

**THE SKILL OR THE SKIRT? A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO THE
LIVES OF WOMEN IN SPORT**



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Abstract

The primary focus for this study was addressing the nature of gender inequality for women in sport. The aim of the study was to achieve this by examining how women participated in sport. This thesis aimed to contribute to the promotion of gender equality for women in sport and how best to achieve this equality.

This study originated from a feminist perspective and applied a qualitative method approach to investigating this phenomenon. As part of this qualitative method approach this research used semi-structured interviews. These interviews consisted of six participant's one focus group and three individual interviews.

The results of this study found that gender inequality does exist for women in sport. It is as a result of power within sporting institutions, the patriarchal dividend, media objectification and power, men's attitudes to women in sport and women's attitudes to sport. The literature that was reviewed as part of this study verified that. The results of the study also showed how more research needs to take place if achieving equality is to become possible.

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Abbreviations

A.G.M. Annual General Meeting

G.A.A. Gaelic Athletic Association

D.S.I. Deaf Sports Ireland

1 WELCOME TO MY WORLD

“It is because she has felt herself an object since childhood. Her education has prompted her to identify with her whole body; puberty has revealed this body as being passive and desirerable” (Parshley, 1949:662)

1.1. Introduction

Do you ever ask yourself the question why? Why is it that society decides to place importance on one discipline over another? Why a society can choose not to discuss what is unfolding right in front of its eyes? Why society functions in a particular manner? These are the types of questions I have been tackling in regards to sport for quite some time now, particularly around women in sport. Sport as a discourse has a tendency to drift away from important discussion in society, with most only being focused on what the score of the latest match was at the weekend. Yet sport like any other discourse in society plays a vital role in the development of a person and has huge influence in the lifestyles of many people. It is not something that just sits on the edge of society nor is it some kind of taboo to critically analyse its structure. Sport is a real social practice ‘it is not an idealistic abstraction with no connection to the making and remaking of ourselves....sport is a creation of human agency and it can be transformed’ (Hall, 2002:6). Sport is one of those practices which are influential in embedding gender essentialism. It contributes to how society sees what is strictly masculine and feminine. Sport will be examined in the Irish context because of how unique the relationship is between sport and society. Irelands sporting institutions are at the core of maintaining patriarchy and producing masculinity.

This is no different when it comes to women in sport. The very nature of women in sport has transformed throughout the years, yet there is still much up for discussion about where women stand in relation to sport now and if a further transformation is necessary in its new context. This research will show that there is more change needed. Even though we are now living in a culture where change is said to be accepted and equality is at the forefront of every discussion, in practice it would appear quite different. It is true that women have progressed in the field of sport and have been heavily successful in their sporting achievements but it would still seem that it is not as important as discussing their male counterparts achievements. This under representation points to the ongoing inequality in sport that exists when it comes to comparing the involvement of men and women. This study is not trying to pit one sex against the other nor is it another attempt to tarnish men, its aim is to understand why, why women who play sport are not valued as much in society and why is it that women are still placed on a lower platform although they are just as capable as men. Investigating the social construction of women through sport will help answer these questions. Is there inequality for women in sport and if so what is causing it?

It will delve into the lives of women in sport and highlight their experiences as athletes. It will highlight the fact that women are still treated differently and explain some reasons as to why that is. It will look at how women are socially constructed into sport and the implications that has for how they are viewed as athletes. It will also highlight how even for women it has become the almost the 'norm' to engage with male sports over female sports. This research will also comment on how women in society are attempting to challenge the subordination of women in sport.

A transformation cannot be made without gaining a deep understanding of those involved in the practice you are investigating. This research does this by interviewing six women involved in sport; it also draws on my own experience as a sportswoman. It is only

through this process that one can begin to see what the real concerns are for women in sport and essentially why they are concerns in the first place. What has caused these concerns to come to the forefront? It is only then can we begin to tackle these concerns and make suggestions on what can be done. Just like a Paulo Freire approach to research which talks about how learning can be achieved through dialect, represents a process which is ‘self reflective on behalf of both the researcher and the participants so they can improve the situation they find themselves in.’ (Baum et al, 2006, p.854).

Women are always questioned about their femininity within sport but men never seem to be ‘there is an obsession with the femininity (and masculinity) of female athletes and sportswomen but never with the masculinity (and femininity) of male athletes and sportsmen’(Ann Hall 1985:331). Engaging in any form of action research is a difficult process. It is not simply about achieving an end goal to a specific problem rather it is seen as ‘investigating the interplay between theory and practice with a view of making a change.’ (Kirby et al, 2010:30). The form of action research one is to take depends on a number of various factors such as positionality, knowledge, political interests, and societal concerns.

1.2 My Position as the Researcher

My reasons for choosing this research topic are linked to my previously named identity as a sportswoman. I have been heavily involved in sport since I have been ten years old. At this young age I never investigated what this meant for me as a girl; because it was not something I was subjected to or ever asked about. It was only when I began to get older that being a woman in sport became an issue. I quickly began to realise that I was now viewed as more of a man than a woman. Personal experience of this in some ways has made me constantly question the nature of the institution within society. It also began to open my eyes to the clear unequal distribution of resources to women’s teams on behalf of sporting institutions. It made me ask questions about the power that is exerted within institutions, the

economical factors at play and the role of the media in all of this. I began to realise that there was a lot more to my ill treatment than just gender.

In this research I want to know if my experience is shared with other women who play sport. I want to investigate what other women see and experience while playing sport. I want to see how they feel as women in sport and begin to understand the journey they have been on. I want to investigate why society would seem not to allow women to be both feminine and athletic without implying that they have male characteristics. I also want to investigate why more attention is paid to sports that are used to reinforce femininity. Katie Taylor is a sportswoman who outside of boxing is pressured into being feminine. The question here is would she still be respected as much if she wasn't under this pressure.

I want to know why this is happening and what else is causing this difference. Women can be athletic and feminine at the same time, they have achieved great things within the field and this deserves to be investigated. Sport contributes to people's confidence, enhances their fitness, ensures commitment and passion, encourages positive mental health, brings communities together and creates lifelong friendships. Women would be a great loss to the field which is why tackling the issues is immensely important.

2 REVIEWING EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

“Sexual domination is so universal: and hence it becomes invisible so that it is the most pervasive ideology of our culture” (Bryson and Meehan, 1992:185).

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present an overview of the key areas of study which surround women in sport. The focus of this literature is to draw together the different concepts that exist in the field of women’s studies to set the context for the aims of this research. The outcome of this literature review will be to draw attention to what is missing because when I examine the literature I found there was not enough discussion on some issues. This literature will consult the themes that were approached throughout this investigation. The themes that are addressed throughout this literature review are patriarchy, essentialism, equality, feminism, gender, culture and media. It will give an account of the theoretical frameworks which underpin women’s study which will allow for comparisons and contrasts to be made to the outcomes of this research.

2.2 This Is A Man’s World?

Sport and culture or culture and sport whichever way you decide to look at it, the relationship amongst the two is undeniable. Irish culture and sport is certainly no different and they have been married to one another since the foundation of sporting institutions in Ireland. Why this relationship is so profound will be discussed next. Ireland is always described as having a culture which is old fashioned, conservative and to that extent very patriarchal. Investigating

the theory and claims surrounding this idea of patriarchy are central to understanding the implications it has for women in sport 'gender is crucial in understanding Irish society '(O'Connor, 2000:81). The term patriarchy is generally associated with men's power over women in a given society and is usually used to help describe the reasons women are subordinated. It is not something which can be reduced down to a single entity, but it is a concept which much be investigated in society throughout multiple structures and relationships (Bryson and Meehan, 1992).

In Ireland's case it would seem that patriarchy is 'embedded in the practices and processes of state organisations' (O'Connor, 2000:81) in which a patriarchal dividend exists. Many have a number of ways in defining this concept. For example Hartmann believes it is 'a set of social relations between which have a material base, and which through hierarchical establish or create interdependence and solidarity amongst men that enable them to dominate women' (O'Connor, 2000:83).

However it was through earlier feminist research that this term began to gain ground in the academic literature. Kate Millet is one feminist whose early work surrounding this idea set down the groundwork for understanding how this male superior status existed. Valerie Bryson and Elizabeth Meehan (2010) give an account of this and point to its simplistic nature. Millet's theory suggests that the relationship 'between the sexes have been based on power and that they are therefore political' (Bryson and Meehan, 1992:185). It is because of this kind of power she believes allows for male domination of women in all areas of their lives. She believes that this patriarchy is maintained and reproduced by a process 'of conditioning which starts with childhood socialisation within the family and is reinforced through education, literature and religion'(Bryson and Meehan, 1992:186).

O Connor's (2010) work on the other hand goes into a bit more detail about what patriarchy looks like today. For her this power that Millet talks of is maintained through a

man's 'prestige, honour and the right to command' (2010:83) which in my view are more like historical constructs. Important to note here also is that she feels that most men are comfortable with the idea that they hold some form of power and domination over women 'the majority of men are most comfortable when it appears that the patriarchal dividend is given to them by an external force or even by women themselves' (O'Connor, 2010: 96). It would seem that this theory surrounding patriarchy is more up to date than that of Millets. This was as a result of the critiques which Millets feminist theory received from other branches of feminism.

Marxist feminists and Socialist feminists would be among those who critiqued Millets approach because they approach it differently and are more focused on investigating the elements of a society and investigating the class divide. Her theory was critiqued for its failure to be analytical. Millet seemed to name these conditions without actually pointing out a place of origin that patriarchy stems from. This meant that learning to challenge this concept was difficult. It was said to have given of an impression of universality which was false and saying that all conditions in each society would be the same. It was also suggested that her theory expressed a one sided argument on behalf of women. Finally it was critiqued for assuming that the women who are subordinated as a result of this patriarchy were willing 'passive victims' and played no active role in constructing themselves (Bryson and Meehan, 1992: 186). Critiques of patriarchy also suggested that it must be taken into account that men too can suffer from oppression and subordination by women, for example, 'being forced into being the male breadwinners' (Bryson and Meehan, 1992: 188).

More modern approaches to this idea of patriarchy such as post-modern feminists have begun to break down patriarchy into different fractions. It can now be divided into two categories, private and public, each taken on a different role in women's subordination. It highlights the fact that patriarchy exists in a number of different sections of a society. Public

patriarchy tends to describe the relationship it has to the state, the economy and employment, while on the other hand, private patriarchy tends to be more focused on the family, domestic labour and sexual objectification. For the purpose of the research I have chosen to use the example of private patriarchy which occurs in the family. As Millet suggested earlier exposure to gender difference usually begins at the earlier stages of life or in the socialisation of the family particularly for children.

She suggests that the family is 'the primary social institutions through which all young children learn the values and expectations of their society' (Bryson and Meehan, 1992:201). Sport is a social institution which young boys and girls get involved in and can be said to be heavily influenced by family so I feel that this kind of private patriarchy is worth noting. Not that it is the only example of patriarchy, but it is relevant to this particular research in setting the conditions as to why women get involved in sport. She believes that because of this early socialisation of gender difference and the role of power it can become difficult in the later stages of life to begin tackling the patriarchy (Bryson and Meehan, 1992). Primary schooling is also another area of interest when it comes to encouraging participation in sport for children. It plays just as much an important role for socialising children into sport as the family does.

Understanding some of the theory surrounding patriarchy will be helpful in understanding the barriers and challenges for women in sport. In my opinion and from what I have been researching some suggest that male superiority is decreasing while others suggest it still exists and its constantly being debated 'in Ireland the social subordination of women was until recently, seen as natural and inevitable'(O' Connor, 2000:84).

In the context of sport R.W Connells work on masculinities can also be examined when looking at patriarchy. Masculinity is a term which we can usually describe as deriving from patriarchy. Within the context of sport he says that masculinities are constructed in

institutional settings and the way in which they are constructed must be kept in mind 'it is not just a learning game; they are entering an organised institution' (Connell, 1995:35). While talking about the gender divide it is my belief that this work is suggesting the importance of investigating sport as an institution not just as a product of patriarchy. In my opinion he is almost saying the construction of masculinity is pre defined in the context of sport and does not stand a chance being anything other than that. Millet's earlier approach suggested that challenging patriarchy can be difficult since it has been so embedded into children from an early age. For Connell on the other hand when it comes to tackling this hegemonic masculinity it is possible to fight your way out of this pattern (Connell, 1995:37). Connell does not seem to agree with the early feminist writings of Millet and feels that there is such a thing as too much 'sporting prowess'. He feels that hegemony does 'not mean total control, it's not automatic and it may be disrupted' (Connell, 1995:37). Some feminists would agree that gender inequality is a direct result of this masculine hegemony but Connell questions the nature of the sporting institutions and the role they play in reproducing gender inequality.

In helping to understand why such a dominant culture of patriarchy can prevail and why the oppressed sometimes internalise this patriarchy Paulo Freire's work on anti-dialogical action can be used as a point of reference here. Anti dialogical action is said to be used by the oppressors of a culture, take in this case men, on the oppressed (women) when dialogue is absent. For Freire without any dialogue amongst the people it becomes impossible to be free 'dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution' (Freire, 2005:109).

To give a better understanding of how this anti-dialogical action is used in cultures I will give a brief description of some of the characteristics which Freire says exist for it to be maintained. One of the first characteristics of this is known as divide and rule which allows the oppressor to reign over the oppressed 'as the oppressor minority subordinates and

dominates the majority, it must divide it up and keep it divided in order to remain in power (Freire, 2005:122). The divide and rule concept of anti-dialogical action can be applied to patriarchy and sport if we think about it in terms of the division of men and women.

Cultural invasion is another characteristic of this action which Freire describes as ‘the invaders penetrate the cultural context, they impose their world view upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded’ (Freire, 2005:133). Patriarchy can be seen to inhibit the creativity of women and prevent them from progressing, something which can also be applied to sport. For cultural invasion to succeed Freire feels that the ‘invaded must become convinced of their inferiority’ (2005:134). In my opinion I feel women are convinced they are inferior particularly in a patriarchal context. I feel using this as example creates a clear picture of where and how patriarchy can be maintained. It gives us more detail about a place of origin than say Kate Millet’s theory of patriarchy.

2.3. Is It Essential That Our Sex Defines Us?

Challenging the idea of patriarchy becomes difficult when we investigate the feminist debates around essentialism. It is important to examine this debate in the context of this research as gender differences are at the very heart of what this work is all about. As discussed above patriarchy represents a social system which favours men and allows for the oppression and subordination of women. Patriarchy is a term which allows for gender differences to prevail so the question here is do we just accept that men and women will always be different and that society will remain the same because of this?. The essentialist debate around the relationship between men and women would seem to suggest so.

In its simplest form essentialism is the belief that there are fixed essential differences between men and women and that will never change. In my opinion it is a very scientific approach to the study of gender and does not necessarily favour the socialisation process.

None the less it must be engaged with to understand the arguments that will be made in regards to women in sport in the following chapters. There has been a wide range of debates on the idea of essentialism within feminism which have not come without their critiques. It has been critiqued for being 'old fashioned, unsophisticated and irrevocably conservative' (Stanley and Wise, 1993:208). I would also agree with this argument because a conservative ideology is something that in my opinion only suppresses women more. Within the context of sport I feel a conservative ideology is something which only reinforces inequality and is not the correct lens to use when trying to promote equality.

Essentialism indicates a belief 'in the existence of fixed and essential properties which often invokes biology as the supposed bases'(Stanley and Wise, 1993:208) of these differences between men and women. It would seem then that sport fits into this category because it relies on a certain set of conditions to allow it to function within a society; however these conditions are not just gender related. Taking an essential approach like this to the investigating inequality in sport is not something I would consider because I believe there is more to the gender divide than just sex.

Stanley and Wise discuss three sets of discourses that exist among essentialism within feminism which will allow us to gain a greater understanding in how this idea is approached. The first discourse represents the idea that in essentialism there are 'womanist qualities untainted by the patriarchal order' (1993:209.) This idea expresses that there a certain characteristics women hold which have not been contaminated by patriarchy. My question here would be if women are submersed into this culture from the very existence of their being how can they not be tainted by it?

Secondly essentialist thinking believes that all women's oppression is the same and experienced at the same level. Universal ideas of women's oppression are something that consistently appears within the feminist debates. I disagree with the idea that anyone not just

women experience oppression the same way. If essentialism argues that there are fixed traits that make us different how can our experiences be the same? They say that women and men are different but it must also be remembered that no two women are the same and for that matter experience things the same way. What one woman might see as oppression another might see as empowerment. I definitely disagree with the third idea that 'women are united by the characteristics that define them' because there is not a fixed list of these 'characteristics' defined anywhere and I don't believe there ever will be.

It is in my view that this kind of essentialist ideology has allowed stereotyping to prevail and has almost come as a consequence of this thinking. Lorraine Code highlights my opinion when she says that stereotyping 'women is as a result of people believing that they know who women are which leads to the belief that they should be treated a particular way in society'(1991:188). Essentialist theory insists that they know who women are in terms of their experience and also their fixed characteristics and in my opinion stereotyping stems from this. I would agree with Lorraine on her belief that stereotypes are ' the most inadequate of claims to know other people'(1991:188) which to me also makes essentialism inadequate. Stereotyping of women is certainly a factor when it comes to studying women in sport and it is important to make note of how it operates in a society and the thinking behind it. Stereotyping in sport can cause difficulty particular for women in how they see themselves 'the tomboy has to be scruffy as well as athletic, as if sport and attractiveness where opposed' (Delamont, 1980:57).

It is difficult for me to associate with essentialism on a personal level although I may disagree with it this thinking is certainly one of the many reasons I chose to tackle this research. I understand that women and men are different in a biological sense but that does not justify women's treatment in the field of sport. It is through the social construction of women in sport that we will begin to see the other factors emerging. It will also become

evident that women's oppression is experienced on a different level, some may echo that same feelings on a particular topic but how they experienced it I will argue is not the same.

2.4. Tackling Inequality

Patriarchy and essentialism are some of the social and cultural conditions which contribute to producing inequality particularly for women. It is important now that we engage in the ideas that exist around equality. This theoretical approach must be investigated in the context of this research because it deals with what equality can look like and how to go about challenging inequality. Looking at some ideas surrounding what equality is, who this equality is for and how to achieve equality in a society will highlight this.

The idea of equality is centred on the 'relationship between two or more groups or individuals in a society' (Barker et al, 2004:21). However like essentialism and patriarchy equality is not a simple concept to understand. It becomes difficult because what constitutes that relationship amongst two people or groups is hard to define. Also how each person perceives equality is different, what one might see as equal the other may not? The basic idea for equality stresses the idea that 'at some very basic level all human beings have equal worth and importance and are therefore equally worthy of concern and respect' (Barker et al, 2004:23).

Barker et al give examples of two approaches of addressing the issue of equality. It highlights the diversity that exists in how others see how equality should look. One of the ideas is focused within the liberal egalitarian approach to equality. The liberal equality of opportunity 'means that people should in some sense have an equal chance to compete for social advantage'(2004:25). In contrast to that idea is the equality of condition approach which is more concerned with the influence 'social factors have on people's choices and actions' (Barker et al, 2004:33).

What separates their ideas is how they approach what this equal opportunity looks like. In suggesting that people should have the right to compete for social advantage the liberal equality ideology is saying that ‘there will be winners and losers’ (Barker et al, 2004:33) as a result of this competition. Whereas the equality of condition idea believes it is important to empower people ‘to exercise real choices among real options’ (Barker et al, 2004:33). I have difficulty in understanding here what they mean by real choices and real options. In my opinion it is difficult it’s hard to define what a real choice or real option in achieving equality. I do not want to dismiss either of these approaches as I feel they are both valid when it comes to addressing my research question. I felt it necessary to give examples of the kind of ideas that exist around the idea.

Learning to understand how to tackle inequality and achieve equality is a task which society has yet to achieve. There have been significant attempts to reduce the inequality within the field of gender equality and the main actors are the women’s movement. This movement is centred on achieving equality and believes that ‘any change must address the gender differences in a society’(Barker et al, 2004:207). While women have been at the heart of subordination for many years their significance as a social group is developing fast. For example in Ireland they are said to be emerging as a huge political force and that this has led to ‘women’s groups having within them the sociological potential for generating change’(Barker et al, 2004: 208).

Women’s changing role over the years has led to a greater sense of independence within society, the economy and also the political stage. Women are not as constricted as they used to be which has led to this freedom. It is now the belief of many feminists that ‘women no longer feel their subordination would be to escape from being a woman’(Barker et al, 2004:209) and than trying to be a man is no longer necessary. Women are now content in

highlighting their identity as women and feel that they can be advocates for change in women's oppression.

This idea that women are no longer concerned with escaping from their identity as a woman is at the very heart of this research. Personally it is something which I have identified with and is another reason why I felt tackling this research was necessary. It is I believe along with many other feminists the right time for research about women in sport and the right time for us to highlight that. This research, I believe, is another step in helping to achieve equality for women and achieving it within the sport context will have a greater impact on a society that is so consumed by it.

2.5. Sport and Nationalism In Ireland

It is essential to this research to look at the historical context of Irish sport through its formation and development as this allows for a better understanding of the way sport is conducted in Ireland in the present day. Ireland is used as the context for this research because I believe it is unique in its development of sport and also unique in how much importance Irish society places on it. A brief history of sports origin in Ireland will contribute to helping to understand why these problems for women in sport exist. This section will also represent how women were introduced to sport in the initial stages and what that were like. It will allow for a visible comparative to the present day. Sport has existed in Ireland since the late eighteen hundreds and has had a huge impact in community development right through to the present day.

Although people in these early years engaged in play and physical activity it seems that sport only began to take its stronghold with the development of The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884 (G.A.A.) in the Nineteenth Century. It was set up by men and for men, according to Rouse in its early years it was mainly influenced by 'the nature of Irish Politics' (2011:117) or as Hassan puts it 'connected to a wider campaign for Irish Sovereignty' (2010:416). Liston

argues that what makes Ireland unique in sport on a European comparative scale is the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). She argues that because of this institution sport became embedded in every aspect of Irish life “not just a sport, a way of being”(Liston, 2014:199). From the beginning it was original in the sense that it was mainly for the community, however it later turned slightly political in the context of Irish Nationalism. It began to take a different form in embodying ‘an explicit opposition to British culture imperialism”(Liston, 2014:201). Another shift occurred toward the end of the 20th century when British games were allowed to be played in Croke park and the institution became “more outward looking”(Liston, 2014:201).

With this connection to Irish sovereignty there is no surprise then that sport became viewed as a very masculine heroic like domain within Irish life. It was only in the later years of Ireland’s historic development that women’s involvement in the campaign for Irish freedom was exposed. Just like the hidden nature of women in Irish politics, women’s participation in sport was also unexposed at this time.

With Ireland’s patriarchal history it is no surprise that it was initially male participants that got involved in the Gaelic games established by the G.A.A. such as Gaelic football and hurling. Even though Rouse has stated that the establishment was open to everyone women did not generate as much numbers as men. Again here one must consider the social context in Ireland at this time, it was at this time that a woman’s role was mainly at home caring for her children, her home and her husband. Sources from that time particularly convey this message for example a quote from the Irish Times in 1967 by a Cork farmer says “now girls if you must play sport it better be foreign and if you’re thinking of combining it with marriage, beware of the Co. Cork farmers”(Grehan, p.6.) The influence of the Catholic Church would have also influenced this ideal particularly around the notion of marriage. That unfortunately was the reality of that time in Ireland.

Although not all women were confined to being at home the socially constructed image of women was certainly not of someone engaging in a 'masculine arena'. Even when women were introduced to the G.A.A. with the establishment of hurling for women (Camogie), how they had to dress was almost church like. They had to wear long skirts which reached their ankles and long sleeved tops, while in comparison to today the skirt is short and the top is now a jersey with short sleeves. However these are just some of the minor changes which have been made today there have been many more but the focus here is on the new challenges women face in sport.

In present day Ireland the idea of sport and women in sport has completely changed. There has been an enormous shift in the relationship between men and women not just in the ability to play the game but also in the participation of sport and identity. The old traditional image of a woman essentially being a caretaker in the home has changed to become more an image of independence at home and in the workplace. Socially it would seem that the gender roles have been transformed to favour women as independent beings and having equal abilities to men not just in sport but in everyday life 'women are sometimes more powerful than men and gender relations are much more complex' (Liston, 2006:621).

With this growing independence and equality of women it is no surprise then that the number of women to play sport has grown. This inclusion if not for a better word brings about many positive and negative effects for women. This changing dynamic in sport has also brought about positive and negative effects for men. With more inclusion and participation of women within sport men now seem to be questioning their masculinity. It's difficult because it is calling into question male dominance in the field of sport which has existed for many years 'sports have become one of the last bastions of male exclusiveness' (Liston, 2006:620) and that exclusiveness is beginning to be challenged.

Women's increased involvement has also increased the stigmatisation they receive

because men need control. They push for this negativity on women as a reaction ‘by vilifying female’s participation and protecting their male status’ (Liston, 2006:628). Clark also agrees with Liston in this sense when she talks about the nature of modern sport ‘sporting achievements for women she believes is prohibited because of “the social constructs of ability as highly gendered thus it is a discriminatory kind of mechanism”(Clark,2012:1179). So for her sport is also discriminated against in terms of a woman’s ability to perform. She would argue that men and women are treated different in sport in terms of how good you are at it and that that process is already gendered. She believes that talent identification is ‘increasingly used to justify the merits of the sports selection process’ (Clark, 2012:1179). Sport in modern Ireland has changed and women have become more involved but as we have seen from these examples further gendered boundaries have been created.

2.6. The Complex Nature of Gender

Gender is a central theme of this study and what constitutes that term has become increasingly difficult to understand. Understanding it in the context of sport and how women’s gender and identity is created and challenged makes it even more difficult. I am going to choose a quote I recovered in the literature to highlight the very nature of this complexity “If penises were purchable, in other words, functional ones, who exactly might want one”(Price and Shildrick, 1999:126). This suggests to me that for a woman to be appreciated in sport she does not need to be seen as a man nor does she want to become one.

Throughout reviewing the literature surrounding the issue of gender and sport the division between science and the social sciences seems to raise its head a number of times. Is gender a biological attribute to our identities or is it something that is socially constructed? There are a number of different responses to this question but in the field of sociology and in fact the sociology of women in sport the answer is more in favour of a social construct. When we mention the word 'sex' the literature continues to express that this term is strictly

biological. Anthony Giddens expresses his feelings on this and focuses on looking at what aspects of 'human biology naturally determines gender inequality'(2001:71) and that equality amongst the two is scientifically impossible to achieve because of this biology.

However in a more sociological way of discussing the notion of gender it is not strictly just how you are scientifically made up rather gender is described as being made up of 'the social attributes associated with being a man or a woman in a particular society'(Grove and Hall, 2000:44). whilst we are biologically different the approach to gender here is more about its social contribution as that is the part that helps us determine our gender identities.

The ways in which we then decide to produce our identities or find a sense of who we are is how they are socially constructed. This is no different for women in sport and in some cases more difficult because of how their identities in sport have been almost defined by a patriarchal culture. Within this notion of gender identity the idea of stereotypes emerges. Stereotypes are ideas that people tend to associate and apply to specific kinds of individuals or groups within a society that usually tend to be generalised, over simplistic and often offensive. How these stereotypes come into being and are reproduced is due to the knowledge people have in regards to male and female characteristics which are also heavily gendered. To give an example of what I mean when I say male and female characteristics I will give some examples of what they are said to represent. Masculine characteristics are described as being active, athletic, strong, and unemotional while in contrast feminine characteristics are anxious, gentle and vulnerable (Grove and Hall, 2000:45).

From this literature it would seem almost 'unnatural' in scientific terms then that one person or sex could resemble characteristics of the other sex. This is where identity formation becomes complex and is central to women's identity in sport. Gender role conflict theory can help describe this complexity for female athletes in more detail. For women in sport this conflict usually stems from ' a sense of conflict between personal gender values and societal

expectations of femininity'(Miller and Levy, 1996:112). It is difficult for a woman to be an athlete and express her femininity because there is also the added 'stigma of being a female athlete'(Miller and Levy, 1996:112). This study also highlighted the fact that women who participate in sport are more likely to be from a more athletic family background than women who are not athletes whose parents only offer an athletic role model (Miller and Levy, 1996:112). Finally this study suggested that even though female athletes are in constant conflict with their gender and the pressures of society they use 'positive self concepts related to athletic participation'(Miller and Levy, 1996:113) to combat that negativity.

If we look at what has become known as female masculinity. This term suggests that women who, take for example in sport begin to display athleticism or strength, she has now become a female who paints a masculine image. The discussion of male femininity is not something I feel that the literature is necessarily up to speed with yet as it is only in recent years that the masculine identity is being questioned in the sports discourse with many men opening up about their sexuality. This raises questions like does it make a man more feminine if he is gay and plays sport? Can a society that has seen sport as a masculine arena for so many years adjust to that? Some literature makes reference to this contention and talk about men rejecting dominant ideas about their sex because they feel that 'our power in society as men not only oppress women but also imprisons us in a demanding masculinity which cripples our relationships'(Hargreaves,1986:31).

When this kind of identity issue is raised particularly in female masculinity like I previously questioned causes huge uncertainty for the cultural sporting context of a society. It essentially becomes different or the unknown something people are not used to. If a woman is seen to step outside the box of what strictly makes her feminine the question of her sex becomes an issue. However literature does suggest that even 'masculinity must not and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects' (Halberstam:1998:1). Literature

believes that female masculinity tends to be ignored as a social issue which is why it has become difficult 'to untangle masculinity from the oppression of women'(Halberstam:1998:4).

Within sport for women there is no doubt that this 'swapping' of characteristics is said to occur all the time. Women are heavily stereotyped in the field of sport and these stereotypes are heavily gendered. A well known example of these stereotypes particularly for women in this field is something which has been called 'tomboyism'. To me the fact that it is even represented in the literature expresses how powerful hegemonic masculinity has become. Considering it is tom 'boyism' suggest immediately that it represents the childhood period of women's experience in sport. I have yet to hear the term tom 'man' ism which I hope never reveals itself although worse terms have replaced it. Tomboyism tends to be associated with a natural 'desire for the greater freedoms and mobility's enjoyed by boys' (Halberstam, 1988:6). It is this non- conformity by young girls into their 'allocated gender roles' which has caused this stereotype to come to the forefront.

These literatures are a true representation of the difficulty of creating an identity for women wanting to engage in sport or perhaps are already involved. If the identity a person or a child wants to choose immediately makes them an outcast it causes difficulties in association. What this literature summarised was that to be constantly 'mistaken for a boy can contribute to the production of a masculine identity'(Halberstam, 1988:6) for a girl in later life. This is also a contentious statement in this literature unlike the literature which Miller and Levy talked about. It is not considered that experiencing this kind of emotional distress could contribute to women and girls holding on to femininity within sport and using it as a driving force to stay distinctly and independently feminine.

I can completely understand the concept that this literature has created and where it has come from but my issue here is that the literature is always focused on the negative experience of growing up as a girl in sport. It is literature like this that I feel adds to the

problem and reinforces bad gender identities. I feel there is a gap here in the literature surrounding girls and women in sport. The literature has all focused on sport as a masculine domain and sport as being a negative. Present day demands a real investigation of this because let's face sport is just as much a feminine domain now as it is masculine. Lorber reinforces my concerns with this kind of approach when she expresses 'where men are oppressively dominant, the divide between women and men is strictly enforced'(Lorber, 2010:245) and sport is where that is practiced.

In contrast to most of the literature I reviewed on this issue in the dividing up of gender identities and the problem being masculine can cause for a women others have made the suggestion that it is possible 'to be both masculine and feminine at the same time' which has become known as androgyny (Woodward, 2000:54). This term has come to represent a kind of freedom in the notion of gender identity, there is no doubt that it is also controversial. While the literature surrounding this idea takes a more positive approach to gender identity formation, personally I feel the literature is lacking on another area here. It's approached in the literature almost as something people would be happy with like for instance women in sport. For a woman involved in sport being 'allowed' to have masculine qualities should be a good thing? I still feel the literature is brushing the real issue under the carpet and not identifying an acceptance of each person's own qualities. As if having one or the other makes it more acceptable, what is so wrong with someone showing a certain trait without it being labelled as either masculine or feminine. Literature does not really focus on an alternative to gendered characteristics and how to deal with that. A woman may be strong, athletic and unemotional but that does not make her masculine it makes her who she is.

Literature surrounding theoretical approaches to challenging the issues of gender oppression I also feel need to be updated. The theoretical approaches I have reviewed are all focused on men's oppression of women, how men have power and how masculinity is the

problem. It becomes a little boring and frustrating. Tackling this problem I feel has moved beyond this theoretical approach. For example a theory has never derived out of women's influence over men. Again here this is just hindsight as dominance of one group over another in society is not my approach to research. The way we even approach dealing with gender equality immediately deals with men's superior status. Whether that is Marx's theory on class or radical feminism on patriarchy men are usually the centres of discussion. I can appreciate and recognise some shifts in feminism which are more favourable for example the social construction to gender approach which is more focused on the 'gendered social order as a whole and the processes that construct and maintain it' (Lorber, 2010:244). It is difficult however as feminisms are mainly about women's oppression. Sport is certainly a field where new approaches and new theories can be developed on the issues as it is dynamic and can be 'altered by shifting gender relations and can itself be part of the process that challenge and shift hegemonic notions of gender' (Scaton and Flintoff, 2002:30).

2.7. Media, Women and Sport

Critically investigating media is always a difficult task and reviewing the literature has suggested that. As an entity on its own it becomes difficult to learn how to interpret a particular piece of media. Learning to understand the different kinds of media becomes more difficult when you begin to investigate its purpose. What is media for? Why do we use media? How do we interpret the media we receive? 'Media do not function in a vacuum, but are embedded in economic, political and cultural settings, be they local, regional or international' (Bailey et al, 2007:3). When critically evaluating any form of media it is important to take into account a number of different influences, for example, power (who holds it, how is it used), audiences (who is the audience, how do they effect the media that is produced), and new technologies (what implications technology has had for media consumption). When

you begin to combine women, sport and media representation it becomes more complex.

Literature has constantly pointed to the power the media wields within a society ‘it is not reasonable to suggest that media power is imaginary’(Burton, 2005:26). The effect the media power has is also echoed in other literature ‘it represents the world in terms of its own inferential framework and thus creates events with its own features’(Hargreaves, 1986:141). It then becomes a question of whether you see the power of the media as a good thing or a bad thing. In the context of sport news and media coverage is improving ‘but there are worrying trends in the commodification of women’s bodies’(Byerly and Ross,2006:37) and women are being reduced to the makeup of their bodies. Media can be useful in a number of ways. It can globally report events, it can promote awareness, can be used to promote positive change on an issue etc. With this power in mind and the medias usefulness as a tool for social change and influence one could think that for women in sport this would be a help, it could be used as a positive platform. It would be helpful if it was used correctly or used at all. While media represents the on goings in society there is no doubt that it is inherently political and politics and capitalism are heavy influences on media output. What outcomes are realised depends on how the society and power structures deal with the information they receive. The political is seen as ‘ a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological position’ (Bailey et al, 2007:3) and media is no different.

The investigation of the media , sport and society has expressed this heightened dependency of sport on the media and vice versa. However this dependency has become focused around the commercialisation aspect of sport as an institution “without media coverage the popularity and revenue generating potential of commercial spectator sport would be seriously limited’ (Coakly, 2004:413). Whilst many are critical of media, people tend to value the coverage they give on sport and it wouldn’t be questioned as much as the coverage of national politics. Its power, its revenue, and its loyalty of readers have a huge

impact on how people are represented in sport.

When we shift our focus to what literature says about the media representation of women in the media it reveals how under represented they still are. It represents a clear mistreatment of one sex over the other and in a sense devalues the nature of women's participation in sport. This re-occurring theme of neglect shows up in the literature on more than one occasion. It was not much of a surprise to find out that coverage was still at an all time low for women's sport in comparison to men 'men's sports receive well over 80% of coverage in all media'(Coakly, 2004:428) in the twenty first century. While women receive just fewer than 15% of coverage in sport which suggests it is not a priority nor is it worthy of the front pages. Similar to the treatment of gender identity which was discussed previously the small amount of coverage they do receive is focused on 'aestheticised sports-gymnastics- in which supposedly women's qualities are to the fore' (Hargreaves, 1986:171).

2.8. The Dress That Captured The Hearts Of a Nation

Taking a closer look at the media coverage of women in sport today will help explain the concepts of inequality and misrepresentation that keep reoccurring in the literature. The best example of this is the coverage that Stephanie Roche received on the night of the FIFA Puskas Award ceremony earlier in this year. Roche as many are now aware was nominated for the best goal of the year 2014 amongst many of the all time greats like Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and James Rodriguez. Her skill, achievement, dedication and commitment are those things you would expect to be highlighted amongst the media following her nomination.



Figure 1: Stephanie Roche, FIFA Goal of the Year Nominee

However what got more attention in the media was the way she looked on the night of the award ceremony. The way in which the media continue to represent women in this light only ‘contributes to the circulation of passive and victimised femininity which is reinforced

through the repetitive framing of women as object and women as body'(Byerly and Ross,2006:54). The focus was not on the skill and determination but rather it was on what she was wearing, who made the dress she was wearing and how she was viewed wearing the dress. The image was portrayed in a way that made her an object of sexual desire. It showed how her fellow nominees gazed her up and down as she walked into the ceremony. The media frenzy which occurred was talking about how she must have been delighted to have these two men appreciate her looks. Can we just take a moment to digest that, this woman had just been nominated for one of the highest achievements in her sporting field but it was more important to report who made the dress and how beautiful she looked. She could not care less if those men were looking at her .Are the media really that far behind? How could anyone even imagine justifying the reasons for that?



Figure 2: Chrisitano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi looking on as Stephanie Roche enters.

Whilst the media attention she got is perceived to be great and the complementary nature of the image would seem unproblematic it couldn't be further away from the truth. How must she have felt after knowing all her hard work and success throughout the year was summed

up in one picture which clearly depicts sexual objectification. An interview which took place before the event suggests that she felt her skill would be recognised ‘ it’s good to hear that my goal is being considered based on technicality and its quality rather than being seen as a ‘woman’s goal’(Driscoll, 2014) ‘I want to be recognised for my football rather than my gender’(Driscoll, 2014). One might say she was naive to think that would be the case. Personally I don’t think she was naive to think that at all she should be excited and proud of her achievements and expect nothing less. On the other side of things it was also as if she knew before hand that the fact that she was a woman would inhibit her achievement in some form when she talked about her gender becoming an issue.

Although her achievement was covered it was reported completely the wrong way and many now remember that photo as the main outcome of that achievement. As previously noted media have their own agenda and create events with its own features which have happened here. It is a great example of how women are being judged on how worthy they are to a man’s needs. I think media need to be updated on the effects this is having for women who play sport and also how others view women who play sport. The media are not mindful of the impact it has on a younger audience. A younger audience may see this and just think that it was great that Ronaldo and Messi were looking at Stephanie, it would not allow them to view Stephanie’s achievement as valuable in the sporting world. It is a never ending cycle of the notion that ‘sex sells’. It was like the media was trying to remind people that she was still a woman and could still wear a dress. Why was Lionel Messi not criticised for wearing a purple suit? Trying to encourage media representation of women in sport may not be worth the hassle if this is the kind of representation they will receive.

2.9. Boxing Clever



Figure 3: Katie Taylor Olympic Qualifier

Katie Taylor is another sportswoman which in a sense has been victimised by the media, however unlike Stephanie Roche her image is not scrutinized as much in my opinion. Where the media has been at fault here is not highlighting and reporting on her sporting achievements like they should. It has only been lately that this is beginning to improve. Katie is no doubt one of the best athletes to ever come out of Ireland yet it took a long time for her own national broadcasters to get involved in covering her sporting events.

This became evident when the sport star herself lashed out at her own national broadcaster about only choosing to cover it when it suits them ‘they seem to always consume rugby and GAA but boxing is our most successful sport’ the lack of coverage over the years is very disrespectful’ (Doherty, 2014). She talks about how they reported on the lad’s semi final but that when it was her turn to box ‘they were nowhere to be seen’(Doherty, 2014). Did they not cover her final because they did not see it having the same affect on the audiences

nor did they just disregard it because they didn't think women's boxing was important?



Figure 4: Receiving RTE Sportsperson of the Year Award

This image is a complete contrast to what had happened amongst the national broadcaster and herself in regards to coverage issues. What changed?, did RTE finally give in and decide to back Katie up because they believed in her as a sport star and were willing to highlight her achievements as a woman? Or was it because Katie would be a massive loss to the national broadcaster and they would take a massive blow to revenue? In my personal opinion which maybe due to mistrust of media on the issue but I feel it would be the latter. It is really important to consider this kind of debate especially if equality for women in sports media is ever to be achieved. It also raises concerns for media coverage for women's sports that is not necessarily professional or viewed on a world stage. Is it possible for everyday local competitions and events to receive the same kind of attention particularly for women in sport?

2.10. Getting Over the Final Hurdle

The representation of women in sport in today's media as we have seen is still at an all time low. It is also quite evident that when women do appear in the sport section of the media it is still quite sexist in its nature. Women are not being recognised in their field for their achievements but are being recognised for all the wrong reasons. There is evidence that some are advocating for the media to address this issue and it is becoming more central to the discussion on equality for women in sport.

Clare Balding who has now become a well known journalist and television representative for the BBC is someone who is advocating for this change. Clare who was once an amateur jockey herself has been becoming more vocal on the issue of inequality in women's media representation.

In an article that was published in the Irish Times Clare points to the importance this positive change in media representation could mean for younger generations of women in sport to come. 'I think it's changing, and it is why I wanted to be here, because it is very interesting research and because if you can make a difference for any girl aged 15 and below, her life will be different because of that' (Reid, 2015). This statement echoes much of what this research is about and reflects some of the reasons this research is being done. You can see here that sport represents a discourse which works from the bottom up rather than top down. Positive change needs to be targeted at the younger generation of women in sport which she feels the media could have a positive role in something I would also agree on. She adds 'it is actually about a wider legacy: if I can just help make 10 or 100 or 1,000 girls think (about playing sport) that's great' (Reid, 2015).

Her articles also points to how to deal with women's concerns of how their identity is portrayed in the sport through the media. She discusses that using media in this style would

help them be viewed as athletic women without being judged. ‘Women’s sport is such a visual, powerful image of women being allowed to be strong and confident and ambitious and competitive and those things not being seen as bad things’(Reid, 2015). Unfortunately even her language represents how women are entrapped in elements of cultural patriarchy. She says ‘of women being allowed’, which highlights my concern. There is no physical force preventing women doing as they please but there is clearly structural influences preventing women being equally viewed in sport.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to review the relevant literature in the field of women’s sport and also of women’s inequality in sport. I attempted to analyse the existing knowledge to the best of my ability in terms of what I felt was right for this research. I hope it has highlighted that some of the literature is outdated in its approach to women’s studies and also the study of women in sport. The theoretical review presented the arguments that existed in the context of women’s inequality which was necessary in understanding the structures that maintain inequality and also the attitudes that exist to inequality. The discussions regarding patriarchy, essentialism and equality allowed a lot of questions to be raised in the context of this research. Relevant material was also consulted about women in sport today and women’s introduction to the field of sport which allows for a visual as to how it has developed throughout the years. All of the questions which arose in this chapter will be compared to the findings in my final chapter and the relevant arguments will be made. It will contribute to the statements I will make to understanding inequality for women in sport.

3 THERE IS A METHOD TO MY MADNESS

“She loves to multiply her experiences; she wants to know the intoxication and the torments of love, the pure joys of motherhood, of friendship, of solitude, of tears and laughter”

(Parshley, 1949:671)

3.1.Introduction

In my methods section I will begin by giving an outline and explain why I chose two main theoretical approaches as methods to my research and later delve into the methodological tools I used to conduct my research. ‘Who you are and where you are situated do make a difference to the knowledge you produce.’ (Kirby et al, 2010, p.38). The nature of this research requires a type of method that is flexible and allows participants to best describe how they see the social world. The object of this research project is to understand how women are socially constructed through sport and using these methods was the best possible approach to understanding that. This research aims to find out if inequality exists for women in sport. With the research question in mind here it will become evident as to why the methods I chose were the most appropriate in helping to answer this question.

3.2. Feminist Approach

Taking a feminist approach to any issue within social life is usually a difficult task, “this question of being a woman is more difficult than it perhaps originally appeared, for we not only refer to women as a social category but also as a felt sense of self” (Butler 1990:247). Considering the variety of dimensions which exist in feminism this difficulty can be easily justified. To best describe why I have chosen to take this approach to my research I will give one or two examples of the dominant themes associated with this approach. This

will also help to explain the importance I place on conducting this research and of the phenomenon I am investigating.

I place huge importance on equality of the sexes in any area of social life and rate the treatment of gender as something to always be considered when investigating or researching any given field of social science. Hammersley (1995) calls this treatment of gender “The Omni-Relevance of Gender” which argues that “conventional social science is primarily an expression of the male experience as if it were human experience”(p.45). Sport is one of those disciplines within social science which views the male experience in this way. This is why it has become difficult for women who participate in sport to be viewed on the same platform. This is why it is important for me to approach women in sport from this perspective as it allows me to begin to understand why sport is conducted the way it is and why women experience it different.

Another theme which is a dominant part of the feminist research approach is personal experience. This theme expresses the notion that it is only by looking at the lives and experiences of women that we can begin to understand the actual reality of what is going on. It is a process which allows us “to see what is there, not what we have been thought is there” (Hammersley, 1995:46). This theme is my main approach to conducting this research and it explains the reasons as to why certain methods were chosen to answer my research question. Without investigating the personal experiences of women in sport this research would be too difficult for me to give a complete overview of the truth. Society tends to create the status quo for sport and for women in sport without necessarily investigating it thoroughly and the personal experience of women is rarely considered in creating it. This is why this study must be done, to begin to see what is there “we see and think in terms of our culture... yet we always have another consciousness” (Hammersley, 1995:47).

Where I myself am situated within feminism must be explained to further understand the position I hold as the researcher. Within the liberal framework of feminism it suggested that it was the responsibility of the individual to make a change to women's status. I have an issue with this kind of approach because it does not go into depth about community participation or make any reference to other possible outlets in challenging women's oppression. The focus on the individual to me came across as narrow minded. The liberal approach also discusses the idea of androgyny. This is focused on the idea that women can take on the characteristics of the opposite sex in order to become more successful. This idea also created a problem for me as I don't feel that there are particular characteristics for particular sexes. I feel that the idea of what it is to be feminine or masculine has been socialised to the extent that people automatically categorise difference between sexes "the fact is that feminism is threatening to those who want to protect the status quo"(Anderson 1997:8).

I share more in common with the radical approach of feminism. The main reason being that the notion of challenging patriarchy as a form of women's oppression is central to their ideology. I also agree that patriarchy is central to the reproduction of gender inequality. As explained earlier in the historical context, sport in Irish society was created through this notion of patriarchy and to an extent still viewed that way today. The idea of being radical also appeals to me as it suggests becoming active as the way forward in promoting change to women's oppression. This radical approach also expresses the importance of linking the personal and the political something which I also place a great importance on. Radical feminism also suggests that women be valued in the private sphere just as much as men are in the public sphere. I also found myself agreeing with this idea. However I would be concerned with this traditional idea of women in the private sphere as I feel that the traditional gender roles are shifting and more men are now in the private sphere while women are becoming

more active in the public sphere. Identifying with the radical approach allowed me to change my original views on the issue of gender and women, which helped me develop a better understanding of me using a feminist lens.

3.3. Grounded Theory

The second theoretical approach to my methods was grounded theory ‘grounded theory is a systematic research approach involving the discovery of theory through data collection and analysis. In particular the focus is on uncovering patterns in social life that individuals might or might not be aware of’ (Paterson, 2013:37). The reasons I felt a grounded theory approach was best for me was because it echoed a lot of my own personal ideas to approaching research. Understanding women’s experiences from their perspectives was a key part of this research and this approach represents how my primary concern was treating their views with respect and really making an effort to engage with women’s lives. It is an approach will allows for my research to create new ideas instead of just recreating the knowledge that already exists. The main concern of this research is to voice the opinions of women involved in sport ‘our position is that truth is enacted’ (Bryman and Burgess, 1999:83). It is also my belief that the truth should be enacted in this situation as I don’t feel there is enough importance given to equality for women in sport. The truth is what I want this research to produce and this approach best serves that aim.

3.4. Qualitative Methods

“ Participant observation is an attractive idea because it helps us to understand why women participate in sport, what meanings and values sports holds for them, the significance some women attach to sport, and what visions women might have about alternatives” (Hargreaves, 1994:12). While participant observation is one element of qualitative research and certainly

would seem a good approach to take for this study it would not give me the real live experiences of women. This is why I chose the qualitative method of interviews and focus groups because it is in these settings and conversations that I could best understand the women's experiences.

Qualitative research in this case can be useful for explaining the viewpoints of the participants. As such this kind of methodology is most beneficial for my research question. Quantitative research I feel would not suit the aims and rationale of this study because it 'entails the collection of numerical data and views the relationship between theory and data as deductive' (Bryman, 2004:62). The presentation of my findings and analysis will stem from my position as the researcher. Six interviews semi structured interviews were conducted as part of this process. Three of them which were conducted in a focus group and the other three were conducted individually.

3.5. Focus Group

I began by conducting a focus group. The focus group consisted of three participants each of whom played sport for a number of years. The three women that participated in this played sport from an early age and played for an average of twenty years. These three women have played on the same team for this amount of years and were very comfortable with each other. To conduct this focus group I personally contacted them as I also have played with them on the same team for most of my life. This was helpful to me when taking on the role of a researcher. The participants and I had a strong relationship with each other and trust was easily established. I was invited to conduct this focus group in the one of the homes of the participants which represents this trust.

I found it a lot more difficult than I had previously assumed. Having already built up a rapport with the participants I assumed it the focus group interview would run smoothly. However as I have learned from this process research is not an easy thing. When I began and

switched on the digital recording device it almost went quiet. Initially there was some awkwardness towards me as I now took on the role of a researcher not as a friend. It began quite slow with some short answers then only later really began to develop. I also noticed that there was a tendency for one of the participants in the focus group to almost take centre stage. This became evident in the transcript to a certain degree. When one gained the confidence to answer or to give a detailed description of their experience the others tended to follow. It also showed me that some of the participants in this group were more passionate about the issues than others, something which unfortunately is out of my control. It was an eye opening experience and really showed me the dynamics of group interviewing in comparison to one on one interviewing, it was completely different.

3.6. Interviews

My aim for conducting these interviews the way I did was centred on a number of different elements which allowed me to get the best results for my research. The questions I asked participants were focused on learning to understand the experience they had or were having as women in sport 'the interview is, in a sense the foundation upon which all other elements rest, for it is where the data gathering occurs' (Goode and Hatt, 1981:185). There were semi structured interviews which meant that the questions were not fixed and conversation was allowed to flow. Semi structured interviews involves an interview process where open ended questions are asked. Semi structured interviews allowed 'the interviewee to have a great deal of leeway in how to reply' (Bryman, 2004:321). It was a chance for the women to voice their own opinions on the issues and display how they felt. I was constantly curious about finding out what they knew that I didn't 'a female interviewer who is interviewing women and who is aware of the way in which women are treated... will make the distinction between textbook interviewing and how a feminist feels she should treat other women' (May, 2001:135). It was

also important that these interviews were conducted in a manner which also gave the participants the opportunity to give their own input. This made me reconsider some of what I was asking and remembered that essential to this interview was considering what I was missing and allowing them to suggest other options and spaces for investigation.

In comparison to the focus group interview the one on one interview brought about its own issues. Trying to get conversation to flow in this particular context was a little more difficult. It was almost as if the participant felt extra pressure giving it was just the two of us. I did find that unlike in the focus group the responses were not influenced by the responses of anybody else. I was constantly reassuring the participants not to feel under any pressure to answer something if they didn't feel comfortable. I was also aware of making sure it was a conversation between the two of us and shared some of my experiences as a woman in sport which I felt made it easier for the participant.

The interviews were digitally recorded and lasted for an average of thirty to forty minutes. I conducted two of these interviews through social media one for geographical reasons and the other was on behalf of the participant's request. Each of the interviewees were contacted previously to the interview and consent was taken from them, I issued consent forms to each participant and made sure that the nature of being involved in this study was understood before proceeding.

3.7. Sample

I identified and located participants who are/ were involved in sport to uncover the answers to my research question. The only requirements I was looking for from the participants was that they were female and had or are still currently playing sport. This made each of my participants similar to each other however the sport and how long they participated in it separated them. They also came from different occupational backgrounds two were primary

school teachers, one was a student, one working in a law background and the other worked in telecommunications. I chose a purposive sampling method which I chose them on the basis that I wanted to interview the relevant people to answer my research question. Snow ball sampling was also used as other people suggested possible participants for me to contact.

3.8. Data Analysis

The data analysis process was where I gathered all my information and decided on how I would present my findings. ‘The process of data analysis is one of culling for meaning from the words and actions of the participants, framed by the researcher’s focus of inquiry’ (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:128). When I began investigating this field and prepared to conduct my interviews I initially consulted a number of literatures surrounding the issue. However in the end not all of this literature I originally examined was consulted again due to changes in this process.

A similar situation occurred in regards to developing my research idea. With having a personal connection to this research my first idea was mainly centred on gender inequality in sport and trying to prove that it existed. I quickly understood that this was not the approach to take as conducting an original piece of research meant not trying to prove a particular view of your own and also remembering that how I see the world is different to how others see it. This research was not about how I felt but it was about how the participant’s did. It was only with this realisation of research and the conversation with a focus group that my idea developed. The group began to make suggestions which I had never thought of and they also opened my eyes up to how women in sport actually felt.

After I finished my interviews and focus groups I began the process of coding ‘the constant comparative method of analysing qualitative data combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:134) Firstly I transcribed the interviews of the six participants. This was one

of the most time consuming processes of the research. It took hours just to complete one transcript which then you had to go over again and again to make sure each transcript was one hundred per cent correct. After this lengthy process I then drafted up some themes which were centred on answering my research question. Some of those themes included gender, identity and inequality. These themes also then had to be reconsidered when I began to compare and contrast the data. It was here that some new themes emerged that I had not thought of ones that I could not ignore either. Gathering all these new themes together I then began to match up each of the participants experiences with the relevant themes. I then had to decide which ones out of the themes were most dominant and which data I should choose to get the best representation of my findings. It was after this then I had to decide in which order I would present the themes in order to present my findings in a way that would tell a particular story.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

From investigating the politics of research it has become evident that power and action research are intrinsically linked. Power takes on many different forms in the process of research. There are many theorists that conceptualise what this idea of power means. For example when looking at doing collaborative research which includes the participation of participants it is important to share power with not over. As Steven Lukes conceptualises it, power is the 'ability to constrain the choices of others.' (Lukes, 2005, p. 85). It is important as a researcher to be constantly aware of this power dynamic throughout the whole research process. It is not just theorists such as Lukes who help contextualise the issue of power in terms of action research. Michael Foucault also presents a view of power which can be used to discuss the idea of research. He views power as something that results from 'the interactions between people, from the practices of institutions and from the exercise of

different forms of knowledge.’(Baum et al, 2006, p.857). All of which are used in the process of doing research and if the researcher is not careful of the use of power between these different elements of the process the validity of research can become questionable.

The work of Paulo Freire has also become an influential piece of work that influences the ideas of action research. His ideas about becoming critically aware of your reality suggest some solutions to preventing the use of this kind of power. In the case of the researcher, being aware of this power is important because ‘recognising the structure and its components of oppression’ can eventually lead to transformation. (Freire, 2005, p.55). The purpose of action research is essentially to bring about a change to a particular problem so transformation is important. Understanding these concepts such as the political, the use of knowledge and the use of power are essential to understanding how to conduct research and also what limits the researcher may encounter while undergoing the research process.

Power as discussed above was an issue of ethics which had to be revisited a lot throughout conducting this research. I constantly made sure that those I was interviewing felt no pressure to answer any questions that they were not comfortable with. I also made sure not to enforce any ideas on them. As a researcher it was my responsibility to be constantly ware of this throughout interviews. I made sure to build up a rapport with participants and reminded them what their involvement in this research would involve. I assured them that they would have confidentiality throughout this research and the information they gave me would be available upon request to them. I also made sure to tell participants that their involvement in this research was voluntary and if at any time they wish to withdraw their participation they could contact me. The participants were made aware that the interviews would be digitally recorded and that it would only be I, my supervisor and the participants themselves that would have access to the interviews. This study has adhered to the ethical principles of this institution with professional competence, integrity, respect and equality.

3.10. Limitations

Throughout this research I encountered a number of limitations not all of which are necessary to include. I would first like to include those which I felt had the biggest potential impact on the quality of my findings and my ability to answer this research question effectively. I would then like to explain the nature of these limitations in bit more detail and justify the decisions I made. Finally I would like to make suggestions as to how these limitations could be overcome in future research.

The main limitation I encountered in this research was diversity of participants in terms of the sport they played. This was important for me as to allow a greater generalisation. However when I reached out to the different societies on the college campus for example the response was limited. While one society did email back in pursuit of further information which I then forwarded I got no reply and other societies did not reply to the first point of contact. While this was disappointing choosing a snowball method of gaining access to participants in different fields of sports was my next step. Originally this worked out fantastic and I got some participants successfully from this. There was one which was contacted and in agreement of participation but on the day of the interview I had contacted this person and received no reply. This also fell through unfortunately which points to a disadvantage of this type of sampling selection. With time also being a limitation factor to this research I had to adapt to the situation and use the resources I had closet to me for participants.

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the theoretical approaches taken to investigate this research. It has also looked at how and why the methods were chosen to complete this study. It has given an account of the interview process that was involved. It has talked about the sample that was chosen and why. The limitations of the study were also highlighted. I also made note of the

ethical considerations which I encountered and enforced as part of this study. The next chapter will be a presentation of the findings which were as a result of adopting these methods.

4 WHAT THE WOMEN HAD TO SAY

“The woman believes in her heroines presence but if she wanted to reveal her to others, she would be as embarrassed as the neurotic struggling to confess intangible guilt” (Parshley, 1949:666)

4.1 Introduction

This next chapter will reveal the findings of the interviews that took place which were described in the previous chapter. Throughout the findings the dynamic between interviewing in a group setting and interviewing on a one to one basis will become evident. What will follow are the results that I gathered from my research through the data analysis process and will be presented through a thematic approach. The themes that will be discussed include the following: gender, identity, attitudes, media, sporting institutions, women’s roles, and family/childhood. This thematic approach will allow for the context of the study to be set. It should be noted here that it is difficult to interpret an individual’s response and also sometimes difficult to understand the motivations behind it. Choosing a semi structured approach to research also meant that the questions I asked were not fixed which is why a theme by theme approach is best in helping to understand these findings. This study is focused on the experiences of women who play sport. It is investigating the socialisation of women into sport. All of this is an attempt to see if inequality exists for women in sport.

This chapter will only give a small amount of discussion and make valid points of reference were needed as further analysis will continue in the following chapter.

This research and the findings which will be presented here are concentrated on the lived experience of women in sport. The findings of the six participants are as a result of the focus group and individual interviews which took place as part of this investigation. Upon request of the participants and also keeping in mind the ethical and confidentiality principles of this research each of them will remain anonymous. From here on in the participants will be

known as participant 1 (P1), participant 2(P2), participant three (P3), participant 4(P4), participant 5(P5) and participant 6(P6). By the end of this chapter I hope to have given a detailed account of their experiences which I hope will highlight its importance. The final chapter will present the discussion of these findings and the dialogue with the literature review.

4.2. Motivations for Involvement

To grasp the concept of this study it was firstly important to gain a greater understanding into what and how these women got involved in sport. I felt it was also important to allow the participants to express how they felt about sport and what it meant to them. The number one influence which I found throughout my investigation was that family influence was one of the main driving forces for the women's involvement in sport. 'My mam and dad when we were like six, our family our heavily involved in the club'(P4). Participant 3 went into further detail and highlighted that sport has been in her family for generations and that sport and family are very much interconnected.

I started playing because it's in my family, it's like my great granddad, my granddad, my dad all of us played or have played. Like I think family and G.A.A. are intertwined, the G.A.A. is family(P3).

There was an emerging theme of family influence throughout the transcripts, however two of the participants did not feel this way. Participant 1 shed light on the influence of her early education 'my swim teacher at school'(P3). She was guided by her teacher to get involved in swimming at an early age and is something she has stuck with her whole life. Participant 2 had neither of the above influences she talked about how it just happened 'I got into handball by accident'(P2). While family plays a huge part in sport for the women it was not the only factor of influence.

It was also important to gain a sense of what sport meant to these women because it is their feelings that matter as this is essentially their research. Sport is very much at the heart of every community and that was echoed in the women's responses 'it is a community'(P3). This sense of community and the importance sport has in building relationships in a community was also expressed by Participant 1 'I feel sport is a great way to get hearing, hard of hearing and deaf children and adults to mix'(P1). This participant was passionate about highlighting the power of sport as a way of building relationships between people and that it is a fun experience and setting in which to build them.

This heightened sense of community was also evident when participants talked about how it has led to them building relationships with people many of whom they will know for life. When talking about the positive experiences of sport this became evident 'my experience was positive because all my friends I don't think I would still play if like (name of friend) wasn't playing'(P4). Participant 5 also expressed her love of how sport has helped her socially 'The social aspect of it. I always feel so much better as opposed to going home from work at sitting on my arse'(P5). Family, friends and community were the three things here that represented the reasons for the women's involvement in sport and also what made it a positive experience for them.

4.3. What does your gender have to do with it?

Participants were also asked about what they thought about the issue of gender and if this had an influence on them being women in sport.

Note: what became particularly evident in the focus group conversation when I asked about gender not all the participants were familiar with the term. I then adjusted how I approached this question and explained to them what I meant by the term. We talked about whether or not being a girl was an issue for them while playing sport.

Participant 2 immediate response to this question was focused not only on being a woman in sport but being a woman in society as a whole 'I think we are the minority in every aspect of life but we are slowly but surely making our voices hear'(P2).

When this particular question was discussed among the focus group each of the participants agreed that being a woman in sport was a major disadvantage and were not afraid to express as to why they felt this way. I then discussed with them why they felt so strongly on this issue and some expressed anger. It was like the participants couldn't believe that I was asking them this question and that I should have already known the answer. 'It is because your second fiddle like'(P4). 'It is all geared towards the men they get recognition for everything they have achieved'(P5). The main focus of these responses was comparing themselves to men when it came to being a woman in sport. Participant 4 then went on to give an example of what she meant by being 'second fiddle' to men in sport. She talked about her experience in school being a teacher who is involved in the sports programme there for girls. She also talked of gender being an issue within the wider context of society not just her personal experience.

They don't care in the school there is four teams like senior boys, junior boys, senior girls and junior girls and it literally goes that order in hierarchy like. I set up a Camogie team and we were bumped one lower than that(P4).

I mean if you look at everything sprinting swimming everything, it is all men who holds the world records and then there is women's world records, do you remember that girl em she won a gold broke some record and they started questioning her like, and like she was very masculine, and they basically said is she actually a girl because she ran that fast(P4).

Within the focus group and some of the one on one interviews the fact that they were women was clearly a disadvantage for them as women in sport. However I did not get this feeling

from all of the participants. Participant 1 who is involved in swimming had a different reaction to this question 'In competitive swimming, it was a positive , I did not feel I was treated any different to the male swimmers'(P1). There was no sense of anger expressed in this response and in comparison to men in swimming this participant did not feel let down at all.

Shifting from what being a girl in sport meant for them the question of gender also brought up some identity and image problems. Unlike the previous reactions to being a girl in sport talking about how they were perceived painted a different picture. It became more personal to them . Participant 5 without realising it implicated that sport in a way was bad for her image. While she initially reacted with a no response she went on to talk about her figure 'No, I think my figure is worse because I play sport, I think I would be skinnier if I just went to the gym three or four times a week'(P5). Even though she insisted sport did not influence her image she almost blamed it for how she looked expressing that if she was not involved she would look better.

What was also revealed was how past experiences about their image were still engrained in the minds of the participants 'I used to get told I had Camogie calves'(P3). Participant 2 talked about how she was perceived as a woman in sport growing up and felt that it had nothing to do with what she looked like 'I was definitely considered a tomboy growing up not because of the way I dressed but because of the playing sport aspect'(P2). Identity for these women in the interviews seemed to be something that was a little bit more uncomfortable to talk about. It was not as openly discussed as was the issue of being a woman in comparison to men.

4.4 Attitudes of Men to Women in Sport

Throughout my analysis of the data there was a constant re occurring theme of attitudes. This theme presented itself in the case of men but also in the case of the women being interviewed. The first theme of attitudes that will be discussed is that of men to women in sport. Women talked a lot about how they felt men felt about them as women in sport and gave a number of examples to highlight their behaviour towards them. It was interesting to see the different perspectives of the women and it pointed out a huge attitude problem.

Participant 3 made this very clear in her response to how men treated them because they played sport. ‘ I think men sometimes look at you as if you are not on the same level as them I think it’s more of an age thing, I think young fellas are more likely to slag and dismiss’(P3). She talked about men looking down on them but was quick to point out that it was those men of a younger age that was an issue in her opinion. She went on further to give us a picture of what that experience looked like. At an award event for her club in which her team were the recipients of medals for winning the championship that year this is what happened

When we were going up to collect our medals, as we were passing again a young fella about eighteen or nineteen said ughh it must have been a bad year in the club if only women are winning something(P3).

Participant 1 echoed the attitudes of men towards women in sport with her experience. She talked about how her and her team where in preparation for one of the biggest swimming events that year swimming the Channel. They were invited to attend a good luck party which was held for them to wish them good luck in this massive challenge. This is what she experienced

I was approached by a man at a good luck party and he said aw women usually give up especially in sport(she discussed saying excuse me your actually going to say this at a good luck party, we haven’t given up yet) yeah yet he said. I made him a deal that

if we do complete the challenge he has to stop all the criticism against women especially in front of me. After returning from London he never spoke about one of us(P1).

Unfortunately they were not the only participants to have experienced the behaviour of men towards women in sport. Participant 4 described an experience she had while in college with a lad she was friends with. She talked about how the two of them had played a match for their teams the night before.

I remember him saying to me aw I'm knackered I remember him going I had a match last night. I was like yeah I had a match last night I'm knackered too and he laughed at me! And I was like what and he was like yeah but my matches are different than yours, but automatically because I'm a girl my matches aren't as important as his like!.(P4).

The other participants in the research were not as forthcoming about given too much detail about it but it still highlighted this problem 'we were at a wedding and the men, the best man's speech he called us all lesbians, all the hockey players the lesbians'(P5). It is just interesting to note here that the girls don't play hockey and the men at that wedding would have been aware that she played camogie. It is just a clear representation of the lack of interest in women in sport.

There was also a small bit of explanation as to why the women felt these attitudes were consistent. Participant 2 made a comment which pointed to the men almost feeling threatened by women participating in sport 'It usually came from boys who couldn't handle a girl being better than them at sport'(P2). There was also a sense of sympathy from one of the participants about men's role in their behaviour towards women in sport. She was a lot more acceptant of this kind of behaviour 'like I don't know like, I don't think men know how much of a difference there is because they've just always had better than us like'(P5).

4.5. Attitudes of Women in Sport

The comparison of women to men in sport did seem to dominate a lot of the findings in the data analysis and will be a re-occurring theme throughout this findings section. It is important here also to shift our focus to not only how women are treated in sport but also their attitude to other women in sport too. Participant one made reference to this when she talked about the other women's teams in her club

The ladies basketball team and futsal teams often get attitudes from the DSI board and community. I used to think that it was blatant discrimination but when I got on the new board I realised that these two teams didn't show as much commitment as the men's football team they let us down far more often than the men's team(P1).

This lack of commitment was echoed in the focus group when it came to be committed to supporting other women in sport at events and games. The three women talked about how they would not necessarily go out and support them.

Although like I have to say like, I mean we love Dublin (G.A.A.) but we don't go to the Dublin ladies(P4).

We would just laugh so we are part of the problem(P5).

We always think that I'm not even interested in it(P6).

These women highlighted here that they have no interest in other women's sport. There is a bigger picture here and there is more going on than these women just not being interested. Why is it that they play sport? Are interested in the equality between men and women in sport but don't practice it? Further analysis on this and the answer to this question will be dealt with in my final chapter.

The women in this research were also discussed about how they felt about men in sport. There was light shed on the acceptance of their biological nature and their skill in sport. Participant 3 talked about this in relation to Wimbledon and the men's tennis

Plus I hate admitting this but the men's is more skilful, like it's more competitive. I hate admitting that as a women in sport i absolutely hate it but it is there is a more competitive edge(P3).

Men are naturally physically stronger, men are physically faster down to biology and all that there sport is going to be played at a higher level and it's going to be better than ours that's a fact like.. like its biology you're not going to deny that, with your period and everything you're not going to have the same strength, you're born into it like(P4).

Like the previous discussion on women's approach to this dynamic there are a lot of questions to be asked and answered in relation to what this really means. This will be highlighted alongside the analysis. I felt this point of view was important to discuss as it also highlights women's role in sport. I did not want to focus only on the attitudes of men, I felt a comparative of attitudes was necessary.

4.6. Sporting Institutions

Each of the participants were also asked to discuss how they perceived the sporting institution within their sporting context. There was mixed feelings surrounding this issue. Many of the participants felt almost neglected from their sporting institution. Others felt a bit more positive about them but only in the sense of women having power and being involved in the decision making process for women.

Note: as discussed in the limitations of my research many of the participants that were interviewed had a G.A.A. background. Much of the findings here will be talked about in that context. There will also be some comparatives made to other sporting institutions such as D.S.I. and handball.

Institutions such as the G.A.A were spoke about in a bad light throughout most of the conversations I had with the participants 'the money and the resources are not shared fairly,

you take part in fundraisers in the club and you will never receive the same amount'(P4). This statement like many of the others to follow from my findings discuss how men are giving a lot more treatment and a lot of the participants suggested it was because there was no importance given to improving the women's teams within the sporting clubs.

One of the women talked about her direct experience of this. She talked about how her team were neglected when it came to finding a new manager for the team she is on. It shows how the responsibility was left on her as a player to find a new one. They did not tell her to go out and do this but the message I got was that if she did not it would not have been done.

They (the board) were interviewing people all over the country (searching for a new manager for the men's team) from Donegal from Galway, I'm a player I play Camogie and I was ringing people begging them to coach us. The Chair (head of the board) was behind me one hundred per cent (P5). Yeah behind her doing the work'(P6). In (name of club) the senior footballers (men's team) membership is cheaper(P5).

There was more anger and disbelief expressed about sporting institutions. Participant 3 discussed her involvement in the club she was part of and talked about what happens at A.G.M's which are held every year. These meetings are held with the purpose of raising issues which people feel need to be addressed within the club and making suggestions as to what can be done to improve the structure as a whole.

Sure in our club we are treated as second class citizens, and it's always been that way. The G.A.A. yano is still old men mentality in a lot of aspects. At the A.G.M we have every year there is so much I want to say every year and I don't because I'd be laughed at and it definitely wouldn't be taken seriously(P3).

Participant 4 felt the personal side effects of being a woman in sport and how her club did not have any respect for her. She talks about her mistreatment and also the lack of care her club

put into her wellbeing as a player. She discussed this term of 'dual playing'. What she meant here was if you played two different sports for the one club. She talked about how she had to train almost six times a week. 'I used to play basically five or six nights a week but the lads who were dual players don't have to they get one week on and one week off'(P4). So she had to do twice the work to stay involved or she felt people would have seen her as lazy whereas the lads on the other team were giving a break between the two sports.

When positive feelings about sporting institutions were revealed it was only in regards to women being involved in the decision making at an institutional level. One of the participants that I interviewed happened to be involved on the board of DSI and talked about why this was a good thing for her and them 'having the time and knowledge to contribute I feel that I can try and encourage young athletes to push to the best of their ability'(P1).

Participant 2 shared this feeling of positivity for women's active involvement in these roles within institutions. She expressed how she felt that in some places equality for women in sport was improving. I then asked her what she felt contributed to this turn around and she said

I think a lot of it has to do with women taking on more roles behind the scenes as so we can have a voice in the decision making.. the committee, the boardroom was male dominated but that has changed for the better(P2).

4.7. Media Representation

The media was another theme which was dominant throughout the data analysis. When the participants were asked about media representation for women in sport they responded to the lack of recognition women received. They discussed how they felt women were represented and also why they were not represented fairly. What I found most interesting was the a number of the participants found media representation of women in sport to be improving and were more positive about this being a tool which could help women's equality in the field.

It was suggested to be by the participants that they all felt women did not receive enough coverage in the media in sport.

It's definitely not recognised enough, it wrecks my head(P3)

I do agree one hundred per cent that women rarely get the same level of attention to men(P1)

It would seem that some participants felt that the media only favoured men in sport in some instances. Two participants highlighted the use of media power and what effect it can have for women. Participant 6 felt that the reason many people supported male events and games was because of the media

Because like through the media you know all the players (men) you have heard all about them they get more coverage, you wouldn't even know who is playing (ladies) football half of the time (P6).

Participant 4 talked about this media power being used to dismiss women in sport and that some of the time it was more to do with sex 'I mean look at your one Stephanie Roche or whatever you call her, she won that award with Ronaldo and everything, then the next week she is up modelling lingerie'(P4).

Participant 5 talked about how the media depicted sportsmen as almost heroic like figures for doing everyday things. This particular point was talked about within the focus group so Participant 4 will be included in this to highlight this point further. Participant 5 talks about seeing a photograph at a ladies football match

And it was like fair play to I think it was Johnny Cooper and Paul Flynn for going to watch them (ladies match)... you never see a picture of like Christina O Reilly who plays Camogie for Dublin go out to watch the lads like (P5)

If they did they would be called wags(P4)

Jesus it was like he was given to charity for going to watch a ladies football match (P5).

While a lot of the examples that were given surrounding media coverage were bad it would seem that improvement in this area was a mutual feeling amongst the interviewees. It would seem that role models in the sporting field had a massive impact on why this was happening.

I think it has definitely improved loads it's mainly because of people like her (Stephanie Roche) and Katie Taylor. They say she looks great but nobody is going to go up against her, every lad would admit she would kill them (P4).

At London 2012 I watched Katie Taylor playing every boxing match and never watched the men playing I think it's because media spotlight is always on Katie and not so much the others(P1).

Women being involved in media roles was also spoke about as one of the reasons media coverage was improving ' I think there is definitely improvements to it now you've got sports broadcasters yano on the news females'(P3). Women in media are the ones influencing what is wrong with how media perceives women now 'Evanne Ni Chuillin is a G.A.A. female reporter and she said that sexism is rife in Irish broadcasting'(P.2). The participants expressed that women's participation in media was a positive approach for representing women in sport.

4.8. Other Findings

There was also a number of themes which presented themselves which must for the purpose of this research be mentioned. Although there may not have been as much dept into discussing them they are important to consider.

(a) How would you change it?

I was also interested in getting the women's input on how they felt equality for women could be achieved. I got mixed responses but most of them were mainly positive. The participants

seemed hopeful for women's future in sport ' I think we have to be positive only we can make changes happen and I believe that we will keep pushing forward'(P2).

Participant one was concerned with concentrating on structural changes within society. She felt people in society could help push for the equality women deserve in the field.

For women in sports the general attitude, turning up to watch women's matches, treat women the same as men. Simple things like that can have a huge effect on female athlete's mentality. Media as well of course. The more women in sports are highlighted the more society can learn to accept women can do it just as well as men. (P1).

In trying to tackle this issue participants talked about how it would have to be a bottom up approach rather than a top down one ' start from the ground up like start small. They need to start from the bottom up if they are going to change anything'.(P3).

(b) Fitness is Now More Important Than Ever Before

This particular finding was only as a result of one of the interviews I conducted. It is something that struck me and also something that is very relevant. Participant 3 made me aware of the fact the image is now more important than it ever has been before. She believed that image today and what you look like is more focused on how fit you are. She suggested that this was the reason things were changing for women in sport.

Think things are changing particularly in the last few years. People are really more conscious of their health, their fitness and looking after themselves. I think the whole fitness thing, the whole looking after yourself yano, I think that's definitely turning people's minds. Strong is the new skinny.(P3).

(c) Individual Sports Vs Team Sports

This theme was not discussed by everyone but was evident to me when analysing the data after this participant made note of it. Participant one made light of the fact that inequality

comes in different forms. She suggested that to consider that maybe inequality was more evident in team sports than individual sports 'I don't know if it's just me but I notice its usually team sports that gender inequality is more noticeable'(P1). She felt that in individual sports women were at more of an advantage

In individual sports women do get the spotlight. For example in athletics Sonia O' Sullivan, Derval O' Rourke in swimming three female swimmers get more attention Grainne Murphy, Fiona Doyle in recent years as opposed to male swimmers. Attendance is higher in individual sports because both men and women compete on the same day in the same place.(P1).

(d) Being A Mother In Sport

Note: This team emerged from a participant that had children. She was the only mother which I interviewed as the rest of the participants did not have any children. None the less it is important to stress this point in the context of this research.

How women were perceived in sport when they became mothers was another theme which emerged and must be highlighted. It is important as it relates to the notion of patriarchy and also hegemonic masculinity. Participant 2 made light of the fact that people still held a conservative role when it came to women being mothers and playing sport.

My husband and I have four children and I often get remarks like how can you train everyday with the children as if I should be at home. Whereas my husband plays Gaelic football but it's ok for him to play competitively. It's almost like now you have children you need to be looking after the house and the kiddies as if we were back in the dark ages. Usually from older small minded people (P2).

4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of this study with a small amount of discussion. A further analysis of what these findings mean will be discussed in the next chapter.

5 WHAT THIS MEANS FOR WOMEN IN SPORT

“Each woman, lost in her own reflection rules over space and time, alone, supreme she has every right to men and fortune, to fame and pleasure” (Parshley, 1949:663).

5.1. Introduction

The final chapter of this research will present a dialogue between the literature I examined and the research I found. This will allow for a comparative to be made between what existing literature says about women in sport and what women who play sport actually experience. I will say that there is still inequality in women’s sport but that this inequality is more evident in some areas than others. I will also suggest that it is improving but that more research needs to be done on it. Following on from this I hope to give a brief account of what this all means for women in sport today.

5.2. The Socialisation Of Women In Sport

The majority of women in this study suggested that they got involved in sport because of family influence. This was most evident in those women who came from a G.A.A. background. It came across as being very much a generational thing for these women with reference to the older male generations of their family. The bigger question I asked myself here was why? What can help us explain this relationship amongst the two?

One reason which was highlighted in the literature was the nature of how the G.A.A. was established. As the literature pointed to the establishment of the G.A.A. was heavily linked to Irish Sovereignty and nationalism (Hassan, Rouse, and Liston 2014). It is something that contributed to making Ireland distinct from Britain and it was this sense of pride that was instilled in many Irish families. The Catholic Church at this time also influenced how women were to behave in society back then but with the church almost irrelevant in the minds of most people in the 21st Century women now have more freedom.

One of the participants talked about how family was not necessarily an influence for her. Important to note here is that she did not come from a G.A.A. and her sport was swimming. She got involved from a teacher at school, literature also pointed to how children become exposed to their gender roles through education. Those involved in the G.A.A. background entered a very masculine institution while the woman who was involved in swimming had no family influence. It was like she had more of a choice in what sport she was going to choose because she wasn't exposed to the family sporting influence.

This socialisation process of the women into sport all happened in a culture where patriarchy is present. Although the women did not necessarily point to this if we look at what Bryson and Meehan said in regards to what patriarchy looks like the women were exposed to this. He talked about how patriarchy is conditioned from childhood socialisation within the family and is enforced by education. It is my belief that the women in this study were so unaware of how this patriarchy would have affected their choice in the sports they were exposed to.

5.3. Gender Is An Issue In The Reproduction Of Inequality

There is no doubt than from what the women in this study said that gender causes inequality for women in sport. It was interesting however to see that they felt at a disadvantage in resources and in comparison to men but when it came to the production of their identities they did not seem bothered.

They began by unanimously agreeing that they were at a disadvantage because of their gender when compared to men. They felt that they were treated as second class citizens and that men were always given the upper hand. They made note of the fact that it has always been this way. What is also interesting to note here is that the woman who came from a swimming sporting background didn't necessarily feel that way. I asked myself why and

began to think that the G.A.A. was at fault for the way the other women felt. She talked about her experience being positive and never feeling like she was treated any different.

The women did talk about their identity being affected as a young girl growing up in sport saying that they were referred to as tomboys but as they got older they were not necessarily concerned with this stereotype. This was difficult for me to understand as I personally still struggle with stereotypes and they have certainly contributed to the issues I have had with feminine identity. Even though I shared this with the women their discomfort was not mutual. Unless they just did not feel comfortable discussing it that is something I also have to consider.

The study that was done about gender role conflict can be introduced here as a point of discussion from the literature. Miller and Levy's study pointed to the fact that female athletes struggle with their gender role because of the social stigma associated with being a female athlete. While on a personal level I can relate to this gender role conflict the women did not. It would seem that adult female athletes struggle more with how they are treated when compared to men rather than how they create their femininity. Halberstam (1988) also made reference to the fact that constantly been mistaken for a boy can lead to the production of a masculine identity. Looking at the findings of this research suggests that it does not seem to be the case so maybe things are changing.

5.4. Men Do Feel Threatened By Women Who Play Sport

I have come to the conclusion that men do feel threatened by women who play sport. I feel that from what the women in this study had to say 'it usually came from boys who couldn't handle women being better than them at sport' (P2). I feel it is massively threatening their social status as the dominant figure in the sporting field and they cannot accept losing control of it. Times are changing in sport for women and their increased participation is bringing about new questions that men cannot answer.

Throughout the findings it became clear that men constantly felt women were the inferior sex in sport. They constantly questioned their skill, ability and determination. They were usually the ones who reinforced the stereotypes and made reference to girls being tomboys. I will agree with the literature here that this is more than men just simply bullying women. Gender essentialism I feel has a lot to do with this. Giddens stressed that equality amongst the sexes was always going to be impossible because of biology. Many men may approach women in sport and feel that they are the superior sex and because they are biologically different it gives them the right to dismiss women.

These findings as a whole suggest to me that there is a possibility of men and women being equal in sport and gender essentialism does not fit into this new picture. Patriarchy once again peaks its head here as the way men acted to women in this research cannot be understood without examining how it affects them. Millet believed that because of patriarchy men become comfortable when they feel the dividend has been given to them by women themselves. This can in some ways help explain the reaction of men toward women in sport. Liston (2006) made light of this when she talked about women's participation in the field threatening men and to keep up their status they must constantly vilify women.

One of the women in this study talked about this patriarchy when she said that 'men may not know how much of a difference there is' (P5). R.W. Connell highlighted this point when he talked about sport already being an organised institution so that masculinities were almost predetermined. It would seem that patriarchy is the root of most of the problems. From what I have investigated and from the findings I got from the women I still find it difficult to allow patriarchy or even essentialism for that matter to justify the reasons women are treated the way they are. I like most women I don't think can accept the behaviour of men because of an invisible social construct. It is clear that the women who participated in this study were fed up and felt that they were on the same platform as men in sport, so I feel it

is time for the men to start accepting it too. The woman involved in swimming who I interviewed talked about how even after she proved that man in her experience wrong he never came back and apologised or spoke about them again.

5.5. Women Are Also To Blame

What finding interested me the most was that the majority of women in this study did not participate in supporting other women? While what they said clearly indicated they believed in equality for women in sport their actions did not necessarily replicate that. It became clear that throughout the conversations with the women in this study that they did not feel it necessary for them to support other women in their sport.

When asked about going to support women at games or events the women did not seem too excited about the thought and in fact some laughed about it. This was one theme which I didn't really see emerging in any of the literature I examined. I feel more research could be done on how women react to other female athletes in the future. I begged the question here as to why and the main reason was because not enough media attention was given to female athletes. Not much of the literature within this study can collaborate with the reasons women don't support other women. One of the women talked about how she spent most of her time playing it so she wouldn't go watch it.

While men do oppress women and women internalise that oppression it doesn't justify the reasons that research is lacking in this area. We could take Freire's (2005) approach to dialogue when approaching this issue as the way to deal with it. There needs to be dialogue with those who oppress women and also with women themselves.

5.6. The G.A.A. Treats Women Unfairly

The G.A.A. was introduced as a man's sport and it would seem it is staying that way. Five of the participants I interviewed were involved in the G.A.A and not one of them had anything positive to say about them. The women talked about how they were treated unprofessionally

on behalf of those in charge. They talked about how those in charge attended to the men in their club more and they received more resources. They talked about how even when it came around to voicing their opinion there was none. I then thought about how they get away with treating the women who are part of their community like that.

Anti dialogical action comes to mind here. Freire (2005) talked about how one of the features of this type of action was divide and rule. The G.A.A seem to have this tactic by subordinating women's position in their clubs and dividing men and women up which allows them to keep real power. Power I feel is at the very heart of this conflict and it is a result of patriarchy. Another feature of Freires work in anti dialogical action was cultural invasion. Through the patriarchal culture which the G.A.A. rests on it is able to inhibit the creativity of those who are oppressed so for example women in sport.

When investigating the equality literature, the liberal egalitarian approach, talks about people having the same equal opportunity to compete for social advantage. This also means that there will be winners and losers in this competition. In the context of the G.A.A both men and women would seem to have the same opportunity but unfortunately in this institutional setting they are the losers. The women in the study did make reference to more women being involved in within the G.A.A. and that being in positions of power would only lead to an improvement for women in sport. When women are involved as the literature has suggested they have the sociological potential for generating change (Baker et al, 2004).

5.7. Media Still Has Its Own Agendas

All of the women in this study agreed that media representation for women was low which literature also made reference too (Coakley, 2004). The women suggested that the media attention was always on male athletes which had a negative effect on female athletes. I found from what they said that this causes society to drift away from women in sport. With the media being very one dimensional in their approach society follows. It has shown that media

is a powerful vacuum and can very easily influence a society. As Hargreaves (1986) suggested earlier media always create their own events with their own features and own their own agendas. The women suggested that the agenda behind media representation is about promoting popularity and revenue not equality.

One thing that struck me when comparing both the literature and the findings was there was a lack of attention paid to media representing local sporting events whether it is male or female. I did not come across any studies or any evidence in the findings about local coverage of sporting events. I feel there should be more attention paid to local sports because it is here that people begin to get involved in sport.

The only thing which I am aware of from the findings is that social media tends to be taken over and people can distribute evidence of local sporting events through these kinds of media sites. In terms of national broadcasters there was none which I came across or was pointed to by the women. Social media seems to be a more successful tool in promoting women's representation in sport. The women made reference to Twitter and Facebook as being social platforms which can help to promote this. I believe there is a space here for further research to be done in understanding what social media is capable of and how it can help be an effective tool for encouraging equality for women in sport.

There was also a reference made to the mistreatment and lack of care that goes into representing female athletes in the media. Stephanie Roche was highlighted again here and how she was sexually objectified by participating in a lingerie campaign the following week after her award ceremony. Byerly and Ross (2006) talked about this when they said that women are being objected to the sum of their body parts. It has a detrimental impact in the discourses of a society and only adds to maintaining gender inequality. It once again exposes the nature of patriarchy ideology. Media and patriarchy are both political which causes a

damaging impact in our society. As Bryson and Meehan suggested media must be investigated through multiple structures and relationships (1992).

It also must be remembered like R.W. Connell said in his study on masculinities that hegemony does not mean total control and it can be disrupted (1995). It as we have seen from the literature review beginning to be disrupted with people like Clare Balding advocating for equal representation. I still feel that the media only chooses to report what will generate the most profit. Unless there comes a time where there is an equal representation of women involved in reporting media then I believe sexism will continue to be rife and women will continue to be objectified.

5.8. Conclusion

Finally I would like to conclude this research by explaining how this research has helped me answer my research question. I want to make further suggestions as to what I feel still needs to be done. It is clear that inequality exists for women who are involved in sport but I am now aware that it is has more than one origin.

Setting out on this research journey I had a particular view of how the situation for women in sport was. Being a female athlete myself I had my own concerns and reservations about inequality for women in sport. Throughout this process I have been directed into new areas of possible research, come to the conclusion that the process of change is difficult and realised the importance of learning from other women in my position.

I wanted to investigate how women were treated in sport and to see if inequality existed. I was curious to know if what I was experiencing was being experienced by other female athletes. I realised that some of what we shared was similar but that I had to consider that maybe things were not how I seen them. It was the women in this study that opened my eyes to that.

I discovered that women's inequality in sport comes in all different forms. It allowed me to see that gender was not the only concept in inequality. Like the social constructionist view in feminism I believe it should be examined through the different social structures that produce and maintain it. I had to come to terms with realising that some women were more acceptant of their position as a woman in sport and more comfortable with whom they were than I was. The women in this study where showed great ownership of their identity in sport by not accepting societies expectations of them as females.

Inequality is not something that can be fixed over night but there was an improvement to it because more women were getting involved. Women's involvement still brings about new challenges particularly for men. It challenges the patriarchal dividend and the idea of

men's masculinity in sport. Women felt very positive about more women being included in the decision making process and positive about the future for women in sport.

I can't stress enough how much I feel people should encourage further research on this issue. I unfortunately only had a limited time and a limited number of resources available to me so not all the issues could be challenged in great detail. There is a space for further research to be done in regards to making a comparison to how women are treated in individual sports vs. how they are treated in team sports. With new generations now becoming more consumed with image and fitness this area could also be addressed in future research. With people being more concerned about fitness and health I feel this can only help women's representation and treatment in the field of sport. The idea of health nonetheless comes with its own challenges but as this study made note of strong is the new sexy. Maybe for women in sport it would become more about health which is better than being seen as a tomboy or a man.

In Irish culture it has been made evident that the relationship between sporting institutions and women's sport needs to be improved. It is my belief that the conservative culture is dismantling and that institutions like the G.A.A need to be modernised to adjust to that. It may have been introduced as a consequence of Irish Sovereignty and Nationalism but it is not within that platform anymore because women's participation is still on the rise. These institutions need to stop believing that they can dismiss the voices of women and begin to take into consideration what they have to say because it is valuable.

I stated at the beginning of this study that sport is something that is usually left out of sociological and academic discussion. I would like to think that after reading this research and becoming immersed in its problematic nature it will be now be considered. I hope those reading this will see the value in it just as much as we women do. This study does not represent another piece of research on women's oppression. It is a study which has shown

that women in sport are strong, positive and willing to tackle the challenges that come their way.

Sport is important to us as women and we should be considered in our capabilities as female athletes. The next time you think about sport whether it be going to a sporting event or reading an article in the news take a step back and think about how you can help tackle inequality through your actions. In the words of Maureen Gaffney 'living happily ever after has very little to do with fitting into tight glass slippers fashioned by a demanding Prince Charming. It is much more to do with Cinderella becoming one tough bargainer' (1991:22).

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Appendix A: Research Consent Form

Topic of Study: Women in Sport

Researchers Name: Christina O Reilly (0873102549)

Supervisor: Camilla Fitzsimons, Department of Adult Education, NUI Maynooth (01-7083761).

I am delighted that you have given me the permission to undertake an interview with you on behalf of my research. I hope that this will be a positive process for all involved. The following consent form will describe what you need to know in regards to being a participant in this research. Any queries or questions please don't hesitate to contact either myself or my research supervisor.

Purpose of the study: I am undertaking the following research as to investigate the lives of women in sport. I am also investigating the field of sport as an institution. I want this research to highlight the importance of sport as a social development and also the importance of women's participation in the field.

Confidentiality: Any data/information received during this research will be kept secure at all times. At no time or in any circumstances will your identity be disclosed to anyone. Those who will have access to the data will also secure your confidentiality at all times. Those who also who have access to the finished product will not know the identity of any of the participants in this research. The data I retain and the findings I produce as a result of that data will be available at your discretion. If you wish to access the information you have given me at any time this will not be a problem. This includes the tapes, the transcripts and any notes that have been produced from this research. You may withdraw from the study at any time and also have the ability to withdraw your data right up until the

work is published. These interviews will not constitute any kind of counselling.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Signature:

Date: