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	<p>Title and Abstract Title to include: A concise indication of the research question/problem. Abstract to include: A concise summary of the empirical study undertaken.</p>
	<p>Introduction and literature review To include: outline of context (theoretical/conceptual/applied) for the question; analysis of findings of previous related research including gaps in the literature and relevant contributions; logical flow to, and clear presentation of the research problem/ question; an indication of any research expectations, (i.e., hypotheses if applicable).</p>
	<p>Methods and Research Design To include: details of the research design and justification for the methods applied; participant details; comprehensive replicable protocol.</p>
	<p>Results and Analysis ² To include: description and justification of data treatment/ data analysis procedures; appropriate presentation of analysed data within text and in tables or figures; description of critical findings.</p>
	<p>Discussion and Conclusions ² To include: collation of information and ideas and evaluation of those ideas relative to the extant literature/concept/theory and research question/problem; adoption of a personal position on the study by linking and combining different elements of the data reported; discussion of the real-life impact of your research findings for coaches and/or practitioners (i.e. practical implications); discussion of the limitations and a critical reflection of the approach/process adopted; and indication of potential improvements and future developments building on the study; and a conclusion which summarises the relationship between the research question and the major findings.</p>
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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

TITLE

**An Exploration of the Role of Women in Rugby League in
Great Britain in the 21st Century**

**(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of
Sport Development)**

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN
RUGBY LEAGUE IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE 21ST
CENTURY

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Abstract

This study explores the role that women play in the sport of rugby league in Great Britain in the 21st Century, paying particular attention to the playing aspect. Employing an ethnographical approach to the research the researcher combines a mixture of experiences, observations and interviews with participants involved in the research area. The data gathered was then analysed using open coding to identify emerging key themes. Three key themes were identified; development (both at grassroots and elite level), expansion of the game, and funding (predominantly a lack of funding which was seen to be holding the women's game back). Two underlying themes also emerged. Participants identified the supportive environment which women experienced in the game and encouraged them to become involved at all levels including playing and spectating. Sexism was also noted as an underlying theme with was identified predominantly in the refereeing aspect of the game, and when dealing with older generations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study will look at the role women have in rugby league in the 21st century, particularly how this role is changing and evolving. This area was chosen by first identifying an area that was of interest to the researcher, and then by identifying any gaps in the previous literature on the subject. At the time of writing there was no previous research looking at women in rugby league and their position within the game which led to the identified topic being chosen.

The aim is to identify the areas of rugby league in which women are involved, and to identify their roles within the game. This will be done through the use of ethnography. This method will allow a greater access into the rugby league culture as the researcher already holds a solid position within the culture which has grown over the last decade. Particular attention will be paid to how women playing rugby has and is developing, particularly in the lead to the World Cup being played in July 2013, however other roles will also be noted including refereeing and a brief outline of other positions that women hold in rugby. Interviews will also be sought with individuals in different aspects of rugby league, both male and female. These individuals will offer an insight into the game which the researcher cannot, offering a more rounded collection of data. The development of where teams are now playing rugby league is of particular relevance as historically rugby league has been confined to the north of England, specifically Yorkshire and the North West.

Existing literature will be reviewed in order to provide a justification for the research. As already stated the literature is limited when specifically related to rugby league so other sports will be used in place that share similar characteristics between the two sports, such as rugby union and soccer.

After the data has been collected it will then be analysed using open coding and key themes will be drawn from the data. These key themes will then presented in the results section offering direct quotes from the research and grouping the relevant data. At this point it will be essential to draw key themes however to also identify any other smaller themes that may emerge. The results will then be further analysed in the discussion section. The discussion section will analyse the results and use existing literature to support the findings. Finally a conclusion to the research will be offered and will include any considerations that should be taken into account in order to further improve the role that women hold in rugby league.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE
REVIEW

2.0

Before carrying out research into the chosen subject, it is first essential to review the literature already available around the subject area so that an area for further research can be identified. In order to do this the research subject must be broken down into further areas. As the aim of this assignment is to look at the role women play in rugby league several key areas must first be explored. First rugby league itself needs to be defined, along with a brief history of how it became a sport and why it is played mainly in the geographical locations that is as well as the role that women have played since its inception in 1895. The role that women play in sport, not specifically rugby league, also needs to be explored; particularly looking at the role women have in more traditionally male sports such as rugby union where more research has been undertaken, so that a comparison can be drawn with rugby league. From this it is possible to further divulge and look at reasons for women participating in sport the barriers to participation that they face. As a result of analysing the literature available then it will possible to refine the research subject and identify an area to research.

2.1 Rugby League

Rugby league is an invasion game. The principles are the same as in rugby union in the sense that the aim of the game is to touch the ball down in the opponents in goal area, and many rules are the same for example the ball can only be passed in a backwards motion and tackles must occur in prescribed manner. The main differences are that rugby league has 13 players on the field from each team, the absence of line outs, and the inclusion of the play the ball. It is a unique sport in the sense that it is almost limited to where it is played on geographical location. Rugby league was created in 1895 after the Northern Union (now the RFL) voted to break away from the rugby football union over a dispute in the payment of players for time away from jobs (Rugby League Heritage, 2012). This was particularly important to the clubs in the industrial north of England where players were predominantly miners and mill workers who took time off work to play rugby. In Great Britain rugby league was played mainly in Yorkshire and Lancashire as the Yorkshire - Lancashire railway was a key mode of transport between games, it was not until the 1980's in which the game further expanded in Britain (Burkitt and Cameron, 1992). As a result of this

many clubs are still focused in the north of England, however in the past decade the game has begun to slowly expand to areas such London, Cumbria, and Wales of where teams now compete in the annual domestic leagues. Since its creation in 1895 rugby league has grown and developed as a sport to many countries around the world and has incorporated many different kinds of people including disabled, children and women. It is traditionally regarded as a very masculine sport and discourse over time has been of the masculine persuasion.

There is very little research around women in rugby league. Dawson (2013) is the main contributor to work surrounding the subject. She offers a brief history in the role that women play in the game of rugby league, noting that the main role women have played over the last century is that as a spectator as many pictures document. Where women playing the game is now becoming more widely known it is not a new phenomenon; Dawson notes that as early as 1921 women organised and played in charity matches to raise funds during the miners strikes, and again in 1926 for the general strike. Women's teams began to formulate more in the late 60's and 70's but it was not until 1978 that girls could play in mixed teams, which then gave open age women's teams more of a base from which to draw players. In 2000 the first women's world cup was held in Great Britain alongside the men's world cup, and again in 2005 in which New Zealand won on both occasions. The tournament will also be held again in Great Britain in the summer of 2013.

It is well known that in sport there are many different roles in which individuals can hold and be a part of that activity from playing to spectating, coaching to officiating. Women have traditionally held many of these roles particularly the 'behind the scenes roles'. Dawson documents that in 1945 many women's committees of rugby clubs across the north raised funds to help rebuild their local rugby clubs after the devastation of World War Two. In more recent times women have also held roles in club serving on the board of directors. More recently super league side Bradford Bulls (who were also one of the first 22 teams to join the Northern Union in 1895) have appointed Kate Hardcastle as the first ever female director of a super league club (Sky Sports News, 2013).

2.2 Barriers

There is a wealth of research available within the concept of barriers and constraints to participation within women's sport (Gilligan, 1982; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993). Crawford and Godbey (1987) suggest that constraints to women taking part in physical activity fall into three categories: interpersonal, structural and intrapersonal. Intrapersonal constraints include issues such as lack of self-esteem, stress and anxiety; structural constraints are those such as financial issues or transport; and interpersonal constraints include family needs and involvement with other people.

One of these barriers to participation is the view that others have of women taking part in sport. Throughout history sport has long been dominated by men, and the inclusion of women been restricted, with women only being allowed to spectate at some sporting events. Even when the modern Olympics were revived by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894, women were not allowed to compete in the first games held in 1896, and only allowed to compete in the following games (Spivey 2005). The athletic role is long associated with masculinity, aggression and competition, which were deemed as undesirable qualities in men; therefore reserving the athletic role for men. This left the vision of the athlete to individuals as being very manly, a direct conflict with the feminine role which has been developed over centuries and conformed to the male expectations of society. This view forms the basis of gender role theory (Goldberg and Chandler, 1991; Miller and Levy, 1996). This association of athletic performers in sports carries the assumption that female participants hold some form of masculinity therefore rejecting the feminine gender presumption placed upon them by society (Chase, 2006), making the female athlete almost an outcast to society. This view has been associated to female athletes since women began taking part in sport in the early 20th century. Women attempting to play rugby in south Australia for the first time in the 1920's were ridiculed by the local media and the male rugby players of the time, who took no time in pointing out to the public that women should be at home looking after children. Those against the participation of women in the sport, said that it was dangerous for women to play such a sport as it risked injuring their female organs and they would not be able to have babies, and that the sport carried more risk to women as they were not as physically fit and able

as their male counterparts. Many said that women taking part in such masculine activities such as sport would develop male qualities, such as facial hair thus making them undesirable. Over time this view has evolved to include the stereotype that athletic women are more masculine and therefore more likely to be lesbians. Such a view has been commonly put into everyday life and spread further than the sporting world. For example in one episode of the American sitcom 'the Big Bang Theory' three of the leading protagonists are having a debate about a female comic book character, with one saying that he thought the character was a lesbian, only for another of the protagonists to reply '*no she was just athletic*' (The Big Bang Theory, 2008). This demonstrates the stereotypical view placed on female athletes used in the media.

Sport is one of the few remaining areas of society in which men can assert their dominance (Mean, 2001; Hong, 2003; Stirling & Schulz, 2011). Some of the more commonly associated characteristics and traditional views of sport include physicality, aggression and violence which are still stereotypically associated with the masculine identity (Cauldwell, 1999; Murray & Howat, 2009). The perceived physicality of women is that they do not possess the same characteristics of their male counterparts and instead their physical structure is considered to prevent them from being successful in sport, as they lack strength and stamina which would enable them to run or kick as successfully as men do (Hall, 1996; Stirling & Schulz, 2011). Sterling and Schulz and Vertinsky (1994) continue and state that women have often been excluded from sport by men as it was believed that they would be at risk from physical trauma and harm more than men, as demonstrated in the early 1920's where women in Australia were excluded from playing rugby as it was believed they would not be physically capable of such demands on the body. Rugby is considered to be among some of the most masculine sports in the world (Fallon & Jome, 2007)

Opportunities for women to participate over the last 20 years have steadily grown increased. This can be associated to a number of factors. The improvements made in the social and economic power of women that has been gained through the equal rights legislation and political agendas have contributed to the forward movement of

women's place in society as a whole, and therefore contributed to women's place in the sporting landscape (Cox & Thompson, 2001; Stirling & Schulz, 2011).

Stirling and Schulz (2011) researched rates of participation in women's football in England, and the barriers that their participants faced whilst playing. They found that women are showing a change in female boundaries by participating in the sports that display those traditionally male characteristics already described. Many of the participants interviewed in the research described themselves as feeling like 'one of the lads' or as a 'tomboy'. These attitudes show that women are not simply pushing the boundaries of the socially constructed gender norm expected of them, but instead they have simply crossed the boundary all together, in order to access the male sporting environment in which they wish to participate.

2.3 Women's participation in sport

Regular physical activity is essential to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, as it is associated with reducing a number of health problems such as obesity and diabetes (Stamatakis & Choudhury, 2008). It is however also associated with a number of non-health related benefits which include reducing crime rates, increasing community cohesion and enhancing a sense of wellbeing in individuals (Steptoe & Butler, 1996; Hassmen, Koivula & Uutela, 2000). These reasons among others such as reducing rates of unemployment have led to sport being of higher political importance due to the wide range of benefits it has across multiple government agendas. This has resulted in an increase in funding in order to get more people involved in sport.

A study by Stamatakis and Choudhury (2008) in the participation rates of sport over a ten year period (1997-2006) found that there was a general increase in participation rates in physical activity in women by three per cent. They however also stated that this could not be seen as a true representation as it did not show a three per cent increase across all sorting areas looked which included various socioeconomic groups, geographical location, ethnicity and sports participated in. Stamatakis and Choudhury also found that the biggest area of participation was swimming (15.3% of women swam on a regular basis), and the most popular team

sports were football and rugby (0.7%) in comparison to men where 11.6% of men surveyed took part.

As already identified a very low percentage of women participate in rugby as a form of physical activity, so it is important to identify reasons why women engage in rugby, which has already been noted as a being traditionally masculine in nature due to the physicality and aggression commonly displayed in the game. There is limited research into why women participate in rugby, all of which is focussed on rugby union which is a much more popular variation of the game.

Rugby league is a team sport and played predominantly in Great Britain and Australia. Research has found that participating in team sports can lead to increased self-esteem, improved peer relations and greater social skills (Richman & Shaffer, 2000; Pederson & Seidman, 2004). Murray and Howat (2009) identify constraints that apply particularly to women and contact sports that are in line with Crawford and Godbey's (1987) constraints approach. They identify issues such as femininity and sexuality, fears of sustaining injuries, other responsibilities such as family and time constraints and also the importance of body shape and size. Dempsey (1989) argues that issues women face in participating in typified masculine sports stem from the paternalistic nature that dominates women in Western society of which sport mirrors.

Murray and Howat (2009) studied a group of rugby players in Australia, where rugby is the most popular sport. They aimed to identify reasons why women participate in rugby. They found that the female rugby players specified they became involved in playing contact sport because of family influences where family members were either previously or currently involved in the sport or acted as role models to the participants. This encouraged the individuals to become involved in the game as they were in a supportive environment. It was also identified that the social supportive environment was important to encouraging new members to join, but also in maintaining involvement once within the team. These findings were also consistent with those of Chase (2006) who explored women's rugby in America, where it is considered to be a fringe sport.

With these reasons for participation in masculine sports identified, it is possible to see why women turn to team sports and contact sports such as rugby league in which to participate. Rugby league is often referred to as a family game by those people that are involved in the game itself as being a family sport. Often generations of the same family will attend the same fixtures and play for the same teams. This is also dependant on geographical location as rugby league in Great Britain is very concentrated to the north of England.

2.4 Different ways in which to participate in sport

Farrell, Fink & Fields (2011) explore the reasons behind female spectatorship in traditionally male sport, and why these women did not participate in spectating at women's sporting events. As already established sport is predominantly masculine in its role and is seen as being created for men to participate in, thus it would be expected that some aspect of sport socialisation in women would come as a result of male influence, whether it be from a spouse or other family member. Farrell et al found that the most pronounced reason for women attending men's games was that the men in the lives of the participants were the biggest influences. These men had shaped the way in which women became involved in sports spectatorship, which to the man meant men's sport. It was also highlighted that the lack of media coverage surrounding the women's game was a contributing factor as to why women did not attend women's sporting fixtures. This research could be applicable to rugby league as both rugby league and basketball are seen as being predominantly male in their culture.

It is important to note that there are many different roles in sport, and that these roles offer multiple ways in which an individual can be involved. They include playing, coaching, refereeing, spectating, board members and organising, to roles more common in the community game which can include working in a club house or even washing the team kit. 2011 saw the first female to officiate on a professional men's game, and also to take charge of a full senior men's international friendly (The RFL, 2013).

2.5 Research question

After looking at the existing literature surrounding the history of women in rugby league, women in sport, barriers to participation, reasons for participating and the different ways in which it is possible to be involved in sport, it is now possible to formulate an area of which to further research. It has already been noted that there is very little in the way of research into women in rugby league, only that of Dawson (2013) which is more historical in its nature. The role of women in modern rugby league has not been researched. Since the creation of the women's world cup in 2000 the number of women playing in particular has grown, however so has the involvement of women in other aspects of the game such as officiating. Therefore this research will aim to look at the role in which women play in the modern game of rugby league, paying particular attention to how playing the game has changed since the creation of the World Cup in 2000, but also looking at other aspects such as expansion, refereeing and the attitudes that others in the game have towards these changes.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0

This study will encapsulate the role that women hold within rugby league across all areas and show how this role is developing and changing. This will be done using ethnography; including interviews and experiences sought from pre-selected participants, as well as observations from the researcher and her own experiences within the game.

Ethnography offers a rounded and holistic understanding of a particular social action. Miller, Hengst and Wang (p223) state that ethnographic methods are '*meaning is understood to be structured by culture—that is, by collectively shared and transmitted symbols, understandings, and ways of being*'. This research is being approached by the researcher being classed as a 'cultural insider' (Olive and Thorpe, 2011), through already having had a number of years submerged in the sport in a number of different roles. These roles have enabled the researcher to develop relationships with the individuals asked to participate in the study, being friends, work colleagues and fellow competitors.

3.1 Procedure

The research will be carried out through the use of interviews with participants and documenting the thoughts and experiences of the researcher while submerged in the rugby league culture. As the research is being conducted between the time period of September to March there is very little rugby league being played as this time frame encompasses the off season, therefore experiences will be drawn on from before this time frame in order to give a more balanced and rounded selection of data. This data will be gathered from journals that have been used to previously record the experiences. These experiences and interviews will then be interwoven to create a more in depth view of the role that women play in rugby league. The purpose of this research is to explore the role that women play in rugby in as much detail as possible. For this the researcher will draw upon past experiences with the use of diary entries and the use of social media that has documented the experiences, along with observations more recently in the field. As the researcher is already submerged in the rugby league culture in a number of roles, player, spectator, referee, coach and in development in the women's this has enabled her to gain

access to events, spaces and individuals that an outsider may not be able to. It is however important to note that this familiarity and being an insider may cause potential downfalls. These mainly comprise of the need to develop an analytical distance that is necessary to appropriately contextualise the data gathered (Wheaton 2002, Olive and Thorpe, 2011). Olive and Thorpe continue to highlight some of the issues that a researcher classed as an insider within the given sporting culture may face. These come in the form of personal, cultural and ethical dangers. Wheaton (2002) and Evers (2004,2006) (both cited in Olive and Thorpe, 2011) both recall feelings of discomfort and exclusion from comments that were sexist or homophobic that they have either endured or witnessed whilst researching in their own sport specific cultures which are also traditionally male sporting areas. It is therefore necessary to note that due to the male domination of rugby league that such issues may also arise, and it should be questioned whether or not these issues should be addressed whilst in the field should they occur and at the risk of losing quality data. As the dual role of researcher and cultural insider there is a degree of subjectivity involved and this must be taken into account.

Interviews will be used when collecting information from people within rugby league that offer further insight into the different roles and responsibilities in which women are present. These individuals offer an insight into their own involvement in rugby league and help to shape the research further. Veal (2006, cited in Grattan and Jones, 2010) suggests that interviews tend to be used primarily where the information gathered is likely to vary greatly between participants, and where the research is exploratory and the information gathered is likely to be used for further research. The type of interview method that will be used is an unstructured interview. This type of interview allows for the respondent to provide information that they deem important to them, and also for the researcher to develop questions pertinent to the research as it progresses. Grattan and Jones (2010) note that this method is potentially dangerous as the information gathered is more likely to lack focus, however they also highlight that unstructured interviews can be particularly useful as they allow for the emergence of themes that may otherwise not become evident. Within the data collection phase the researcher will also be using their own experiences and knowledge of the rugby league culture to access different situations and observe them, as well as recalling past experiences. These are particularly

useful as they show how the role of women in rugby league has changed over recent times, as well as being able to compare these experiences with those of the participants themselves. These experiences and observations will be drawn from a number of different areas of rugby league, including the playing, coaching, refereeing and spectating aspects as well as from working within a national governing body.

The interviews will be conducted at a time and place of the participant's choice, or over the phone or Skype if they are not available in person due to geographical constraints. The interview will be recorded with the use of a sound recorder in person and over Skype, or detailed notes will be taken for interviews over the phone. These will then be transcribed and used for data analysis by drawing out common themes and using them to explore the role of women in rugby league.

3.2 Participants

Three individuals were approached to take part in the research based on their involvement in the game, their gender and their geographical location. These factors are important in order to best gain a fair representation of the different roles within the game of rugby league, and across the different areas of the country. These include both men and women, referees, players, administrators and coaches as well as other roles, with some participants belonging to more than one of these groups. These individuals have been chosen as they can each contribute something that the researcher cannot, for example a position or job held, their geographical location, or views that the male individual has on women in the game. These views will then be interwoven with the researchers own experiences.

3.3 Trustworthiness

It is essential to make sure that the study is trustworthy therefore providing results that are credible and dependable which can be used in other research, and also so that the study can be replicated in the future (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba noted that with regards to credibility it is essential that the data reported matches the constructed realities of what the respondent has stated. To ensure this happens the interviews will be recorded using a sound recorder in person, or where interviews have to take place over the phone due to various constraints then detailed notes will be taken throughout. Transferability denotes that the findings of the study

must be transferable to studies in other settings. Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings, and conformability refers to the findings that are 'rooted' in the data. In order to achieve this the data analysis process is important.

3.4 Data Analysis

Grounded theory will be used to analyse the data as this approach and ethnography both use an emergent interpretive approach to data (Weed, 2006). Following the data gathering process the information gathered will then be analysed. Content analysis is the process by which data gathered in verbal, written or visual communication is analysed (Cole, 1988). This will be done through the use of open coding. Themes will be identified throughout the transcribed interviews using comment boxes and will then be grouped using a table to make the themes easier to interpret and further discuss. From the information identified it will then be possible to draw conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.0

These results have shown a number of different themes that ran concurrently throughout the data gathered. The aim of this paper is to explore the role of women in rugby league in the 21st century. These results have been structured so that this role can be identified and analysed with the use of the data gathered. Several of the themes also interlinked with one another, to create a more elaborate view of women in rugby league and how they are or can be affected by those themes identified. Direct quotes will be taken from the data gathered and random names will be assigned to each of the participants so as to protect anonymity and the participants' identity.

4.1 Development

One of the biggest themes to emerge throughout the data gathered was that of development in various aspects, but mainly with regards to the playing of women's rugby. The development of the women's game could be then broken down into two categories; the development of grassroots rugby and the increase in participation, and the development of the elite aspect of the game.

There was a large emphasis on increasing participation and enhancing the playing experience at the grassroots level of the game, this came across in multiple aspects of the data gathered. Dan - *'Then as far as the four seasons goes the RFL conducted some research using an independent partner into the women's game. This found that the majority of women prefer to play in the March to October season'*. This also shows that there is a desire to involve the participants in the major decisions that affect their playing experiences rather than simply imposing change on the participants. The change to playing in the summer was noted in a number of interviews as being better for both enjoyment and the quality of the game, several reasons for this were noted but most prominent was that it allowed the game to expand into new areas of the country, the weather was better and also the women were then aligned with their male counterparts, Dan - *'I think now the women feel more like they are part of the game and the rugby league family; they play alongside the men's professional season which also runs in the summer'*. Ruth - *'the summer*

league has really helped to move the game forward with expansion and development.' These reasons demonstrate that the traditional game of rugby has adapted to embrace the women's game of rugby by moving from a predominantly winter season where the weather would often be cold and wet, to the summer which is much warmer and drier allowing for a more positive experience by participants, and also by aligning the women's season with the men's it also helps to create a sense of belonging and a welcome atmosphere.

The data also shows that there is considerable development occurring at the elite level of women's rugby, with some aspects being similar to how the men's teams operate. The use of central contracting players into a development squad at elite level is relatively new to women's rugby league. Ruth - *England players have central contracts, it's a relatively new thing but it's definitely a step in the right direction.*' By identifying players early and having them train consistently over longer periods of time is a similar structure to how is operated in the men's national squad. Dan - *'The players now have nutritionists and strength and conditioning sessions just like the men do.'* This is bringing a sense of equality to the game and creating equal opportunities for women who wish to participate in rugby league at the highest level.

4.2 Funding

Another prominent theme that was identified was funding and the implications that it can have on the women's game. This can be further broken down into the three main strands of funding; funding as being important, things that can be achieved without funding and a lack of funding and its effects.

The general consensus from the data gathered was that it is seen as important, with varying degrees of just how important. The uses for funding varied from using it for promoting the game to establishing new teams and expanding the game further into areas where rugby league is not traditionally played. When discussing the move from winter to summer playing seasons it was noted that *'We also managed to secure more funding by moving to summer which is important in order to raise the profile of the game.'* This suggests that without the funding it may have been difficult to raise the profile of the women's game. It was also noted that funding was important to existing teams, particularly in covering expenses such as travelling when going long distances. Travel costs are particularly important as teams play half of their games

away in the league, however if teams are geographically located away from others, for example if they are a team that has developed in a non-traditional area of rugby such as the Midlands, then it would become expensive travelling each week. These small contributions to running costs do provide clubs with more opportunities, Ruth – *‘There are lots of teams down south like Nottingham and Coventry and London even has its own league. We get to go to new places now and play new teams, it’s really exciting.’* Funding was regarded as a necessary part of being able to develop new teams, particularly in areas where rugby league is not a traditional sport, in this example South Wales. The need to be able to fund a team before fully creating it was pointed out during a meeting to establish a women’s team in south Wales, *‘The main issue was funding and how we would be able to fund ourselves’*. The *‘community chest’* was also mentioned as a funding resource. This highlights the necessity of funding to be able to encourage further participation in women’s rugby league.

It did however emerge that not all participants thought that funding was vital to the game. One participant identified a number of opportunities that could be sought in order to move forwards that did not require funding but could be equally beneficial to the game, *‘I do think that there are a lot of things that don’t necessarily require money to achieve. For example training and up skilling volunteers.’*

The overall consensus however was that funding was important to be able to develop the women’s game and move forwards, predominantly through expanding the game into new areas that have traditionally not played rugby league before. There was a distinct presence that there was a significant lack of funding in sport and women’s rugby in general, particularly however in areas where women had not played rugby before, the example used is in Wales. When discussing reasons for the Wales national team withdrawing funding was highlighted as the main reason, Ruth – *‘Obviously at the minute there isn’t a lot of money in the sport. In fact it’s shocking at just how little money is available. The World Cup was very expensive to enter. Two weeks in Leeds was going to cost £500 a person, so £15k for the full team and staff. The governing body just didn’t have the money to fit the bill.’* This shows that it is difficult to establish and run teams without additional funding as it is particularly costly.

4.3 Expansion

Expansion was another key theme that emerged from the data gathered. Two main aspects of expansion became apparent; expansion of where rugby league is being played geographically, and expansion in terms of the roles that women were undertaking within rugby. Throughout the data analysis aspect of this research it became clear that expansion is closely linked with development and funding. Evidence suggests that expansion is a major aspect of development, yet it is majorly dependant on funding in order to be successful. 'Expansion combined with developing the game and moving the playing season to the summer was cited as a reason that the women's game has progressed over recent years and has improved for participants, Ruth - *There was nothing new and the same teams would win week after week. But now the summer league has really helped to move the game forward with expansion and development.*' Funding and expansion are linked as it is difficult to both create a team and deal with associated costs, as well as traveling expenses to games 'The RFL pays for the coach if we travel over so many miles to a game which means we don't all have to fork out more money when we go play in places like Derby today'. A key area in which was explored in the data collection was women playing rugby in Wales, at both international and community level. It was noted that England is the only one of the home nations to have an international team, thus international fixtures would require playing the southern hemisphere teams Dan – *'The biggest issue at the moment is that to go get a competitive fixture England need to travel to the other side of the world.'* This suggests that it is needed for the northern hemisphere teams to create another international side so that regular fixtures can be established. Expansion in terms of roles in which women undertake in rugby was also addressed. It was stressed that everyone needs to have opportunities to be as involved in the game as they would like to Ruth – *'everyone needs to have the opportunity to be involved in the game is as many different roles as possible.'* This is reinforced as the extent to which women hold different positions within the game became apparent Dan – *'Obviously women are involved in our game from the top to the bottom. When I say top I mean the executive director of the*

RFL Claire Morrow is at the very pinnacle of the game here. There are directors in some of the professional game too. There are also roles in the community game which are wide and varied, plus a lot of what you may call traditional roles such as post-match catering. A number of roles were identified including refereeing in non-traditional areas such as Wales.

4.4 Other themes

Development, funding and expansion were the main themes that arose from the research. There were however smaller themes that also emerged that should also be noted. The 'lad culture' was also identified in the data on a smaller scale in comparison to the others. This was most prominent where female referees were involved in refereeing male games. The term 'banter' was used *'When I told my friends they couldn't believe what had been said and asked why I didn't do something about it. I still ask myself that question. The obvious answer is that it's just 'banter' and part of the lad culture, something that seems prominent in rugby at all levels.'* A player interviewed also noted the 'lad culture' prominent in rugby league Dean – *'The thing is when you get lads in an environment like that they just want to act up anyway.'* This is where the negative experiences of women being involved in rugby in a male environment.

A further theme to emerge was the supportive environment in which rugby prides itself. This came across in the data a number of times, particularly in the development and expansion phase of women playing. It was remarked how men aided the creation of new teams, for example in Wales *'The Scorpions [local semi-professional men's side in south Wales] were willing to allow us to use their equipment and players would assist us with coaching from time to time. The WRL said that they would help us to secure further funding from other areas such as community chest which would hopefully help us on our way.'* This shows that there is the support there for women to be involved in the game and it also shows how these moves are regarded as the men involved in the game.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.0

This section will further explore the findings of the data gathered for the purpose of this research. These findings will then be underpinned by relevant existing literature and will be discussed as to their relevance within the field. Following this there will be a discussion as to the theoretical and practical implications of this study and what has been achieved as a result of this. Then the limitations and strengths of the study will be explored and finally considerations for future research will be made.

The data analysis procedure determined a number of key themes that emerged from the research gathered. These were; development, funding, expansion and two further underlying themes in the form of sexism and the supportive environment.

5.1 Development

The theme of development was prominent both during the data gathering phase of this research and during the analysis. During the analysis it became evident that two strands of development were apparent; elite development and community based development, which is also reinforced by Stewart (2007).

Elite development was concerned mainly with professionalising the elite women's aspect of rugby league. This was done through the use of creating central contracts for the players and a central training base. Training squads were chosen well in advance of major competitions and benefit from having more contact hours with the coaching team as well as having access to nutritionists and strength and conditioning professionals, something that is very recent to the women's aspect of the game in the last year. This is very similar to how the structure of the men's game is run. It also emerged that there is a new focus on the retention of players at age 16 during the transition to the open age aspect of the game. The governing body identified that 16-18 was a key age where dropout rates increased from sport in general. Girls playing in the u16 game were talent identified as having potential to be part of the elite squad in future years, therefore the governing body ensured that they made the transition for these players to the open age game as easy as possible to minimise the drop off rate and to protect the future of the national squad. Cote and Hay (2002) state that following the second phase of socialising into sport aged 13-

15, known as the specialising phase, one of three things happen; either the individual will drop out of sport, they will make the move to playing for recreational purposes or they will move into the investment phase. This investment phase sees the individual focusing on one activity with the intent to train intently and compete successfully. The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2010) identified that less than 20% of 15 year old girls take part in sport on a regular basis and that drop off rates at this point are high. This supports the findings of the rugby league governing body in targeting these individuals.

The second aspect of development that became apparent during the data analysis phase was that of grassroots or community level development which focussed on participation levels and also the experience of its players. This was demonstrated a number of times as the move to the summer season. After conducting research the Rugby Football League (RFL) found that women preferred playing in the summer months, and that there was more interest by potential new clubs during the summer months. The RFL took the initiative to change the playing format to the summer season. Ruth, the female rugby player in the study, identified the move to summer being positive as it created an influx of new players and teams which made the game more interesting.

In order to increase participation rates it is necessary to understand the target audience and their needs for participating in sport, as demonstrated here. As already previously stated rugby league is not traditionally perceived as a sport for women due to its aggressive and masculine nature, therefore it is necessary to market the sport to potential players in a way that the target audience can relate to. Murray and Howat (2009) found that female rugby players in Australia chose to play rugby because of the supportive nature that rugby had, they stated that this was crucial in both deciding to play rugby and also maintaining participation in the sport. Therefore the move to summer has the potential to attract new players as it shows the governing body is in touch with the participants needs.

5.2 Funding

Funding was another key theme that was noted throughout the data during the analysing process, from both interviews with participants and from observations. The

data gathered was predominantly negative, with participants expressing that a lack of funding was holding back the women's game. This was particularly evident when it came to light that Wales could not run their national women's team due to compete in the World Cup 2013 due to a lack of funding in order to cover the costs of the fortnight long tournament. Funding is a very complex issue. There can be a number of different investors in an organisation, dependant on the nature of the organisation itself. For example, rugby league itself receives funding on a four year cycle from Sport England. For the period 2013-17 rugby league received £17.5million, with £4.5million to be spent on talent player development (Sport England, 2012). This funding is then distributed within the organisation as they see fit to cover essential running costs and projects. Sponsorship is another route that can be utilised in order to gain extra revenue or save on costs. A third option would be to seek a grant or additional funding from alternative sources on a club by club basis. The Home Nations Sports Councils offer additional grants available to organisations based on very strict criteria. One such grant is the Community Chest which is awarded in Wales from Sport Wales (2013) and was referred to in the data gathering process.

Whereas the information gathered was predominantly negative and concerned with a lack of funding, one participant did highlight that there are aspects of rugby league that did not require funding. The use of volunteers was mentioned and is considered a huge resource across many community level organisations, not just in sport. Volunteers provide a willing workforce that can reduce the cost of staffing costs. It is however important to note that volunteers are beneficial if they are trained and willing to be involved in their role. It has been noted that poor morale by volunteers can have an adverse effect on people that they are working with (Armistead and Pettigrew, 2004; Maguire and Truscott, 2006). By creating a bigger network of enthusiastic volunteers and providing them with the training that would be needed in order to carry out their roles to the best of their abilities this would lead to reduced costs allowing funding to be spent in other areas.

5.3 Expansion

Expansion was a third key theme that emerged from the data. Two forms of expansion became apparent; firstly expansion of the game as a whole, and secondly the roles in which women are occupying in rugby league are expanding. Expansion in general is seen as the game of rugby league being played in areas where it is not traditionally played. For example, the Midlands and the North East have traditionally not been associated with rugby league, however since the creation of the summer league in 2012 the game has moved to these areas with the establishment of teams in Newcastle, Coventry and Nottingham. The data gathered suggests that in order for the women's game of rugby league to progress and develop it is essential to first expand the game into new areas. It was noted by one participant that the move to playing rugby in the summer was beneficial as the new teams that joined made the competition more interesting as the same teams would not win every week.

It was also noted that the roles that women are occupying in rugby league are also growing. Women have been involved in rugby league for as long as the game has existed, however their role became more prominent in the 1920's where predominantly their roles would consist of raising money to support their men's teams, and then post war to help rebuild the broken clubs (Dawson, 2013). This research has presented a number of ways in which the traditional role has evolved and expanded into some of the most senior positions in rugby league today. Women are now board members in several rugby clubs, there is a woman as executive director of the RFL and 2011 saw the first woman to take charge of a men's professional game, and referee a full men's senior international (The RFL, 2013).

While each of these themes are important in their own rights, it is also necessary to see them being interlinked. Each of these themes exists because of the other two, for example expansion exists because of development and funding to initiate an interest in a new place, however development cannot take place if funding does not exist or is not sufficient. Therefore it is important to see these three films as being tightly connected to each other and see them as a whole.

5.4 Other themes

There were two other themes that emerged from the data but were less prominent, however they should also be discussed further. The supportive environment within the rugby league culture was apparent during the research gathering process. Rugby league prides itself on being a family game and having an all inclusive attitude to who participates in the sport and what role they wish to participate in. Murray and Howat (2009) noted that for women to engage in a contact sport and to stay as active participants the emotional support was a key factor. These findings conclude with Murray and Howat and demonstrate that women do need and utilise the supportive environment in order to become and maintain their involvement in contact sports.

One other underlying theme that became apparent was that of sexism in rugby league. It was not apparent at all levels however, mainly just the refereeing aspect of the game. It was not clear from the research why this occurs only in the refereeing side of rugby league. It could be argued that as rugby is a masculine sport by nature (Chase, 2006) men may possibly resent the idea of having women telling them what to do in this environment, or possibly they feel the need to exert their dominance over women which has been culturally given to them by the patriarchal nature of Western civilisation (Dempsey, 1989). *'Women have no place on the rugby pitch'* Was one comment received whilst observing the culture, something that demonstrates the sexism in rugby, yet it could be due to generational factors that older generations of men still regard rugby league as 'their game'. It is difficult to ascertain the reason for this behaviour from the research gathered, as much of the data came from female participants therefore the male perspective would be necessary. This aspect of sexism still found in corners of the game would need to be addressed further in order to ensure that rugby league maintains its ethos of being an all welcoming family environment with a place for everyone in its ranks.

5.5 Practical and Theoretical Implications, Limitations and Strengths and Future Developments

This study explored the role that women have in rugby league. Rugby league has been a male dominated sport in Great Britain since it was created at the end of the nineteenth century. As there had been no research into the role of women before the research was very broad and aimed to cover as wide a field as possible. This could be seen as both a strength and limitation of the study. As the research was so broad it offers a base on which further research could be undertaken, however it could also be argued that as a result of the broadness the research is not as detailed as would be possible if it were to focus on one aspect of women's involvement instead.

As already stated there has been no research undertaken into women in rugby league of this nature, therefore theoretically there is now scope for further research to be undertaken. It would be recommended that further research would be more specific to an individual element of women in rugby opposed to looking at it as a whole, or possibly looking at one regional element of the game. Practically the findings gathered could be employed as a tool to aid women's involvement in the sport, and also to ensure that this involvement continues to grow and develop.

During the discussion phase of this paper issues were identified where further research could be undertaken. Most noticeably was the underlying theme of sexism that emerged in the refereeing aspect of the game. This is of particular importance as rugby league prides itself on being an all inclusive family sport, yet in this aspect of the game sexism is a barrier for women who are already involved and potentially for those looking to become involved in refereeing. It would be important to further explore this aspect and ascertain as to why sexism is still involved, then it could potentially be removed as a result of any findings.

If the study was to be repeated or further researched, a recommendation would be to continue the data collection phase over a longer period of time, or to focus on one aspect of women's involvement.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.0

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to explore the role that women hold in rugby league in Great Britain in the 21st Century. There was a focus on the playing aspect of rugby league as that is where more women are involved with the exception of spectating. Women have historically been limited in their roles in rugby league, to areas such as spectating and fundraising, however the turn of the century brought the creation of the women's World Cup and with that a new attraction to the sport for women. It was identified how women were involved in the game and some of the issues that they face, noticeably in the development, expansion and funding of women's involvement, however it did also emerge that there was an underlying theme of support within the environment which was consistent with the findings of Murray and Howat (2009) as to why women participate in contact sports. A more unfavourable finding that emerged from the data, yet not wholly unexpected was that of sexism. The focus of this finding was specific to the refereeing environment and came from either male players speaking to a female referee, or from a male referee.

An ethnographical approach to the research was deployed in order to gain a more detailed and wide range of information, as the researcher was considered a 'cultural insider' within the chosen field it was easy to gather a wide and appropriate amount of data to be used. This was then analysed using an open coding system as ethnography takes an emergent approach to data analysis. Themes were then identified as a result of this and discussed appropriately, followed by assessing the strengths and limitations, theoretical and practical implications and future considerations of this study.

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