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**“We kind of bro out with each other too.” Gender, race and sexuality on
and off the rugby pitch**

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and off the rugby pitch**

by

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Dedication

To bell hooks, who taught me how to not let the terrorists win.

Acknowledgements

Throughout these pages I share the pseudonyms and stories of fifteen women who took the time to discuss their experiences playing rugby with me. I am grateful to each one of them for their generous storytelling. I would also like to thank Dr. Christine Williams and Dr. Ben Carrington for reading over drafts of this project and providing me with useful feedback and edits.

Abstract

“We kind of bro out with each other too.” Gender, race and sexuality on and off the rugby pitch

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This study examines the experiences of women rugby players to understand how gender informs their participation in a sport described as masculine. Considering how race, gender, and sexuality constitute women’s identities is important when answering the question of how women experience playing “masculine sports.” This project examines how race, specifically whiteness, and sexuality inform the gendered experiences of women athletes. Using interviews with women rugby players, I consider how women who play a sport characterized by masculinity describe their experiences as rugby players. I argue that reflecting on how race and sexuality constitute these athletes’ experiences illuminates the different ways in which the categories of masculinity and femininity are racially constructed, constantly in flux, and contested.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Women are in roles previously assumed to be exclusive to men. They serve as politicians, lawyers, doctors, and now officially hold combat positions in the U.S. American military. In these positions women challenge the assumed masculinity of leadership, aggression, and action and the equation of femininity with weakness and passivity. And yet during the 2012 London Olympic Games, for example, there were mixed reviews concerning the inclusion of women's boxing in the Games. Opinion pieces and articles suggested that "it doesn't feel quite right" to watch women box (see Francis Phillip (2012) author at the Catholic Herald; commentary by author of *Out of Left Field*, Nathan Kalmam-Lamb (2012) on the blog *Left Hook*). In one *Daily News* article the author, Jane Fryer (2012), described her discomfort watching the championship match between Britain's Nicola Adams and Ren Cancan of China. Fryer oscillated between agreeing that a woman should be able to participate in all sports regardless of what her society deemed appropriate, and a feeling that women just should not be doing this. Although identifying herself as a feminist invested in equal rights for women and men, Fryer (as well as other commentators) had difficulty accepting women's participation in boxing.

One important way women challenge the construction of femininity as weak is through sport (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Hall, 1988; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002; Theberge, 1981). Women play rugby, hockey, football, and even box. Yet despite women's record participation in different kinds of contact sports

these sports are still characterized as masculine, underscoring the ongoing equation of athleticism with masculinity. When women play violent sport do they consider themselves to be challenging the idea of femininity as passive and helpless? Do they think that they performing masculinity?

This study examines the experiences of women rugby players to understand how gender informs their participation in a sport described as masculine. Women who play rugby present an ideal case for studying the relationship between gender and violence because unlike other contact sports such as lacrosse, hockey, and boxing, women's rugby is played by exactly the same rules as men's rugby. Given the similar rules by which men and women play rugby, the equation of women/femininity with passivity and men/masculinity with aggression might be understood differently when studying the experiences of women's rugby players.

The excerpt below from my field notes illustrates my observations of the aggressive behavior women rugby players engage in on the field. I was attending practice with a women's team in Austin, Texas. After about half an hour of playing touch rugby, which does not involve any tackling, we moved into fitness routine.

Once the players were done with sprints, we went back to the far side of the field where there were large black tires. We divided into two groups of 10 players and were supposed to push the tires up and down the field by lifting it two players at a time. I was going to sit it out but decided my ankle could probably take it. Before I could head over, "Chavez" came up to me and said, "You can join in on this one." I grabbed a rookie and joined a group. When we lifted, "Jeanette" kept

saying things like: “make this tire your bitch!” “Flat back, use your legs. Titties out!” Nobody seemed to find that funny, and instead people were getting very competitive about lifting the tire and winning against the other group. People also kept saying, “good job, ladies.”

From what I saw, these were women engaging in behavior that might not be considered ladylike, and yet they were calling themselves ladies. The language of “mak[ing] this tire your bitch” speaks to the gendered aggression that is expected of players on the field. If they make the tire their bitch, they will be able to make their opponents their bitch in a real match.

When considering how gender informs women rugby players’ experiences of the sport, it is important to recognize that race and sexuality mutually constitute gender experiences. Race is often descriptive of non-white bodies, ignoring the ways in which whiteness is also racialized (Ahmed, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993; Puwar, 2006). U.S. anti-miscegenation laws, for example, illustrate one important way in which race, gender, and sexuality are mutually constructed. As Patricia Hill Collins argues, the gender politics that makes whites “carriers of ‘normal’ gender ideology and sexual practices” and blacks the converse, “have long served as the fulcrum for constructing racial difference” (2005, p. 44). Black women are stereotyped as sexless mammies, oversexed jezebels, and emasculating sapphires (Collins, 1990; Harris-Perry, 2011). Conversely, white women are pure, passive, and virginal (Frankenberg, 1993). The interaction between the construction of gender, race, and sexuality is evident in these different images of black and white women.

Recognizing how race, gender, and sexuality constitute women's identities is important when answering the question of how women experience playing "masculine sports." The aim of this project is to examine how race, specifically whiteness, and sexuality inform the gendered experiences of women athletes. Using interviews with fifteen women rugby players, I consider how women who play a sport characterized by masculinity (Broad, 2001; Schacht, 1996) describe their experiences as rugby players. I argue that reflecting on how race and sexuality constitute these athletes' experiences illuminates the different ways in which the categories of masculinity and femininity are racially constructed, constantly in flux, and contested.

My analysis is grounded in poststructuralist feminist theory and intersectionality (Collins, 2009[1990]; Crenshaw, 1989). Poststructuralist feminism aims to deconstruct the category of sex, recognizing that the existence of a gender binary, which "is constantly reinforced on all levels of social reality...conceals the fact of the subjugation of one sex by the other" (Wittig, 1992, p. 8). This wave of feminist theory resists the dichotomy of femininity/masculinity and instead explores the possibility for multiple femininities and masculinities. The difficulty with engaging post-structuralism and intersectional analysis lies in post-structuralism's refusal to hold identity categories static. At the same time, a useful insight of post-structuralism is that the categories of race, gender, and sexuality are not essentialist categories. Therefore using a post-structural analysis with an intersectional framework allows for a consideration of how power informs these constructed categories (Lutz, Vivar, & Supik 2011).

When I talk about race, I am referring specifically to whiteness as a “privileged signifier” (hooks 2009 [1992], p. 92), that is deemed outside of critique and criticism. Whiteness as an invisible other means that analyses of race often examine the other other (Ahmed, 2006; Puwar, 2004), those people who are excluded from white privilege and oppressed by white supremacy. I refer to whiteness as invisible because as Nirmal Puwar (2004) shows, whiteness is constructed as the somatic norm, the body that belongs unquestioned, in any space at any time. For example, the United States always had a president, until it had a *black* president. The racial marker here emphasizes the notion that because he is black, the president is an anomaly in a space reserved for a white body.

An intersectional analysis considers how categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are co-constructed. Consequently, intersectionality offers a framework through which to examine how the social construction of gender, race, and sexuality shape individual identities and experiences. An intersectional analysis recognizes the material consequences of identity categories and thus allows for an examination of people’s individual experiences within larger social constructs.

Overview of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis is divided into five chapters. In chapter two, I provide an overview of the literature on gender, sexuality, race, and sports. Chapter three briefly discusses women’s rugby in the United States and the methods used in this research. Chapter four examines how whiteness informs my respondents’ experiences on the field.

I argue that because many of my respondents were invested in the heterosexual matrix, which accrues to them benefits of white feminine heterosexuality, they insist on their identities as women and may sometimes accept unequal treatment from their male teammates and coaches.

In chapter five, I consider how women's experiences on the rugby field are informed by their investment in white heterosexual femininity. I find that my respondents do not restrain themselves from playing violently, but instead are disciplined by the rules of the sport and played accordingly. My respondents' show of physical strength and aggression on the field challenges the equation of femininity with passivity but appear exempt from the mark of deviance. I suggested that white privilege mediates their engagement in violence on the field.

Chapter six answers the question of whether my respondents are violent off the field. Although my respondents reported fighting both on and off the field, they did not describe these fights as "real fights." Their fighting and aggressive behavior, like the way they play rugby, challenges the idea that women are naturally passive or may engage in apologetic behavior off the field. Once again, whiteness as a privileged category may play a role in how these women navigate the world outside of a rugby context.

In concluding I revisit the themes above and explore how women athletes complicate hegemonic understandings of gender, sexuality, and race through their lived experiences. I examine how, in their everyday lives, sportswomen contest ideas about masculinity and femininity, white privilege, and heteronormativity, even as they remain invested in the privileges that these systems might present to them. Finally I imagine how

sports can be a sight wherein individuals can begin the work of dismantling systems of oppression.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Forty years after the passage of Title IX, scholarship on sport suggests that contact sports remain a masculine space. Studies about women who play sports described as masculine often consider questions of apologetics, sexuality, and embodiment. Specifically, these studies examine how women who play sports such as football (soccer), rugby, and hockey are deviant because they are not appropriately performing femininity (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Caudwell, 1999; Howe, 2003). These women may engage in apologetics or refuse to apologize for ostensibly failing at heterosexual femininity. By focusing on women's deviance when they play "masculine" sports, such rhetoric reproduces sports as masculine.

The equation of sport with masculinity and men (Connell, 1995; Kaufman, 2001[1987]; Messner, 1990) reifies the link between violence, physical aggression, and masculinity and consequently constructs femininity in opposition to these traits. For example, Michael Messner (1990) argues that the uses of violence in sports are "symbolic proof of the natural superiority of men over women" (1990, p. 95). Although Messner emphasizes that men's violence is "learned behavior" (1990, p. 97), and therefore not natural to men, his constructionist analysis does not leave room to consider how women might learn to use violence in a sports context as well. Consequently, his analysis proscribes women's ability to use sporting violence as a tool to resist male domination. On the other hand, scholars suggest that women's participation in sports related violence not only resists male domination but might also reproduce masculine hegemony (Young

& White, 1995; Young, 2012). The tenuous relationship between women's sports violence and the reproduction of masculine domination requires further research.

When scholarship on sport critically examines masculinities a “radical critique” (Butler 1999 [1990], p. 150) of the heterosexual matrix is very rarely undertaken. For example, Ben Carrington (2010) offers a careful analysis of sport as a site for the production and reproduction of idealized masculinities and homosocial desires. By examining the way homo-social/sexual desire is produced in sports, Carrington's (2010) work begins to undermine the construction of sports as exclusively heterosexual. This work is illustrative of analyses of race and sport, which often examine sport and the production of racialized masculinities (see for example, Hoberman 1997; Ferber 2007; Kusz, 2007; Newman & Giardina, 2011; Walton & Butryn, 2006). Such scholarship emphasizes how race and masculinities are contested on the sport field without considering how femininity might also be contested.

The characterization of sport as masculine often means that women athletes are disparaged as deviant because they are “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) inappropriately. However, the passage of Title IX seems to have abated some of this derision. Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin (2003), suggest that in the years following Title IX, athletics offered women the opportunity to resist the construction of femininity as passive. At the same time the authors recognize that as athletes women occupy a space rife with contradictions because they are still women and sport is still masculine. The apparent tension that exists between women and athleticism is evident in studies that show the unequal distribution of resources between men and women who play the same

sports (Lafferty & McKay, 2004), media coverage of women athletes that diminishes their athleticism and applauds their feminine heterosexuality (Bernstein, 2002), and the countless studies that recount the paradoxes of athleticism and femininity (Cahn, 2011; Harrison & Lynch, 2005; Krane *et al*, 2004; Malcom, 2003; Mennesson, 2000). The mere fact that a tension remains between women and muscularity, and there is resistance against women playing certain sports highlights how femininity and athleticism remain contested despite the advances of Title IX and women's increasing access to sports.

Although sports on the one hand are theorized as a masculine space, scholars also argue that sport offers the possibility for rethinking the categories of masculinity and femininity (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). In their recent work, *The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*, for example, Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin (2003) analyze the disparities between second and third wave feminist readings of the body of the female athlete and argue that these bodies propose a new way of understanding femininities and masculinities on women's bodies. They suggest that the cultural iconicity of the female athlete resists the construction of femininity as passive and allows for a reimagining of hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity.

But studies that examine sport as a site for contesting ideas about masculinity and femininity rarely examine how race complicates the nature of this contestation. Despite the recognition that sport is a site for the contestation of gender and racial identities, very little research employs an intersectional analysis to how race and gender operate in the experience of women athletes. Typically when such work is undertaken, the focus is on how women of color are racialized on the sports field (see for example Bruening, 2012;

Douglas, 2011; Douglas, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). My project seeks to address this oversight by examining how women's race, sexuality, and gender inform their experiences in sports. Specifically I consider how apologetics, sexuality and embodiment inform the experiences of women who play rugby.

Un/Apologetics and sexuality

In sports scholarship, apologetics refers to women who, to rectify their perceived deviance as athletes, perform emphasized notions of femininity (Broad, 2001; Cahn, 1993; Sabo, 1988). The idea that women athletes perform more traditional forms of femininity as a means to apologize for their athleticism remains contested. Don Sabo suggests that the "female apologetic" is a myth because favorable attitudes towards women's sports means that the perceptions of sport as masculinizing women "may have lost its former venom" (Sabo, 1988, p. 67). However, in an essay that examines the historical relationship between female same-sex desire and sports, Susan Cahn found that many women athletes "adopted an apologetic stance" (1993, p. 354) by ensuring that they wore traditionally feminine attire off the field, and engaged in stereotypically gender appropriate behavior. According to Cahn, the stereotype of women athletes as lesbians pressured these women to perform their feminine heterosexuality off the field as a way to deflect accusations of sexual deviance. Cahn's assessment of apologetics includes the important consideration of both race and sexuality. She notes how racist gender ideologies often characterized black women as mannish so that their performance of

apologetics was informed by their specific racial location. This characterization of mannishness circumscribes how black women may engage in apologetics about their athleticism. Cahn's (1993) work highlights the importance of examining how race and sexuality inform women's apologetics in sports.

More recent work (Broad, 2001; Ezzell, 2009) on women's un/apologetics in sports complicates the idea that women are either apologetic or unapologetic for their athleticism. I use the virgule in un/apologetic to highlight the tension between women apologizing for their athleticism and women playing sport unabashedly. Specifically I want to call attention to the fact that such a strategy is not entirely one way (apologetic) or the other (unapologetic), but rather is informed by different circumstances and contexts. For example, Nancy Malcom (2003) has argued that not all forms of emphasized femininity in sports stem from apologetic behavior. She notes that apologetics are performed out of a fear of being perceived as masculine, but her research with girls who play softball suggests that these adolescents might emphasize femininity to show maturity, rather than out of a fear of being masculinized. Malcom's examination of how young women might perform emphasized femininity highlights the importance of age in the performance of gender. Thus for Malcom, the performance of emphasized femininity does not necessarily stem from a fear of being masculinized through sport, but adolescent athletes' desire to be considered grown-up.

Although age is an important component for understanding apologetics in sport, sexuality also plays a role in how women may be un/apologetic. In women's sports today, although the "lesbian bogey woman" might still exist, the emergence of gay sports

challenges the compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) of sports (Caudwell, 2002; McDonald, 2008; Wellard, 2006). In his ethnography with a college women's rugby team, Matthew Ezzell (2009) shows how the women on the college team engaged in "defensive othering," as a form of apologetic behavior. Through defensive othering, the women acknowledged the stereotype of the gay women's rugby player, but emphasized their own identities as heterosexy-fit, meaning that unlike those other rugby players who are tough, fit, masculine and lesbians, they are "tough, fit, feminine, and heterosexual" (Ezzell, 2009, p. 112). For Ezzell, the process of defensive othering is an enactment of apologetics, "when female athletes 'compensate' for their sports participation by emphasizing traditional notions of white, middle class femininity and heterosexuality" (ibid, p. 115). By insisting on the idea that they are different from other rugby players who fit a stereotype of masculinity and homosexuality, the women on this team help to reproduce the idea that women athletes are unfeminine and not heterosexual.

On the other hand, K.L. Broad (2001) explores how women rugby players refuse to perform traditional expressions of femininity and heterosexuality as a way of apologizing for their athleticism. Broad's ethnographic study posits women's participation in rugby as a form of resistance against norms of femininity and heterosexuality. She shows how women who play rugby "challenged standards of passivity associated with (typically white, middle-class, heterosexual) femininity" (p. 189), and destabilized the homo/hetero binary by, for example, emphasizing "strength, sexual agency, and sexual diversity for women in their rugby songs (p. 193). Broad's (2001) research provides a space to analyze the opportunity for queer resistance in sports

and highlights the different ways in which women can be empowered through sport. The way in which apologetic behavior among women athletes is informed by sexuality (Griffin, 1998) highlights the relationship between appropriate performances of femininity and heterosexuality.

At the same time that scholars recognize that age, race, and sexuality might inform how women perform un/apologetics, their scholarship also appears to assume that all the women are white. How do race and sexuality complicate women's engagement apologetics in sports? What is the role of bodies and embodiment in the performance of apologetics? In my findings below I attempt to update current understandings of women's un/apologetics in sports by carefully examining how the intersections of race and sexuality complicate how and when women are un/apologetic about their athleticism.

Disciplined bodies

The embodiment of gender is socially constructed. Anne Fausto-Sterling (1995) offers an insightful way to think about how masculinity is constructed both socially and scientifically. By examining how children are assigned a gender at birth, Fausto-Sterling (1995) assesses how masculinity and maleness are constructed through ideas about what society *thinks* it means to be a man. She argues that the body is a site to question gender as social construction because even the science of the body is culturally instigated. Fausto-Sterling's assessment of the social construction of bodies to fulfill gendered

expectations illuminates how despite the progress of feminist scholarship, the idea of women as passive and weak remains culturally ingrained.

Women (and men) experience their bodies in specifically gendered ways, evident through rhetoric that suggests a paradox between femininity and muscularity. For example, in a study with twenty-one NCAA division one women athletes, Krane *et al* (2004) find that the women made sense of the paradox of their muscularity and femininity by constructing being an athlete as different from being a girl. Through this construction, they could take pride in their athletic performances and achievements even if those achievements contradicted notions of hegemonic femininity. In a later study, Harrison and Lynch (2005) find that perceived gender role orientation of athletes adhere to what kind of sport they played, rather than their gender. In this sense, women who play basketball (here identified as a masculine sport) are perceived to have a masculine orientation, while boys and girls who participate in “gender nontraditional sports are likely to be perceived as having a more complex gender role orientation that consists of traditional masculine and feminine characteristics” (Harrison & Lynch, 2005, p. 234).

The way women athletes attempt to make sense of a perceived paradox between athleticism and femininity highlights sports as a site where women can challenge notions of feminine passivity and everyday understandings of masculinity as domination/physical power. As David Whitson (2002, p. 231) writes:

In living their bodies as skilled and forceful subjects... and especially in embodying power themselves, [women in sport] challenge one of the fundamental

sources of male power, the ideological equation of physical power itself with masculinity.

Whitson's (2002) assertion contradicts Jack Halberstam (1998), whose conception of female masculinity maintains that masculinity is domination and women athletes might in fact be performing masculinity. Although Whitson (2002) argues that women athletes challenge contemporary conceptions of gender and embodiment, do these women consider themselves to be challenging male power or do they, as Halberstam (1998) suggests, consider themselves to be performing masculinity?

Laura Chase's (2006) assessment of how women rugby players navigate the perceived paradox between femininity and athleticism resists the idea that women athletes are performing masculinity. Instead, Chase (2006) suggests that sport can be a site where bodies are disciplined into becoming "docile" sporting bodies. She notes that even though women rugby players may resist normative discourses of the ideal feminine body, they are also disciplined to possess properly athletic bodies. By tackling and using their bodies in physically challenging ways, Chase's (2006) respondents reported feeling powerful. Chase (2006) argues that although women rugby players may have ideal rugby bodies, they might not possess appropriately feminine bodies. Consequently, these women navigate between appropriate femininity and athleticism.

The ways in which athletes use their bodies can be understood through the rhetoric of discipline as a technology of the self. Although not immune to technologies of power and domination, technologies of the self empower individuals to counteract the domination of power (Foucault, 1988). Pirkko Markula (2003) extends Foucault's

analysis to consider how technologies of the self offer a way to think about power and resistance in relation to women athletes. Markula (2003) argues that the operationalization of sport as a technology of the self can destabilize rigid gender categorization. Importantly, Chase (2006) and Markula's (2003) examination of bodies, sport, and gender illuminate how gender is differently constructed depending on context. In a sporting context, hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity might be muted in favor of normative valuation of athletic bodies and abilities. Conversely, in different social contexts, norms of masculinity and femininity must be adhered to. Through their assessment of disciplined bodies and resistance, Chase (2006) and Markula (2003) show how the hegemonic constructions of gender can actually be (simultaneously) done, undone, and redone.

Despite the important connections scholars make between power and resistance in sports, an intersectional analysis of how women might engage in these resistant practices remains absent. Just as un/apologetics dictates a racial analysis, recognizing the technologies of the self in sports requires a consideration of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). What are the different resources that inform women's resistant practices in sports? Which bodies (can) engage in sport as a resistant practice/practice of freedom? Such questions bring up concerns of not just embodiment and race, but also sexuality.

The cultural iconicity of the female athlete

Recognizing how embodiment, race, and sexuality constitute the experiences of women athletes, it becomes apparent that cultural capital co-constructs these axes of identity. Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital, loosely defined as the aspects of one's being that informs her relationship to power illuminates the bearing of race, sexuality and embodiment on the experiences of women athletes. As Bourdieu (1986) highlights, cultural capital presupposes embodiment because the work of acquisition of this form of capital is work on oneself; consequently, acquiring cultural capital can be a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988).

Because capital is transferable, embodied forms of capital can be converted into social and economic capital. How does cultural capital become social capital with regards to how bodies take up space? In her discussion of race as a way of inhabiting space, Sara Ahmed suggests that being orientated around or towards whiteness is not simply a property of possessing white skin but is packaged with issues of power and accessibility (2006, p. 126). With this assertion Ahmed highlights how race as an embodied form of cultural capital lends some bodies access to power and prevents others from attaining similar resources. Importantly, she considers how race as a form of cultural capital constitutes a person's habitus. Ahmed's conception of race as capital allows for a way to think about which bodies can play sports as a resistance practice and who is (and/or can be) legibly un/apologetic for their involvement in sport.

In Bourdieu's original conception of habitus (1984), he makes little mention of race but discusses gender and habitus. Habitus is acquired through socialization and is not

an explicitly learned way of being. The gender habitus of women therefore stems from their orientation towards culturally determined modes of how to be a woman. However, Terry Lovell (2000) argues that Bourdieu's concept of the habitus overdetermines the role of society and socialization in how women and men experience gender. Lovell cites the example of women who successfully pass as men as a way in which the gender habitus is challenged. She asks

How was it possible [for those women who pass as men] to acquire these skills and attitudes, given that they would have been denied access in early life to the practices in which the masculine *habitus* is founded? (2000, p. 14).

Lovell's question challenges the notion that habitus primarily informs gender experiences. Women who successfully perform masculinity by passing highlight the performativity of gender (Butler 1999 [1990]). In other words genders is both constructed as performative and through modes of socialization.

One way in which gender is constituted through habitus and performativity is evident in women athletes' enactment of emphasized femininity or un/apologetics. How women athletes are socialized on and off the field challenges the idea that habitus is the primary arbiter of gender on the field. Lafferty and McKay's (2004) ethnographic study of women in boxing gyms show that although women may be permitted into masculinized spaces, often mechanisms are installed to ensure that the gender regime (Connell 2001) remains intact. In their study, Lafferty and McKay (2004) found that although women took seriously their training as boxers, they did not have access to the same resources as men in the boxing gym because the coaches perceived the women as

physically inferior to the men and thus incapable of becoming real boxers. In a similar vein Christine Mennesson (2000) questions how women boxers define their identities as women. Like Krane *et al* (2004), Mennesson concludes that these women describe their athleticism as making them different from other women, although they are women nonetheless. These studies show how the women challenge the gender habitus by suggesting that they are different from other women but are women nonetheless.

The performance of difference suggests that these women may be asserting their investment in different forms of feminine capital. According to Holly Thorpe, feminine capital is “the gender advantage derived from a disposition or skill set learned via socialization” (2009, p. 495). In this definition Thorpe suggests a monolithic privileged femininity. Thus she ignores how race and sexuality complicate feminine capital. Thorpe’s lack of engagement with different kinds of capital in assessing feminine capital highlights the need for engaging in intersectional analysis when making claims about capital, empowerment, resistance, and identity. How do race and sexuality inform women’s gendered experiences outside of their sports?

Engaging in an intersectional analysis

Some scholars who study sports suggest that sports are perceived to be the quintessential level playing field (Brown et al., 2003, Early, 2011) meaning that regardless of what happens in society, be it racial discrimination, homophobia or sexism, once on the sports field, all of these inequalities disappear; players get out what they put

in and are rewarded for their hard work. However, scholars have also argued that sports reproduce inequalities in terms of who can play which sport (Burdsey, 2006; Walton & Butryn, 2006) and what resources are available to racialized athletes from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Hanson, 2005). Despite scholarship on how sports reproduce and reflect social inequalities (Azzarito & Harrison, 2008; Ferber, 2007; Hartmann, 2000) this research often equates race with black men and gender with white women.

Scholars of race have long noted how gender often lacks a racial analysis (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981). For example, Sojourner Truth's famous speech (Collins, 2000 [1990]) illustrates how black women were excluded from the category of woman. Truth's speech highlights how the early feminist movement maintained white womanhood as normative and ignored how whiteness "functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism, and...contributes to the domination of other women" (Crenshaw 1989 [2011], p. 33). Over time, scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg (1993), bell hooks, and Richard King (2005) have studied whiteness as a racial category. For example, Frankenberg shows how hegemonic ideas about race shape white women's lives just as much as it shapes the lives of people of color. Likewise hooks (1992) calls attention to how an investment in whiteness and white privilege means that white people often do not perceive how they participate in oppressing others.

Over a decade after Sheila Scraton (2001) called for a reconceptualization of how race and gender are employed in the sociology of sport, the discipline continues to reproduce scholarship that offers a perfunctory nod to the need for intersectional

analyses. For example in the book *Playing with the Boys*, Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano (2008) insist that although race is an important aspect of women's experiences, gender is more important in examining how they are discriminated in sport. This claim ignores how gender, race, sexuality, and class are mutually constitutive in the experiences of female athletes (and all people). Furthermore, the reproduction of such claims marginalizes the contributions made by queer and feminist scholars who recognize the importance of paying equal mind to the different axes of identity. Scholarship on women athletes considers the different ways women challenge ideas of femininity and masculinity. However, few scholars apply an intersectional analysis to examine how different women experience sports through their specific social locations. My research seeks to fill this gap. Through my work I also hope to offer an analysis of how women may simultaneously resist and reaffirm the equation of white femininity with passivity both on and off the sports field.

Because the category of woman is not monolithic, how can women's experiences playing rugby be understood? How does race and sexuality inform women's performance of un/apologetics? Secondly, how do women play rugby? Scholars argue that athletes discipline their bodies to fit into the discourse of athleticism (Chase, 2006; Markula, 2003, Whitson, 2002). If this is the case, in what ways do women rugby players fit their bodies into the discourse on athleticism and how might their experiences of disciplining their bodies be gendered? Finally, in considering how women's experiences are informed by their race and sexuality, what happens when these women are no longer on the rugby

field? Specifically, how does playing rugby inform women's experiences of race, gender, and sexuality off the field?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

This study employs an intersectional and queer theory analysis to examine how women rugby players experience an aggressive contact sport. Because I was interested to learn about how women describe their experiences playing rugby, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews. Although I had my own conceptions and observations of how women behaved on the rugby field, I wanted to know from their perspectives how they thought about their experiences playing rugby. How might hearing from these women change understandings of their experience in sports?

I attempt a sociological approach to examine how my respondents' experiences might reflect or improve upon sociological theories of gender and race. However, my training in queer theory and literary criticism means that at times I engage in discourse analysis and literary criticism of my sociologically derived data. How my respondents talk about their experiences and understanding their social world is "mediated by language" (Bordo, 1993, p. 288). Discourse analysis is thus a way to critically examine the language my respondents use in discussing their lived experiences. Queer theory's emergence from post-structuralism provides a theoretical framework through which to deconstruct hegemonic notions about gender and sexuality and to critique power. Employing the different disciplinary analytical tools at my disposal provides greater insight into how my respondents' experiences generate interesting and different ways of understanding the social world.

Site of Study

Rugby is a violent and physically aggressive contact sport. An eighty-minute game involves one-on-one tackling; mauling, where a tackled player does not fall to the ground and her teammates try to push her forward against the opposing team; and rucking, where several players compete for the ball in a tight space. A rugby game may be played with teams of seven, ten, or fifteen players. Each team is divided into forwards and backs. In fifteen-a-side rugby matches, the eight forward players form a scrum, which I will describe below. The back players play behind the forwards and are responsible for quick play and running into open space on the field.

In a scrum, eight players on each team bind to each other in the following order: first the front row, which comprises a hooker in the middle and two props to each side of her. The hooker is so named because she uses her legs to hook the ball back through the scrum. The props, as their name suggests, prop up the hooker. Behind the front row two locks stand side-by-side, arms around each other and holding on tightly to the other's shirt. They kneel and pass their hands through the props' legs to hold on to their shorts. This configuration forms the "tight five." Once the tight five is bound to each other, on either side of the pack a flanker binds loosely to the prop and lock by kneeling and holding on to their shirts and shorts. Finally, the number eight, also called the eighth-man, stands in the back of the scrum to ensure that it is stable. The eight players who form the scrum are called the forward players.

Once both teams are in position to scrum, meaning they are bound to each other and facing their opponents, the two teams collide into each other on the referee's call.

The hookers compete for the ball, which one scrumhalf places into the scrum. Meanwhile the other members of the scrum push against each other to allow the hooker easier access to the ball. Once the ball is hooked through the back of the scrum, the number eight (who is a forward player) or the scrumhalf, who is considered the link between the forward players and the back players, passes the ball, typically out to the back players.

Unlike the scrum, which only involves forwards players, rucks and mauls can involve players in any position. A ruck is formed when a player is tackled, falls to the ground, and at least one player from each team forms what looks like a bridge over the tackled player and the ball. In a ruck the goal is to drive the opposing player away from the ball so that another player who is not offside (meaning she is not in the ruck) can pick up the ball and continue play. On the other hand, a maul is formed when the tackled player does not fall to the ground and is instead pushed forward by her teammate. At least one player from the opposing team tries to keep the two players from gaining ground.

I describe ruck, mauls, and scrums in detail to call attention to the ways in which rugby is a contact sport. Although violent sports are typically associated with men and masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995; Messner & Sabo 1990), women also play such sports. In the United States there are 3,000 girls playing rugby at a high school level and 11,000 at a college level. There are about 75 women's club teams in the country, and five varsity-level women's teams (USA Rugby website). Because women's rugby is played by exactly the same rules as men, examining women's experiences playing rugby offers an opportunity to understand how these women's participation in the sport are specifically gendered.

Another important consideration when studying rugby is the fact that rugby is a sport played primarily by white people. USA Rugby, the administrative body of rugby in the U.S., does not provide racial information about who plays rugby, but studies about the sport often remark on the fact that players are mostly white (Broad, 2001; Cottle and Keys 2010; Spracklen *et al* 2010). In order to play rugby in the U.S., women must pay club dues, pay for their own travel to and from games, and buy costly protective gear. USA Rugby also prohibits anyone without health insurance from playing. All of these result in a high cost of entry to play. Unlike most sports with high costs to access, women's rugby is additionally exclusive because most women learn about the game while in university. The potentially prohibitive cost to entry and the fact that most players learn about the sport through higher education might explain why qualitative studies about rugby often only describe the experiences of white players. Recognizing the large number of white players on rugby teams, one of my research goals is to consider how whiteness structures women's experiences playing rugby.

Sample

During the summer of 2012 I recruited and interviewed respondents for this study. I attended three tournaments, which I learned about by contacting different teams either through Facebook or via email. The first tournament I attended was in Central Texas. Although the local men's team organized the tournament, upon entering the park where the matches were to be played, I saw several women's teams huddled together under trees

and umbrellas. I would not have noticed the parity of women and men in attendance at this tournament had I not been struck by the absence of women at the two tournaments I attended in southern California. The excerpt below from my fieldnotes describes my surprise when I arrived at the first tournament, which I will call Pacific Sevens, in California:

When I arrived at the field I was surprised. I'm not sure what I had expected but it wasn't as nice as the [Austin] fields. There were a lot of games happening, but I saw absolutely no women. I made my way to the far side of the fields, where I finally saw a couple of women passing a rugby ball back and forth. They were sitting under a tent and were all in jersey.

Despite the marked absence of women at the Pacific tournament, I met three women to interview. Jen, an 18-year old white woman who had responded to the email I sent to her team; Caren, a 29-year old white woman who was injured and so was sitting on the sidelines drinking a beer when I approached her for an interview; and Tate a 28-year old Mexican-American woman whose team pressured me to play with them if I wanted any interviews. I was unable to interview Tate at the Pacific tournament but we made plans to meet the following week at the Seagram Sevens tournament.

In total I interviewed six women in California, three of whom I met at tournaments. Cindy, Terrence, and Janis all contacted me via email, eager to share their experiences playing rugby. Cindy worked as a development manager at a non-profit organization and referred to herself as a "rugby ambassador" because she had played in Southeast Asia for a few years. Terrence was a law student and we met at a bar near her

school for our interview. She told me I would be able to recognize her because she would be wearing a suit and a tie. I had expected to meet Janis at the Pacific Sevens tournament but she was unable to make it. We finally met at an open-air market near her work place. Janis was a self-described hippie who wore a blue “hippie band” on her almost waist-long brown hair.

The three women I interviewed at the Austin tournament were Mary, Laura, and Taylor. Mary was thirty-six years old and a professor in a STEM discipline, Laura was a thirty-three year old lawyer, and Taylor was twenty-five years old and worked in a laboratory. Texas is considered to be socially conservative, whereas California is more progressive. Consequently, I expected differences in how my respondents might discuss their gendered experiences playing rugby in these two states. However, my limited sample size does not allow me to make claims about regional differences.

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic information obtained from my respondents. Twelve were white women, one was black, and two were Latina. They ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-six, with the median age being twenty-eight. All of my respondents had at least a bachelor’s degree, with the exception of my youngest respondent, who was enrolled in university at the time of our interview. Two of my respondents had doctorate degrees, two had law degrees, and two had masters’ degrees. With the exception of my youngest respondent who was still in college, the fact that all of my respondents had at least a bachelor’s degree suggests homogeneity in their experiences. At the same time, because most people first learn about rugby in college, it makes sense that all of my respondents had a college degree. As of 2011, USA Rugby

reported 209 registered high school girls' rugby clubs. This compares to 343 women's clubs in universities and colleges and 676 boys' teams. The number of high school teams reflects USA Rugby's movement towards developing rugby at the youth level (USA Rugby Strategic Plan 2009-2012). Given how recently rugby has found its way to American high schools, it was no surprise that all but three of my respondents were introduced to the sport while they were in college.

Eleven of the fifteen women I interviewed told me they were sexually attracted to other women. I chose not to ask my respondents whether they identified as lesbian, bisexual, gay, or straight because I wanted to give them the flexibility to describe their sexuality in their own language. By asking my respondents whether they dated men, women, or both, rather than how they identified, I was able to get a diversity of answers that more accurately reflected my respondents' ideas about their sexuality. For example Lo told me, "I don't identify as straight or gay or anything...or bi." At the same time, she answered my question of whether she dated men, women, or both by explaining that in the past she dated both but was now exclusively dating men. Although Lo might have told me that she did not identify with a specific sexual orientation, by asking the question the way I did, I avoided any anxiety she might have experienced in being asked to "check a box."

Interestingly, when I asked my respondents whether they dated men, women, or both, those who dated men exclusively typically remarked that they were somehow different from other women rugby players because they date men. For example, Jen responded, "men, surprisingly." Her response highlights her awareness that women who

play rugby are typically thought of as gay. Similarly, Mary and Cindy made sure to tell me that they were married in response to my question about whom they date. For these women telling me they were married, without noting that they were married to men, seemed to affirm their heterosexuality. This response highlights my respondents' recognition of the stereotype of the gay women's rugby player.

With the exception of one interview, which I conducted over the phone, all my interviews were conducted in person. Interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes, with the average length of an interview being about forty-five minutes. Overall I conducted six interviews at tournaments, five at bars, one at a post-match social, one in my home, one on the telephone, and one in my respondent's office. When I conducted interviews at tournaments, bars, and socials, my respondents and I would typically each have a beer. Sharing a drink with my respondents in a specifically rugby context meant that I could more readily represent myself as a fellow rugby player rather than an outsider with a recording device.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Name	Race ¹	Age	Sexuality ²	Occupation	Highest degree earned	Years Playing	Position played
Caren	White	29	Women	Scientist	Doctorate	10 years	Hook and flanker
Cindy	White	29	Men	Development Manager	Bachelors	11 years	Everything but scrum, mostly fly
Flip	White	27	Women	Social Worker	Bachelors	6 years	Scrumhalf
Gene	White	26	Women	Office manager	Bachelors	6 years	Fullback, inside, outside center
Janis	White	25	Men	Volunteer	Bachelors	5 years	Flanker, sometimes hooker
Jen	White	18	Men	Student	High School Diploma	1 year	Flanker
Juanita	Hispanic	26	Women	Financial Analyst	Bachelors	3 months	Flanker and wing
Laura	White	33	Men and Women	Attorney	JD/MBA	6 years	Hooker and Scrumhalf
Lo	White	29	Previously men and women, now exclusively men	Stockroom Clerk	Bachelors	10 years	Hooker, Flanker, Eight
Mary	White	36	Men	Professor	Doctorate	6 years ³	Back (fly and fullback)
Tank	Black	29	Women	Real Estate / Entrepreneur	Bachelors	9 years	Everything but prop and hook

¹ Race is self-reported.

² The question for sexuality was “do you date men, women, or both?” Answers reflect responses.

³ Mary played for 5 years in college, then took a 10-year hiatus and started again last year

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (continued)

Name	Race	Age	Sexuality	Occupation	Highest degree earned	Years Playing	Position played
Tate	Mexican	28	Women	Social Worker	Masters	1 year	Inside center, flanker
Taylor	White	25	Women	Scientist	Bachelors	6 years	Lock
Terrence	White	28	Women	Student	Masters/JD in progress	6 years	Everything, but typically fly, full or wing
Z	White	26	Men and women	Student	Bachelors/Masters in progress	7 years	Hooker, Prop, Inside Center

Analysis

I used a semi-structured format for my interviews. My interview guide was divided into three sections. The first asked respondents to tell me about how and why they decided to play women's rugby. In this section I wanted to learn about women's motivation to play the sport and how their friends and family reacted to this decision. I then asked players to describe their experiences actually playing rugby. The purpose of this line of questioning was to identify what players thought about the sport. I asked them about coaches, about things they liked and did not like about the game, and their relationship with their teammates and other players. Finally I asked respondents to tell me about their experiences off the field and the extent to which rugby was a part of their lives when they were not playing. I ended my interviews by asking my respondents to discuss any issues that they thought were important but I did not ask about. This conclusion to my interviews on occasion yielded further detail about players' experiences that they might not have talked about earlier. For example, one of my respondents used my last question as an opportunity to tell me about how playing rugby gave her a different relationship to her body than she had before she started.

Using an interview guide helped organize my questions in a methodical way. I started all of my interviews by asking my respondents for their age, race, highest degree completed and sexual orientation. Robert Weiss suggests that starting an interview formally by asking demographic questions might steer interviewees away from providing "a full and detailed narrative account" (1994, p. 51). However I used this approach

because as a new researcher, I felt that starting in a formal way would establish some level of authority on my part. I did not find this way of beginning my interviews to be a hindrance. To the contrary, it allowed me to attain demographic information of my respondents and move right into the qualitative questions. With this approach I believe I was often able to end my interviews on an informal and friendly note.

I audio-recorded and transcribed all of my interviews. I transferred all of my audio-recorded interviews to a password-protected file and deleted the copies on the recording device. After transcription I deleted all audio files. Additionally, I use pseudonyms for all my respondents and their team names. I also only describe the general geographic areas that might come up in interviews. For example I will refer to the Pacific Northwest instead of Portland.

Once I had transcribed all the interviews, I conducted a preliminary round of open-coding using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. Following the first round of coding, I combined codes as I identified themes throughout for my analysis. I then wrote memos to help me codify and make sense of the data.

Access

Recruiting players at tournaments meant that sometimes I played for or against some of my respondents. I view my ability to play with some of my potential respondents as a benefit of my recruitment at tournaments. By playing with my respondents I was able to represent myself as more than just another researcher. Instead I could, even if only

momentarily, be perceived as another rugby player and thus part of the rugby family. At the same time that there were benefits to conducting interviews at tournaments, there were also downsides. For example sometimes I felt pressed to play for one team or another and potential respondents would try to bribe me into playing for them if I wanted an interview.

As with my interviews at tournaments, meeting my respondents at a bar also established rapport between us. Drinking with my respondents typically meant that we reminisced about rugby socials or made jokes about how rugby players liked to drink. In fact, when I asked Tank, a 29 year-old black woman whether she wanted to meet at a bar or coffee shop, she told me, “well I’m a rugby player so I’m most comfortable at a bar.” Being in tune with rugby culture allowed me to take such comment in stride and respond accordingly. Finally, balancing my informal settings of my interviews with formal questions such as asking how old my respondents were created an interviewee/interviewer relationship that I think facilitated the trajectory of my interviews.

As part of my efforts to establish rapport with my respondents, I included a question about what position they played. Being a rugby player myself, I was able to comment on the different positions my respondents played and joke about how positions differed, or commiserate on those positions that are universally considered to be difficult or unpleasant. For example, if a respondent told me she was a lock, I would ask if she liked it and note that I played lock in college and found it to be terrible because we spent so much time with our heads squeezed between other people’s legs. I would then

acknowledge her prowess as a forward player and make a joke about how locks could not see or hear anything during the game. In this way I demonstrated my knowledge of the sport and slowly transitioned from the more formal questions about occupation and education to questions about players experiences on the field.

Reflexivity

Initially I had imagined that the most difficult moments in my interviews would be when I brought up race with white women. However, I found that I was easily able to bring up the topic and ask them to reflect on the racial composition of their teams and why they thought it was homogenous. Perhaps part of the ease of discussing race with white women was because they did not see themselves as racialized. Instead they would often talk about “others.” For example when I asked Taylor, a 25 year-old white women to describe the racial composition of her team she told me, “we have an Asian, which is cool.” hooks suggests that white people’s investment in sameness, while clinging to white privilege means that they are often unable to think of themselves as racialized, but instead reproduce a “liberal belief in a universal subjectivity” (2009 [1992], p. 92). It is perhaps this liberal belief that facilitated my white respondents’ discussion of racialized others on their teams rather than reflecting on how segregated their teams were.

Age was also an important factor in my interviews. My oldest respondent, Mary, was a thirty-six year old white mathematics professor. I took comfort in the fact that she had been through the PhD process and could sympathize with the work I was doing. At

the same time, because of her age, I felt the need to extend some additional show of respect to her. This meant that there were moments when I felt more hesitant about following up on some of her statements. For example, when she lamented the disappearance of all the heterosexual women in rugby I merely nodded along, whereas with a younger respondent I might have asked her for more of an explanation. The age dynamic in this interview, coupled with my sense of Mary's conservatism likely impacted the trajectory of the interview.

Limitations

In the United States, summer months are for seven-a-side rugby tournaments, where most of my recruiting and interviewing occurred. Given my limited funds and time constraints, I could only attend a small number of tournaments in order to find players to interview. Sometimes I would conduct several interviews at the same tournament because teams were traveling from afar and I would not have the opportunity to interview these women in-person otherwise. Conducting two or three interviews back-to-back at a loud rugby tournament where players are drinking and balls are whizzing past can get to be tiring. Consequently, although I tried to take field notes immediately following each interview and after a long day of interviewing, doing so was not always feasible. My use of field notes in my research does not make this study ethnographic. I recorded field notes in order to collect my initial thoughts after each interview and write down physical descriptions of my respondents and where the interview occurred.

My relatively small sample size means that I cannot make any generalizations about women rugby players in southern California, where I interviewed six players, or

women rugby players in Central Texas, where I conducted nine interviews. Furthermore, I neither interviewed several players from the same team nor conducted participant observation with individual teams. My findings are therefore limited to how the individuals described their experiences on their different teams and their overall experiences as rugby players in the U.S.

CHAPTER 4. PERFECTED BY WOMEN? GENDER ON THE RUGBY PITCH

Scholars have suggested that women who play sports are performing masculinity, and/or challenging hegemonic notions of what it means to be feminine. In this chapter I focus specifically on how the women I interviewed described their experiences playing rugby. I am interested in how women navigate their athleticism and their relationship with other players. Broad (2001) suggests that women who play rugby engage in a gendered unapologetic evident in their DIY ethic on the field and their lack of compunction for breaking the rules off the field. Likewise, Whitson (2002) suggests that women who play rugby challenge the equation of physical power with masculinity. But what do women think of their experiences on the field and their relationships with other women and men who play rugby? How do ideas about gender, sexuality and race inform these relationships between players?

The following chapter is divided into three parts. First I share women's stories of their access to resources including coaches, field space, and practice time. An analysis of women's experiences with access to the game offers a way to examine how their gender might complicate this access. Next I consider the women's relationship with men's teams and finally examine how stereotypes of women rugby players inform my respondents' experiences.

Women, coaches and fields

Research has shown that although women might be accepted in sports, they still face barriers when it comes to accessing resources (Cox & Pringle, 2011; Lafferty & McKay, 2004; Mennson, 2000). Lafferty and McKay (2004) in their ethnographic study of women boxers demonstrate how women might be welcomed into the boxing gym but received less attention from coaches, were sexualized by men in the gym, and did not have the opportunity to spar as frequently as the men. Through their study, Lafferty and McKay (2004) show how the gender regime (Connell 2001) remains intact. Likewise, using in-depth interviews, Cox and Pringle (2011) examine how women footballers in New Zealand managed to gain a foothold in the sport by performing prescribed femininity, which included accepting substandard access to resources such as field time, and coaches. Instead of fighting to attain these resources, the women Cox and Pringle (2011) interviewed subscribed to the discourses of normative femininity, which resulted in the men seeing them as not threatening, thereby “allowing” them access to coaches, fields, and other resources necessary to play.

My respondents shared stories that suggested that they also experienced times when they felt unequal treatment between them and the men with whom they played. As Tank told me about her team:

... it's just like, there's a men and a women's side to that team, and they are all-inclusive and everything like that. Blah, blah, blah. Lies! I'm saying that because I'm a little bit bitter, but it's just a mess. Everything is focused on the men's side and the women play too.

Tank's comments highlight her awareness of the unequal distributions between the men's team and the women's team. Despite the notion that her team is "all-inclusive" she notes a clear divide between how the resources are distributed and who receives attention.

Mary had a similar experience on her team although she does not express as much disdain for this inequity as Tank. Speaking about coaches she notes:

I can't really speak to the differences between men and women coaches but it felt like the women's side, there was not as much attention given to women. There were a number of reasons for that. You know, there was the men going to this particular tournament, the women just weren't coming out in numbers. You'd have 3 to 5 women showing up to practice, yet you'd have 20 men showing up.

The men are going to have more attention just naturally.

Mary justifies the lack of attention the women's team receives by highlighting that the men were preparing for a tournament and also that the women were not showing up for practices in as large of numbers as the men were. For this reason the men deserved to have more attention. Unlike Tank who is irate about the discrepancy in how attention is divided, Mary seems to blame the women who do not show up to practice for some of these inequalities.

Laura did not agree entirely that the women were at fault in the unequal distribution of resources. When I asked her about her team's relationship with coaches she had this to say:

Right now we're kind of in a weird phase where we're practicing with the men and the whole club has a group of coaches that work with all of us. But in reality

we kind of get pushed out to where we don't really have anyone working with us.

[Anima: Why?] I don't know. Everyone wants to work with the men.

Although Laura cannot say why, she is aware that the women's team gets the short end of the stick. Laura goes on to explain that because the women and men practice together on her team, she does not "feel like we have as much time to focus on the specific things we need to work on." Because the men hijack the coaches' attention, the women are left to figure out practices for themselves. Furthermore, Laura recognizes that "a lot of the guys don't want to practice with us so during some drills they'd purposely pass over us and stuff like that." Not only does Laura's team lack the same kind of resources that the men's team has, but she also reports that the men actively exclude the women from drills. The way in which women were excluded from the field reflects what Lafferty and McKay (2004) identified as maintaining the gender regime (Connell, 2001) in sports, despite the inclusion of women into previously exclusively masculine spaces.

Just as the women experienced unfair access to field and play time, they also had difficulty in finding coaches. Like many of my other respondents, Caren related how her team had difficulty with finding coaches. When I asked her to expand on some of the difficulties, she told me:

Well we're part of a large men's club that has been a large men's club for a long time. And there's a lot of old boys and everything like that. But we've just recently been joined with them. So this is still very fresh [but] I feel like no one really wants to coach women. And there's, you know, there's a couple of reasons for that. Women are, they are notoriously hard to coach sometimes.

Caren recognized the difficulty her team has in retaining coaches, but justifies it as being because women are difficult to coach. She explained that her team had “a lot of older players” who were not “acquiescent towards people telling them what to do” and suggested that this stubbornness was a “woman’s thing.” However she added:

But yeah what’s the glory in coaching a women’s team? You really have to want to be a good coach. And I don’t think there are a lot of men out there who are like, “I’m ready to like, this is what I want to dedicate my life to is coaching this team to greatness.” I don’t think there are a lot of people like that. [3-second silence]
Yeah.

Although Caren suggests that women are to blame for their difficulty in finding coaches, she also acknowledges that there’s no “glory in coaching women.” Cindy similarly noted that it “takes a special man” to coach women’s rugby. She explained that in college they had a lot of turnover with their coaches and she believed it was because with one of her coaches for example, “I think he just got tired of all the drama and all the bullshit of dealing with 30 plus women 4 to 5 days a week...It’s like all the time.”

Like Caren, Cindy suggests that women are difficult to coach simply because women are difficult. Why would these women assert that women are difficult and that only someone who wants to be a good coach would actively seek to be a women’s rugby coach? By claiming that women are difficult to coach, my respondents try to justify why they have fewer resources than men, choosing to believe that they do not deserve these resources because they are women. My respondents’ claim that women are difficult

suggests an investment in what Thorpe (2009) refers to as feminine capital. This identification with the category of woman reproduces maleness as superior in sport.

Given the difficulty some teams had in finding and retaining coaches, several of my respondents reported that players serve as coaches. But as Lo noted, “I think it’s very hard to be a player-coach because you want to get in the practice time, but you also have to lead it.” At the same time, Lo thinks that there are perks to having player-coaches “because they understand how we feel, and so communication is a lot smoother” than with previous coaches that her team had. According to Lo one of her team’s former coaches did not explain to them why he made certain play decisions: “It didn’t make sense and we couldn’t understand where he was coming from at all.... so I think we were all kind of flustered.”

My respondents suggested that coaches who did not understand how players feel were oblivious to the fact that their players were women. Gene described her college coach as “really insensitive” because “he didn’t really know how to coach women, so he kind of just treated us like guys because that’s... how he had been coached.” When I asked her to explain how he would be insensitive she replied, “If you were sucking, he’d be like, you know, you suck right now! You need to pull it together. And like [chuckles] you can’t really tell girls that they suck. They take that really personally.” Gene remarks on how sensitive women supposedly are when she says, “they take it personally.” However, it is interesting to note that she does not identify with women when she calls them sensitive. Instead she distances herself from those women who would take offense to hearing their coach tell them they are “not good enough to start” in a game.

When Tate talked about her coaches, she described one, “Fernando” as being “more of a softie, more of a pushover,” who cared a lot about his players and developing their skills. “Dick” on the other hand was “the more aggressive type and [he’d] yell at us and some of the girls actually take that very offensive.” She went on to explain:

We’re females, you know, we get very emotional sometimes. And sometimes that keeps some of them from coming to practice because sometimes [Dick] is really negative. But me coming from sports, I’m kind of used to that. I’m used to coaches yelling at me and telling me what to do, telling me what I need to work on, so I don’t take it personal.

Although Tate identifies with the women on her team as women, like Gene she distances herself from the sensitivity that her teammates supposedly show to their coaches. Importantly however, whether they explicitly say it or not, both Tate and Gene assert that they are women. Consequently, they insert themselves into the category of woman and use the lens of femininity to characterize their experiences. Consistent with Krane *et al* (2004), the findings from this study suggest that female athletes make sense of the paradoxes of their femininity and their athleticism by asserting a difference between athleticism and what it means to be a woman in a way that circumvents a conflict between the two.

Access to coaches was not the only limitation that my respondents experienced. Tank, who was instrumental in founding her university’s college team, told me about their first jerseys. The city in which her university was located had a men’s team that “had been there since Methuselah.” This team was apparently excited about the prospect

of a women's team and donated old jerseys to the women: "We used their oversized jerseys and just played and I still have pictures of our practices and it's just, it's been, it was awesome." Tank's initial contact with men's rugby team appears to have been positive since the men donated jerseys and even helped her new team with coaching.

However Tate had a different experience with the men's team in her city. When I asked her about the relationship between the men's and women's teams, she responded:

There is a men's team and they're pretty established. However I feel like there is no connection there... I think they are sponsored by Michelob. They have jerseys that are fully paid for. Two, three sets of jerseys. And we have one. We had to, in the beginning, last year, [during] 15s, we had to borrow their old jerseys because we didn't have any. So I can't say that I know any of the guys. I mean if I saw them I could point them out, but I don't know any of the guys on the team. It's more like we kind of stay separate.

The marked difference in resources between the men's and women's teams in Tate's city is evidenced by the fact that the men have sponsorship, while the women hold fundraisers to pay for their jerseys.

Gene told me that her rugby team previously used to pay to use the men's field for games. She was not sure if her team still paid or if that relationship had changed however she described the relationship as follows:

I don't really do much with the men's team, but I know that there's two men's teams and even in [my college city] there's a men's team there and they are always open to us coming and practicing with them or here we've used one of the

teams' club house and we play at their pitch. And they'll do cookouts and stuff for us. And we will go help them either line their fields or whatever they need.

The relationship between the teams is clearly gendered. The men work the grill while the women line the fields. This division of labor, although it appears on the surface to be different, hearkens to traditional divisions between masculine roles and feminine roles.

The women I interviewed experienced difficulty recruiting and retaining coaches, finding sponsors for their equipment, and generally being taken seriously as rugby players. Part of the difficulties my respondents discussed seemed to be organized around their relationship with the men's teams. Below I examine how these relationships are organized around gender hierarchies and norms of sexuality.

Women, men and rugby

I found that although the relationship between my respondents' teams and their local men's teams seemed strained, the women also felt an affinity for the men's teams. Taylor found that the men's team comprised "a great group of guys" with whom she could play touch when not enough women came out to practice. Likewise Tank told me that the men's team "really wants a good women's team to get built, which would be awesome." These women suggest that men's support is useful if not necessary in developing women's skills on the team.

Although Tank and Taylor only discussed support from the men's teams, several of my other respondents noted sexual relationships between the two teams. Laura, who

initially noted that the men's team did not want to practice with the women, told me that the two teams "have a pretty good [relationship] like we hang out; they'll invite us to anything they do and vice versa." She continued:

We had a rocky time with the men's team a few years back because some of the girls were sleeping with some of the guys and well, so we were just like the guys suck! ...there's not the incest going on right now. It makes it way easier for us to all hang out.

By suggesting that the sexual relationship between the men's and women's teams caused tension, Laura argues that sex changes things. When she notes that there's no more "incest" between the teams the men and women get along better, she calls attention to the idea that the possibility of sexual relationships between men and women may potentially be disruptive. Laura's claim about sex between players also normalizes heterosexuality on the team. If not having sex makes it easier for the different teams to hang out, then is sex between players on the same team also potentially problematic?

Jen had a different story to tell about the relationship between the men and women's teams at her university. When I asked her if the two teams spent time with each other, even though she responded in the affirmative, she added, "We're actually not super close to them surprisingly. They kind of bro out with each other, we kind of bro out with each other too." Jen suggests that her women's team is similar to the men's team in how they hang out with each other. By calling her teammates relationship "bro-ing out," perhaps Jen is also making a claim about heterosexuality. Bros do not sleep with each other, after all. Yet she also revealed that "one of my captains is dating one of the men's

players that graduated last year, and I've dated a men's rugby player. So yeah, I'd say a lot of relationships form within and between teams." Despite Jen's initial assertion that the two teams are not close, she calls attention to romantic/sexual relationships between the two men and women's teams.

The relationship between the men and women's teams reproduces the expectation that women are sexually available to men (Cox & Pringle, 2011; Mennesson, 2000). On Terrence's team, "there are several girls on the team that are dating players on the men's team." Because their girlfriends play women's rugby, Terrence reports that the men's team is "really supportive of us." The possibility of developing romantic/sexual relationships with the women's rugby team seems to encourage men's support of these women.

At the same time that my respondents recognized the sexual investment the men's teams had with the women's teams, they also distinguished themselves from "rugby whores," who Laura described as "this group of skanky girls that will come out and watch the men." She went on to explain "a huge divide between us, the girls who play rugby and the wives, girlfriends, and rugby groupies." By bringing up the "rugby whores" and noting how they do not play rugby, Laura attempts to distance herself from the sexual relationship that the men have with these women. Yet like the other straight players, she is aware of the men's sexual interest in her teammates.

Cindy explains the expectation of sexual availability when she describes the different levels of rapport between the men and women's teams that she's been on:

Yeah, I've experienced all sorts of levels of socialization [from the guys wanting to hang out with us] to the guys don't want to be a part of the women's team at all...Sometimes the guys think that the women are really cool and they want to hang out and sometimes they don't want to have anything to do with the women because they think we're all lesbians or whatever.

For Cindy the men's interest in the women's team has centered on whether the women are considered to be potentially sexually available to the men. It is interesting to note that she does not mark the sexuality of the women who are "really cool" but mentions that the men are hesitant to spend time with women perceived as lesbians. The distinction between really cool women and lesbians suggests that sexual interest might explain why men are supportive.

Flip did not see the oscillating relationship between the men and women's teams as dependent on the possibility for sex between the teams however. She described the relationship between the two teams at her university as follows:

We started off really close-knit...You know, with college you just kind of go back and forth, like "oh we love our men's teams" and then a couple of years later it's like "oh they're douchebags I don't like them, we're not gonna hang out." ... So my time there we were pretty close to them. A couple of years after I left though I think things fell apart. Unfortunately I think you see that a lot with men's and women's rugby because the numbers are so different so the men's teams always have much more funding and they are able to do more. So it's difficult to coordinate socials with teams when you can only bring one keg and they bring

four. So what do you do? Say if you're a woman, if you have a vagina you can only drink from this keg... So you get into some nitty-gritty bullshit I think with that.

In Flip's experience part of the tensions arose from the unequal distribution of resources between the men and women. Flip also identifies as a gay woman and may have been oblivious to some of the sexual expectations the men's team had.

The ways that my respondents discussed their relationships with men's teams highlight how sexuality informs these relationships. All the women were aware that the men's interest in them was somehow related to their perceived (potential) sexual availability. At the same time, they seemed to seek the men's support (and maybe approval) in their relationships.

From my interviews it appears that several of my respondents had the impression that men's interest in women's rugby is contingent on the possibility that the men will get laid. Perhaps because women who play rugby are often stereotyped as dykes, their apparent heterosexuality makes it easier for men to support their participation in rugby. At the same time that my respondents affirmed their heterosexuality, they also had to confront the stereotype that all women rugby players were lesbians. According to my respondents, there appeared to be tension between lesbian and straight women who play rugby. My respondents offered several interpretations of how they experienced the lesbian stereotype, which I explore below.

“There’s no room for straight girls in women’s rugby.”

The stereotype of the lesbian women’s rugby players meant that several of my respondents did not think they fit the prescription of what a women’s rugby player was supposed to look like (masculine), or be like (lesbian). Jen explained that she “hate[s] to use this kind of language,” but described her team as “notoriously straight.” She continued:

Sexuality is very mixed on the team, but I expected to be among purely masculine women. It is kind of like that, but not really. My team is more feminine than a lot of the other teams I’ve seen. Not that I care either way, but yeah, when I got on the team they were like, “yeah we’re notoriously straight, we’re like a cute rugby team.” I don’t know how true that is. I’ve been to a lot of tournaments and there’s other teams like us so, I don’t know.

Jen contradicts herself several times as she attempts to describe her team. First she agrees with her teammates that the team is, unlike other rugby teams, mostly straight. Here “straight” is also meant to mark femininity, because she explains further that she expected to be on a team of mostly masculine women. At the same time she suggests that perhaps the notoriety that her team asserts as straight might not actually be so unique since she’s seen other teams like hers. Jen evidently buys into the stereotype of the butch women’s rugby player, although she also seems to question this stereotype.

Jen also noted “a lot of people assume that I’m not straight right away.” When I asked if this assumption bothered her, she laughed it off by saying:

I don't really give a fuck [laughs] like I don't really care. I can see how that can be sort of offensive, but it's like sometimes I don't even know what they mean, but a lot of times they mean [that I'm not fat and I'm not ugly], but it doesn't really bother me.

Jen appears to be conflicted by how the lesbian stereotype affects her. Even though she insists that she does not care, she also remarks on how people calling her a lesbian can be offensive.

Jen expressed frustration that when she tells people she plays rugby, their first reaction is, "You don't look like a rugby player." When I asked her to explain what she thought that meant she responded, "They're like, 'well you're not ugly, and you're not fat. And you're not this and that.' And I'm like, that's the common misconception." As a rugby player who does not fit the fat and ugly stereotype (these are words also used to describe dykes), Jen has to navigate this conception of what she's supposed to look like and what she actually looks like as a rugby player.

Cindy found the stereotype of the gay women's rugby player to be frustrating. When I asked her to describe her team in terms of sexuality she sighed heavily and responded:

I mean in any women's serious athletic sport, there's going to be a mixture of gay and straight people. That's the way it is. I think that rugby does have the stereotype that lesbians play or whatever. And so I think that sometimes women who are gay are attracted to it because they think that they'll like fit in or it'll be accepting. That's, you know, that's great. But I think that that's not always the

case... I think back on my different years through college. And like when I first got on the team there were a lot of girls that were gay. And then like a couple years they were mostly straight and then the third year there was a mix. You know, it just changed.

Cindy first suggests that when women play any sport seriously there will be both straight and gay women on the team. She then uses the example of her college team to show how the stereotype of the gay women's rugby player did not always fit on her team because depending on which women chose to play during any given season there were sometimes more straight women than gay women or vice versa. Cindy also notes how the stereotype of gay women playing rugby encourages lesbians to try out the sport. In Cindy's view, this stereotype does not always prove to be true.

Laura also noted that rugby attracted gay women when she discussed how the stereotype of gay women playing rugby impacted her experiences:

Women's rugby I don't like that it is [pause] a lot of the gay girls feel like it is a lesbian sport. Like I've been told, "there's no room for straight girls in women's rugby." I've been told that to my face. [Anima: How did you respond to that?] I didn't. I was just like, "what?!" And like we'll get a lot of girls come out to practice just to try it out that had never played before, and they'll think like "just because I'm gay and just because I'm um, dykey, I'm going to be good at rugby."

And they're not. They're not athletes and they never come back.

Laura resists the idea that rugby is played by gay women when she employs the example of the gay women who are not athletes and do not belong on the rugby field.

The stereotype of women rugby players as gay seemed to strike a nerve with several of my straight respondents. At the same time because they are aware of the stereotype, it seems that several of my straight respondents were prepared to ward off accusations of being a lesbian. Mary recalled how when she first started playing rugby in college her stepmother “for a long time thought I was going to become a lesbian. *Become a lesbian* [emphasizes]. At the age of seventeen I was going to *become* a lesbian.” It is difficult to determine if Mary meant that one could not “become” a lesbian at such a young age, or if one’s sexuality was already determined by age seventeen. But the frustration with which she recalled this story is interesting to note. Although she suggests that being potentially seen as a lesbian does not bother her, she is clearly frustrated by the idea.

Cindy initially was not sure if the stereotype of gay women rugby players bothered her. When I asked she responded:

I don’t know. I guess it kind of does. But I don’t really see it as a bad thing. I mean I have a lot of friends from rugby that are gay and I have a lot that are straight. And I don’t know. I don’t look at anyone any differently so I mean, people can think what they think and maybe they should have more of an open mind. Because like I said, any collegiate, women’s basketball team, it’s going be a mixture. Soccer team, same thing! So you know, it does bother me some... so it does bother me I guess when I’ve heard guys say like, oh yeah, women’s rugby, they’re all like nasty dykes or, you know, comments like that, that bothers me. Because it’s derogatory. So from that aspect it definitely does bother me.

Cindy starts off by denying that she cares about being called gay because she plays women's rugby. But as she continues she first asserts that she does not think any differently of people regardless of whether they are gay or straight. Finally she admits that being seen as a "nasty dyke" because she plays rugby definitely bothers her. The difficulty with which Cindy expresses her dislike of the stereotype highlights the tenuous relationship between women athletes and the perception of failed heterosexuality.

Cindy further asserts her heterosexuality when she tells me about a shirt she owns: "I have funny shirts too. Like I have the endangered species: heterosexual rugger." Although the words on Cindy's shirt resist the stereotype of the gay women's rugby players in mocking tones, it also highlights the anxiety that straight women who play the sport feel. Mary, Jen, Cindy, and Laura were sure to mention, at least at first, that this stereotype did not bother them. However, further questioning revealed that they were not completely at ease with being potentially marked as lesbians.

While my straight respondents had conflicting thoughts about the stereotype of gay women rugby players, my gay respondents expressed a sense of acceptance within the community. Flip told me:

I think rugby definitely breaks a lot of stereotypes for women, gay and straight. There are a lot of queer people who play, which is wonderful. I was already out before I started playing rugby, but I have known quite a few teammates who came to rugby not being out and then through rugby and meeting a lot of queer people and maybe like seeing that "oh ok this can be normal or there is a life you know that I can lead if I am this way." Or they meet someone that they have affections

for or something. But I've seen quite a few people come to rugby and they've been able to come out and be happy and be healthy. So I think rugby definitely offers a support group there for that population.

Like Flip, Gene experienced rugby as a supportive environment. She called rugby "a pretty gay sport" and explained that:

For me it's been great because I don't think I would have ever come out. Well I probably would have come out of the closet without rugby but it helps a lot. There are so many gay people in rugby and it's just a really great support system, like an instant support system that you have.... For me it's been great because you just know that you're going to have a support system there.

Flip and Gene note the community that rugby provides for them as gay women and remark on this sense of support when they reflect on their experiences in the sport. For them, the stereotype serves to attract other gay women to the sport and therefore helps to build a community (Cahn 1993). Terrence explained of her initial contact with rugby players, "I think that they were trying to recruit me just because I looked kind of dyke-y and like I wouldn't mind being physical and getting dirty." Terrence deduced that because she looked like she might be gay, the women's rugby team at her college tried to recruit her. Susan Cahn (1993), Jayne Caudwell (1999; 2002) and others (see for example, Broad, 2001; Carle & Nauright, 1999; Gill, 2007) have shown that sports such as rugby, soccer, and hockey are a space where lesbians can find and create community.

Perhaps the tension that my straight respondents felt around the stereotype of the gay women's rugby player informed how they related to the men as sexual beings. At the

same time, the stereotype seemed to create a space for gay women to find community in the sport. Regardless of the different ways that my gay and straight respondents experienced the stereotype of the lesbian athlete, they all insisted on an identity as “a women’s rugby player.” This identity marked their sense of a shared experience as women doing something different from the norm.

Discussion

Despite the progress that women have made in sports, my interviews show that women still navigate a seeming paradox between being women and being athletes. My respondents’ apparent investment in their identities as women complicates how they experience themselves as rugby players in three significant ways. First of all, they seem to accept that women are in some ways intruders on the field and should *naturally* have a hard time gaining access to resources. Secondly, for the straight women I spoke to, their investment in heterosexuality meant that they reproduced heteronormative expectations in their relationship with men and between themselves. In their attempts to assert themselves as heterosexual women who play rugby, my respondents often engaged in “defensive othering” (Ezzell, 2009). For the straight women who asserted their heterosexuality, they seemed to do this in response to the gay women who wanted to make rugby a “dykescape” (Caudwell, 2002).

After Title IX, women’s participation in sport is no longer an anomaly. In fact, women feel entitled in their access to different sports (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). And

yet, my respondents are aware that they are not in a truly all-inclusive environment when they play rugby. My respondents' performance of "athlete" seemed limited to when they were with each other, as Jen called it, "bro-ing out." As athletes they were part of a community of rugby players, men and women. They reported working with the men's teams to help build a successful women's rugby team. Likewise they attended each other's games as a show of support and hosted after-game socials together.

But when women accept (though angrily), the unequal distribution of resources between them and the men's teams with whom they are associated, they might be understood to be "doing woman." Interestingly, several of the women I spoke to identified themselves as more sensitive than men and more difficult to coach. By claiming sensitivity and stubbornness, these players are performing the culturally hegemonic prescription for woman and femininity.

As Schilt and Westbrook show, "doing woman" is closely tied to heterosexuality (2009). My findings support Schilt and Westbrook's (2009) assessment of how performance of gender and sexuality inform each other. Despite claims by some of my respondents that sexual relationships between the men and women's teams could result in tension and animosity between teams, several of them also related stories about such sexual relationships. These women reproduced heteronormative prescriptions that expect women to be sexually available to men. Even when my respondents were aware that men's investment in their teams were related to the women's perceived (potential) sexual availability, they did not seem to actively reject this idea. Instead, like Laura, they distinguished themselves from rugby whores or rejected the lesbian stereotype ascribed to

women rugby players. My respondents' investment in their white heterosexual femininity resulted in their distinguishing themselves from those other non-athletic straight "whorish" women, and those gay women's rugby players. Like the women on the team Ezzell (2009) studied, my respondents' assertion of their heterosexual femininity characterizes how they navigate doing woman and doing athlete.

Not only did my respondents navigate between being women and being athletes, they also appeared to experience a tension between being women and being women rugby players. This tension was centered on the perception of the women's rugby play as lesbian. The lesbian stereotype is a way of controlling women in sport (Cahn, 1993; Caudwell, 2002) but also provides a space for lesbians to congregate. For many of my straight respondents, their awareness of the lesbian presence meant that they prepared themselves to resist being branded lesbians. For them, being a woman rugby player was complicated by the idea that women rugby players were lesbians. Conversely, respondents who did not identify as heterosexual reported that playing rugby created for them a "dykescape" (Caudwell, 2002, p. 24). Regardless of how my respondents described their sexuality, there appeared to be a tension about how to do woman rugby player. The way in which sexuality is deployed to complicate the identity of woman rugby player suggests that the relationship between doing gender and doing (hetero) sexuality is far more complex than a linear equation might indicate.

My interviews further suggest that women rugby players might not actually be performing masculinity. Instead, they seem to identify as women who navigate different

ways of “doing (white) woman.” One of my respondents, Gene, who I imagined would identify strongly with masculinity, told me:

But I don't really like thinking of myself in terms of masculine and feminine. I kind of like to think of myself as like this is who I am. I like working with tools, and I also like gardening and quilting and baking.

Gene's response illustrates the diverse ways in which women who play rugby might describe their experiences—neither masculine nor feminine. Instead they express an investment in their identities as white women, athletes, and rugby players.

Because gender and sexuality are racialized categories, it is important to consider how my respondents' race informed their navigation of these categories. Although my respondents did not make any explicit statements about race, their experiences are racialized. As Nirmal Puwar notes, social spaces are not “blank and open for any body to occupy” (2004, p. 8). Instead, space is always contested and constituted by the bodies that inhabit it. Women's rugby, and rugby in general is characterized as a white (male) sport (Long & Hylton, 2002; Spracklen, 2001), meaning that the sport might be racially understood as a white space. When white women rugby players insist that they are women, they can be understood to be illustrating their investment in what Holly Thorpe describes as white feminine capital (Thorpe, 2009), which is the gender advantage they derive from their white femininity. Consequently, when my respondents accept that as women they would naturally get less attention than men, I think it is worthwhile to consider how this conclusion might be informed by their race and sexuality.

When my respondents talked about race, they often talked about otherness. They discussed Samoans as really huge and the ideal rugby player. For example, Terrence told me:

All the women that I've played with that were like from Tonga, Guam, they're just really big, and they're really great at rugby. It's pretty awesome. Samoan. Oh my god, the Samoan girls. There are a lot of Samoan girls that play on the college teams here in California, and they are huge! Just really good rugby stock; I'm a little bit jealous actually.

The suggestion that Samoans are naturally good at rugby was repeated throughout my interviews with white women.

At the same time that my respondents talked about “really big Samoan girls” and “hundred pound Hispanics” who did not belong on the field, they also note, as Taylor did, that “there's black [or Asian] players on every team,” who are “awesome.” When respondents did acknowledge that rugby was a segregated sport, they offered incomprehensible explanations as to why. For example, in response to my statement that I had heard that rugby was a “pretty white sport,” Mary told me, “I don't know what the blacks were playing but it wasn't...I mean there are more and more blacks now. I mean I know that there are other colors, but...uh...anyways...um...” Mary added that on her team, “I think there are a couple of Latino women, but those are again white, right? It's a white race.” Likewise, Taylor described her college team as mostly white with some Asians, who she noted, “were cool though.”

This chapter has explored how my respondents discussed their experiences as women rugby players. I have shown that despite contentions that women who play sport are performing masculinity, they are challenging the gender binary in more complex ways than might be imagined. At the same time that these women contest ideas about masculinity and femininity, they also express an investment in the heterosexual matrix. Furthermore, the way whiteness shapes the sport of rugby illustrates another aspect of how my respondents' identification with whiteness constitutes their experiences of themselves as white women who play rugby. Any kind of resistance they perform around these norms must be understood as resistance against norms of white femininity. Considering how race and sexuality inform women's experiences on the rugby field shows how navigating and or resisting notions of femininity and masculinity are not static processes but are always informed and complicated by ideas around race and sexuality.

CHAPTER 5. VIOLENCE ON THE PITCH: “IT’S BASICALLY THE SAME, JUST WITH TITS”

Previously I discussed how my respondents, despite their identities as women who play rugby, and their recognition of inequalities between male players and themselves, still demonstrated an investment in the heterosexual matrix, which reproduces these inequalities. In this chapter I examine how women rugby players perform their athleticism and hence demonstrate that women are capable of performing the same kinds of physical feats as men. At the same time that sportswomen who play violent sports are seen to challenge gender ideologies that affirm the relationship between men, masculinity and violence (Dunn, 1994; Whitson, 2002), little sociological research has been undertaken to empirically assess this relationship (Young, 2012).

I suggest that Michael Kaufman’s (2001 [1987]) characterization of the triad of men’s violence is not, in fact, exclusive to men. Rather, these women engage in similar kinds of violence and aggressive behavior as men. However, as Judith Lorber notes, “once the gender category is given, the attributes of the person are also gendered” (1993, p. 569). Consequently, the equation of violence with masculinity means that when women are violent, they are often understood to be performing masculinity (Gill, 2007; Halberstam, 1998). Yet chapter three showed that my respondents do not necessarily consider their performance as athletes to be masculinity. Below I describe the different modes of violence that my respondents engage in on the field and argue that when

women participate in violent sports, they challenge the attribution of violence to men and the notion that women are naturally nonviolent.

The relationship between gender and violence is also racialized. In *Darwin's Athletes*, John Hoberman considers how the black athlete in white cultural imagination is embedded in “the traditional view of blacks as essentially physical and primitive people” (1997, p. xvii). Through his study of sports, Hoberman examines how the emphasis on “natural black athletic ability” coincided with theorizing about biological causes of violence. Hence blackness became a marker of criminality. The gendered racialization of violence in the white imagination means that black men exist in contradistinction to white women. Whereas black men are deemed violent and hypersexual (Collins, 2005; Hoberman, 1997), white women are passive, virginal, and importantly, must be protected from black men. The social construction of white femininity as docile means that the correct performance of this kind of femininity involves submitting to the protection of white men and certainly not participating in any forms of extracurricular violence.

As Ruth Frankenberg (1993) showed, the proper performance of femininity was of great importance to the women she interviewed. In her discussion of white femininity, Frankenberg remarks on how “white women and men were placed, respectively, as victim and rescuer” when discussing white women’s sexuality (1993, p. 237). This characterization of white femininity meant that white women’s sexuality was safest with white men, who would protect them from the violence of black men. My respondents challenge the construction of white femininity as in need of rescuing or protection through their experiences on the field.

For facility, Table 2 offers a brief description of some of my respondents. I present these descriptions to show that although my respondents may dress in stereotypically feminine or masculine attire, they all engage in different forms of violence explored below.

Table 2. Physical description of respondents

Name	Race	Age	Positions Played	Years Playing	Players' physical description
Caren	White	29	Hook and flanker	10 years	5'2, 145lbs, short curly hair around her ears, red scar on her knee, rugby shorts and shirt
Cindy	White	29	Everything but scrumhalf, mostly fly	11 years	5'8, 155lbs, could see muscles around her shoulders, wore a blue dress, hair pulled back.
Flip	White	27	Scrumhalf	6 years	5'2, 110lbs, jean shorts up to mid thigh, green soccer jersey, hair like little orphan Annie
Gene	White	26	Fullback, inside, outside center	6 years	5'7, 145lbs, square jaw, hair to around shoulders, wore plaid boy shorts and a gray shirt. Texas necklace
Jen	White	18	Flanker	1 year	5'6, 120lbs, shoulder length hair down, rugby shorts, and shirt
Laura	White	33	Hooker and scrumhalf	6 years	5'3, 120lbs, wearing rugby shorts, athletic shirt, shoulder length hair in ponytail
Mary	White	36	Fly-half and fullback	5yrs in college, then 10yrs off started again last year	5'1, 100lbs, wearing rugby shorts, jersey, socks, and cleats, shoulder length hair in ponytail
Tank	Black	29	Everything but prop and hook	9 years	5'6, 182lbs, dressed in men's jeans, red t-shirt, and a baseball cap
Tate	Mexican	28	Inside center, flanker	1 year	5'7, 150lbs, short sleeve tattoos, broad shoulders, long black hair worn in a single braid that went down to mid-back, wore rugby shorts and a white tank-top
Terrence	White	28	Everything, typically fly-half, fullback or wing	6 years	5'4, 130lbs, knitted hat, boy's jeans, t-shirt, piercings in her ear, tattoo on arm
Z	White	26	Hooker, prop, inside center	7 years	5'5, 165lbs, hair cut short to above her ears

Ruck me, maul me, make scrum

Perhaps the image most associated with rugby is the scrum. In fifteen-a-side rugby matches, eight women from each team crouch in front of each other. On the referee's call, "crouch, touch, pause, engage," the players hit each other and push against the opposing team. This move forms the scrum. Not all rugby players scrum, but all tackle. Unlike a football tackle a rugby tackle is typically one-on-one and involves a player grabbing her opponent and driving her to the ground. The convention is "cheek-to-cheek," meaning the tackling player aims her cheek at her opponent's buttocks. Both players typically go to the ground together.

Players expressed ambivalence about tackling. On the one hand they reported that they hated it and were afraid of tackling. On the other hand they claimed to love it, especially when it was well executed. Gene is 26 years old and in the military. When I asked her whether she likes tackling she responded,

No [both laugh] I hate tackling people. Yeah, I would much rather get tackled than have to tackle somebody. But I mean you don't even realize it when you play rugby that it's this contact sport in which you're hitting each other with no pads.

It's just, you're taught how to do it and that's the sport.

Gene suggests that tackling is not a feature of the sport she enjoys, but "you're just taught how to do it and that's the sport." Gene's words highlight how athletes' bodies are expected to perform aggressive, violent tasks without thinking about the consequences of their actions. The fact that tackling is an expected part of the sport means for these

women that it is something they have to do regardless of how they feel about it. In fact as Gene makes clear, the motions that result in the tackle are not even something she thinks about when doing it.

Several of my respondents felt similarly to Gene about tackling. They said they hated it. At the same time they expressed a sense of great satisfaction when they executed a tackle successfully. For many of the women I interviewed tackling was a challenge for them to overcome. Mary, who is 36 years old and a mathematics professor told me:

I like tackling. Tackling feels really good, especially if it's a good tackle. There've been times when I've [chuckles] tackled bigger women. And it's more like I'm just on them, but I'm not actually tackling them. I like that. I like when we've been practicing something and we execute it, it actually goes well. Like we've actually done it well, oh that feels *so* good.

Mary is a small woman, about 5'1 and 100 pounds. Most rugby players would reasonably be bigger than her. From her words it is evident that she is proud of her ability to tackle women bigger than her.

Tate, a 28-year-old social worker described how she enjoys the thrill of the tackle. She told me about a "natural instinct" to tackle:

Yes! Yes, I do enjoy tackling. I guess my coaches are like there's a natural instinct in me to always want to make contact with somebody and that's one of my, that's one of the things I need to work on on the field is not making contact every time. So I guess I'm just naturally physical and so I think that's one of the things that I really enjoyed is just the physical-ness of the sport.

By speaking about a natural instinct to tackle Tate used similar language to men who suggest that their sports ability is natural (Messner, 1990). Like Tate, several of my respondents reported a “natural” aggression, which made them ideal rugby players. Players who had only been playing for less than a year prior to our interview often emphasized how much they like tackling. Tate had been playing for about seven months at the time of our interview. Her insistence on her natural tackling instinct could be associated with her development of her rugby identity. As a rugby player she *must* enjoy the “physical-ness of the sport.”

Whether my respondents considered tackling to be a necessary part of the game, a challenge to be overcome, or an act that gave them pleasure, none of them called tackling a violent aspect of the sport. Like men who find the violence of their sport necessary (Messner, 1990; Schacht, 1996), my respondents consider tackling, rucking, and mauling part of the game. At the same time, they are aware that tackles can be dangerous because they result in injuries. When Gene described tackling as one of the things she did not like about the game she added:

The thing I don't like [is] tackling people that are like 100 pounds bigger than me. I don't like open field tackles more than anything. At fullback there are quite a few times where it's just you and the other person has the ball and it's really terrifying when they are just running at you full speed and you're more or less just left to the will of destruction [both laugh] I've hurt myself numerous times in open field tackles because there's so much energy colliding and it has to go somewhere and it comes back on me [points at herself] and you get hurt that

way... However when they're executed and you hit an open field tackle you feel awesome. You feel like you just conquered the world.

In her position at wing, Gene's chances of injury are increased. On the periphery of the field, players are moving at faster speeds, which means that the impact of the tackle can be especially painful. However, as Gene shows, the euphoria associated with accomplishing this difficult task helps to mitigate the pain that they undoubtedly know they will experience. Like Mary, Gene's comment that a well-executed tackling feels like taking over the world highlights her ambivalence about tackling. In the same breath that she expresses fear on the field she also expresses euphoria.

In the context of playing rugby the feeling of accomplishing a difficult task successfully mitigates the violence of the sport. Not unlike men who play violent sport, the violence on the field is considered a necessary part of play. By engaging with the violence of the sport as a "necessary" part of the game, but not necessarily violent they reproduce the sport culture of violence (Young & White, 1995) at the same time that they resist the idea that women are naturally nonviolent.

(Women's) bodies as weapons

Players repeatedly mentioned that they like rugby because there is a position for any and every body type. The forward pack comprises eight women who are typically bigger than the rest of the team. Players in the front row are short and squat in order to be able to crouch low and hit their opponents in the scrum. The second row typically has the

tallest women on the team who help push the front row forward in the scrum and are lifted during lineouts to be able to catch the ball. Players in the back are expected to be smaller and faster than the forwards since they run into open space. The scrumhalf is usually the smallest person on the team. Her job is to move the ball from the forwards to the backs. Despite her size she knows that she is protected by her forwards and is not typically tackled during plays. The ways that different bodies can be utilized on the field means that regardless of how they looked according to conventional standards of beauty, players often reported feeling comfortable on the rugby field.

However a body in the “wrong” position heightens the likelihood of injury. For many players placing their bodies in a position that is not suited for them increased the risk of injury. When I met Tank she was wearing blue jeans and a red baseball shirt. Her hair was tucked underneath a red baseball cap with the letter T embroidered on it in white and blue. Tank is about 5’6 and although I did not ask about her weight she told me that she weighs 182 pounds. She was not the only one to tell me how much she weighed without my asking. Talking about being placed at the wing, Tank said:

Don’t stick me out on the wings, because that doesn’t make any sense. I mean strategically, it makes no sense, because I’m going up against somebody who is maybe 140 [pounds]. If I hit her, she’s going to be hurt. I’m going to hurt her. And I’d feel bad for like seconds. I’d do it again, but I’d feel bad for seconds.

At 182 pounds Tank imagines that she has no business playing out on the wings because in that position players are typically smaller and are moving at much faster speeds. If Tank should execute the kind of collision that Gene describes in the open field, she is

sure to cause injuries. And even though she recognizes that hurting another player is a bad thing, she also does not show much remorse. Some of her assertion that she would only “feel bad for seconds” could be posturing. Throughout our interview, which occurred at a bar, Tank flirted with the waitress by calling her names such as “babe,” and “doll.” Her demeanor seemed to me a show of how tough she was. Thus I am inclined to understand her lack of remorse as part of her show of toughness. But considering Tank’s words in relation to how my other respondents talk about injuring their opponents, her relative lack of compunction about hurting a 140-pound opponent evidences a trend.

Tackling is such a major part of the game that injuries are expected to occur. My respondents often expressed a cavalier attitude towards hurting other players. Terrence had been playing rugby for six years at the time of our interview. She mentioned that earlier on in her rugby career her injuries were a result of not knowing her body. When I asked her if she had ever injured another player, she said:

Oh I’m sure I have... [But] not that I know of that I can specifically say like oh that was because of me. I think that’s one of the sort of bigger misconceptions about rugby is that people actually think that there are these people that are out to hurt you... And you only really think that if you’ve never played before because you don’t realize that playing in a way that is going to hurt other people also hurts yourself... And also you’re trusting in the people that are playing against you that when they try to tackle you... they are going to do it in a way that’s not going to injure you. And I think that if you approach the game with the idea that you’re going to go out and like hurt other people, it’s a really dangerous mentality to

have. I'm sure that I've landed on somebody wrong or something. But... nobody's been able to go [gasps] you did this.

Terrence maps out several ways she understands rugby as a violent sport. First she suggests that playing with the intention of hurting others is a dangerous mentality to have because it increases the risk of hurting yourself. Secondly, there is an element of trust not just amongst teammates but also between all the players on the field. The game is structured in such a way that players are expected to engage in violent but safe behavior. Playing safely and recognizing that a tackle should not hurt your opponent keeps injuries to a minimum. However the possibility still remains that playing rugby might result in an injury. Terrence notes the likelihood that she may have hurt another player by “land[ing] on somebody wrong or something.” However this kind of injury is all part of the game. Terrence's words highlight her awareness of the inherent risk involved in playing the game.

At the same time the lack of intention to hurt another player in many ways mitigates the guilt that causing injuries might elicit. Thus players who go out to hurt others intentionally have a really “dangerous mentality” and engage in behavior contrary to the goal of playing rugby. As Tank saw it:

Your goal is to score points; your goal is to be efficient at your position. Your goal is not to dump tackle people, your goal is not to go out there and try and break people's ribs, or break someone's neck in a scrum.

Players with the intent purpose of hurting others are seen as anathema to the game. As Terrence and Tank show, the accepted roughness of rugby means that one player is not

necessarily held responsible for injuring another, especially if these injuries happen within the rules. The improbability of specifically pointing out one player for having caused an injury, compounded with the idea that good rugby players are not out there with the intention to hurt others reduces players' likelihood to feel remorse when they do hurt each other. When Tank said that she would only "feel bad for seconds" she also reiterated how injuries are just a part of the game.

You know, it's not written in the rules that you have to go out there and break someone's ribs every time. If it happens it's unfortunate, buy 'em a beer, patch 'em up, let's go, you know.

The idea that hurting other players is just part of the game diminishes the responsibility that players feel towards each other when that should happen.

Cindy is 29 years old and works as a development manager for an environmental firm. She laughed a lot throughout our conversation, even as she shared the story below about hurting another player:

The one that comes to mind is I tackled the scrumhalf [lowers voice and speaks deliberately], this really small girl. And I tackled her so hard her head hit the ground and she went into convulsions and like almost died... [Chuckles] yeah it was pretty scary. She was like frothing at the mouth and like the ambulance had to come and stuff. It sounds really bad. [Still laughing] I was like 100 more pounds than her. Not a hundred more pounds. She was really, really little. She was like, Hispanic or maybe Indian or something? A really little girl; she probably weighed like a 100 pounds soaking wet. I mean you gotta think about that when you're

playing. I mean, I'm a big woman, but I have been knocked on my ass too by girls that are bigger than me.

Cindy's story not only reveals some of the dangers of tackling but also shows how players can escape taking responsibility for causing injury to others. She implicitly blamed the other player for being too small to play—"you gotta think about that when you're playing"—and remarks on how she too has been hit by women much larger than she. Thus Cindy managed to victimize herself for injuries she may have sustained, and blamed her opponent for the injury that Cindy caused her. When I asked her if she was able to keep playing she laughed and said, "I was able to. I was fine."

As I have shown earlier, rugby might be understood as a racially white space. When Cindy highlights her opponent's race, it is to show the other scrumhalf's otherness. Why does it matter that the opposing scrumhalf was Hispanic or Indian? Cindy seems to be using the scrumhalf's race to "explain" her size and in some ways to suggest that Hispanics and/or Indians are not suited for rugby. Contrarily she mentions "a huge Samoan girl, which was awesome," on another one of her teams.

Although Cindy's story might be considered an extreme case of not caring about hurting other players, it is useful to understand her emotional response as part of the game. Additionally, the idea that players were not purposely trying to hurt each other played a part in how my respondents discussed hurting other players. Tate's response to my question about ever hurting another player was as follows:

Um, have I ever injured? Yes. I think I messed up an ankle tackling her. It was 15s season in Vegas. And she was out. I was able to keep playing, yeah. I didn't

physically; I mean I didn't intentionally [Laughs] ok. Like no, no, no. I'm not out for blood. So [as far as any injuries] that I know of. I've tackled many girls. By insisting that she's not out to hurt anybody, "not out for blood," Tate is able to distance herself from the blame for injuring another player.

Of course it would be remiss to suggest that all my respondents experience injuring other players in the way that Cindy and Tate tell it. In the instances when players did show remorse, it was because they followed up with their opponents. Caren was recovering from ACL surgery and had on a knee-brace at the time of our interview. She injured her knee in a tackle during a rugby game. When I asked her if she had ever injured another player, she told me:

Of the ones that I'm positively absolutely aware about it was actually on this field... I went in to tackle a girl and one of my teammates was also tackling the same girl. And she had wrapped around, and I hit her, I'm not sure what the upper arm is called, but this bone though [grabs her bicep, referring to the humerus], it was broken. I didn't feel terribly bad at first actually. Because I didn't know, [that] it was probably broken. She had some nerve damage that she had to overcome though. And she did. She's got full everything with her arm now and with her hand. And she's got a pretty wicked scar... Once I saw her not being able to use her hand, I was pretty [lowers voice] yeah I was pretty torn up about it. [Anima: Is that the only injury that you know of?] That I know of, that I was acutely aware of, yeah. If I injured someone on an opposing team you know, you don't really follow up on those types of things.

It is important to note that Caren only felt bad *after* she learned the result of the injury. Unlike Cindy who never followed up, Caren had insight into how her tackle affected her opponent and thus she “was pretty torn up about it.” As she noted, following up on injuries is not a normal part of playing. By bringing up this point, Caren revealed how players are able to escape feeling responsible for hurting other players. Once they are off the field, it is almost like the injury never happened. The possibility of injuring another player is of course directly related to the likelihood of sustaining personal injuries. Perhaps part of Caren’s remorse about hurting her opponent was not just because she followed up, but also because she was, at the time of our conversation, recovering from an injury herself.

Hurting other players is unfortunate but “buy ‘em a beer, patch ‘em up.” The way my respondents talked about hurting other players did not sound much different from how a men’s team might respond to opponents’ injuries (Messner, 1990). The experiences described above call for a reconsideration of the triad of men’s violence (Kaufman 2001[1987]) as exclusive to men.

Injuries: It happens

When I asked my respondents what circumstances would end their rugby careers several of them suggested that an injury would keep them off the pitch. However many of my respondents had experienced concussions, torn ACLs and MCLs, and fractured and broken several limbs and continued to play. Getting hurt is par for the course when

playing rugby. As Jen, an 18 year-old player put it, “It’s just, you know, you deal with it. It’s expected. You kind of sign an imaginary waiver when you step on the field. You’re going to get hurt. It happens.” Injuries are such an expected part of the game that several players responded in the negative when I asked if they had sustained any injuries. Laura, a 33-year-old lawyer who had been playing for six years at the time of our interview told me:

Fortunately, no [knocks on wood] I’ve never had something so bad that I was out for months and months and months. I’ve had, you know, like sprained shoulders that hurt for a few months, and sprained ankles, but that’s about it.

For Laura sprained shoulders and ankles do not constitute injuries because they did not keep her out of the game for “long” periods of time. How long is long enough to be considered an injury? Laura’s sprained shoulders hurt for a few months but she continued to play perhaps because athletes are expected to play through pain. When I asked Jen about any injuries her response was, “I haven’t [ever been injured]. I got a concussion, like my second to last game, so that put me out for a bit. It was a mild one, but it just, it’s kind of a reality check every time something bad like that happens.” For Jen a concussion is not considered a real injury. Like sportsmen who use their bodies as weapons and experience severe injuries through which they play, my respondents often remained in the game despite the injuries they sustained.

Playing through injuries has significant psychological impact on players. Z is 26 years old. She had been playing rugby for seven years at the time of our interview. When I asked her to tell me about the worst injury she had sustained as a rugby player she

related an injury that I had seen happen. For Z's team the spring season is a developmental season and newer players have the opportunity to play noncompetitive matches that help improve their skills. It was during a tournament in the spring season that Z sustained her injury. She described the forward pack as "rather inexperienced" and suggests that her pack's lack of experience contributed to her getting hurt. The injury occurred in a scrum, which collapsed as a result of the tight-head prop's inability to remain standing when the other team pushed through.

...And as I was on the front row, as I fell, I twisted sideways. The opposite scrum of course was still driving through me... so my spine twisted, kind of torqued because I fell sideways and we all fell down. I started screaming and sobbing. I felt like it took about fifteen, twenty minutes to get all of the trainers and doctors who happened to be around kind of rushing over. There was fear that I was paralyzed, they had to test me to make sure I could wiggle my fingers, wiggle my toes... It wasn't until our coach came over and said, "by the way, can you move your fingers?" that I was like "oh God! That's a real concern, I don't know if I can!"... It worked out. I'm not paralyzed... It was all of these things: very frightening, extremely painful, and long lasting. The physical part of it I think took about 6 to 8 weeks before I was back to normal. I still am not psychologically where I was, just because it was such a frightening awful thing. Every now and then, something will flip and it will freak me out again.

I was on the field with Z when she sustained this injury and I remember feeling very scared. I was playing wing on the side closest to where Z was propping, directly behind

the scrum. Hearing Z retell that story, I remember that for what felt like fifteen minutes the whole field was quiet. Coaches huddled around her while each team stood in a circle away from the huddle. We were all worried and people kept looking back at the coaches hoping to see Z move even a little bit, to show us that she was still alive. When she finally got up and walked over to the other side of the pitch, both teams breathed a collective sigh of relief. We applauded. And then we kept playing. At the time of our interview it had been a year since Z's injury. Yet she told me that she still feels frightened about playing in certain positions. However she continued to play! The impulse to keep playing despite injuries seemed to be a common theme, regardless of the gravity of the injury.

Caren sat on the floor during our interview because she had just had surgery on her ACL and was in immense pain. I did not realize this until she started to tell me some of the reasons why she does not like the game.

I just tore my ACL, and this has been probably the hardest thing I've had to do with my life [voice quavers]. Especially with knees it's not just about the pain, at first. It's like the repair of it is going to be pretty much a year of pain... It's like I've always played rugby never being concerned that oh my God, I could get hurt today. Never. But now, after this, it's like, ugh. It's definitely going to be in my mind. Because first of all the injury is the most painful thing I've ever experienced. And then this rehab has been really [voice quavers again] just challenging. And so it's definitely going to be there. But hopefully I will be able

to power through it. I feel like once you get into this you're in the game. And once you get into the game you forget about that. That will go away.

Like Z, Caren described her injury as an obstacle to be overcome. She convinced herself that despite her present pain she was very lucky to have had only one such serious injury and was hopeful that she would be able to surmount the pain and keep playing. Once the game starts back up again "you forget about that." My respondents revealed a complex relationship with their injuries. They did not consider their torn ligaments a serious enough reason to stop playing the game. Instead, they remained committed to playing. Although players reported that they would quit rugby after a serious injury, when asked to explain what a serious injury meant, it became difficult to discern the circumstances that would cause a player to quit.

Terrence disclosed a long list of injuries she has sustained in her six years of playing rugby. She described her first injury, which she sustained after playing for only a year. At a tournament in "the middle of Montana," which she described as "Woodstock for rugby players" because "the rugby is sort of incidental to the drinking and craziness," she fractured her left fibula. The injury was a result of a tackle where Terrence was hit "two different directions from two different people" and she rolled her foot over the top of her ankle. Because she did not have health insurance and because they were "in the middle of nowhere," her and her teammates went to Wal-Mart, bought a pair of crutches, and for the rest of the weekend she hobbled around on crutches. After several weeks of walking around on a foot that "was all swollen up and turning black and blue," Terrence went to the hospital because her foot was not getting any better. An x-ray revealed the

fractured fibula and she was in rehab for six months. Like my other respondents, she returned to playing as soon as she was done healing. She also revealed tearing her right ACL and meniscus, which had her out of the game for about a year, and finally a “really bad contusion to my right quad” where she thought she had fractured her femur because it was “the most pain I have ever been in in my entire life!” These were not Terrence’s only injuries, however.

And I’ve broken some fingers and [other] sort of incidental injuries that are pretty common for rugby players. I might have broken my nose once. I don’t know. I never went to the doctor. I don’t know. I think that when you’re playing rugby, your relationship to your body and your relationship to what you can handle and what hurts changes a lot. And normal things that like, you know a person fractures their leg and immediately goes to the doctor because it looks gross and it hurts and its all swollen and you know, I’m just like oh it’ll get better. It’s fine... And you walk around on it for almost a month.

Terrence’s list of injuries is certainly impressive. But beyond the myriad broken bones, fractures, and contusions is some insight into how players might experience injuries. Terrence’s description of her relationship to her body highlights how athletes and the sport culture encourage playing through pain and relating to the body as a tool. Her body is disciplined to perform the functions of a rugby player (Chase, 2006) and she conducts this role through injuries. Just as men who play violent sports hurt themselves and other players and play through injuries, my respondents reported living through similar

experiences. My interviews suggest that the idea that women are less capable of violence than men must seriously be reassessed.

Discussion

When women play violent sports according to the same rules as men, they rupture the idea that women cannot physically do the same things that men can do. And yet sports such as lacrosse and boxing maintain different rules for men and women's sports because women are apparently not as strong, not as violent, and not as aggressive as men. However as my interviews show, on the sports field, women too can use their bodies as weapons.

At the same time that these women play while injured and hurt others, they insist on being women. Consequently, these women's experiences call for a rethinking of the equation of violence with masculinity (and men). When women play rugby and other "masculine" sports according to the same rules as men, they show that understanding men as violent and women as nonviolent is inaccurate. Specifically, I am referring to the equation of men and masculinities with violence and aggression, and suggesting that it can be replaced just as easily with:

{women/men = masculine = violent; women/men = feminine = nonviolent; women/men = masculine = nonviolent; women/men = feminine = nonviolent}

What happens with such an equation is that it calls for a rethinking of how we characterize masculinity and femininity with regard to violence and open up ways to

rethink all of these categories. The relationship between gender and violence as it currently stands cannot empirically be sustained. My interviews instead show that regardless of whether my respondents identified with masculinity or femininity, they performed violence with facility.

In their study of women's experiences with physical pain and injuries in elite sports, Kevin Young and Philip White (1995) found that men and women athletes were equally as willing to risk getting injured and injuring other players in their sports. Likewise, my respondents use their bodies as weapons in much the same ways that male athletes use their bodies as weapons. Furthermore, they consider their bodies to be instruments and discipline themselves to play through pain and injuries. Although Young and White (1995, p. 56) suggest that women "appear to be contributing to a male-defined sports process replete with [violence]," I agree with Chase (2006), Markula (2003) and Whitson (2002) that the ways in which women use their bodies as weapons in sports challenges the *de facto* relationship between masculinity and violence in sports. My respondents' willingness to play while injured and after injuring other players suggests that women are not naturally more compassionate and less aggressive than men. Rather, recognizing the different ways in which women (and men) use their bodies and engage with violence is a reminder that gender is prefigured on different bodies in ways that sustain male domination.

Recognizing the historical construction of white femininity as nonviolent, how do my respondents manage to play rugby and still assert that they are women in concert with hegemonic understandings of women as stubborn, difficult to coach, and weaker than

men? On the one hand, the cultural iconicity of the (white) female athlete might begin to explain how these women embody their white femininity and their sporting violence. The benefits accrued to them through white privilege mean that their participation in sporting violence is not pathology. Rugby is a hooligan's game played by gentlemen, and in the spirit of equality, when white women play, they may leave their hooliganism on the field and return to the business of performing appropriate white femininity off the field.

Considering how white privilege informs my respondents' participation in violence on the rugby field requires a rethinking of the notion of un/apologetics (Cahn, 1993; Broad, 2000) and "defensive othering" (Ezzell, 2009). Ezzell's conception of defensive othering acknowledges that his respondents were invested in femininity to the extent that they punished those players who did not conform the norms of femininity. Conversely, Broad (2001) found that her ethnographic participants were unapologetic about playing a traditionally masculine sport and engaging in raucous behavior off the field. I suggest that my respondents' experiences of their athleticism are informed by their white privilege. White privilege and investment in "feminine capital" (Thorpe, 2009) mean that these women can challenge the dominant relationship between gender and violence while at the same time submitting to the prescriptions of the gender regime (Cox & Pringle, 2011).

In this chapter I have examined how by playing rugby, my respondents challenge the equation of masculinity with violence and femininity with passivity. I have also shown how the opportunity to engage in such a resistance is mediated by racialized understandings of gender. Because my respondents are mostly white women, their

gendered experiences are informed by whiteness, which means that their un/apologetics are specifically against constructions of white femininity. At the same time, my respondents' investment in white feminine capital (Thorpe, 2009) means that they also work in ways that undermine their assertion of their equality. These women navigate the complexity of the relationship between un/apologetics, whiteness and feminine capital in order to play rugby.

CHAPTER 6. AGGRESSIVE BY NATURE, RUGBY BY CHOICE

As I have shown in previous chapters, women can express similar levels of violence and aggression as men, at least on the field when they play rugby. But is the same true off the field? Are women as violent and aggressive off the field as men or do they, once they have taken off their jerseys perform emphasized femininity? Emphasized femininity may manifest itself in different ways. Matthew Ezzell's (2009) ethnography found that women rugby players asserted themselves as "heterosexy-fit" as a form of emphasized femininity. Conversely, Krane *et al* (2004) study concluded that sportswomen navigated the perceived paradox of their femininity and athleticism by attempting to maintain a balance between being muscular athletes but not too muscular women, and Broad (2001) found that the women in her study did not perform emphasized femininity but instead were bawdy and unapologetic off the field.

In this chapter I examine how women may be un/apologetic off the field. Specifically I consider women's experiences with violence once they are no longer playing rugby. One characteristic of emphasized femininity is the engagement in normatively feminine activities once off the field. Because of the equation of femininity with non-violence, I consider the fights players get into, and how they experience the consequences of these fights to assess their performance of un/apologetics off the field. I use women's experience with their bruises as a way to identify the implications of their playing rugby and engaging in violence off the field.

Fighting

The conflation of violent sports with violence off the field often results in women who play rugby being characterized as violent. However my respondents resisted this characterization even at the same time that they admitted to getting into fights. Importantly, the women I interviewed rejected the equation of violent sports with violence of the field. As Tank put it:

It's not rugby that's made anything any more violent. And when people use that excuse it's like... no, no. People just say he was a boxer and so that's why he beat his wife. No he beat his wife because he hits women. That's why. It's not because he was a boxer. Because he was boxing men. Go hit a guy. So that doesn't register, that doesn't fly with me. That doesn't make any sense to me.

Tank disagreed that men who beat other men on the field have a desire to beat women off the field and she insisted that rugby does not impact her own orientation towards violence. By conflating men's violence off the field with her own propensity to violence off the field, she challenged the idea that men playing violent sports explain their violence outside of sports.

Rather than linking any violent behavior to playing rugby, my respondents suggested that playing rugby calmed them down. Mary found the idea that playing an aggressive sport would make a person more violent off the field to be repugnant.

I disagree with that premise that...if somebody plays a violent sport then they are more likely to be violent. I disagree with that. I feel like we're animals right? I mean at the end of the day we're still animals and we still have those violent,

fighting tendencies and I feel like sports are just a controlled way of doing that...

I don't think that playing a violent sport or a contact sport would get me to be a bit more physically confrontational. I don't think so at all.

Mary rejected the idea that sports are a legitimate explanation for anyone's violence outside of a sporting context, regardless of their gender.

Jen told me that she gets angry when people assume she had anger issues because she plays rugby.

I'm just an aggressive person naturally. Not physically, [but] I will always defend a friend, or always defend myself. I'm not afraid of confrontation. But I wouldn't say that that's because of rugby. But people do [think that it's because of rugby] definitely. I told one of my teachers that I had rugby practice and he was like, "are you an angry person or something?" and I was like, "you want me to show you?" [laughs] I get that kind of stuff. That kind of stuff is kind of offensive. You think like because I play rugby I have anger issues or whatever? I do get those kinds of comments.

For Jen, the use of her sport to assign her with an angry disposition infuriates her. Her comments suggest that she is more than the violence associated with her sport.

My respondents' discussion of how playing rugby contributes to the likelihood that they would be violent off the field reveals that these women do not equate violent sports with violence off the field. Additionally, Jen and Tank's suggestion that they are naturally aggressive illustrates their perception of having an inherent tendency towards the sport. Despite my respondents' insistence that playing rugby did not make them

violent, they described several fights to me. Below I consider occasions when my respondents fight. Almost all of my respondents reported having been in a fight on or off the field but insisted that rugby had nothing to do with these fights. By examining how players talk about their fighting on and off the field, I consider what it means for women to engage in this kind of behavior. I also consider the racial dimensions of this transgression.

My respondents distinguished between verbal altercations and physical fights in ways that were not always clear to me. Most of the fights that players described happened on the field during rugby matches, however players said these fights were not really fights. Take Caren's description of a non-fight below,

So yeah, I guess last season a girl pretty much clotheslined one of my friends, like tackled her literally like this [stretches out her right hand]. And we had had problems with that team already, and that was the point where I was like becoming mildly emotional. So when she did that I was like, "really?" and I was very expressive with my really... I've definitely gotten into confrontations with a few girls about stuff... [But] I've never gotten into an actual fight with someone on the field. Usually it's just like you say something, you push and then you walk away from it.

The kind of tackle Caren is describing means that the other player tackled her friend in the neck or chest with outstretched arms. Such a tackle can potentially render the tackled player unconscious. Caren describes her response to this incident as not an actual fight because it did not escalate beyond an exchange of words and she walked away from it.

The above incident raises the question: at what point does such an altercation become a fight? The intensity of the game might explain why physical confrontations are diminished as not actual fights. When I asked Terrence if she had ever been in a fight, she responded:

A real fight? No. I punched a girl in the face on the pitch once because she tried to break my hand [but] we were in the bottom of the ruck or something, and we were both sort of just laying there like you do because you can't really [move], you're stuck, you got people all over you... She just started bending my fingers back and I was yelling at her to stop. She didn't stop, so I pulled back my hand that wasn't being bent and I just sort of bopped her in the head so that she would let go. And then I got up. But she was totally holding me down and bending my hand back.

Like Caren, Terrence did not consider punching a girl in the face to be a "real fight." Perhaps it is not a real fight because it did not escalate beyond the initial punch. Once she got up the moment was over and the game continued.

In contrast, "real" fights typically happened off the field. Terrence reported tackling a man in a taco shop in defense of her "very small" guy friend. Terrence herself is 5'6 and about 130lbs but she tackled a larger man to defend her friend. "The guy pulled his hand back like he was going to sucker punch my friend in the head. And without even really thinking about it I tackled him." That Terrence's automatic impulse was to tackle the man shows how her skills on the rugby field transfer off the field.

Respondents often discussed tackling as their preferred mode of fighting off the field. Z told me the story of a teammate who got into an altercation with a man on a kickball team while at a bar.

So some kickball guys were there, and one of them started making fun of rugby, which you know in a sober situation, ok whatever, that's kind of funny. But one of my teammates did not think it was funny and started telling him that he doesn't even play a real sport and he would insult rugby and it went back and forth, and finally she just told him, "look, either shut-up and walk away or I'm going to tackle you." And he didn't, so she tackled him. She didn't get in trouble. He was escorted out of the bar.

Z's teammate threatened to tackle her provocateur and carried out her threat. On the other hand, Juanita who had never been in a fight told me simply, "I would tackle them." Tackling can thus be understood as a preferred mode of fighting among the women I interviewed.

The skills players gained on the rugby field translated to their likelihood to fight off the field, as evidenced by Z's words. When I asked her if she thought playing rugby made it more likely that she would get into fights off the field she responded:

Yes I would say so. Not necessarily to walk up and like punch somebody, but just from the fact that rugby is a great confidence booster, like I know I can tackle people if I had to.

Z highlighted how rugby makes her more confident in a very specific way. She knows she can use her body as a weapon to tackle anyone who provokes her. The confidence

that my respondents expressed in their physical abilities directly relates to their willingness to engage in violence off the field. Just as men are trained to have confidence in their physical strength and superiority and consequently use their bodies as weapons, women who have confidence in their own physical abilities also seem to engage freely in physically demanding activities.

Flip explained to me that as a new player she was more willing to fight off the field because she felt unconquerable. She told me a story about a night when she got into a fight:

So one night I was at the bar and I was with some of my teammates, and some guy was just drunk and bumped into my friend and spilled her drink. And I was like “hey, you want to buy another drink because that was shitty of you” or whatever and he got mouthy and was being dumb so I got mouthy back and he like pushed me a little bit so I punched him [chuckles].

For Flip, telling off a rotund man and punching him was not only a way to defend her friend in the bar, it was also a moment when she knew was backed up by her teammates. If the man punched her back, she knew that there was a team of women who would rise to her defense. Like Terrence, Flip is a white woman with a more masculine appearance. Their whiteness and their masculine appearance may have contributed to their willingness to fight off the field. For Flip, knowing that her teammates were there to lend her protection if necessary is also a contributing factor in her decision to fight.

Cindy was wearing a dress at our interview and presented herself as more feminine than Flip and Terrence. When Cindy described the fights in which she had been involved, she highlighted that she was standing up for her friends.

Sometimes women take, like women's rugby, some of my friends, kind of take that aggression off the field. But I also think that it's a lot of times surrounding drinking. It probably wouldn't have happened if they had been sober. But you know, at the same time it's because you're in such a tight group of women, it's kind of like you mess with one you mess with everybody. So you just have that sisterhood, like you're going to back them up no matter what.

Cindy offered several excuses for why she would fight off the field. First and foremost she cited alcohol as a reason why her and her teammates would fight off the field. Secondly, they fought in solidarity with each other. Fighting for Cindy, then, was a matter of honor.

Tank did not describe any specific fights off the field. She explained to me that she was not a violent person but did not take kindly to being treated disrespectfully:

I'm a good Christian woman, but I have my limits. I will absolutely fuck somebody up if provoked. At our [post-match] social after our tournament in June, this party girl, her and her friend decided they wanted to bump me and laugh about it. Why would you do that? That's so stupid. And I remember grabbing her by her shoulder and one of the guys from the men's team actually like intercepted me. He was like, "hey, let's dance." He's like you had that look in your eye... The look you get when you're about to fuck somebody up.

Tank is a muscular black woman, and by identifying the other woman as a “party girl,” Tank described this woman as perhaps more feminine than she. It is interesting then that a men’s player stopped Tank from fighting with this other woman.

Whether my respondents punched their opponents in “not real” fights on the field, or tackled people off the field, they fought for each other as friends and teammates. Above I have shown how despite their insistence that playing rugby did not influence their violence off the field, my respondents sometimes used the skills they gain in rugby when they fight off the field.

Bruises: “They are like badges of honor”

Scholars have noted that injuries and bruises are a sign of masculinity (Howe, 2001; Joncheray & Haifa, 2012). Women who play rugby often have bruises, but what did they think of these bruises? Did they consider them to be a sign of masculinity or did they experience these bruises differently? This section is concerned with answering the above question as a means of understanding how race and sexuality complicate the performance of masculinity and femininity outside of a sporting context.

Janis, a 25-year-old environmental volunteer spent about five minutes of our interview looking through her phone to show me photos of her most recent bruises. She had taken pictures of large black, purple, and blue bruises on both her thighs. When I expressed my unease about how they looked she called them “baby bruises” because they

were smaller than others she had seen. I asked Janis if she got bruises after games and whether she covered them. She responded in the negative.

I love them [my bruises]. If anything I'd wear shorts [chuckles] or like a short thing so I could show 'em off. Because people are like whoa! Why are you bruised? When I went to work after one game my co-worker came in and she shut the door, put her hand on my shoulders and goes [lowers voice], "is everything alright?" And I was like yeah, why? And she was like [lowers voice again] "where'd you get those?" [gesture] And I was like, oh rugby! And she's like [lowers voice] "you sure?" And I was like yeah! So I kind of like it, because it keeps people wonder what's going on there...My roommate, she went to a pole dancing class and she got bruises from trying to slide around the pole I guess, and her boyfriend was like "we're not going out, cover that up." I was like, if you make me cover up my bruise, then I will not be with you. I don't know. They are like badges of honor.

Janis is aware that her visible bruises are a cause for concern. However she also knows that because she can point to rugby as the cause of her bruises she is different from those other battered and abused women. Furthermore, by telling the story of her roommate whose boyfriend would rather she covers up her bruises when they go out, Janis asserts herself as a woman who does not listen to any man.

Laura also describes her bruises as a source of pride. She describes how she often has bruises because she is grabbed by other players during games and has finger marks on her arms after matches. These markings have people showing concern.

I've actually had people come up to me in a bar and say like, "oh is your boyfriend beating you" [chuckles] and stuff like that. So I kind of wear it [my bruises] as a badge of honor. Like, "yeah, I'm a rugger." But you get weird looks. I've had black eyes and people are more like, "what?!"

Like Janis, Laura is aware that her bruises might mean she looks like a victim of intimate partner violence. However she proudly proclaims her affiliation with rugby. When she responds that her boyfriend is not beating her up she's able to assert her own physical prowess by calling herself a rugger.

Just as Janis and Laura call their bruises badges of honor, Gene explains the pride that showing off bruises held on her college rugby team. As she was listing her injuries she noted that she had a black eye once, and "that was pretty awesome." When I asked why it was awesome she responded:

On my college rugby team...everybody wanted a black eye because it was like this badge of awesomeness, like I got a black eye. And uh you always wanted to get one when you played, preferably. And I got one when, I took a knee to the face and busted open my eye. It healed really fast though and that wasn't cool but it was there for a while, which was awesome.

For Gene her black eye was a source of pride because it showed that she played valiantly. The longer the injury lasted the more badass she was to her teammates. The black eye was thus a constant reminder of her valor. When people expressed concern about her black eyes or bruises off the field, she simply had to respond, "I play rugby and then they once again they think you're a badass." If valiance can only be understood as

masculinity, then yes, Gene, Janis, and Laura's bruises are signs of masculinity. But why must valiance be equated as masculinity when these women suggest that they experience their bruises as signs that they are "badass" in sometimes specifically feminine ways?

Players could not always be deemed badass because of their bruises, and not all of them received concern about the possibility that they were victims of abuse. Z related the story of her teammate who was chastised for her bruises:

And then another one of my friends had some bruising maybe on her shoulders and chest area, and she was going out for a birthday and was wearing a dress that didn't have shoulder straps. So you know, again, prominent bruises there. And a guy came up to her and said, "if you didn't dress like that he wouldn't have to hit you."

The man's assumption that Z's friend's bruises were a result of another man's abuse, and that she deserved it because of what she was wearing highlights not only how some women might experience their bruises as signs of intimate partner violence, but also illustrates how current notions of women's capacity for violence remain incongruent. When men show bruises they are perpetrators of violence; when women show bruises they are victims of violence (Joncheray & Haifa, 2012).

Similarly Lo told me how someone said of her black eye, "it looks like you listened the first time, like just one black eye instead of two." When I asked Lo how this comment made her feel she replied that the man was "just like dirty old man and I know that so it's like he can say what he wants and it's not going affect me because that's just kind of how he is." Although Lo seems to take this comment in stride, it is important to

note how this comment whether said seriously or in jest makes light of the fact that sometimes men physically abuse women.

Although my respondents talked about their bruises as signs of their strength, they also recognized that others sometimes perceived these injuries as a mark of the women's victimization. Consequently, many of the women with whom I spoke often distanced themselves from the idea that they were victims of domestic violence. Cindy talked about her bruises as injuries that differentiated her from other women. She related an incident from her college days when a colleague was concerned about her black eye.

I had a few pretty bad, a couple pretty bad concussions, which resulted in really bad black eyes and like bruising on my face. They thought that I had fractured my cheekbone. Fortunately I didn't. But you know, when that, not only do you have to deal with it, but people like think that you're being abused or something too. I got that a lot. Like I would have black eyes and be like walking around campus, or I worked in the university bookstore like in the sales department, so I was like interacting with people all the time. And they would look at me like my boyfriend beat me up or something. I could tell like the way they were looking at me that they were thinking something like that. And it's like, no I play rugby [chuckles] it's a rugby injury, like, I'm fine, I'm a healthy person.

Cindy is aware of the discomfort that her bruises elicit for people who do not know where these injuries come from. Her insistence that she is a healthy person suggests that women who are physically abused are not healthy.

The only respondent to explicitly express discomfort with showing off her bruises talked about her work in a domestic violence shelter:

I started out working at a domestic violence shelter. And when I broke that bone in my face I had a really nasty black eye... I had to call my boss before and say, “hey listen I’ve had this injury and I look pretty bad. I don’t know if this is going to potentially trigger stuff for some clients who are there.”... I didn’t want to belittle anyone else’s injuries or whatever... I think most of the women at the shelter were not, had not experienced much physical trauma so luckily it worked out and I was able to work my shifts and it was ok.

Because of her proximity to women whose bruises denoted instances of physical abuse against them, Flip was conscious of how her clients might understand her black eyes. Flip’s experiences illustrate how women rugby players navigate a tenuous terrain when they decide to display their bruises.

Cindy also notes how professional circumstances may constrain display of bruises when she says:

Well, I mean if I had a really nasty bruise on my leg I wouldn’t wear like a short skirt or something to show it off necessarily [chuckles]. Maybe I would have been more prone to do that in college but now I mean, especially being a professional in the professional business world, you know. I don’t really want to like, even though, I mean I could explain myself, but you know, I’d just probably wear pants if I had like nasty bruises on my leg or something.

By mentioning the “professional business world” Cindy calls attention to how women are expected to fit certain ideals of respectability by not appearing to be victims of abuse. The contrast she draws between college students and working professionals highlights the expectations of femininity associated with maturity (post-college). College age women are perhaps more free to show off their bruises without the kinds of repercussions that professional women might face. Cindy’s comment about the professional world illustrates the connection Malcom (2003) draws between age and displays of appropriate femininity.

Players noted that because of how people might respond to their bruises, they often introduce themselves as rugby players. Z told me:

I try to make a point of mentioning early on, you know, professors always make you introduce yourself and I try to say something about rugby so that I don’t face all those funny looks. You know, like I had a black eye last year and to some people that would look like maybe domestic violence, and I want people to know that it’s ok, that it’s not that, you know, it’s just a sports injury.

Z’s response highlights her awareness of how her bruises and black eyes might be interpreted. She thus makes efforts to ensure that people do not consider her to be a victim of violence. Like Cindy, she wants to assure people that she is a healthy person by letting them know that she plays rugby. As Taylor put it, letting people know you play rugby means, “It’s easy to explain bruises.”

Although women attempt to mitigate concerns about their involvement in abusive intimate relationships by mentioning early on that they play rugby, they also call attention to how different spaces shape how women experience their bruises. As Caren recalls:

I've had notoriously bad problems with getting black eyes... It depends. If you tell your job early on, 'oh yeah I play rugby, it's a pretty violent sport,' then when you go in on Monday morning with a black eye, it's a little easier to explain. I have never worked in a position where I was going to necessarily get judged terribly... There was one time when I was working in a kitchen. That probably, it looked a little off, but yeah, no. Yeah I get a lot of black eyes. The bruises, you know, you can hide your legs, sort of that stuff. It's usually the facial stuff that people notice.

She refers to the positions in which she's worked and acknowledges that working in a kitchen, a black eye might "look a little off." Caren suggests that in her other positions as a graduate student or a laboratory assistant she can dodge the inscription of domestic violence because perhaps in that space violence is not expected.

The way my respondents discuss their bruises highlights the tensions associated between women and violence. Women are not expected to be perpetrators of violence. Consequently they make efforts to contextualize their bruises before others mark them as victims of intimate partner violence. On the other hand, some women, such as Janis, use their bruises to resist the discourse of women as victims of violence and instead assert pride in their ability to be physical in their own right.

Discussion

The equation of masculinity with violence remains. And yet my interviews show that not only do women use “legitimate” violence in sport, they also employ violence outside of a sporting context. Current understanding about masculinity and violence and white femininity and passivity must be seriously reconsidered. My respondents do not consider their engagement with violence off the field to be anathema to their identity as white women. Instead they fight as a matter of honor in defense of the sisterhood.

Despite my respondents’ sense of themselves as “badass” however, they also recognized the social implications of showing off their bruises and black eyes of the field. Because they were women, their injuries were not a sign of masculinity. Instead on their white women’s bodies and depending on where they were, they experienced their bruises as signs of their victimization. Interestingly, those women who presented as more masculine than some quintessential notion of proper white femininity were disciplined for showing their bruises – as in the man who told Lo, “it looks like you listened the first time.” For these women, their presentation of self means that even when they experience their injuries as marks of their feminine weakness they do not receive sympathy from others. On the other hand, some of my respondents received sympathy and concern when they showed their bruises. These women were typically straight, white, and pretty. The different ways in which my respondents experienced their bruises highlights how bodies matter in presenting femininity as vulnerable or in need of protection.

Of note is the fact that neither my two Latina respondents nor my black respondent discussed their bruises in as much detail as my white respondents. Juanita

mentioned that her father, to ease her mother's concerns about Juanita's bruises, highlighted that she's young and the bruises will heal. Tate on the other hand only mentioned her bruises to say that she got fewer bruises playing seven-a-side rugby than fifteens. For Tank, bruises only came up when she analogized rugby as a long-term relationship, where "you get all the bumps and bruises of a long term relationship in 80 minutes."

The relationship my white respondents had to their bruises contrasts sharply with how my respondents of color talked about their bruises. The differences suggest to me that how these women experienced their injuries off the field might be considered in racialized terms. The way in which my respondents' whiteness was used to discipline and/or protect them illustrates how the privileges of white femininity extend under the conditions of obeying the rules. Although white femininity is constructed as in need of protection, adhering to the rules of appropriate sexuality is a prerequisite for attaining this kind of protection. Otherwise like Z's friend and Lo, white women who may be perceived to be breaking the rules are punished.

How different bodies are constructed as worthy of sympathy and protection shape the ways my respondents consider their bruises once they are off the rugby field. For my white respondents, the equation of white women's bodies with passive femininity meant that in certain spaces they experienced their injuries as marks of their victimization. At the same time, their perceived sexual purity informed how they experienced their bruises, as evidenced by Z's friend who was told, "If you didn't dress like that he wouldn't have to hit you."

Although women may perform violence on and off the field, this chapter shows how the experiences of violence for women might differ because of expectations for appropriate performances of racialized and sexualized femininity. Because women are prefigured as feminine, and femininity is characterized by passivity, the consequences of women's engagement with violence outside of certain spaces, such as the rugby pitch, mean that these women must navigate the legitimacy with which they can assert themselves as entitled to use violent force. I have shown how women who play rugby employ violence off the field by getting into fights. Importantly, I examine the consequences of women's violence off the field and highlight how the equation of straight, white femininity with passivity means that when women show off their bruises, they must navigate around preconceived ideas around their bodies as victimized bodies.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Following the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut, public commentary on white masculinity and violence in the form of mass shootings was rampant. One commentator, Charlotte Allen (2012), from the conservative online journal *National Review Online*, offered that part of why Adam Lanza, the shooter, was able to kill so many people was because in a school of 450 students, there was not a single male presence. She blamed the “feminized setting” of the elementary school, “in which helpless passivity is the norm,” and went on to recount the benefits of male aggression, which “can be a good thing” when used in protecting the weak, read: women and children (Allen, 2012). Such a response to mass shootings reifies the idea that women require protection from men because they lack the aggressive strength that men naturally possess.

The idea that women are weaker and less aggressive than remains culturally salient, despite the fact that women engage in all the activities that their natural passivity should preclude. In this thesis I have examined the claim that women who play certain sports are performing masculinity. By considering the experiences of women rugby players, I found that to call these women’s involvement with rugby “masculinity” is to ignore the different ways in which they navigate their position within the gender hierarchy. Rather than categorically identifying their participation in rugby as masculinity, my respondents adhered to prescriptions for white femininity that helped explain why they received less attention from coaches, had less access to fields and did

not receive sponsorship from corporations. Below I will revisit the themes from this thesis and discuss how my findings contribute to understanding notions of female un/apologetic, disciplined bodies, and cultural capital. Finally I will comment on how my empirical analysis contributes to overall understandings of gender, sexuality, and race.

Rethinking the female un/apologetic

The idea that women apologize for their deviance as athletes or resist the disciplinary discourses of normative femininity in sports has often focused exclusively on the experiences of white women without examining how whiteness informs this un/apologetic. My findings suggest that white women's performance of the un/apologetic are complicated by their relationship to constructs of heteronormativity and whiteness. My respondents' investment in these constructs mediated through the privileges they gain from sustaining norms of white heterosexual femininity complicated how they were un/apologetic about their involvement with sports. When examining women's experiences of sports on and off the sports field, it is important to consider how race and sexuality mutually constitute these experiences.

Disciplined bodies, race and sexuality

Recognizing how the un/apologetic in sports is socially constructed around norms of white heterosexual femininity, I also suggest that as scholars we rethink our

assessment of how bodies are disciplined on and off the sports field. Although I agree that women's participation in sports can empower them to use their bodies in ways that resist norms of femininity, the racialization of these norms cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the way in which women are empowered on the sports field might not always translate off the field. My respondents' discussion of their bruises for example, show how the empowerment that women experience on the sports field can be disrupted by how they embody norms of white heterosexual femininity.

The import of bodies and investment in cultural capital

The embodiment of whiteness and heterosexual femininity exists in different ways that inform how people experience the privileges of these institutions. Although most of my respondents were white, for example, they did not all embody whiteness in the same ways. Likewise, the different ways in which they embodied femininity and masculinity (sometimes simultaneously) meant that they did not always have access to the privileges of white femininity. Instead their embodiment mitigated how these privileges accrued to them. The value of whiteness however, cannot be discounted. My respondents' investment in their whiteness as a privileged marker remained salient in their descriptions of their gendered experiences. Whether they apologized for being athletes, fought aggressively off the field, or showed off their bruises, their experiences were informed by how they embodied gendered norms of whiteness.

Implications

When Jen, my youngest respondent, described her relationship with her teammates as “bro-ing out,” she highlighted a significant aspect of her experience as a woman who plays rugby. Within a rugby context, her and her teammates were bros, a term typically used to describe stereotypically white male jocks. That “the bro” is a specifically white male was brought into high relief following the bombings at the 2013 Boston Marathon. The two suspects, white men from the Chechen Republic were identified on Twitter as bros, and “bro-filing,” a play on the language of racial profiling, was used to describe the search for the men. When Jen uses the term “bro-ing out” to describe her relationship with her teammates, she may be calling attention to the way in which her rugby experiences are characterized by whiteness. At the same time, she also highlights how as a woman who plays rugby, she simultaneously challenges the white masculinity of the sport and affirms it.

This study has focused on how white women resist and adhere to norms of femininity, while challenging the equation of masculinity with violence and aggression. I have been careful not to impose the categories of masculinity and femininity on my respondents’ actions, but instead have sought to explore beyond these constructs so as to show how these categories are neither given nor static. The way my respondents discussed their bruises highlighted that although white women may have successfully challenged much of the characterization of white femininity as passive, they are still accountable to norms of femininity that expect them to be passive and requiring of protection.

Throughout my analysis I strived to remain attentive to how race, sexuality and gender framed the ways my respondents talked about their experiences on and off the field. Using an intersectional framework for my analysis allowed me to consider how these women's participation in rugby is characterized by their specific social locations. My analytical approach also acknowledged the specificity of my respondents' experiences while recognizing that these experiences are grounded in larger socio-historical constructions of these identities (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; Valocchi, 2005).

Although I explored different ways whiteness and heterosexuality characterized how my respondents talked about themselves as women rugby players, I did not spend much time considering the experiences of my respondents of color. How might they, finding themselves in a space marked by the whiteness and heteronormativity challenge or reproduce the space? As Sara Ahmed writes, "adding color to the white face of the organization *confirms the whiteness of that face*" (2012, p. 150). Could it be the case that women of color in predominantly white sports such as rugby affirm the whiteness of that space? Or might they challenge and reshape what whiteness means? Is it possible that in spaces such as the rugby team, where white women and women of color play together and have to learn to trust each other they might start to refashion the norms of white femininity while challenging the gender regime that oppresses them in varying ways?

Just as the white women and women of color playing together might encourage these women to rethink how these racial categories differently affect their lives, how might straight women's affiliation to gay women, compounded by the stereotype of rugby as a lesbian sport, challenge these women's experiences of the heterosexual

matrix? As I showed, the lesbian stereotype was a source of frustration for some of my straight respondents. How might centering sexuality in my analysis lend insight into how heteronormativity is challenged and/or reified even in the face of a “dykescape” (Caudwell, 2002)? Future research that more closely explores the relationships between white women and women of color and examines how sexuality informs their experiences on the rugby field will lend insight into how peer groups redefine, challenge, and reify hegemonic prescriptions of gender, sexuality, and racialization on and off the playing field.

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