types of resistance to standards about gender roles and body expectations are argued by Hardy (2015) and Broad (2001) to be the product of unapologetic feminist and queer resistance patterns. The term "unapologetic feminism," Hardy (2015) describes, is derived by the development of women to 'apologize' for their behavior as they have begun participating in masculine defined activities such as contact sports. Using the term 'female apologetic,' the author claims that female athletes have been expected to negotiate negative stereotypes of their involvement in such sports by embodying the "traditional, hegemonic, heterosexual notion of femininity," (p. 156). After studying Canadian women's national rugby players, Hardy (2015) discovered that women resisted the apologetic stereotype by refusing to

acknowledge the stereotypes of them by the media and the social body and embracing their non-conformist behavior unapologetically (Hardy, 2015). The theory of unapologetic feminism will be used to identify the ways that women in the U.S. negotiate negative reactions to their participation in rugby and how they respond.

Expanding on the concept of the 'female apologetic,' Broad (2001) argues that women's participation in sports can be contextualized as a "queer resistance." The author argues that unapologetic behavior transgresses gender and destabilizes the sexuality binary. After completing an ethnographic research study of female rugby players, Broad (2001) claims that understandings of women's sport are informed by styles of queer resistance and defiance by offering a community for those that are not accepted by society, family, friends, or anyone else. The theory of queer resistance will provide a framework for understanding if and how rugby contravenes gender. Furthermore, I will seek to find out if rugby offers a form of acceptance for those that resist hegemonic perceptions of gender. Next, I will summarize the methods utilized for conducting the study.

IV: Methods

The selected method for this research study was an online cross-sectional survey. A cross-sectional survey is a useful quantitative method for collecting data on the distribution of factors and outcomes in a population at a specified time (Barrett & Kirwan, 2009). One advantage to using a cross-sectional research study is that there is no long-term obligation to follow individuals, like in longitudinal cohort studies. Secondly, cross-sectional research allows for the examination of multiple factors and outcomes in one complete study. The purpose of using surveys to collect data is that it was easy to distribute, quick for data collection, and provided anonymous feedback so that the answers were less biased. A disadvantage of this type of study may be a temporality bias, known as the inability to gauge factors and outcomes over time to draw more causal conclusions. Additionally, survey research leaves room for errors such as the misunderstanding of questions, incompleteness of surveys, and difficulty in distribution (Barrett & Kirwan, 2009). Nonetheless, cross-sectional survey research was the best fit for collecting the type of data necessary for this project.

The purpose of the survey in relation to the research question was to understand how women who currently play or have previously played rugby in the United States experience gender, gender expression, sexuality, bodily confidence, and occupying masculinized spaces. Secondly, I wanted to gauge if and how women resist hegemonic masculinities and femininities through the sport of rugby. Third, I looked to test men's perceptions and understandings of women who play a masculine sport. Since sport in the U.S. operates on the assumption of the gender binary and my study

seeks to understand identifying women's experiences, including questions that operated in the gender spectrum were difficult if not impossible. Despite this, the survey was designed to be open to transgender rugby athletes and their experiences as best as possible.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument crafted for this study contains six sections, each of which was designed to explore the relationship between playing rugby and gender. Section 1 contained questions focused on capturing demographics, such as age, gender, and race. Section 2 provided questions about respondents' background in rugby with questions such as "why did you decide to play rugby?" Section 3 included questions focused on the relationship between gender and sports. For example, to capture information on the inclusion of women in contact sports, the following question was asked: "which high contact sports had female teams available at your high-school?" Section 4 contained questions on the relationship between physicality, confidence, and rugby. For instance, the question "are you more confident about navigating a gym and working out because of rugby?" was asked. Section 5 focused on perceptions and stereotypes of gender in rugby. For example, the following question was asked: "what do you think is a common perception of women rugby players on your campus, or by the public generally if you do not attend college?" The last section, section 6, encompassed questions on sexuality in rugby such as "have you been referred to or perceived as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (regardless of your sexual orientation) because you play rugby?"

Questions were formatted in multiple ways to include single answer multiple choice, select all that apply multiple choice, true or false, and short written answer responses. Respondents were also asked to explain their answers in a few instances. The survey was designed online to be easily distributed to the population in question. The website used to construct the survey was SurveyHero.com. The platform was selected for its simplicity, free price, and automatic data summary. Respondents could only fill out the survey once and were not given feedback on any survey results. The survey instrument was IRB approved.

Data

In totality, the population targeted included women, transgender women, men, and transgender men who have played or currently play rugby at any level in the U.S. This population was selected as they represent people currently or previously engaged in the sport in the U.S. The population was accessed online through social media. My involvement in the sport as a player and a coach allowed for access to various social media group pages as well as to local teams and contacts.

The survey was distributed via Facebook and email lists. I joined four large public Facebook groups known as “Women’s Rugby Connection,” “Scrumhalf Connection,” “Rugby Coaches,” and “Rugby Women’s Mentorship Group” where thousands of players all over the country can share practice, match, lodging, and coaching advice on one platform. Using an IRB approved recruitment script, I requested respondents by posting publicly to those pages. From there, coaches, captains, or other members of United States teams shared the post and asked their

respective teams to take the survey. Additionally, I sent out the survey to the closest women's and men's conferences in the Kentucky area and asked that they distribute the survey to anyone they knew. Surveying took place from January 1, 2018 to March 1, 2018 and participation was both confidential and voluntary. The next section will encompass the survey results and analysis.

V: Results and Analysis

The first two sections of the survey results will present respondents' demographics and background in rugby. The remaining data will be presented in sections based on thematic elements that developed from the data. Additionally, I will analyze the results through each lens of the three-part theoretical framework: hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), unapologetic feminism (Hardy, 2015), and queer resistance theory (Broad, 2001).

Following the method indicated above, 420 surveys were returned in total, but of those 70 were incomplete and therefore were omitted from the analysis. All percentages presented are based on the total number of completed surveys: 350.

Demographics

The survey captured 350 participants, with 317 identifying as women (90.57%), 27 as men (8%), one transgender woman (.29%), three transgender men (.86%), and two as other – one nonbinary and one androgynous (.6%). The participants ages ranged from under 20 (required to be 18+ to take the survey) to over 40 years. Most respondents fell between the ages of '21-24' (30%) and '25-29' (20%). This was expected due to the physicality of the sport of rugby as well as the concentration of opportunities to play the sport (i.e. on university campuses). However, there is still a fair distribution of respondents in each age group. The results are summarized in *Figure 1*.

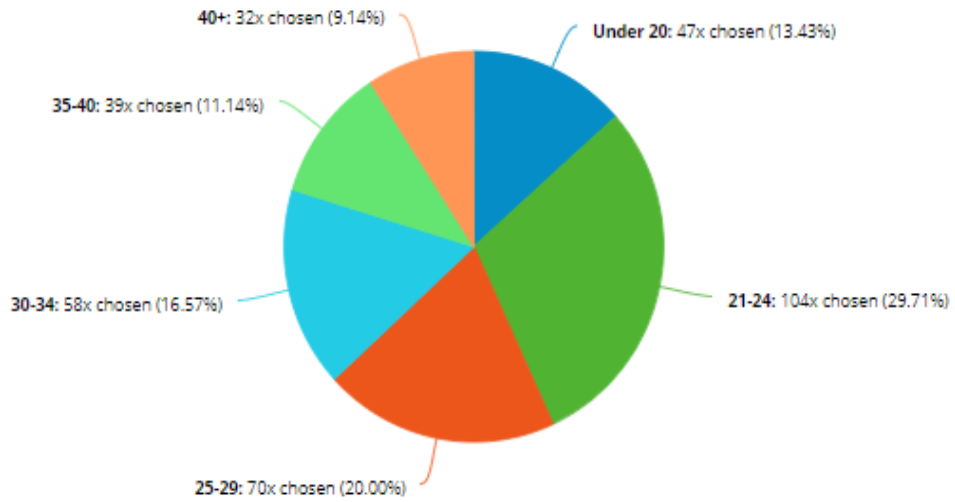


Figure 1: Age of Respondents

Race was categorized into white, Hispanic or Latino, black or African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and other. Respondents could select more than one option so the results did not add up to a total of 350. Most respondents were white, making up 89% of the survey population. Hispanic or Latino was chosen by 15 people, Black or African American by 19 people, Native American by four people, Asian/Pacific Islander by 22 people, and Other by four people – three biracial and one other/non-specific.

Birth country was included to gauge what areas respondents came from that now play rugby in the U.S. A total of 92% of the respondents were born in the U.S. Of the remaining 27 respondents, five were born in the UK, three in Germany, two each in Spain, South Korea, New Zealand, and Canada, and one each in Belgium, Scotland, China, Ethiopia, The Netherlands, Great Britain, Hong Kong, South Africa, Thailand, Denmark, and Guam.

Background in Rugby

This section was designed to establish an understanding of the level and experience that respondents had with rugby. The length of time the respondents had played the sport varied. As shown in *Figure 2*, most answered '3-4' years (23%). The category '10+' years was a close second with 20% of the survey population falling into that category. Only 9.5% of respondents had less than one year of experience playing rugby meaning most of the survey respondents were representative of those who had experience with both the sport and the culture associated with it.

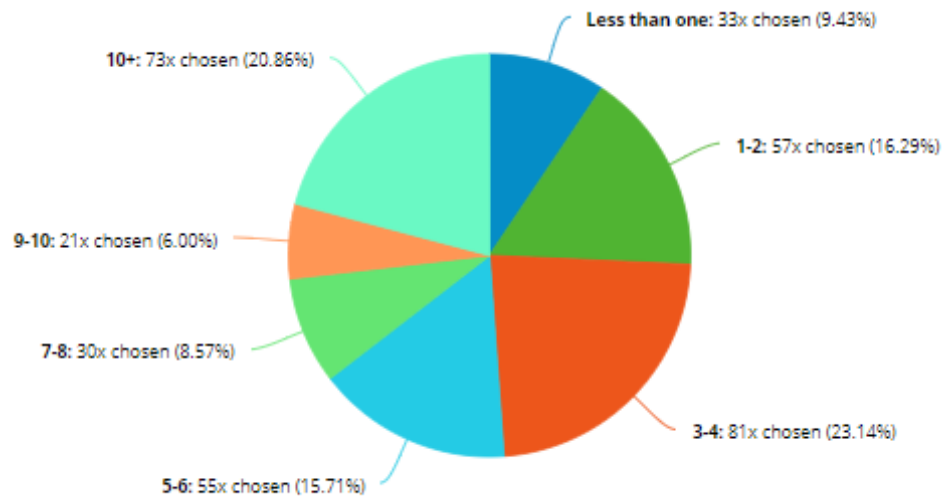


Figure 2: Number of Years Playing Rugby

Figure 3 shows the level at which the respondents have competed. This is important to show how many women are engaging in opportunities to play at each level. Additionally, this data provides context for the various perspectives of players at each level. They could select more than one answer and the results are summarized in *Figure 3*.

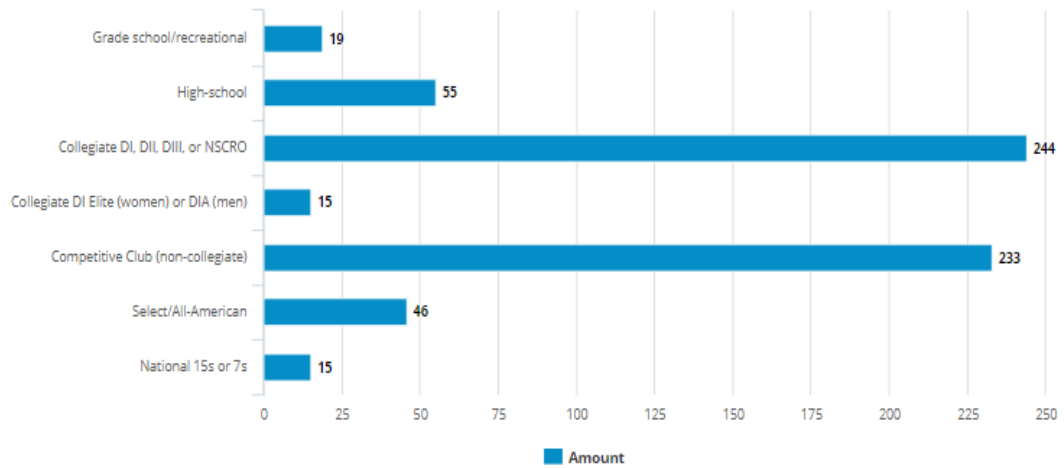


Figure 3: The Level at which Respondents Have Completed

Most respondents fell into the ‘Collegiate DI, DII, DIII, or NSCRO’ or ‘Competitive Club (non-collegiate)’ as expected. These two levels are the most available for amateur rugby athletes, especially for those with no background in rugby at the high-school level. Surprisingly, 55 respondents competed at the high-school level and 19 at the grade school level which means the sport is starting to reach a younger population. Finally, the category ‘National 15s or 7s’ was selected by 15 respondents meaning they compete or have competed for the USA Rugby National team. This indicates the sample includes players that have experience as professional athletes competing in the public arena.

There was also considerable variability in the positions that the respondents have played. Respondents could choose more than one answer so the results do not add up to 350. Tight five forwards, the five players that do most of the heavy, contact-intensive work in rugby, was selected the most at 61%. Backs, who run the ball into space, made up almost the same amount at 57%. Loose forwards, which are typically like backs in stature but are involved in more contact, was selected by 49%. Scrumhalf,

the player responsible for ball restarts and who is largely expected to be uninvolved in contact offensively, was selected by 25%. Overall, there is a considerably even split among the positions played by respondents.

Emerging Themes

The following sections provide an overview of significant results as they emerged from the surveys. These results will be presented thematically as they relate to the theoretical frame used for analysis, beginning with examining the access to resources and the sport afforded to these players.

Disparate access to resources and sports

One of the first themes that emerged from the data was the differential access to sporting activities in the time leading up to this research. Many of the respondents reported on both high school and recreational sporting opportunities. The general pattern that emerged was that access to sports and sporting activities varied based on gender. For example, most respondents played different sports prior to rugby, yet many had no experience in a high-contact sport.

More than half of respondents (56%) answered that no high contact sports, such as boxing, field hockey, hockey, football, rugby, or wrestling, were available for girls at their high school. Of the remaining respondents, field hockey was selected the most (26%) and rugby next (15%). Football and boxing fell at the lowest, only selected by 5% and less than one percent respectively. As for semi-contact or low contact sports such as basketball, lacrosse, soccer, softball, and volleyball, the availability for women increased substantially. Female teams in basketball, soccer, softball, and

volleyball were available at more than 85% of respondents' high schools.

Consequently, most respondents answered that they played soccer, softball, and basketball prior to rugby. However, in the appearance of high contact sports such as football and wrestling, a much greater volume of male respondents participated versus female respondents. Almost half of all male respondents (44%) played football and 29% wrestled prior to rugby. Of the female respondents, only 1% played football and less than 1% wrestled prior to rugby.

Through the Gramscian (1971) theoretical lens employed here, it becomes apparent that the hegemonic narrative about sports dictates who can participate in them. By society's standards, women are not expected or desired to engage in high contact sports – i.e. it violates hegemonic constructs of femininity in the United States. Therefore, those sports are largely unavailable for women. The numbers presented in the data confirm that hegemonic gender standards about femininity and masculinity continue to operate within the institution of sport, creating inequalities for women in the sports they are allowed/offered access to. This is especially so with sports that are typically understood as being masculine - i.e. those with high levels of contact.

Aligned with normative social constructs of gender, 89% of respondents felt that men are more likely to play a high-contact sport. In explanation, however, respondents also believed that men's greater likelihood of playing a contact sport is due to the lack of availability of those sports to women. One respondent said "the only reason I feel men are more likely to play high contact sports is because it is more accessible to them. If there were more women's teams I definitely think we could see a

huge jump in the number of women participating in contact sports” (Respondent 3400945, 1/30/2018). Therefore, it is less about the participants’ self prescription to gender roles, but personal experience with the larger gender social structure that dictates some sports as being inappropriate and therefore, unavailable to women and girls.

To further the point that women would engage in contact sports should they be more readily available, 99% of respondents felt that women should have access to the same sports as men (women against women, men against men). The hegemonic gendered narrative suggests that contact sports are not the proper place for a woman to engage. However, the results of this study show that women are not only capable of engaging in those sports, by playing rugby, but also would engage in other contact sports if they were available.

Conversely to the lack of opportunities for women to play high contact sports, accessibility to a gym, exercising, or a lifting facility did not appear to be dependent on gender. In high school, 77% of respondents agreed that they were given access to a gym or private lifting facility. Additionally, 54% stated that they were encouraged to lift weights and exercise by their teachers, coaches, or other members at their school. There was no significant difference between men and women’s access.

Comradery and Community

Another theme that developed from the data was the sense of comradery, companionship, and acceptance that players acknowledged from the sport of rugby. Most every respondent claimed that their primary reason for joining, as well as sticking

with the sport of rugby, was the sense of community provided by their teammates. Many felt that rugby was unlike previous sports they had played and offered them something that had been missing. One player claimed, “I felt part of the team, whereas basketball and other sports had mini cliques” (respondent 3387425, 1/29/2018). Other players felt similarly, with statements such as “nobody bullied me on the rugby team like they had in soccer” (Respondent 3408011, 1/31/2018). Another said

the team was a very welcoming community and I quickly made some really close friends. Once I started to understand the sport I was actually pretty good at it and felt more valuable than I ever felt on a soccer team. It was primarily the people that kept me playing (respondent 3400603, 1/30/2018).

The ‘culture,’ as many referenced it, made players feel like they could trust and rely on other players, even those that were on different teams. As one described, he felt that “the sense of camaraderie with team mates and rugby players all around the globe” was responsible for his continuation with rugby (Respondent 3530675, 2/7/2018). Another player said “I move a lot and could always find a women's or men's team to play and socialize with. Basically instant friends anywhere” (respondent 3406490, 1/30/2018).

Some players claimed that the companionship provided in rugby offered them a second family or even a support system for other matters in their life. One respondent wrote “I found my second family in the rugby community. It's become a significant part of my life. It has improved my confidence [and] my ability to function as part of the team/group” (respondent 3465777, 2/4/2018). One player added that

she felt rugby brought a variety of people together through its commonalities – “our team is amazing, we are such hard-working women, mothers, daughters, police officers, firefighters, all coming together for one goal, practice and win. We are there for each other in and out of the sport” (respondent 3388814, 1/29/2018). One respondent stated that the bond of rugby is so strong that nearly every player from her high school women’s team, the men’s team, the coaches, and even opposing players from other schools came to support her at her father’s funeral during her senior year, dressed in their jerseys to pay respects (respondent 3381477, 1/29/2018).

Others discussed how rugby contravened gender by bringing both men and women together. One claimed “I love living in a city with strong men's teams that appreciate and support our women's program and our culture. [It] sets an example for what I hope other parts of society can look like with strong men and women respectfully coexisting and thriving” (respondent 3400945, 1/30/2018). Many other women agreed that men often respected them and treated them equally because of their engagement in rugby. One respondent said, “when male rugby players know that I play rugby, they instan[tly] develop an interest on my person, and it brings us closer” (respondent 3599090, 2/12/2018).

Lastly, nearly all respondents felt that the rugby space was open and welcome to the LGBTQ community. One stated “it’s really excit[ing] to meet new lgbt women rugby players because it strengthens our community further” (respondent 3573853, 2/10/2018). Moreover, respondents stated that rugby had the potential to offer safety and security to those, like the LGBTQ community, that may not be provided in other

social spaces. This player stated, “something I love about women's rugby is that it provides a safe space for that to happen, and I like to think that the teams I've been a part of have provided that safety” (respondent 3433502, 2/1/2018).

The community politics iterated by most respondents to this research resemble the types of queer resistance discussed by Broad (2001). Although most of the women in this survey engaged in other sports prior to rugby, many felt that the nature of rugby provided them with a net of support and acceptance that they were unable to find elsewhere (such as at home, in their family, and in other sports). Additionally, women of all types were brought together in rugby through its resistance to traditional standards about gender in sport. Rugby provides a space that transgresses gender and destabilizes the sexuality binary, a clear link to queer resistance patterns. Furthermore, the companionship and respect developed in many cases between men and women who both play the sport of rugby, shows that sport can contravene gender, in much the same way as queer resistance suggests, when both men and women are given the opportunity to engage in the same spaces by the same rules. Lastly, the safety and acceptance of the LGBTQ community in rugby, especially in the face of stereotypes about women’s sexualities in contact sports, is also a form of queer resistance to the hegemonic gendered standards set forth by society.

Confidence and Empowerment through Physicality

The next common theme that developed in the data was confidence, brought by various aspects of the sport. When reading through the factors that influenced players to stay involved with rugby after joining, I found that players felt like they

could alleviate aggression, engage more physically in the sport, and tune into their competitive spirit brought by the intensity of the game. Some claimed that these elements were missing or undesirable in other sports. In example, one respondent wrote “I once hurt one of the varsity players for my school's basketball team because I couldn't contain myself and as soon as I played my first game [of rugby] I was just like this is perfect. All of me is exactly what is needed for rugby” (Respondent 3610587, 2/12/2018).

Although only 70% answered that they felt confident in their bodies currently, 88% felt that rugby had at least helped increase their bodily confidence in some way. Furthermore, 77% felt their mental well-being has increased since playing rugby. Players frequently wrote that they were empowered by the sport’s contact elements which helped them build confidence, mental strength, and physical toughness. As one player described “It gave me [the] confidence I needed to further branch outside of my comfort zone, playing rugby is so empowering and just having the ability to run down a field and tackle someone, I love it” (respondent 3483260, 2/5/2018). Some players also stated that engaging in the sport of rugby can provide anyone with confidence – “everyone’s included and the physicality of the sport brings out self confidence in even the most timid players” (respondent 3401618, 1/30/2018). Others felt that the confidence they gained inside of the sport space often translated to everyday life outside of rugby. One player said “as I got older, it gave me the confidence to stand up for myself at work and in my personal life (I'm only 5ft tall). It was the greatest

indicator of respect I had for myself, for my teammates, and for the game itself” (respondent 3387425, 1/29/2018).

Confidence arose in other areas because of rugby too. Almost three quarters of respondents (67%) agreed that rugby encouraged them to exercise, lift weights, or go to the gym. In explanation, one respondent wrote “I stuck with rugby because it helps keep me in shape and it also gave me the motivation to go to the gym and lift weights and it made me want to eat healthy. Rugby actually changed my life” (respondent 3483260, 2/5/2018). Another 47% of respondents agreed that they felt more confident about navigating a gym and working out because of rugby. Players frequently said they were excited and surprised to find out their bodies were capable of handling more than they previously believed. One player wrote that playing rugby was “the first and only time I ever felt athletic and like my body could do powerful things” (respondent 3383348, 1/29/2018). Lastly, women felt that operating by the same rules as men’s teams enabled them to perform and engage in a space not previously open to them. This player wrote “I also love that the rules for the game do not change based on gender, that was a big factor for me” (respondent 3392916, 1/30/2018).

Linking back to the hegemonic narrative about gender performativity, acceptable women’s sporting activities are those that are soft or nurturing (Wilde, 2006) and associated with rhythm, expression, and flexibility rather than aggression, strength, and risk taking (Tuero, Gonzalez-Boto, Espartero, and Zapico, 2014). Additionally, women who operate outside of the confines of those labels, can often be portrayed negatively by society. However, the respondents of the study

overwhelmingly agreed that playing rugby, a masculinized sport, allowed them the mental and physical confidence, empowerment, and bodily respect that they often could not find in other sports or outside of the rugby space. In many cases, as the confidence produced inside of rugby developed, players were inspired and empowered in their every day lives outside of rugby to continue exhibiting the qualities that are acceptable in the rugby space, even if they are not considered acceptable femininities socially. This behavior can be understood through the lens of unapologetic feminism. Women who previously were told their bodies were not capable of performing in a high contact environment found comfort in the physicality of rugby. Women who were asked to hold back or change their behaviors in other sports, found confidence in engaging in a sport that allowed them to play by the same rules as men. Women were inspired to exercise, work out, and build strength because of the empowerment provided in the rugby space. Most importantly, these behaviors occurred unapologetically, meaning with a disapproval of the standards set forth previously about women's place in the sport space and without the need to apologize for behaving non-traditionally.

Negotiating Negative Stereotypes and Perceptions

Another major theme arising from the research is the development of negative stereotypes about women's rugby players and how they respond to them. There were several common observations that respondents made when asked about public perceptions of women's rugby players. Negative stereotypes included assumptions

about women's sexualities, non-conformist gender expression, and validation as an athlete when compared to men.

Sexuality

The first and most popular stereotype, found in 63% of the responses, was that women's rugby players must be homosexual, bisexual, queer, or transgender. Since women who play rugby operate in a traditionally masculinized space, they are at risk for negative stereotypes about their sexuality (Lenskyj, 1995; Blinde & Taub, 1992). More than three quarters (76%) of respondents confirmed this by agreeing they had been referred to as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender strictly because of their participation in rugby. One player claimed that the stereotypes are so widespread that others were surprised she identified as heterosexual – "I have heard a lot of assumptions about the sexuality of female rugby players - someone was once surprised when I said I wasn't a lesbian" (respondent 3424045, 2/1/18).

Sexuality operates independently from gender, and the two are not inherently tied to certain sports. Yet, the socially constructed associations set forth about gender have prescribed heterosexuality to women who act out femininity and men who act out masculinity. When a woman crosses over into a perceived masculine space, and vice versa for men entering a feminine space, gender identity and sexuality are called into question (Lenskyj, 1995; Blinde & Taub). As evidenced by the women's rugby players in this study, varying sexualities are assigned to women who do not exhibit typical femininity. Furthermore, non-heterosexual identities are treated negatively,

and used to negate women's legitimacy in the sport space and, often times, outside of the sport space.

Non-Conformist Gender Expression

In addition to stereotypes about their sexuality, 39% of respondents stated that they felt women who play rugby are perceived to be manly, masculine, bulky, butch, dyke, or performing the wrong gender. As this respondent claimed "people think that women can't be pretty and play rugby. People also think that rugby is only for the super tough, athletic, or 'manly' women" (respondent 3376176, 1/28/2018). In support of this assertion, 66% agreed they had been referred to or perceived as having overly masculine traits and characteristics because they played rugby.

Many felt that the designation of women in rugby and other contact sports as excessively manly reaffirms the stereotypes about their sexuality. This respondent said, "it's definitely a common misperception that all rugby players are fat butch and lesbian" (respondent 3423174, 2/1/2018). Another 33% said that they thought women in rugby are typically assumed to be crazy, scary, rowdy, too aggressive, mean, angry, and brutish. One player wrote "the common stereotypes of women rugby players is butch lesbians or women who are angry and aggressive because of the physical nature of the sport" (respondent 3372822, 1/28/2018). Another claimed, "common perceptions are that we're unladylike, aggressive (in a negative way), abusive, have anger problems, [and we] aren't nurturing" (respondent 3371623, 1/28/2018).

Relating back to the hegemonic prescription of femininity in the United States, women who exhibit extraordinary performance characteristics – in this case strength,

high levels of contact, and aggression – become subject to gender verification (Camporesi, 2017). Furthermore, gender specific rules in sport are often designed to attempt to keep women from crossing the borderline of masculine embodiment and performance (Minichino, 2009). Rugby offers women the opportunity to compete under the same conditions as men with the same rules, allowing them to engage in spaces that are often perceived as exclusively masculine. Consequently, as shown in this study, the majority of women in rugby become subject to false stereotypes about their gender expression. The labeling of women in rugby with terms as they described, such as ‘lesbian, masculine, butch, fat, dyke’ are not only intended to be negative, but are derived directly from the hegemonic understandings of gendered sport conditions.

Although respondents were often perceived as extremely masculine for playing rugby, a majority of respondents (75%) were still told that rugby was too rough or intense for them to be playing as a woman. One player said she had been told rugby is too dangerous a sport and asked, “how can women play such a violent game?” (respondent 1/28/2018). A third of respondents claimed that they were told they seemed too feminine to play a sport like rugby. This respondent said, “I have heard people tell my more feminine friends they shouldn’t be playing or they don’t think they’re competitive in the sport because they’re so feminine” (respondent 3380638, 1/29/2018). More than half (55%) claimed that they have been told that they do not look like the type to play rugby and 36% said they had been told they were too small, feeble, or weak to be associated with rugby. Summarizing instances of these stereotypes, one woman stated that

people think I am fragile, or too feminine. Sometimes I am not taken seriously by other rugby players or people. I tell them I am the captain and coach of my club team, and that we were the champions of the last season, and they look at me like I'm lying or like it isn't a serious sport when it's played by women” (respondent 3374876, 1/31/2018).

Another 11% of respondents agreed, stating they had often been told that women’s rugby was a joke or men’s rugby was better.

Women who engage in sports are expected to participate in feminized sports that value soft, nurturing roles rather than strength and athleticism (Wilde, 2006). Despite those expectations, women are capable of engaging in sports that value the strength and athleticism embodied by men, as evidenced by the participants in this study. However, when analyzed through the lens of hegemony, women in contact sports are continuously labeled less capable than men. Women’s success and elite performance are shaded by the stereotypes offered by society that women are weak, feeble, and less proficient than men at the same activities. Emphasizing hegemonic femininity, such as weakness and fragility, is a tactic useful to reinforcing the patriarchal system that puts men in control and women inferior.

Women in rugby experience multiple forms of exclusion from social groups that are often contradicting. Common perceptions shared by the public are that women are too manly, large, burly, butch, and lesbian. However, when confronted in person, women often hear that they are too small, feeble, weak, or feminine to engage in such a sport. Consequently, women in rugby, and likely most contact sports, are

outcasted for exhibiting too much masculinity by playing the sport, yet they are then told that they exhibit too much femininity to participate in the sport.

One of the last characterizations of women in rugby is that they party a lot, or perhaps too much. About 10% of respondents believed women's rugby players were considered to be excessive partyers or alcoholics. Several respondents linked the perceptions about women's partying behavior back to those about exhibiting masculinity and unconventional sexualities. One player said that women were labeled "lesbians, drunks, [and] beastly" all in one (respondent 3389016, 1/29/2018).

The interpretation of women in rugby as 'partiers,' 'alcoholics,' and 'beastly' as associated with their displays of masculine behavior, seems to classify women as deviants. Goffman (1963) in Cameron (2015) asserts that traits that do not conform to society's norms result in stigmatization that devalues and discredits those qualities. Women's rugby players exhibit non-traditional gender behavior and are consequently labeled deviant. Furthermore, men are not treated as deviants for the same behavior. The hegemonic conditions of femininity assert that women should not behave like men because that would mean they perform equally. In order to justify the patriarchal system constructed in society, women's behavior is policed to ensure that they do not cross the boundaries of masculinity, thus threatening the control dynamics.

Women participate unapologetically in rugby despite perceptions that they are committing a social wrong. They continue to engage in the space and spread awareness that they should not be punished for their behavior. If others are not accepting, this player states that she will move on immediately and not waste time

worrying over their opinions – “rugby has become a great shibboleth when finding out which men I shouldn't bother dating. Can't deal with me playing rugby? Check, please” (respondent 3376140, 1/28/2018). Another player reasoned, “I don't need anyone's belief to know that I am a rugby player” (respondent 3373344, 1/28/2018). From the standpoint of unapologetic feminism, women in rugby are refusing to apologize for their behavior in spite of negativity expressed by those operating with hegemonic gender expectations.

Men's Perceptions

How men treat women who play rugby is important for understanding gender relations in contact sports too. Slightly less than half (44%) of identifying women respondents felt that male rugby players treat them differently. Although ‘differently’ could be interpreted to mean ‘badly,’ most respondents stated that the difference in treatment was a positive engagement – “if anything, the guys who play rugby treat me as best friends because we share a common liking of rugby and can relate better. They treat me in a different way, but a GREAT different way” (respondent 3387486, 1/29/2018). Respondents said that men shared a sense of respect, comradery, and friendship with women over their commonalities in the sport. A few described their experiences – “I think male players feel a sense of comradery with female players because we also know what it's like to play” (respondent 3470431, 2/05/2018) and “I feel more accepted and respected by male rugby players when they know that I am a part of the rugby community” (respondent 3408011, 1/31/2018).

A minority of respondents felt that some male rugby players, typically from older generations, felt that the women's teams are lesser than the men's and therefore treat women like they are inferior. One respondent described both sides "a good number of them had respect for the women's team as they too were genuine lovers of the sport" but "there was a small number that were annoyed by us and treated us disrespectfully because they didn't think we belonged playing their sport" (respondent 3399144, 1/30/2018). By referencing rugby as *theirs*, she means that rugby, like other contact sports, is perceived to be a space primarily for men and not appropriate for women (Senne, 2016). This can be understood as otherizing, especially in the most masculinized sports. For example, men who play rugby are the "rugby team," whereas women who play rugby are the "women's rugby team" or "other rugby team." In a minority of cases, it seems some men continue to operate by these hegemonic interpretations of women, continuing to exclude them from the sport space.

In other situations, women felt that male rugby players tended to treat them like one of the guys which sometimes outcasted them as an option for an intimate relationship. This respondent said,

I have found that most male rugby players are not interested in dating female rugby players for various reasons such as: female rugby players know what they get up to when they're not with their [significant other] or they don't want to share this part of their life with their [significant other] (respondent 1/29/2018).

This links back to the expectations of femininity expressed by the dominant patriarchal social structure. Women who exhibit masculine qualities or engage in a space that is masculinized, are perceived to be crossing the dominant/inferiority borderline between men and women. If women are not exhibiting traditional femininity then, they may be seen more as equals. Although equality is often understood to mean 'treated fairly,' equality in this case means women are allowed to operate in the same spaces and in the same ways as men but become perceived as 'one of the guys' which excludes them from opportunities such as intimate relationships.

Other respondents agreed that male rugby players often considered them like a 'bro' but they felt the consequences were more positive. This player said, "the men's team players usually treat me like 'one of the guys' without much introduction. They don't have to treat me like a 'new person' to the group because we are all fun and relaxed" (respondent 3383232, 1/29/2018). Some even felt like the acceptance and comradery shared by men and women that play rugby was helpful to developing gender relations generally. In example, this person wrote "the men's rugby team made me feel more comfortable around men [in] general. They were helpful, fun, and taught me to relax and be friendly, or to be one of the guys" (respondent 3382820, 1/29/2018).

Although some men in the rugby space seem to operate by hegemonic gender constructions, others have clearly detached from that narrative, and accepted women into the space without prejudice. As presented by Broad (2001), the unapologetic behavior of women entering and partaking in the sport space exemplifies queer

resistance patters which can potentially transgress gender and destabilize the gender binary. In example, the women who participate in rugby and unapologetically remain in the space despite some people's stereotypes about them, have been able to develop relationships with men in which they are treated as equals and respected for their involvement rather than otherized or excluded.

A greater number of respondents (49%) felt that males in general treated them differently than males in rugby. Furthermore, respondents felt that the difference in treatment from males who do not play rugby was more negative. One explained "most male rugby players respect women who play rugby because they understand the sport and look at us more highly than men who do not play rugby because they know what it takes to compete." However "males [who do not play rugby] tend to think the same as others sometimes if they do not know me. They think that playing rugby makes you manly." (respondent 3384090, 1/29/2018)

Others felt non-rugby men often expressed concern over women's involvement in 'such a dangerous sport.' This player said, "the guys that I work with can't believe I play rugby because I have an outwardly scrawny frame" (respondent 3381133, 1/29/2018). Some stated that men are intimidated by them – "they think that rugby doesn't make me girly enough to be with someone or that I would be the 'man' in the relationship and over power them" (respondent 3377587, 1/28/2018). A minority of respondents also stated that they thought some men were scornful of the 'type' of women who play rugby. One of the respondents explained, "people think it's a rough sport and some think that there is something 'off' about women who play. I once had a

male coworker say something to the effect of 'no man wants to marry the type of woman who would play that sport" (respondent 3383523, 1/29/2018).

The socially constructed narrative about gender seems to operate much more strongly among men outside of the rugby space. Whereas women and men who play rugby are able to bond over the commonalities of the sport and respect one another, men who operate outside of the rugby space are not knowledgeable about women's capabilities in a contact sport and therefore do not interpret them in the same way. While not all non-rugby men treat women in the ways they described, it is clear that men outside of the rugby space react more negatively towards women in rugby. The hegemonic constructions of gender in sport are much stronger outside of the rugby space, where the values of gender are constantly policed by society. Women are still generally anticipated to conform to gender expressions but rugby does not align with traditional femininity.

Despite the preservation of the hegemonic gender narrative by some men in and out of the rugby space, the bond created between men and women through rugby seems to be a key component for transcending gender relations. As Broad (2001) suggested, women's refusal to abide by traditional hegemonic femininity standards and apologize for their behavior undermines the gendered binary which suggests men and women must operate by different conditions. Furthermore, utilizing queer resistance ethics, women have transformed the boundaries surrounding gender in sport by showing that they too can perform the same roles as men all while being

accepted by men in that space. The result is a fluidity of gender characteristics for women in which they can express themselves in any way they see fit.

Rugby as Resistance

When navigating negative perceptions and stereotypes about gender and sport, women in rugby refuse to apologize for their non-conformist sexualities, gender expressions, or participation in a man's space. The last theme resulting from the study is that the majority of women in rugby embrace their own standards of expression and performance by actively resisting hegemonic interpretations of their behavior.

The Illegitimacy of Women in Sports

To start, respondents acknowledged the types of negative stereotypes others have of women who play rugby but provided much more positive feedback about themselves. Most agreed that women in rugby were perceived by others as lesbian, manly, butch, angry, and bulky. Yet, when describing themselves, the majority selected positive characteristics such as strong (99%), athletic (96%), fierce (87%), assertive (78%), beautiful (77%), and aggressive (64%). In the face of undesirable stereotypes, women in rugby overlook the negativity and uplift themselves.

The positivity embodied by players had the ability to further generate positivity in the community too. About one third of the respondents (31%) felt that others had positive perceptions of them that included descriptors such as badass, tough, strong, confident, and independent. One respondent claimed that "on my campus, if someone knows you as a rugby player, you are considered a 'bad-ass'" (respondent 3387486, 1/29/2018). Others said having established themselves for a long period of time or

playing for a competitive team allowed them respect and support from their campus that overcast the negative stereotypes. In example, this respondent said, “on campus we’re just another college team. Our club has been established for so long, there’s not really a misconstrued perception about our diversity amongst players” (respondent 3374110, 1/28/2018). Others discussed their success as a squad and how it generated positivity for women, “at my school the women’s team has become more popular than the men’s because of our success” (respondent 3579191, 2/10/2018). Another claimed “on campus, we are considered absolute badasses to everyone who has watched us play. Ever since the national championship, nothing but respect” (respondent 3372407, 1/28/2018). Respondents who had coached also felt that successfulness bred better perceptions – “I coached a very successful team so they were perceived as athletes” (respondent 1/28/2018). Respondents who had played for an independent club (meaning no affiliation with a university) agreed that long term establishment and success allowed them more respect; “after college I played at the club level in an area that rugby was a more recognized sport and most people did not have [a negative] perception” (respondent 3372956, 1/28/2018).

Perceptions about women in rugby, especially on college campuses, seems to be dependent on their success as a team. For the teams that were clearly successful, such as the one that won the national championship, their participation in rugby was regarded positively. Since rugby is a masculinized space, women’s legitimacy is often questioned. If women are successful in that space, they seem to be supported by the public because they have proven their validity. If women in rugby are not successful,

then the stereotypes remain that they should not be in that space at all. Consequently, women, who play for newly established or amateur teams, experience more negative backlash about their gender performance. Many women provided, however, that the success of a team is not dependent on gender, as stereotypes would suggest. Instead, teams that struggled to grow and establish themselves lacked important resources that more successful teams had readily available. One claimed that lack of resources and support from the school administration diminished their reputation

most people do not know that we have a women's rugby club, they think we are a joke, and the school does not support us whatsoever. Because we do not have much support, it is difficult to jump through the school's hoops and we do not have a coach (respondent 3382577, 1/29/2018).

Another agreed by saying “people think we aren’t very good because we have zero funding. We aren’t well known around campus but we are working on it” (respondent 3385511, 1/29/2018).

It is evident that women in rugby struggle to earn respect from others unless their team is proven to be both established and legitimate (i.e. winning record).

Nonetheless, their legitimacy in the rugby space *should not* be dependent on their success as a team. By continuing to engage in the sport, women can actively resist negative perceptions that may legitimize their belonging without having to be a winning team.

Hegemonic Gender Associations

One of the first ways women actively resist negative perceptions is by embracing non-conformist gender expressions. Outside of the rugby space, women are often expected to perform traditional femininity such as dressing, acting, or talking in a feminine manner. However, 76% disagreed that they had to tone down or hide masculine characteristics about themselves outside of rugby to feel more accepted as seen in *figure 4*.

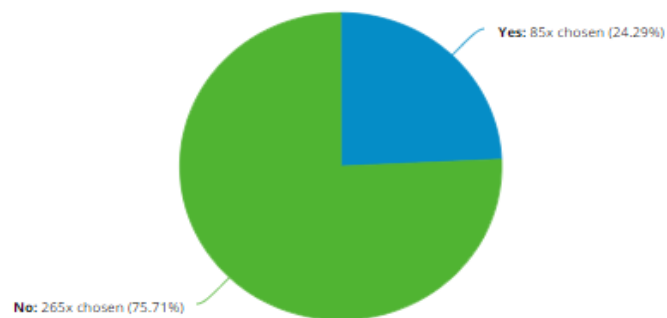


Figure 4: Are there instances where you have had to tone down, reject, or hide masculine characteristics outside of rugby, to feel more accepted?

Of those that responded yes to this question, a few explained that the types of expression accepted by the rugby community were not always admissible in the work place or in public because they lacked the qualities of traditional femininity. One respondent stated that “at work, as well as other social settings, I need to avoid talking about rugby because it makes me come off as ‘too aggressive’ and ‘threatening.” Yet she also claimed she did not give credence to their thoughts and “usually just tell[s] people they need to re-evaluate their perception vs reality” (respondent 3388738, 1/29/2018). Another respondent claimed that rugby actually helped her overcome the social expectations to adhere to gender standards outside of rugby – “before rugby, I

tried to act more feminine/subdued/quiet to be more attractive to men. After rugby, I no longer care what people think. I like myself.” She also claimed that women in rugby can act masculine or feminine, but it does not affect the way they play – “I can wear pink and still kick ass” (respondent 346577, 2/04/2018).

By acknowledging that they do not have to tone down masculinities outside of rugby, women resist the hegemonic standards set forth about their gender. Although others may still react negatively, the women in this study do not seem to care which enables them the confidence and self-respect to continue engaging in the masculine sport space, and perhaps other spaces. Furthermore, they claim that playing a rough sport does not have to negate femininity yet they are not required to abide by femininity either. Rugby seems to offer an environment where women can openly embrace whatever gender characteristics by which they feel comfortable.

Toning down masculinity was not the only gender conformism that women in rugby resisted. Most respondents (93%) also disagreed that they had to embrace masculinity to be more accepted by others. The minority that answered yes explained that they had a hard time legitimating their place in rugby due to their small stature or lack of appearing strong enough to play. One player wrote “I’m a small girl. When I tell someone I play rugby they laugh and don’t take me serious” (respondent 3383588, 1/29/2018) and another stated “if I appear too feminine outside of rugby and someone reacts with surprise, I feel like I should puff up my chest or act stronger just so I can prove that I am strong enough to play rugby” (respondent 3573853, 2/10/2018). However, one respondent explained that the accepting nature in rugby of

various types of people allows her to be herself regardless of social expectations – “I’ve NEVER felt like I had to act differently to be taken seriously as a player because I’ve met rugby players of all shapes, sizes, orientations, colors, what have you of all different abilities” (respondent 3433502, 2/01/2018).

Although some women felt that their legitimacy in the rugby space was defined by their stature or strength which forced them to defend themselves, the large majority felt they did not have to embrace any type of feminine or masculine characteristics to be accepted. This behavior exemplifies the unapologetic feminism described by Hardy (2015) and queer resistance offered by Broad (2001). Women in rugby offer a community for those who want to behave or express themselves in ways that are not always accepted in other spaces while giving them the tools to translate that confidence outside of rugby by resisting gendered norms in other spaces.

Perceptions of Body Capability

Women in rugby resist notions about their performance ability too. Rugby is a dangerous sport so nearly all respondents (97%) had experienced at least some form of injury. Injuries ranged from minor bruises to severe concussions to broken bones to torn ligaments. Due to their injuries, almost half (47%) were asked to quit rugby by their physicians, family, or friends. Yet, almost all respondents (94%) agreed they were not scared away from playing rugby regardless of their injuries or encouragement from others to quit.

Existing stereotypes about women in sports provide that women’s bodies are less capable than men’s at handling harsh contact. However, as Madrigal, Robbins, Gill,

and Wurst (2015) found through interviewing current rugby players, both men and women are drawn to the sacrifice of one's own body for the game and team. Furthermore, there is no difference between male and female players' willingness to play through pain and injury. In addition, Paul (2015) argues against the theory that women's bodies are incapable of withstanding high levels of contacts. Women in sports such as rugby, roller derby, and mixed-martial arts were empowered from finding previously unrecognized physical abilities which contributed to a healthy and positive body image. As this study shows, women in rugby resist the negative perceptions that their bodies are unable to handle a harsh sport. Furthermore, they embrace the rough nature of the sport, even when they have incurred injuries or have been told to quit.

The Gendered Binary

The last area that rugby provides resistance to is the gendered binary. In society, gender is often oversimplified and viewed as a binary – man and woman. In addition, heterosexuality is viewed as the normative. Coupled together this constructs the two-fold system known as the gender binary. The binary excludes anyone who operates by alternative genders such as genderqueer, androgynous, non-binary, and transgender or alternative sexualities such as bisexual, lesbian, gay, pansexual, and asexual or any other genders/sexualities by which people may identify.

Despite the socially constructed binarism narrative, rugby offers a community where a spectrum of identities and sexualities are accepted. Almost all of respondents (98%) stated they would not have a problem with any persons of various sexualities

joining their team. Furthermore, most respondents offered that gender identity and sexuality did not matter in terms of their ability to play rugby. In example, one stated “I feel honored that any person chooses to play rugby. An individual’s sexual affection is not of concern nor a question I ask” (respondent 338778, 1/29/2018). Another claimed that the comradery they share as a team transcends gender and sexuality “I already have women on my team who identify these ways and it really does not make me feel any different towards them. We are all one team no matter what” (respondent 3387486, 1/29/2018). This respondent claimed that all people get along in the rugby space – “we have openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary people on my team. Everything runs great. The rugby community is very inclusive and respectful” (respondent 3388738, 1/29/2018). One even stated that rugby provided the most open and accepting space her city had to offer – “I find that it's one of the most accepting groups in my city for openly LGBTQ people” (respondent 3377086, 1/28/2018). Some claimed they felt that all intersections of a person (class, race, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) did not matter in the rugby space. This respondent said “as an open African American lesbian I felt accepted and loved by my team as my true self more so than I did outside of rugby. Everyone was accepted” (respondent 3384750, 1/29/2018). One respondent summarized the necessary qualifications required to play – “If you are human, come play rugby. I’d welcome them with open arms” (respondent 3382820, 1/29/2018).

The accepting nature of the rugby space welcomes people of various sexualities and gender identities. It seems that people can feel comfortable expressing

themselves in any way they please and feel that they belong in rugby. Most respondents claimed that one's ability to play rugby is not dependent on sexuality or gender identity, therefore they should not matter. By defying the standards of the gender binary, rugby promotes a space for people to embrace a spectrum, or a wide variety, of sexualities and genders without judgment. The result is a sport where people of all natures are able to come and work together towards a common goal without concern.

Based on the responses above, all rugby spaces would seem accepting of varying sexualities or genders. However, about half of respondents (53%) did not feel men's teams were inclusive of varying sexualities and genders. Since the survey was taken by mostly women, answers may have varied about the inclusivity of men's teams should more men have answered or the survey was oriented towards men's perspectives. Some also felt that transgender people do not experience the same level of acceptance as other genders. Rugby, like many sports, has yet to offer a complete inclusive space for transgender athletes. One respondent described trans peoples experiences "I think if there are transgender athletes on a men's club, they wouldn't be open about their past with the club because the club may not accept them. Also, I don't know [that] they would choose to play because of a lack of acceptance" (respondent 3376173, 1/28/2018). For players who do not seek to undergo gender reassignment surgery, but identify as transgender, they face ridicule and questioning of the validity of their gender if they continue to participate with a team of their biological sex. For those who do wish to have gender reassignment surgery, they are

faced with ridicule over hormone replacement therapy and difficulty continuing to play due to harsh rules set by World Rugby (Athlete Ally, 2017). The rules in place currently by World Rugby are not inclusive for transgender peoples in sport, much like many other sports, and research on the nature of transgender performance in sports leaves transgender players without much opportunity should they attempt to transition or play for the gender of which they identify (Athlete Ally). One respondent stated “I think the trans topic is something worth investigating. If someone is still biologically female, but identifies as male and is on hormones, there is a grey area there that is worth sorting out” (respondent 3399675, 1/30/2018). Transgender athlete performance and inclusion necessitates much more research so that all people, regardless of gender or sexuality, can feel included in rugby or any sport space for that matter.

IX: Conclusion

Although Title IX drastically changed the availability and opportunity for women in sports in the last 40 years, several disparities persist in 2018. Of those, disparities in the most masculinized sports involving contact are the greatest. Opportunities for women and girls to participate in sports such as boxing, wrestling and football are scarce. Other sports such as ice hockey and lacrosse are still modified to reduce the levels of contact for women. Hegemonic gender constructs continue to permeate the institution of sports.

However, the sport of rugby is offering unusual and beneficial opportunities to women which are unseen in other sports in the United States. Rugby provides multiple forms of resistance to hegemonic gender constructs, allowing women to engage in a space largely unavailable otherwise. By offering a high contact sport space with the same rules and regulations as the men's game, rugby in the United States gives women a place to embrace non-traditional displays of gender. Furthermore, rugby creates a community of acceptance for varying sexualities, expressions, and identities. Additionally, rugby contravenes the gender binary by bringing men and women together through its qualities of comradeship. Lastly, women are empowered by the high contact provided by the sport and build confidence from learning about body capabilities unknown previously.

While positive forms of resistance to hegemonic gender standards are resulting from rugby in the United States, women and men are still faced with social expectations to adhere to heteronormative gender standards. As shown in the study,

women's players are frequently stereotyped negatively once their participation in rugby becomes known whereas men are not. Perceptions outside of the rugby community seem to operate through the lens of hegemonic gender binarism which can be detrimental to a person's comfort and confidence outside of the rugby space. However, as many of the respondents provided, women in rugby are empowered to resist the stereotypes and continue engaging in the sport unapologetically. As they have negotiated other's perceptions, the women's rugby players in this study are pushing to change the narrative about women's capabilities in contact sports and in general.

One way in which the hegemonic constructs of gender that limit men and women to separate sports (among other separations in society) can be altered is for men to embrace inclusivity as they have in rugby. As discussed by the majority of women in this study, men's rugby operates inclusively with women, offering them respect and comradery through their commonalities of sport. This is evident in previous research. Anderson and Mcquire (2010) performed a study of a men's university team in England to examine the construction of masculinity in the players versus the coaches. The results showed that the coaches operated with an outdated, hypermasculine sensitivity to gender roles and sexuality but the players aligned with an 'inclusive masculinity' that challenged the coaches' orthodox principles of homophobia, misogyny, and excessive risk taking. They propose that as social conditions continue to change, men's teams can adopt more inclusive behaviors that could in turn destabilize many of the gendered understandings of sport.

Another way for the hegemonic gender constructs to be changed is for women to continue to engage in atypical spaces, such as contact sports, unapologetically. Their involvement in rugby despite general social expectations that they should not be is imperative to both the growth of rugby and the growth of opportunities available for women in sports. As women engage in the space, whether as a player, coach, administrator, referee, or even just as a fan, an alternative narrative to the outdated gender expectations of the past can be shared and eventually normalized.

Limitations

This study was limited to and offers data only associated with gender relations in the United States. Both men and women were given the opportunity to take the survey but the primary intent was to gauge women's engagement with rugby. A future study on men's experiences would be necessary for true comparison.

The availability of the survey to respondents was limited to a player's membership on the Facebook pages where it was shared or by the members of their team who were given access. The survey may have been limited to some parts of the United States more than others due to the geographic location of this author. Furthermore, the survey was offered on an internet platform only which required the use of a computer or mobile device to complete and may have excluded some respondents.

Since sports in the United States operate through the binary, the study was conducted through the lens of the binary but with the goal of being as inclusive as possible. However, some of the questions were not inclusive to people with varying

genders. A few respondents suggested that the experiences and opportunities of transgender or nonbinary people in sport would necessitate more investigation. This could be an ideal subject for a future study.

Others suggested that a question be included asking about respondents' sexuality. I felt that including such a question would be contradictory to the point that a person's involvement in certain sports is irrespective of their sexuality. However, others offered that questions regarding a straight person's experience on a team with predominantly homosexual members would be worth including since LGBTQ people often form close bonds over their commonalities through the sport of rugby. A question could have been included on this for comparison or potentially a future study could be conducted.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Women's Gender Roles: Rugby in the U.S. Survey

Appendix A: Women's Gender Roles: Rugby in the U.S. Survey

Women's Gender Roles: Rugby in the U.S.

SUMMARY

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey for a research study regarding women who play rugby in the U.S. While rugby is the fastest growing sport in the U.S., it's growth and popularity are still adolescent in comparison to other nations. Furthermore, it is one of the only contact sports in the U.S. that allows women to participate under the exact same conditions as men. The purpose of this research is to understand why women chose, or continue to choose, to play rugby; how rugby has impacted women's lives; and what their specific experiences are as a woman engaging in a contact sport. While the main purpose of this survey is to gauge the female rugby population's experiences, it is designed for inclusiveness and necessitates responses from all genders. This research project is being conducted by Kelsey Basham, a graduate student in the Criminal Justice Program at Eastern Kentucky University. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION

You must be 18 years or older to participate and a current or previous member of a rugby team in the U.S. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about women's participation and experiences in rugby – a subject largely uncovered in the U.S.

RISKS

The possible risks of the study are minimal and are no more than may occur in daily life. There is potential that you may feel discomfort by the personal nature of the questions which cover sensitive topics on gender, sexuality, body confidence, and identity.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyHero.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Survey Hero does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know of your participation in the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the principal investigator, Kelsey Basham, at kelsey_basham3@mymail.eku.edu.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact the Eastern Kentucky University Institutional Review Board at: Coates CPO 20 Richmond, KY 40475 Office 414. You can also email the IRB research compliance coordinator Lisa Royalty at Lisa.Royalty@eku.edu, or contact via phone at 859-622-3636.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

*

<input type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
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What is your age? *

<input type="radio"/> Under 20	<input type="radio"/> 21-24
<input type="radio"/> 25-29	<input type="radio"/> 30-34
<input type="radio"/> 35-40	<input type="radio"/> 40+

What is your gender? *

<input type="radio"/> Man
<input type="radio"/> Woman
<input type="radio"/> Transgender man
<input type="radio"/> Transgender woman
<input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) <input type="text"/>

What is your race? *

Select all that apply.

White

Hispanic or Latino

Black or African American

Native American

Asian/Pacific Islander

Other (please specify)

What is your birth country? *

United States

Other (please specify)

How many years have you played rugby? *

Less than one

1-2

3-4

5-6

7-8

9-10

10+

At what level have you competed? *

Select all that apply.

Grade school/recreational

High-school

Collegiate DI, DII, DIII, or NSCRO

Collegiate DI Elite (women) or DIA (men)

Competitive Club (non-collegiate)

Select/All-American

National 15s or 7s

What positions have you played? *

Select all that apply.

Tight five forwards (1,2,3,4,5)

Loose forwards (6,7,8)

Scrumhalf (9)

Backs (10,11,12,13,14,15)

What other sports have you played besides rugby?

Please list.

Why did you decide to play rugby? *

Once you joined, what factors contributed to you staying with rugby? *

Feel free to list or explain.

Which high contact sports had female teams available at your high-school? *

Select all that apply.

Boxing

Field hockey

Football

Hockey

None of these were available.

Rugby

Wrestling

Which semi-contact sports had female teams available at your high-school? *

Select all that apply.

Basketball

Lacrosse

None of these were available.

Soccer

Softball

Volleyball

Do you feel that men are more likely to play a high contact sport than women? *

Yes

No

Do you think women should be able to play all high contact sports (such as football, boxing, wrestling, etc.)? *

Yes

No

If you answered no, please explain.

Did you have access to a gym or a private lifting facility at your high school, even if it was only available to you through a sport you played? *

Yes

No

Were you encouraged to lift weights, strength train, or body build while you were in high school by your teachers, coaches, or anyone else? *

Yes

No

I have started exercising, lifting, and going to the gym more because of rugby. *

True

False

I already worked out regularly

Are you more confident about navigating a gym and working out because of rugby? *

Yes

No, but I still try

I already felt confident about navigating a gym and working out

I do not workout

Do you feel comfortable in your body currently? *

Yes

No

Has playing rugby made you feel more confident in your body? *

Yes

No

Has your mental well-being: *

Increased since playing rugby

Decreased since playing rugby

Remained the same

Have you been told that you are too small, feeble, weak, or other similar terms when telling others that you play rugby? *

Yes

No

Have relatives, physicians, friends, or any others told you that rugby is too rough for you to be playing? *

Yes

No

Have you experienced bruises, broken bones, or other injuries while playing rugby? *

Yes

No

If you answered yes, please list any injuries that you incurred from playing rugby.

If you answered yes, did your injuries scare you away from playing rugby?

Yes

No

If you answered yes, were you encouraged by physicians, family, or friends to quit rugby due to your injuries?

Yes

No

What do you think is a common perception of women rugby players on your campus, or by the public generally if you do not attend college? *

Feel free to list descriptors or explain.

Which characteristics do you believe describe women that play rugby? *

Select all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive	<input type="checkbox"/> Assertive	<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic
<input type="checkbox"/> Beautiful	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulky	<input type="checkbox"/> Butch
<input type="checkbox"/> Fierce	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian	<input type="checkbox"/> Loud
<input type="checkbox"/> Manly	<input type="checkbox"/> Petite	<input type="checkbox"/> Soft
<input type="checkbox"/> Strong		

Have you been referred to or perceived as having masculine traits/characteristics or other similar terms because you play rugby? *

<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
---------------------------	--------------------------

Are you afraid of looking/or being perceived as too aggressive or 'manly'? *

<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
---------------------------	--------------------------

Are you afraid of appearing too strong because you play rugby? *

<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
---------------------------	--------------------------

Have you been told that you do not look like the 'type' to play rugby? *

Yes

No

Have you been told that you are too feminine when telling others that you play rugby? *

Yes

No

Are there instances where you have had to tone down, reject, or hide masculine characteristics outside of rugby, to feel more accepted? *

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.

Do you feel the need to act masculine outside of rugby to be taken seriously as a rugby player? *

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.

Do male rugby players treat you differently because you play rugby? *

Yes

No

I am male/not applicable

Do males in general treat you differently because you play rugby? *

Yes

No

I am male/not applicable

If you answered yes to EITHER of the two previous questions, please explain.

Do you feel that men's rugby is inclusive of persons with varying sexualities? *

Yes

No

Do you feel that women's rugby teams are inclusive of women with varying sexualities? *

Yes

No

Would you have a problem with an openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual person joining your rugby team? *

Yes

No

How would you feel if an openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual person joined your rugby team? *

Have you been referred to or perceived as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (regardless of your sexual orientation) because you play rugby? *

<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
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Do you have any further comments?

This concludes the survey on Women's Gender Roles: Rugby in the U.S. Thank you for your time.