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**<TO EXPLORE THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE RUGBY
UNION PLAYERS VIA A SOCIOLOGY OF THE SENSES >**

(Dissertation submitted under the <SOCIO-CULTURAL> area)

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**To Explore the Lived Experiences of Female Rugby
Union Players via a Sociology of the Senses.**

Cardiff Metropolitan University Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

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Abstract

Much research in sport is conducted at an abstract, theoretical level. Little research exists on the corporeal realities of the lived sporting body. The social world, and consequently sport, is experienced foremost through the senses. Therefore, using a phenomenological approach to study how bodily sensation influences experience offers an insight into this lived sporting body. Eight female rugby union players were chosen to participate in a set of three focus group interviews. Here they were questioned on their sensuous experiences playing rugby. Of how bodily sensation can create a sporting experience as a whole. The gender of the participants was also taken into consideration. Previous research has identified differences between how each gender utilises their bodily sensations. These females who participate in a typically 'masculine' sport therefore provided an interesting avenue in which to explore this further. In keeping with the phenomenological philosophy, the participants reflected on their sensuous, taken-for-granted experiences and recalled them with rich and vivid description. Five key sense-related themes emerged from the study, with the senses interacting in a myriad of ways to form a playing experience as a whole. Despite their inexperience in acknowledging their sensual contributions to sport, the participants performed well in their interviews, creating value in this study for bringing the 'fleshy' body into sport research.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 The Body

Central to the establishment and maintenance of social life and central to a person's sense of self-identity, is the human body. This would seem like an obvious statement. However, throughout history the body has occupied an "absent presence" (Schilling, 2006, p.8). As stated by Turner (2008), contemporary sociology has had little to say about the most obvious fact of human existence, that we have and are bodies. Schilling (2006, p.11) offers an initial definition of the body, describing it as an "unfinished biological and social phenomenon, which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society". The development of sociology itself was heavily influenced by the Cartesian legacy, a legacy which followed traditional philosophical thought and focused on a body/mind dichotomy. Favouring the latter, it was believed that the mind held the power with which to define humans as social beings. Despite the 'fleshy' body owning the facets with which to experience the social world and perform agency (the visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic and gustatory senses), bodily sensation was not seen to influence perception (Connell and Dowsett, 1992).

In recent years, interest in the body has grown. There is more of a focus on the embodied human as a subject in its own right. Howson (2004) argues that this is due to ongoing social changes. This includes the transformation from the 'mindless body', associated with twentieth century totalitarian societies, to the recent perception of the body as an individual possession, integrally related to people's self-identities (Schilling, 2006). The rise of feminism in recent years also brought the body to light with the biological body being identified as a source of patriarchy. Arthur Frank stated that bodies emerge from other bodies and consequently provide the means for acting. It is therefore important to have an understanding of these bodies, on all planes.

1.1 The Body in Sport

Much like in general sociology, there has been a cry to bring the body back into sport (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007). This has partly begun and the topic has been studied on a number of levels, including work on the gendered body (Aoki, 1996), bodies in specific sports (Hargreaves, 2007) and the maturing sporting body (Tulle, 2003). Despite this concoction of body-related themes, sport sociologists have still

been criticised for studying sport at an abstract, theoretical level. We are lacking a 'fleshy' account of sporting experience which is grounded in the "carnal realities of the lived sporting body" (Ahmed, 2004, Howson, 2005). Engaging with a phenomenological research approach however may grant us this 'carnal sociology' (Crossley, 1995) that we have been yearning for. The phenomenological philosophy is concerned with consciousness and direct lived experience. It focuses on the here and now of existence and hence would be well-suited to studying the senses' contribution to sporting experience, a topic which is lacking in research.

1.2 Research Aims

This study will therefore adopt a phenomenological approach towards exploring the sensual experiences of a group of female rugby union players. Attempts will be made to understand how their bodily sensations contribute to their lived sporting experiences. Their gender will also be taken into consideration, due to the prevalent literature suggesting that sense utilisation could be gender-dependent. Focus group interviews will be used to access the group of players' sporting accounts and the data will be analysed using Giorgi's (1985) method of phenomenological analysis. This data will then be presented and discussed accordingly.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 An Introduction to Phenomenology

Modern phenomenology is a complex and multi-stranded concept, described by Ehrlich (1999) as a 'tangled web' of threads, encompassing many theoretical and methodological traditions. Rather than being a strictly defined term, it is better described as a style of thought, used and built upon by the likes of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and various other philosophers. It emerged in the twentieth century, conceived by Edmund Husserl. He believed that the basis of all knowledge came from the subjectivity of human experience (Allen-Collinson, 2009), something which was lacking at that time due to the focus on objectivity. Derived from the Greek term *phainomenon*, phenomenology is put simply, the study of phenomena. It requires the acknowledgement of our everyday, taken-for-granted experiences and how we perceive them. It is concerned with the here and now of existence and the lived body. Muller (2011) describes it as "systematically acting the fool in order to see what has been left". Achieving this requires the relegation of our natural attitudes and assumptions regarding the world, in other words engaging in the process of epochē. This involves researchers disregarding what is claimed to be "known" about a phenomenon and approaching it with a fresh and naïve eye (Allen-Collinson, 2011). Phenomenology requires an awareness of the world as we live it, rather than as we conceptualise or theorise it (van Manen, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, there are many branches of phenomenology. These include transcendental and hermeneutic, which are concerned with describing an experience and analysing that description respectively. The branch most relevant to sport and the body however is existential phenomenology. Existential philosophy is concerned with understanding what it means to be human and Maurice Merleau-Ponty is credited with wedding existentialism and phenomenology in the twentieth century. This approach links mind, body and world in an indissoluble relationship (Allen-Collinson et al, 2014). The body is the subject through which all things are perceived and experienced. To quote Merleau-Ponty, "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism". He later used the term "flesh-of-the-world" instead of "being-in-the-world" to better portray our bodily grounded lived reality, our 'corporeality'. Morley (2001) applauds the term 'flesh' as it expresses a raw dimension of human existence, a "crossing point between subject and object, body and world" (Allen-Collinson et al, 2014). As humans, we live through our bodies and as

sportspeople we perform through our bodies. This therefore is a well suited approach to studying sporting embodiment.

2.1 Phenomenology in Sport

The “promise of phenomenology” in sport science was predicted some years ago by Kerry and Armour (2000). Crucially however, they point out that there isn’t a large amount of phenomenological research available on sport. Despite this approach being very relevant in the study of movement, and in this case sport, Bain (1995) points out that little qualitative research in sport has been based upon this perspective. In Kerry and Armour’s (2000) review a few phenomenological studies were identified. Pronger (1990) researched the experiences of gay men in athletics, conducting in-depth interviews with 30 gay-identified male athletes. This work may have contributed knowledge to the subject area, however it was criticised for lacking in the rich, fruitful style of writing associated with this approach. The same could be said for Woods’ (1992) study on the experiences of lesbian physical education teachers. This study’s aim was to get participants to reconstruct their experiences and reflect on their meaning, something this research will be aiming to do. The study was published in the traditional research structure, including a precise method, a reflection on previous theories and a results section under neatly confined headings. A suggestion from Kerry and Armour (2000) was to also include rich, extensive text examples of the data collection and analysis process in order to get more of a ‘feel’ of the participants’ sporting experiences.

Ray (1994) states that in order to establish research as phenomenological, the reader must have a firm understanding of the philosophical roots. It is argued that most phenomenological research in sport is lacking in this and therefore cannot identify as phenomenological, as the reader cannot fully understand the theoretical and methodological purposes of the research. However, including this philosophical detail has been problematic for many researchers due to space constraints in journal writing. This method of research has also often been confused with general qualitative research, due to both approaches seeking out the understanding of human experience (Ravizza, 1977). Fortunately, this area of research *is* growing and more papers are being published. Unfortunately however, this area is lacking in empirical studies and several of the papers published have not generated any data.

They have remained at a theoretical level and therefore contribute little to the knowledge of sport (Weiss, 1982; Kretchmar, 1974). Consequently, there is a gap in this area to fill by collecting phenomenological data.

2.2 The Senses

Merleau-Ponty (1969) was concerned with the sensory dimensions of embodiment and the concept of reversibility, both of which are highly applicable to sporting experiences (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007). As Waskul et al (2012) state “it is only when our own sensual experience is disrupted that our embodied consciousness pays attention”. The concept of reversibility describes how our sense perceptions are reversible. We can both touch and be touched, hear and be heard and so on. There is a constant relationship between our subjectivity and the fleshy world, they are intertwined. Sportspeople have this reversible relationship with other participants as well as equipment and the general environment. For example, an experienced rugby player may possess a good idea of how and where the ball will bounce. The state of the pitch (firm/soft) however could alter its bounce. This displays the interchangeable relationship. The rugby player would then use their previous experiences and utilise their senses in order to evaluate the pitch’s effect, and position themselves as they feel correct to catch the ball.

Deliberation exists as to whether the senses through which we experience the social world have been given equal attention throughout history. This is highlighted in Sparkes’ (2009) review of the existing ethnographies on this topic. Despite people’s knowledge of the world and everything we know being experienced firstly through the senses, he concluded that vision had by far been prioritised when attempting to explain that world. Bull and Black (2003) described this as staring at the spectacle, rather than attempting understanding through other sensory mechanisms. It has been noted however that this visual prioritisation was not the case pre-eighteenth century.

“The very visualism of modernity has, so to speak, thrown a cloak of invisibility over the sensory imagery of previous eras....When this cloak is lifted, however, the cosmos suddenly blazes forth in multisensory splendour: the heavens ring out with music, the planets radiate scents and savors, the earth springs to life in colors, temperatures, and sounds”.

(Classen, 1998, p.1)

Before this era, the senses were regarded as equal, they were each coded with cultural values and linked in hierarchies of meaning (Classen, 1998). Drawing on this and work from Stoller (1989) it was argued that the emphasis on empiricism during the age of enlightenment elevated vision to this superior level. The development of the scientific culture meant that empirical observation became more significant. This brought with it objectivity and rationalisation. Western culture displays the greatest bias in this area, so much so that it has been referred to as 'the culture of the eye'. This has resulted in the 'lower' senses (smell and touch) being neglected. Auditory powers have also been neglected, however not as much as the previous two as it is regarded as a more rational sense and utilised more by males. This meant it complimented the emerging scientific culture (Sparkes, 2009, Classen, 1998).

Relying only on visual representation could lower the value of the research, especially when studying life experiences, as noted by Bull and Black (2003). They suggested that by knowledge relying on the visual, serious limitations are placed on our understanding of the meaning of social behaviour. Taking this into consideration, Howes (2004) calls for an *anthropology of the senses*. This would involve each sense getting a considerable amount of attention in order to fully understand how the world is experienced through that sense. Howes argues that sensation isn't limited to physiological response. We learn societal norms, gender and race distinctions and our culture in general through foremost our senses. Sensory experience therefore becomes "an arena for structuring social roles and interactions" (p.48). Howes states that sensory experience is the fundamental domain for cultural expression. Therefore each sensory dimension deserves an equal amount of attention in research in order to understand how the world came to be.

Feld (1996) noted that sound can have great influence over people's perceptions of experiences. He wanted to develop an acoustemology approach to explore this. Bull and Black (2003) built upon this with their concept of 'deep listening'. This involves participants re-thinking the meaning, nature and significance of their social experiences. This procedure involves paying critical attention to the multiple layers of sound associated with experiences and as Rice (2003) commented, having an informed mind could be a powerful tool when understanding how sound contributes

to experience. Using the technology available today, it would be interesting if games/events were recorded, so that participants could watch over and listen to their performances and then reflect and employ deep listening techniques. There have also been calls for the other senses to be considered. Classen et al (1994) argue that odours are invested with cultural values. They have deep, internalised, culture-dependent meanings to people and therefore the study of the history of smell is likewise a study into the essence of human culture. Similarly, Classen (2005) appeals for attention to be paid to touch. Touch has always been a fundamental medium for expression and experience. Hand-to-hand combat has dominated warfare, people heal with their hands, people express love through affectionate touching. Why then has it not been recognised when the “culture of touch involves all of culture” (p.3). Currently, in terms of research, we live in a world where “dry first principles are generally more important than mouth-watering aromas” (Sparkes, 2009, p.5). However, this is changing and a handful of these sensory-focused studies are available in sport.

2.3 Sensory Studies in Sport

Allen-Collinson (2013) used an autophenomenographic approach in her study, whereby she played the role of both the researcher and the participant. A 3-year log was kept of her middle-long distance running sessions, noting timings, weather conditions, terrain and most importantly, her subjective, corporeal experiences and feeling states.

“Like Baked Alaska in reverse: my wind-chilled outer skin is bitterly cold, grey-blue, but it seems as though just a few layers beneath the epidermis, my inner body is glow-warm orange. The strangeness of the feeling preoccupies me so that the discomfort of the cold is forgotten”.

(Allen-Collinson, 2013, p.13)

This extract from her running logs displays her feeling states and how they contributed to her experience. An effort was made in the logs to record evocative narratives which were rich in detail, in keeping with the phenomenological method. Allen-Collinson also engaged in epochē throughout the study. She held discussions with insiders and outsiders of the running world of both genders, in order to distance herself from her own preconceptions about female running. She also read

ethnographic accounts from other sporting activities in order to compare and contrast their key elements with her running experience. Some of the guidelines put forward by Giorgi (1985) were also followed in this research. A phenomenological attitude was adopted, descriptions were collected from an insider's perspective and the descriptions were re-read in order to achieve a deep immersion in the data.

Therefore this method is phenomenologically sound.

Allen-Collinson (2013) also describes various sensory journeys during her runs. She comments on the olfactory dimension. Of how the smell of freshly cut grass could invoke powerful childhood memories of time spent watching cricket or spending time with her family outdoors. Memories provoked by smells could have interesting motivational effects. If a particular smell was present during a positive game, then a relationship between the two could be established, perhaps aiding performance or experience. The same could be said for a negative experience. The smell and sensation of sweat after exercise is linked with the athlete's perceived exertion. It is part of their sporting identity and seen in a positive light as it is due to the amount of effort they have put in. The soundscape also played a role in the narrative of her embodied experience. She comments on how listening allowed her to identify a steady rhythm and perfect timing, so much so that whole sections of her run went missing because she was so 'in the moment'. This is supported by Goodridge (1999) who noted that when an athlete is playing well there is usually a particular rhythm of respiration. Sound is information as well as sensation (Rodaway, 1994), therefore listening is vital so that athletes can maintain body control and evaluate how they are performing. Auditory powers are also important for road runners and cyclists who must listen out for hazards in order to avoid danger. Wacquant (2004) illustrates how boxers must "learn to see" in the ring. This is so they can anticipate their opponent's moves by reading their body language. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) note here that what is "seen" is culturally dependent and relies on knowledge accumulated from previous experience. Athletes will judge their playing terrain on what they see. They will judge in terms of safety and of how it will affect performance. For downhill skiers a lot relies on this ability to see the snow. Time is of the essence, but they're also travelling at a very high speed. One wrong movement could result in serious injury. The more experience they have, the better they will be at "seeing" and choosing safe and quick passage. Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) detailed the

haptic relationship athletes have with their sporting environment. They stated how the athlete's touch combines pressure between the sporting body and their sporting habitat, as well as a kinaesthetic awareness of the body as it moves through planes. As an example, rugby players will use their visual as well as their haptic resources to evaluate the pitch. If they can feel that it is wet and slippery and they know they are going to get tackled before reaching the try line, they can make the decision to dive. They know that their momentum will cause them to slide over the wet ground and score, leaving the defence with no way to stop them. Kickers will also have a favourite position to place the ball in before kicking it. By moving the ball around in their hands they will find that comfortable position and be psychologically ready to kick it. Previous experience plays a vital role in utilising your sense of touch. The senses own a stock of information to offer us about the social world and consequently sport, a different insight into lived experience.

2.4 Gender and The Senses

Interestingly, distinctions in the use of senses between genders have been reported throughout history. Sparkes (2009) comments on the visual bias between the genders and questions whether men and women occupy distinct tactile worlds. According to Classen (1998), men and women have occupied different sensory realms for many years. Men were associated with the mind and soul as they were considered as the leaders and enlighteners, while women were associated with the body and senses. Inside the sensory domain however, men were still associated with the 'higher' and more noble senses, namely vision and auditory. These senses were readily associated with functions of the mind. Women were left with the 'lower' senses (gustatory, tactile and olfactory) which were more associated with bodily functions.

Typically, female rugby players aren't considered to conform to the gender ideology, a set of attitudes and beliefs about the roles of men and women and how they should act in society (Korabik et al, 2008). This is due to the repercussions of playing the sport, such as having a bruised and bloody body, which deviates from the way society says a female body should look (Hardy, 2014). Although many types of femininity exist, Lenskyj (1994) argues that there is a sole type which is deemed correct; hegemonic femininity. Females of this category should be white,

heterosexual and middle-to-high class. They should behold traits such as dependency, submissiveness and concern over their appearance. Popular female athletes in the media are usually respectful of these traits and 'apologise' for playing certain sports because they are deemed masculine. They do this by overemphasizing their femininity. This is achieved by wearing make-up/jewellery to compete, participating in photo shoots involving boyfriends/husbands and wearing revealing kit to appear attractive to men (Hardy, 2015).

Rugby on the other hand encourages all the behaviours hegemonic femininity discourages. It is a masculine sport which aims for domination via aggression and physical toughness. Females who play this sport therefore deviate from the social norm and cross the boundaries of traditional femininity. Research by Broad (2001) found that on the contrary, female rugby players are often 'unapologetic'. Using ethnographic methods, she observed a female rugby team from the USA and found that they challenged heteronormativity. They created a fluid, gender-transgressive environment. Wheatley (1994) and Chase (2006) also found that female rugby players challenged the sport's male status and created a vision of the sport in general, rather than a male-dominated vision. They also challenged the "dominant discourses of normative femininity" (Chase, 2006, p.232). Rugby therefore offers a "fertile ground for resistance" to conventional gender norms (Ezzell, 2009, p.115). Taking this reported resistance into consideration, it will be interesting to explore whether the "non-traditional" females in this study will utilise the senses usually associated with males or females when they reflect on their experiences.

2.5 Summary

To summarise, the aim of this study will be to research how a small number of female rugby players engage with their senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, and haptic) whilst playing and how they perceive their senses contribute to their experience. As noted by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009), analysis of the sensory dimensions of the working body often plays a minor role in a wider analysis of that body. They are rarely the sole focus. Additionally, when the sensory dimensions are considered, they are usually considered independently and not as a group of interacting systems. There is somewhat of a lacuna present in this area of sport research which needs to be filled. A sociology of the senses will create a new, raw

dimension in which to study sporting embodiment (Allen-Collinson and Owton, 2012) and using a phenomenological approach is a fitting method in which to achieve this. No research of this sort exists on the minority population that is female rugby players. There will therefore be value in their subjective knowledge. The growing literature on gender differences between sense usage (Sparkes, 2009, Classen, 1998) also calls for an opinion, in this case from these females, on the proposed differences.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Paradigm

This study aims to gain an insight into female rugby players' subjective thoughts and feelings regarding how they engage with their senses when playing. Consequently, the research is located inside the interpretative paradigm. Unlike the positivist paradigm that favours quantities and amounts (Murray, 2003), the interpretive paradigm is concerned with how people create meaning and interpret the events of their everyday world (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). It suggests that reality is what people perceive it to be (Sparkes, 1992). In keeping with the traditions of this paradigm, a qualitative research approach was adopted.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.3) offer a definition of qualitative research, stating that it is a "Situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practises that make the world visible". Researchers study phenomena in its natural setting, and then interpret the meaning people bring to that phenomena. This approach acknowledges the need to understand the underlying experiences, feelings and emotions of behaviours conducted in the social world. This is something quantitative research often overlooks (Gratton and Jones, 2004), and for this reason, the approach is growing in sport. Holliday (2007) states that qualitative research focuses on the experiences of specific social settings (micro settings) rather than broad populations (macro settings), making it suitable for the minority that is female rugby players.

3.1 Sampling

Purposeful, criterion based sampling was used in this study. Patton (1990) advocates purposeful sampling as it allows you to select information-rich cases to study in-depth. Eight female Cardiff Metropolitan University rugby union players were selected, ranging from 19-22 in age. The homogeneity of the group, regarding age, courses studied and sporting background facilitated the group interviewing process (Duan et al, 2015). They varied in position from backs to forwards, with two participants having experience in both positions. The group also varied in experience level, with the least experience being one year of playing and the most being thirteen years. In addition, they differed in the level at which they play and the reasons for which they play; competitively, socially and so on.

Shatzman and Strauss (1973) suggest that after observation, researchers will know who to select to suit the aims of the research. This was taken into account and the group therefore ranged along the introvert/extrovert scale. The more extroverted people kept the flow of the interview, offering frequent detailed accounts of their experiences. The more introverted people offered less in terms of amount but offered equally interesting experiences and insights. As the researcher, I know and play with these participants and their style of vocabulary was also taken into account. Phenomenological research is associated with rich, fruitful accounts which are excessive in detail (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Some participants were then chosen based on their day-to-day storytelling ability and expansive vocabulary. As an example, Alice, Lauren, Jo and Abbie are known for their 'bubbly' personalities. They are the talkative members of the group who openly display their loud personalities in the team environment. Jessica, Grace, Gwen and Emily in general are the quieter members of the group. They prefer not to take centre-stage and perhaps stick more to their friendship groups despite having a good relationship with most of the team. As a whole however, this group interacted well.

Eight participants were chosen, following Sparkes and Smith's (2014) recommendation that the optimal focus group number should be between four and eight, with ten being a maximum. This number meant that no 'thinning of voices' occurred but also, everyone could give their input. Gratton and Jones (2004) propose that a large number in qualitative research could be detrimental. Therefore, as Maxwell (1996) states, it is more useful to have a smaller number that provides an account of a unique case. Due to work/sporting commitments, only six people were present at each interview, with participants swapping in and out depending on availability.

3.2 Data Collection

The group participated in three focus group sessions. These lasted approximately thirty minutes each and took place five days after each game. They were at the same time every week in order to achieve consistency regarding how busy participants were and fatigue levels and so on. They were conducted in a study room on the university campus, a familiar setting where there was little background noise. The first session was an introduction to the topic. Participants were given a brief

insight into phenomenological research which related to the senses. They were given extracts to read from Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson's (2013) paper; Narratives of and from a running woman's body: Feminist phenomenological perspectives on running embodiment. This was an attempt to inspire their reflexivity regarding their sense utilisation when playing sport. This taken-for-granted way of thinking was an unknown terrain for these participants. Therefore by giving examples of how Allen-Collinson described her sensual experiences, they hopefully became more equipped at acknowledging their own experiences.

They were interviewed in a semi-structured nature, with an interview guide being drawn up for each focus group session (see appendix C, D and E). The interviews began with 'easy' questions, asking how the participants were and how their previous game went to make them feel comfortable speaking. They then moved on to the aims of that particular session. The interview guide kept me as the researcher on track with what I was focusing on but it also gave room for the discussion to evolve and let new themes emerge. After a brief rugby introduction, the focus group took a more sense-focused approach. Before the second interview, participants were asked to focus on their visual and auditory senses during their game, and how they contributed to their experience. They were told to record any thoughts and feelings in a diary after the game if they felt necessary, which they could bring to the next session. This granted them a space for reflection.

The second interview then concentrated on the visual and auditory senses, with the third focusing on the tactile and olfactory. As an ending question, participants were asked which sense(s) they felt contributed the most to their overall experience. The group were encouraged to bounce off of each other throughout all interviews and by the last session were actively asking each other questions. Participants were probed deeper when it was appropriate.

A Dictaphone was used to record each discussion. Gratton and Jones (2004) regard this as the best method of recording interviews as it allows the researcher to focus solely on the participants and not recording the data themselves, improving rapport. The Dictaphone use ensured that no information was missed and the interviews could be listened to repeatedly. Interviews were later transcribed verbatim for data analysis (see appendix F) and stored securely on a laptop.

As the researcher, I acted as an instrument. Pezalla et al (2012) regard the researcher as the primary instrument in qualitative interviews. I asked the questions and controlled how these questions were presented. This as well as being a member of the team and knowing the group on a personal level meant that I had an influence over what they revealed. This however is celebrated in qualitative research as a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees already exists (Ellis and Berger, 2003; Pillow, 2003). I could also remind the participants of particular games that could be relevant to the topic if needed to. As an instrument, this study required me to be a reflexive researcher. Brackenridge (1999, p.399) defines reflexivity as “a process whereby the effect of the researcher, and their own characteristics, background, values, attitudes and so on, upon the subject matter is taken account of”. My position as the researcher and my relations with the participants (being the same gender, the same ethnicity and sharing common beliefs and values) was therefore acknowledged in order to evaluate the ‘truth’ of the findings.

This method of research is similar to that put forward by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007). Using the analytic categories that were each individual sense, an interview agenda was created and phenomenological accounts were gathered from a group of participants, rather than just using the autoethnographic accounts usually associated with sensuous research. This enabled me to see how participants shared their embodied experiences as well as independently experienced them.

Experiential ethnography (Sands, 2002) also partly took place. As a member of this team I have been fully immersed in this culture for a long period of time. This has allowed me to understand involvement in rugby on all sensuous levels, not just visually or verbally, as are often prioritised.

3.3 Data Analysis

Giorgi's (1985) method of descriptive phenomenology was used for data analysis. Firstly, I had to immerse myself in the data. This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts and listening to the interviews multiple times. This was so I could get a ‘feel’ of what the participants meant when describing their experiences. Pauses to think and changes in their tone of voice in accordance with their experiences were acknowledged here. The transcripts were then coded. The significant words and phrases that stood out visually and were shared most frequently between

participants when describing their experiences were highlighted. These coded sections of the data were referred to as 'meaning units'. Closely related meaning units were gathered into categories (see appendix G) and the participants' expressions, given in their 'natural attitude', were reconstructed into phenomenologically sensitive expressions or headings. Here the attempt was made to understand the participants' experiences and articulate them. The reconstructed expressions were then gathered and presented in a few thematic statements to describe the use of the players' senses in their overall rugby union experience (Finlay, 2013; Grossoehme, 2014). It was important here to illustrate scientific rigour but also to express the findings with grace and elegance, in keeping with the phenomenological philosophy (Polkinghorne, 1983).

3.4 Credibility and Dependability

Validity is a tricky term in qualitative research (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). The main objective of validity is to ensure that the researcher's claims about knowledge correspond to the actual reality, or put simply, it is truthful. However, Mcfee (2009, p.79) points out that truth is "always contextual, occasion-sensitive and perspectival to some degree". Truth is down to interpretation and this is why the interpretive paradigm was utilised for this research. As the researcher, I will have an opinion on these findings and may present the findings in a way to support that opinion. Instead of striving for validity in this study, the concept of credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) was sought out. This focuses on matching the "constructed realities of correspondents (or stakeholders) and those realities represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders" (p.237). To ensure credibility, peer debriefing and member checking were carried out. This allowed the participants to see what had been recorded and confirm or deny that this was an accurate representation of the events.

Dependability is concerned with the stability of data over time (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). It forms a parallel to the concept of reliability in quantitative research. Qualitative researchers will never perform the same interview twice, therefore reliability, which aims to make things repeatable and consistent, is not a concern for them. By making their research logical and traceable however they make it dependable, adding to the trustworthiness of the research (Sparkes and Smith,

2014). An audit trail was recorded throughout this study, as shown throughout the appendices, making note of the path of the research and the decision-making processes. This allows the reader to follow the path of the researcher and independently decide whether they deem the research to be dependable.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by Cardiff Metropolitan University. This protected both the participants and the researcher throughout the research process (Jeukendrup, 2009). Before agreeing to take part the participants were issued with an information sheet (see appendix B). In accordance with Seal (2004), this detailed the aims of the study, what would be required of the participants and any risks involved. The participants then signed informed consent sheets (see appendix A). Here they were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, facing no repercussions. Care was taken when designing the interview guides, on sensitive topics such as masculinity or injury. There was social risk involved if participants were not comfortable revealing certain things in front of their peers. Although further probing did occur, if it was evident that participants were not comfortable talking about a particular topic, perhaps by changes in mood/tone, the interview moved on accordingly. The group were also told not to discuss anything that was revealed during the interviews outside of that group. This was to ensure confidentiality.

Participants were assured of their anonymity throughout the study via pseudonyms being used in the transcripts and the altering of any personal details. The transcripts were stored in a locked file on a password-protected computer which was only accessible by the researcher. This ensured that they were secure. Participants were also encouraged to engage with the researcher if they were experiencing any problems during the research or felt that they needed to talk about anything that arose in the focus groups. Post-study, participants actually reported enjoying the interview process. They commented on how they found it interesting thinking about playing from a sense-perspective, suggesting they experienced a positive outcome from this study.

Chapter Four: Results

4.0 Introduction

Data analysis revealed that the participants cared deeply about their rugby experiences. *“Rugby is everything to me”*, reported one veteran, *“it’s the biggest part of my life”*. They spoke of how they fell in love with it at first touch and how a life without the sport is unacceptable for them. *“I’m planning on playing until I can’t walk anymore”* was stated matter-of-factly by Lauren, a player with thirteen years of experience. They spoke with both elation and sadness, pride and nostalgia, and most of all spoke with a real fondness for the game. Being rugby players has great influence over how these players think, feel and act. Rugby is what they know, and it means everything. Five key sense-related themes emerged from this.

4.1 “You smell a bit funky.”

Body odours was a theme discussed on a number of levels during the interview process, in both positive and negative lights. Descriptions of a noticeable smell of sweat during or after a game was intimately connected with how much effort was put into that game. During the huddle after a game, one participant commented on how it didn’t matter that people were “puffing”, if the smell had changed from how it was during the pre-game huddle, people had worked hard. Participants also noted how they tried not to take notice of it because *“it’s disgusting”*. There was an underlying meaning behind this ‘disgusting’ smell however, of grit and hard work. Something that they yearned for after a game and appreciated.

“I prefer to play in summer when you’re sweating loads and when people do get a bit smelly”.

(Alice)

Playing on the sevens circuit in summer was further associated with the smell of sweat. The heat lounges on your skin. The ground is firm, you feel your calves tighten as you step on it. There’s an eeriness to the sheer size of the pitch in front of you, with sixteen less players on than usual. The spaces to exploit are endless and the game is open. The participants adore this experience and discussed playing sevens with excitement, suggesting the smell of sweat can arouse positive memories and emotions.

Resistance to body odours during scrummaging was present in the focus group. Those who played in positions behind the front row commented on how if players had been working hard, a certain pungency was prevalent. Players are knitted together in a tight pack during the scrum. Personal space is non-existent and these players cannot escape this smell. It affected their performance as they eventually dreaded it. *“You hold your breath and you can’t focus”*. It threw them off their game. The olfactory element here therefore contributes to a negative experience.

“Even in the grim clubhouses...I could be at home for all I know”.

(Jo)

Not body odours, but rather post-game odours of alcohol and chips in the clubhouse were also of significance to the participants. They time-travelled back to moments of exhaustion after a game, where they finally had the chance to sit down. They likened it to memories of going home after a long day at school and sitting down on the sofa, speaking about this with noticeable warmth. Feelings of comfort and relaxation were experienced, an interesting perspective when the clubhouse scene itself is usually one of rowdiness and festivity.

4.2 Turf Wars

There was much discussion on how the ground, and the mud and grass associated with it contributes to players’ experiences. Much like the degree to which they had perspired, the players related how saturated they were in mud to how much effort they had put in.

“Whenever you come away and you know you’re covered head to toe in mud. Maybe not all those tackles were great but you’ve obviously made an effort and you think “Okay. I’ve got my bruises and I’ve got my mud everywhere”. I feel more satisfied”.

(Jessica)

In a tactile sense, being muddy was their mark that they had made an impact on the game. Being clean was unwanted as it meant they had little involvement in the match. This had a psychological effect on the participants when they proceeded to play on a 3G pitch.

“The pitch was different...Everyone looked a bit more clean. It’s weird because you can normally tell how much work you’re putting in by how much you’re covered...everyone looked like they hadn’t really been doing much”

(Abbie)

When probed deeper, Abbie revealed that she felt she had to contribute more to the game due to her being less muddy than usual. Playing on a 3G pitch gave the participants an altogether different experience of playing rugby, with split opinions. Abbie and Jessica spoke of their apprehensions, of how the 3G can burn your skin when you fall and how they worried for their knees and ankles due to the differing firmness of the ground. Jessica suggested that the team then made an effort to play smarter rugby to avoid going to ground as much. This would involve the players seeking out the offload more to keep the ball alive, a faster game. Abbie, a forward, firmly stated *“I like mud”*. This particular match was a highlight of her season as it is a yearly tradition to play at this particular stadium, however *“it would be ten times better”* for her if it was played on grass. Her reasons for this included the disadvantage that was the lack of mud in the scrum. The ‘sludginess’ of the mud holds your boots in the scrum, allowing you to gain a strong grip off of which to drive. Abbie missed this during the game.

In contrast, Alice who is also a forward, enjoyed the experience more on 3G. For her, playing on this turf made everything feel like *“100 miles an hour”* and *“attack, attack, attack”*. Grace expanded on that, commenting on how she liked the bounciness of the artificial ground, and how it made her feel as though she was running faster.

There were also varying degrees of apprehension when playing on a dank, sodden pitch. Alice spoke of how these unpleasant conditions can invoke feelings of panic in the team. The ball itself is a risk with its bounce and slipperiness.

“If I drop it I know someone’s going to be annoyed with me...It affects the team performance majorly”.

(Abbie)

There was also a sense of danger with these conditions. Lineout jumpers feared for the stability of their ankles when landing. Feelings of added pressure and anxiety in muddy games were apparent. The type of mud was also significant to participants.

Emily noted how the grains of sandy mud would irritate her throughout a match. She becomes conscious of the feel of them under her fingernails. Additionally, dry mud was more attractive to the players than wet mud. If the pitch was boggy they were less enthusiastic about getting dirty.

The focus group associated favourable smells with the ground on which they play. Emily reminisced about days spent throwing a ball around with family members in the garden, something prompted by the smell of freshly cut grass. This was a reminder of blissful times for her. It also reassured her that she actually enjoys playing rugby, perhaps when times are hard in the game. They also appreciated the freshness of playing in an open space, where you can take a deep breath in, comparing it to the stuffiness of sports halls they had played other sports in.

4.3 Kitbag Essentials

The participants engaged with the topic of kit enthusiastically, recognising and recalling some interesting taken-for-granted experiences. Many discussions arose from their boots.

“When you’re stepping out from the changing rooms and you hear your studs on the concrete. That really gets my heart going. I’m literally thinking about everything...But as you start walking on the grass it’s different. I go from being really nervous to stepping on the grass and feeling a sense of “Right. I’m here now. This is me”...I have a bit of an attitude”.

(Alice)

A change in emotions was noted by Alice. For her, the walk from the changing rooms to the pitch is an anxious one. The distinct sound of studs clattering on concrete echoes in her mind. When her boots engage with the gentleness of the soft ground however, she enters her ‘zone’ and becomes psychologically equipped for the game. The change in sounds therefore could be a trigger for her readiness before a match. There were differing opinions on the smell of the boot bag for the players. Jessica described the feel and smell of wet boots as a negative for her. Meanwhile, Jo described with content, how her boot bag has always smelled the same but she never intends on washing it. For her, the stale smell of the boot bag informs her that it’s time for rugby. Crusty boot laces before a game also kindled unpleasant feelings

in the players. If previous weather conditions had been bad and they hadn't cleaned their boots, untying crisp, matted laces was a hassle.

“Once I've got that shirt I want to fill that shirt. I want to be the best that I can be in that shirt...The last person who wore that shirt, I'm going to better them...It's a challenge. I love a challenge.

(Jo)

There were many feelings associated with the players' starting shirts. The calling out of the shirt numbers for Grace is a readiness cue. When her number gets called out she becomes reassured. *“That's me”*. She identifies with that shirt number. For Jessica, she experiences excitement but also some anxiety when she hears the shirt numbers or holds her starting shirt. She feels a responsibility to make everyone proud and do the best that she can. Emily meanwhile associates the badge on her chest with pride. This university holds a grand name for women's rugby. When the players step out onto the pitch wearing the Archer emblem on their shirt, they think of all those who stepped out before them. Of how they need to make them proud and live up to their brand that they created.

Alice was aware of a routine that she conducted when getting dressed for a match. She liked to put her kit on all together and in a certain order. When this routine gets disrupted, for example when players are told to put socks and shorts on whilst on the bus to save time, she becomes agitated. She feels disjointed and uneasy as she can feel the difference on her skin, and this carries through to the game. When she performs the routine correctly however, it settles her.

The background accessories associated with kit were also of significance. The sound of physios pulling tape that cuts through a hollow changing room excited Alice. The sensation of that tape on Jessica's body eliminated any feelings of fear about getting injured. The smell of Deep Heat was a trigger in Jo's body to begin the adrenaline-pumping and the nudity of not wearing a gumshield induced panic in Jo and Grace. These minor details hold a lot of meaning to the participants.

4.4 **“Bam. Rather than Crunch.”**

Certain sounds and feelings were symbolic of previous injuries for the participants. When questioned whether she actively seeks out big tackles to hear the ‘crunching’ sound, Abbie had this to say:

“I tend not to...I’ve been injured quite a bit and I did my ACL so I’ve heard horrendous sounds from my body...I’d rather be clean hit. Bam. Rather than crunch.”

The sounds of boots clattering and big hits creates uneasiness in the players. They fear for the person involved in that tackle, knowing how those sounds have been implicated in serious injuries before. They stated that it is always in the back of their mind.

Jo described two injury experiences. One was an overwhelming feeling of pain after having her nose broken when a tackle drove her face into the ground. The second involved her being tackled mid-sprint. The tackler took Jo’s knee out while her foot planted. She described an instant pain, followed by a warm sensation surrounding her knee. When asked if she was nervous about returning after this injury, she stated that she wasn’t. She just wants to get back on the pitch in order to tackle someone. Jo also commented on how tape has a negative effect on her. She feels that if she wore tape on her knee it would provide a visual target for her opponents to aim for, so she chooses not to wear it.

On the subject of pain, Alice described her sensual experiences while playing with asthma.

“If I’ve worked so hard that my asthma’s got that bad, all of my throat is burning and my teeth ache. That’s a big feeling that I get away from a game – that I’ve worked hard and my teeth ache and my chest is burning”.

She can monitor this problem by listening to her breathing. When she is working hard, she can hear her asthma beginning. This can induce feelings of panic in her as in previous years she suffered badly and needed the aid of a paper bag during games to prevent hyperventilation. However she appreciates this ache and burn as it ensures that she has given maximum effort. This phenomenon has been well documented by Allen-Collinson and Owton (2012) in their paper Take a deep breath: Asthma, sporting embodiment, the senses and ‘auditory work’.

4.5 “I know that sound. You know when it feels right.”

The soundscape of the build-up and the game itself was reported as a big contributor to the players’ experiences.

“I know if it’s going to be a good kick or not by the sound. When you make good contact with the ball it sounds completely different to when you stub it with your toe...After I’ve kicked and I hear that sound, I know if it’s going to be good”.

(Lauren)

You often see kickers turn away after striking the ball. They don’t wait to see if it was successful as they already know from the sound and how it felt. Jessica contributed to this, describing how you can also hear the sound of a successful pass.

Abbie compares hearing people’s calls on the pitch to a therapy. She seeks out people who will constantly talk to her during a game. Alice expanded on this, discussing the vocals of the scrum half and outside half on the pitch.

“When there is a loud 9 and 10 I feel connected to everybody...Everyone knows where they should go and you’ll work a lot better...When you haven’t got a (loud) 9 and 10 it feels like the forwards and backs, and you’re actually against each other.”

The group agreed on this point, calling on games where the 9 and 10 weren’t very vocal and mistakes were made. Players in these positions have a responsibility in the team to speak up and say what they want. The team’s performance relies heavily on this factor.

Sounds play a vital role in lineout scenarios in rugby. The players discussed how when they were defending a lineout they would be as loud as possible. They would try to overshadow the attacking team’s calls and cause confusion and intimidation. They frequently turned the ball over using this tactic and eventually established a relationship between screaming at the opposition and turning the ball over. They then did it naturally during any defensive lineout. Alice went on to explain how when attacking, the team sometimes used silent lineouts. This is where you use visual instead of auditory triggers to get the upper hand on the defence. Despite sometimes being successful, Alice felt there was something lacking in these lineouts. A certain ‘umph’ that usually emerges from the shouting involved with the set piece.

Abbie stated that she needs music before a game.

“We always have music. That’s a massive thing for me...otherwise I’m not motivated enough. And I kind of have to act stupid before I play...I just have to dance”.

The loud, up-tempo music in the changing rooms and the dancing settles the players’ nerves before a game. It takes the seriousness away for a second and allows them to relax. From personal experience playing with these women, I can support the notion that when there is no music before a game, the atmosphere is considerably flatter and has a profound effect on the warm up and even the match performances.

It was also noted that the participants enjoyed the ‘ooo’ sounds made by the crowd when they completed a good tackle. These sounds gave the participants a ‘buzz’ and motivated them to go on and make more tackles.

Outside of these themes, additional sensory experiences for these players included the contact side of tackling, the instinct they play with and the emotional bond they feel when their fellow players become down or injured, giving them a sense of an incomplete team.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Rugby Players, First and Foremost

The data gathered from this study revealed interesting insights into the sensual experiences of female rugby union players. The participants described how playing rugby is a cardinal role in their life. They train or play almost every day and regard their fellow players as kin. During the interviews they consistently wore rugby kit and generally, they can be seen moving around the university campus in packs. Powerful athletic identities are displayed by these women. This is the strength with which people identify with their role as an athlete (Brewer et al, 1993). In the face of the bullying and stereotyping they have received throughout their rugby careers, they have remained passionate about their sport (Vallerand et al, 2003) and hold a lot of pride in themselves and their fellow female rugby players. As rugby, like any sport, is experienced foremost through the senses, these sensual experiences therefore play a huge part in their life.

5.1 Sensual Thoughts

The participants possessed an interesting 'yay or nay' perspective on mud and body odours. Although they sometimes didn't enjoy the sensation of them, they did appreciate them. Similar to Hockey and Allen-Collinson's (2007) point, they came to recognise when they were putting their utmost effort in when they could feel and smell sweat on their skin. That odour was then corporeally related to the 'right' degree of effort. The same could be said for how much mud was present on their body after a game. This isn't typical however of a 'traditional' female. Body odours and mud would be more readily associated with the hegemonic male, who displays aggression, strength, power and violence (Hardy, 2014). Body odour and mud would exhibit these qualities for him. The 'female apologetic' (Felshin, 1974) suggests that females would try and hide their enjoyment of these experiences. They would instead perform behaviours typical to the hegemonic female, including being concerned over their feminine appearance and aura (Broverman et al, 1970). When questioned on whether they 'apologise' for their participation in rugby, some of the participants said they had at a younger age, for example in school. One participant also commented on how when her ex-boyfriend would watch her play, she would subconsciously attempt to play in a more feminine way. This involved her avoiding tackles and avoiding the ground when possible. Although they may apologise in

some ways, it is evident that these females don't conform to the norms of the hegemonic female and are mainly unapologetic in the context of an actual game. As Synott (1993) states, despite the cultural perspective that body odour is morally negative, the odour transmits a different message in a sporting space. This message contributes to their performance and is therefore seen as more important than protecting their 'female' identity.

In parts, the participants made note of experiences that were fairly common to previous literature. Feelings of 'flow' and being 'in the zone' when completing skills and performing well were reported. Much like the euphoria found in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) study where participants experienced optimal engagement and fulfilment when sensing this 'flow'.

Emily described how the smell of freshly cut grass pushes her to relive happy childhood memories of playing with a ball in the garden. Tuan (1993, p.57) stated that "Odour has the power to restore the past because, unlike the visual image, it is an encapsulated experience that has been left largely uninterpreted". The participants agreed that they didn't pay much attention to aromas during games. The olfactory sense was more of an accessory to them. It complimented their games well but they only considered it pre/post-match when they had time to reflect. As Emily reported, smells have the power to muster strong emotional responses, connecting previous sporting experiences with the present and therefore affecting that present experience.

Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2006) discovered that when interpreting the playing terrain, the main focus points for performers were of safety (injury prevention) and performance. This was evident in the accounts given by this study's participants. Apprehension was felt playing on both 3G and grass pitches due to possible burns and the instability of wet, muddy conditions respectively. Performance-wise, they evaluated each pitch condition in terms of how they could play to their strengths on it. Whilst on 3G the majority of the participants found it to be a faster game. They would therefore attempt to keep the ball alive and ship it wide to the backs for them to utilise their pace. In wet, muddy conditions they played more of a forwards game. Long passes had to be taken with caution due to the slipperiness of the ball. A narrow game would then be played, keeping the ball in close and hitting up the

middle of the pitch. Participants actively saw their pitch and adapted accordingly (Emmison and Smith, 2000).

The players discussed how they monitor their performance through the sounds and the feel of completing a skill. This is because that skill has become a habitual bodily action. As a result of hours of dedicated practise, they know implicitly what that skill involves, and they often take this for granted. This deep understanding of the skill is therefore not only cognitive, but also corporeal (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007). They possess a complex bodily know-how and it was interesting to see them acknowledge this and attempt to explain it.

5.2 Gender Differences

The participants reported differences in the way the game is played between the genders, rather than the senses each gender utilises more in a game. They considered the men's game as more structured. To them, men are more regimental in the way they play. They're drilled during training on how to achieve a goal and they stick to that method during the game without really questioning it. These players felt that the women's game is more open. They will consider all of the options that are plausible to achieve a goal and will play more 'heads-up' rugby. Rather than follow a process like the men, they feel they play with more instinct and initiative. This is in keeping with the work of Classen (1998). He suggested that throughout history men have been associated with the 'higher' senses. This is because they were seen as rational beings who yearned for empiricism and worked to impose order on society. They would therefore be more likely to follow structure. Women were associated with the 'lower' senses and consequently linked more with feelings.

*“When in a medieval French play, *Jeu d’Adam*, the serpent tells Eve that the forbidden fruit contains “all knowledge,” the first woman asks in response: “What does it taste like?””.*

(Classen, 1998)

Instead of following structure, as Jessica stated, women generally question things more and may be more comfortable following their instinct. The participants also stated that they experience more empathy and sympathy on the pitch for their fellow players than men would. If one of the players has gone down, they feel a

responsibility to bring them back up. The team feels incomplete without that player. In contrast, they suggested that men can be more selfish. Rather than playing as a person, they are a player whose only goal is to complete the job. Women meanwhile show more human character when playing, actively caring for their fellow teammates. This could be due to the housewife/child rearing role most women have carried out throughout history.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has gained a valuable insight into the sensual experiences of female rugby union players. There are however both strengths and weaknesses associated with its approach.

Howes (2004) indicated the dangers of considering each individual sense at a time, as this method did. It would be reductionist to think as though no interaction occurs between the senses, in different patterns or hierarchies to create an experience as a whole. However, as Sparkes (2009) points out, the current absence of research on sensual experiences in sport may call for a 'reintroduction' of each individual sense at a time. Classen et al (1994) supported this, suggesting that although in their case, focusing on the olfactory sense may create a sensory-bias, that sense has long been excluded from research to make way for the visual and auditory senses.

Nevertheless, despite questioning the participants on each individual sense at a time, they still acknowledged and reflected on the interaction of their senses during their experiences.

The novelty of the phenomenological approach was occasionally problematic during data collection. This was a new realm for these participants and they weren't used to acknowledging these taken-for-granted experiences. Across all ability and experience levels it was evident that they had never paid an abundance of attention to how their sensory mechanisms contributed to their play. They were often at a loss for words during the interviews and found it difficult to get their point across. Efforts were made to counter this by providing them with an article of a similar nature beforehand, to allow them to see how phenomenological research was reported. This included examples of how the senses may contribute to sporting experience and the type of language used to express these experiences. The focus group itself also aided this dilemma. When participants were struggling for words, other

members of the group would often jump in with a similar experience and they would work together to make their point.

As stated in Kerry and Armour's (2000) review, there is very little phenomenological research available in sport. This did make aspects of the research difficult. Finding an appropriate method that was consistent with other phenomenological research and designing questions to gain a rich insight from the participants was challenging. However, this can be celebrated. This is an emerging method. The lack of available research granted the freedom to actually ask as the researcher what I was interested in and this study has contributed to a growing corpus of subjective knowledge in sport. A huge part of our sporting experience is granted by our senses and not many people acknowledge this. This method is unique, it's exciting and it has a place in sports research.

Due to space constraints, representational difficulties were also experienced. A high volume of text examples from the interviews could not be included, therefore sensuous expression could be said to be lacking. The results could be accused of being written in a 'bloodless language' (Stoller, 1997, p. 15) whereby the separation of mind and body is actually reinforced. This is due to the difficulty of portraying other people's sensuous experiences in writing. However, these rich text examples were included whenever appropriate and an attempt at 'tasteful writing' was made (Stoller, 1989, p.32). This point additionally creates an avenue for future research.

Many researchers have attempted to broaden the range of representational strategies used in sport research. This has involved the use of autoethnographies, poetic representations and fictional representations (Denison, 1996, Sparkes, 2002, 2009, Allen-Collinson, 2008). These methods allow a wealth of sensory information to be expressed, along with the use of lucid metaphors, helping to achieve the 'tasteful writing' mentioned previously. Expanding on this, Rice (2003) advocated the use of digital technology to allow recorded sound to accompany pieces of text. Sound could therefore be expressed as well as the visual aspects. Sparkes (2002) also reported the use of ethnodramas. This involves the data gathered being transformed into theatrical scripts and performed accordingly. These methods allow for a more well-rounded depiction of sensory experience and there is still room to develop methods that express the olfactory and tactile senses.

Future research could also delve deeper into the experiences of these female rugby players. They were interviewed for a limited number of time on each sense. Conducting more interviews would allow them to become more comfortable with the approach and more used to identifying and analysing their taken-for-granted experiences. This could allow for more fruitful experiences to emerge. There was also a period between when the games took place and when the players were interviewed, something that could not be avoided due to personal commitments. This could have affected their reflective skills. Perhaps by showing them footage of the games during the interviews, letting them hear the sounds and see the actual game, more information could be recalled. Taking them to the pitch or the changing rooms before interviews could also allow them to indulge with their olfactory and tactile senses and reflect on them. The more detail they can reveal about their 'fleshy', lived experiences, the more valuable this research will be.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study aimed to gain an insight into the sensual experiences of a group of female rugby union players. The motive for this was the need for research that is grounded in the corporeal realities of the lived sporting body, proposed by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007). A sociology of the senses offered a new avenue in which to study this carnal body and also addressed the lack of sensuous research in sport (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Being a female rugby player myself gave me the incentive to focus this piece of research on this subculture. However, the boundary-crossing of traditional femininity that these females exhibit offered a different element to the study. One that perhaps would not have been accessed if a different sport was focused upon.

A group of players, differing along the ability, experience and competitiveness scale, were considered. Each participant shared both unique, independent thoughts as well as sensual confessions that were common to the group. Despite their relative inexperience in acknowledging their taken-for-granted sensuousness, they approached the group interviews with real interest and reflected on their sporting embodiment enthusiastically, talking in-depth and using vivid descriptions. They spoke of how each sense provided a valuable component of their sporting experience. The feel of being covered head to toe in mud assured them that they had made their impact. The vision of the pitch conditions told them how cautious to be when playing. The cries of a vocal team intimately connected each person to their fellow teammate and the smell of alcohol and food in the clubhouse provided a nostalgic comfort after a hard game.

No major differences were discovered between how the genders utilise their senses in games. The participants were however under the impression that females play with more 'feeling'. They feel more empathy for their teammates than males do and play with more instinct and gut. Rather than stick to the structures which have been drilled into them, as males commonly do, the females felt that they were more comfortable with an open game, playing 'heads-up' rugby. This was in keeping with the ideas of Classen (1998) and how he found females to be more readily associated with feelings.

This study did indeed grant access to the players' lived, sensual, sporting experiences. Despite some initial apprehension during the interviews, the 'fleshy'

accounts that this phenomenological method hoped for were gained, something to be proud of. There are many future directions this research could take, perhaps incorporating the actual sporting environment into the interview process or using different forms of representation, for example, audio files. As Whitson (1976) stated, there is value for subjective, phenomenological research in sport. While much research on the body in sport remains at an abstract level, this study addressed sporting embodiment on a human, corporeal level. This is a unique and growing area of research with real importance. With hope, this study has contributed, even if slightly, to the cries to bring the 'fleshy' body back into sport.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Exemplar Informed Consent Sheet

Participation Consent Form

Name and Student Number:

Title of Study: To explore the lived experiences of female rugby union players via a sociology of the senses.

Name of Researcher: Ellyse Hopkins

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand what is required of me in the above study, I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered adequately.

2. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and face no repercussions.

3. I agree to the focus group discussions being audio recorded.

4. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Person Taking Consent

Date

Signature of Person Taking Consent

Appendix B: Exemplar Participant Information Sheet

Participation Information Sheet

Title: To Explore the Lived Experiences of Female Rugby Union Players via a Sociology of the Senses.

Background

There is a lack of phenomenological research in the sociology of sport. This means the lived experiences of sportspeople haven't been fully uncovered. The senses play a major role in all parts of social life, particularly sport. This study will look into how the senses (visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile) play a part in your experience of playing sport and how they could contribute to performance. For example, do you know you completed a good pass by the way the ball felt as it left your hands? Conducting research in this area will add to the growing literature on the phenomenology of sport.

Why have you been asked?

This study requires females who play for Cardiff Metropolitan University rugby team. The study requires players of varying ability, age, position and experience level.

What happens if you agree to participate?

You will take part in three focus group sessions with five other people from your team. The first discussion will give you a brief introduction to the study. After that you will have two more discussions after games. You will be told beforehand to play the game and make an attempt to focus on how a particular sense plays a part in your experience of that game.

In the second and third focus group you will be asked to discuss as a group how you felt the sense being studied that week contributed to your experience. Did any smells/sounds etc put you off? Did they take you back to a previous memory that improved your performance in that game? After these discussions take place all data collection will be complete.

Are there any risks?

No risks have been identified with this study and you are free to withdraw at any time.

What happens to the results of the study?

The focus group sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed. They will then be analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. The data collected will be stored on locked computer files so that access is not available to anyone except the researcher. Once the analysis is complete, it will be used to write up a dissertation project which will be submitted to Cardiff Metropolitan University. You will remain anonymous as pseudonyms will be used instead of your actual names.

Are there any benefits of taking part?

This study might give you an insight into how getting in touch with your senses could help improve performance. It will also give you an insight into what phenomenological research is about.

What happens next?

If you agree to take part in the study an informed consent form (provided) must be signed. You will then be notified when the data collection will begin. You can contact the researcher at any time to ask questions about the research.

How will your privacy be protected?

As mentioned earlier, data will be kept on secure computer files so access is unavailable for anyone except the researcher. When the study is written up pseudonyms will be used and positions etc will be changed so that no one will know you were involved.

Further Information

Any further questions do not hesitate to contact Ellyse Hopkins:

e.hopkins5@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk

07817269234

Appendix C: Interview Guide 1

Interview 1

1. First of all I'd like to thank you all for taking part in this investigation. Could we begin with each of you telling me when and how you got involved in rugby?
 - Through friend/family involvement?
 - Through school/college/university?

2. Today, what does rugby mean to you?
 - How significant is it in your life?
 - Do you think your life would be very different without it? Eg. Social life, exercise routine.

3. Why do you think you chose rugby as your main sport?
 - What are your favorite aspects of the game?
 - How does playing it make you feel?

4. Some people regard rugby as a masculine sport. What is your response to this?
 - Do you feel masculine when playing?
 - Do you feel you compensate or 'apologise' on or off the pitch for being a rugby player? Do you make a conscious effort to appear more feminine for example?

5. Do you feel empowered after a rugby game?
 - Do you feel more empowered after certain games than others? Why do you think this is? (More tackles completed, more handoffs, more jackals, muddier than usual?)

6. When you are playing well, how does your body feel? And how about when you aren't playing so well?
 - Do you feel a sense of flow?
 - Do you get a feeling of coordination between your senses?
 - Do you feel like you aren't really trying? Does it feel natural?

7. Do you consciously engage with your senses when playing?
 - For example, are you more eager to make tackles in order to hear the "crunching" sound of a tackle?

- Hookers/kickers, do you move the ball around so that it is in the correct position in your hands before throwing/kicking the ball?
 - Do you seek out smells that you usually associate with a game? (Deep heat, mud etc)
8. Do you think engaging with your senses has much of an influence over your playing experience?
- Does it make it a more well-rounded experience? (Being able to collect smells/sounds etc in your memories)
9. Do you think the masculine nature of rugby affects your use of your senses?
- Do you engage with different senses more when playing different sports? (Netball, hockey, dance)
 - Do you think there are differences between how males and females might use their senses in games? For example, do you think your friend/brother/boyfriend might be as aware of their sense of smell in a game as you are?

That's it for today, thank you for your participation. On a leaving note, I'd like you to try and think about your senses during your next few games. Think about how sights/smells/sounds/touch contribute to your playing experience. Do they improve your performance in any way? Do they play a vital role in your memories of games? Please record anything you feel noteworthy in a diary which you can then bring to the next focus group.

Appendix D: Interview Guide 2

Interview 2

1. Thank you all for joining me once again. I understand that most of you played in last week's game. Tell me a little about it.
 - Was it an enjoyable game?
 - Did you win?

2. You were all asked to make an attempt to pay attention to your visual and auditory senses in your last game. We'll begin with discussing the visual.
 - Could anyone tell me some things that stand out to them visually? For example, did anyone spot a gap and exploit it? If so, what made you choose to do so?
 - Did anyone make a decision to chip and chase/kick for touch during play? How did you know to look for this space? Did you read your opponents' movements?
 - When making tackles could you read your opponents well enough to anticipate their decisions?
 - I understand we have a winger present. What signs did you look for when deciding whether to drop back and cover or push up into the defensive line?
 - Props: is there anything you see when scrummaging that affects the quality of the scrum? For example, a doubtful look in your opponents' eye that may suggest they won't bind well?
 - Forwards: Do you look at your opponents' feet during a line out to anticipate where the jumper will be?

3. Do you think you have "learnt to see" during your time playing rugby?
 - How do you think this is achieved? Can it be coached?
 - How does it contribute to your experience? Does it contribute greatly to performance?
 - Do you think this is a gendered phenomenon?

4. I understand your last game took place on a 3G pitch. Did this affect your seeing in any way?
 - Did you look for other cues?
 - By reading the pitch conditions did you alter your tactics?
 - Do you prefer playing on a 3G pitch? Does it alter the way you play?
 - Is it a different experience than playing on grass? More/less enjoyable?
 - Is there a different feeling related to playing on 3G pitches?

5. Okay now we'll move on to your auditory sense. Describe some sounds that were significant to you in today's game.

- Sound of the ball being kicked.
 - Calls from opponents.
 - Breathing rates relating to perceived effort.
 - Changing room environment – music, taping etc.
6. I understand there was a larger crowd than usual last week. How did that contribute to your playing experience?
- Describe some sounds that came from the crowd.
 - Did you find the crowd loud? Or quiet?
 - Was it facilitative/debilitative?
 - Did it change the atmosphere?
7. Using previous games for reference, describe other sounds you have experienced in your time playing/training.
- Sound of boots clattering
 - Injuries
 - Calls – Scrum, lineouts, opposition
 - Ball being kicked
8. Does sound have a big impact on your experience?
- Is it a big part of your memories?
 - Do you look forward to particular sounds?

Thanks for taking part again today guys you've been really helpful. In your next game I'd like you to concentrate on your olfactory and tactile senses. Feel free to record any thoughts and feelings before the next focus group and bring them with you. See you soon.

Appendix E: Interview Guide 3

Interview 3

1. Welcome back guys. Thanks for joining me once again. How've you all been?
2. In the last discussion you were all asked to make an attempt to focus on your olfactory and tactile senses during the next game. I'd like to begin with discussing your olfactory sense.
 - Did any smells stand out to you?
 - Mud, kit, kitbags, sweat, boots.
3. What are the most significant smells to you in rugby? What do you miss/yearn for when you haven't played for a long time?
 - What feelings do you get when you sense those smells again?
 - Do you think there's a reason those smells stay in your mind?
4. Do you hold any significant memories featuring a smell?
 - Does it contribute to a good experience/performance?
 - Or a negative one?
5. Do you think smells play a big part in your rugby experience?
6. Is smell a bigger or smaller part of rugby compared to other sports?
 - Indoor sports
 - Non-contact sports
7. Do particular smells remind you of certain times of the season or certain parts of your preparation?
 - Summer/winter
 - Changing rooms/going out onto pitch/club house afterwards.
8. Are there any smells you relate to the clubhouse after a game?
 - What feelings do they muster?
9. That's great guys. We'll move onto the tactile sense now. What are the main things you use your tactile sense for during a game?
 - Feeling/judging the pitch – How do you feel when it's boggy/hard?
 - Placing the ball – How do you feel when it's placed right/wrong?
 - Mud under your fingernails.
 - Heavy feet – Hitting the wall.

- Does it aid performance?
10. Is this a conscious effort?
- Do you realise your evaluating the pitch/moving the ball or does it come naturally?
11. Could anyone tell me some significant memories that relate to your sense of touch?
- Making a big tackle
 - The feeling of sliding over the try line after scoring an important try.
12. How does it feel putting your kit on?
- Pride
 - Comfortable
 - Nerve-wracking
13. Can you think of anything you touch that triggers your readiness for a game?
- Boots
 - Scrum cap
 - Taping up injuries
14. How does the impact in rugby make you feel?
- Do you like it/not like it?
 - Do you seek out big hits?
 - Feelings of empowerment?
15. Any other comments on your sense of touch when playing rugby?
16. Out of everything we've talked about; Visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile senses, what do you think makes the biggest contribution to your rugby experience?
- Is it an equal divide between them all?
 - Do you not notice some of those at all?

That's it now guys. Thanks to everyone for taking part. I hope you enjoyed and possibly learned a bit about yourselves and your use of senses when playing rugby.

Appendix F: Example of Interview Transcript

Transcription 2

Interviewer: Hi guys. Thanks for all joining me once again. I understand that most of you played in last week's game. I know Alice 4 you didn't play but hopefully you can relate some of the things we're talking about to previous experiences or maybe even watching the game, so you offer a different perspective. So was it an enjoyable game? We won didn't we?

Group agrees.

Interviewer: So last week's game you were asked to make an attempt to pay attention to your visual and auditory senses. I'd like to begin with discussing the visual sense. Can you tell me some things that stand out to you visually? Any cues that you looked for during the game off opponents? Maybe even the weather?

Abbie: Specific to last week's game?

Interviewer: To start off with last week's game but then you can relate it to anything.

Abbie: For me, it was that the pitch was different. Normally it's mud and grass whereas this was astroturf/3G so that made a big difference to me because I like mud.

Interviewer: In what way? Visually, what things were different?

Jessica: Everyone looked a bit more clean. It's weird because you can normally tell how much work you're putting in by how much you're covered so by having nothing like that everyone looked like they hadn't really been doing very much.

Interviewer: So did that alter the way you played? Did you think you had to contribute more because you weren't as muddy?

Jessica: Yeah I guess so.

Alice: I think one thing for the girls, as soon as they turned up, being at like a mini-stadium and getting changed in stadium changing rooms, everyone was still buzzing but the nerves were there a bit more.

Jessica: There was a bit more pressure with the crowd and the whole not being on any other pitch, it was the Cardiff Arms Park. You had that sense of "Okay. I need to up my game. I don't want to drop it in front of everyone" and you don't want to make a silly mistake that normally you'd be able to shake off.

Interviewer: So there was added pressure. Okay so when you're making tackles were you reading your opponents? Were they making hints as to what they were going to do? How did you read those?

Abbie: Just by their footwork and where they were looking.

