Shaping and Being Shaped: Examining Women's Tackle Football in Canada

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Shaping and Being Shaped: Examining Women’s Tackle Football in Canada

By

Katrina Krawec

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of Kinesiology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2014

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Shaping and Being Shaped: Examining Women’s Tackle Football in Canada

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone’s copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledge in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

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ABSTRACT

I explored how Canadian female football players were shaping football and being shaped by their participation in the sport using a duality of structure framework. Through ten semi-structured interviews with two administrators and four players in the Western Women’s Canadian Football League (WWCFL) and four players in the Legends Football League (LFL) Canada, I examined the leagues’ structures and participants’ experiences in their leagues. I also analyzed media representations in 230 newspaper articles. Results indicated that the leagues’ divergent purposes as well as hegemonic understandings of football differently shaped their structures and consequently players’ experiences and media representations. The WWCFL’s close alignment with men’s football and the LFL’s divergence, especially in terms of its uniform, contributed to these differences, although all players shared an enjoyment of physicality, supportive teammates, and extensive volunteer expectations. WWCFL players had many opportunities to shape their league, while opportunities for LFL players were extremely limited.
DEDICATION

To my mom and brother—my team.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my advisor, Vicky, who immensely contributed to the positive experience that I had completing my master’s degree at the University of Windsor, and profoundly influenced the way that I view the world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFLL: Alberta Female Football League

AFL: [Men’s] Arena Football League

AGM: Annual General Meeting

Board: [WWCFL] Board of Directors

By-laws: WWCFL By-laws

CAFA: Canadian Amateur Football Association

CBC: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

CFL: Canadian [Men’s] Football League

CIS: Canadian Interuniversity Sport

CJFL: Canadian Junior [Men’s] Football League

ESPN: Entertainment and Sports Programming Network

Executive: [WWCFL] Executive Members

Football: tackle football

GM: general manager

Hockey: ice hockey

IFAF: International Federation of American Football

ImPACT: Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing
IRC: [WWCFL] Incident Review Committee

IWFL: Independent Women’s Football League

LFL: Legends Football League (formerly Lingerie Football League)

LFL US: Legends Football League United States

MVP: Most Valuable Player

MWFL: Maritime Women’s Football League

NBJGFL: New Brunswick Junior Girls [sic] Football League

NBWFL: New Brunswick Women’s Football League

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association

NFL: National [Men’s] Football League

PSO: Provincial Sport Organization

Rule Book: Canadian Amateur Rule Book for Tackle Football

SQ: Sub-question

WFTDA: Women’s Flat Track Derby Association

WWC: Women’s World [Football] Championship

WWCFL: Western Women’s Canadian Football League

WWE: World Wrestling Entertainment
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Sport is historically considered a male preserve, and females have faced considerable opposition to their sport participation (Fields, 2005; Hall, 2007; Hargreaves, 1994; Robinson, 2002). Although females have increasingly gained access to and enjoy participation in a variety of sports, scholars and laypeople alike have called tackle football the “last bastion” of male power and domination (e.g., Betancourt, 2001, p. 7; Brown, 1992, as cited in Nelson, 1994, p. 126; Knapp, 2011, p. 46; Packard, 2009). Tackle football (hereafter referred to as “football”) is a collision sport in which players use their bodies to physically prevent opponents from advancing the ball towards their goal line by blocking and tackling players, most importantly the ball carrier, to the ground. Due to the physical nature of football, size, strength, and aggression are valuable player attributes, and such characteristics are culturally associated with and valued in males. Consequently, football has been synonymous with males and masculinity in North America (Fogel, 2011; Messner, 2002; Nelson, 1994). In the last decade, however, the number of opportunities for females to play football in Canada has grown with the establishment of leagues across the country (see Appendix A).

Women’s Football in Canada

Women have participated in football sporadically and in small numbers in Canada during the twentieth century (Oriard, 2001; Peredo, 1970; Smith, 1989); Canada’s first contemporary women’s team was the Montreal Blitz, founded in 2002 (Phillips, 2002). The Blitz is the sole Canadian team in the Independent Women’s Football League (IWFL) (Montreal Blitz, n.d.), an American league established in 2000 (Independent Women’s Football League, n.d.). The first Canadian league, the New Brunswick
Women’s Football League (NBWFL), was established in 2004 with two teams, one from Fredericton and the other from Saint John (Maritime Women’s Football League [MWFL], 2004). A third team from Moncton joined the following year (MWFL, 2005), and a team from Halifax, Nova Scotia entered the league in 2006, prompting a change to the league’s current name, the Maritime Women’s Football League (MWFL, 2006). Since that year, the MWFL has sustained four teams (MWFL, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012), and in 2013 the league celebrated its tenth anniversary (Staffieri, 2013b).

In Western Canada, three women’s football teams operated independently without a league to play in for a number of years (Western Women’s Canadian Football League [WWCFL], n.d.), beginning with the Calgary Rockies in 2003 (Hurlburt, 2003), followed by the Edmonton Storm in 2004 (MacGillivray, 2005) and the Manitoba Fearless from Winnipeg in 2007 (Manitoba Fearless, n.d.). Finally, the Alberta Female Football League (AFFL) was created in 2010, Canada’s second women’s football league and first in Western Canada, with teams in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge (Price, 2010). That fall, there was enough interest in other Western provinces that the Western Women’s Canadian Football League formed (Manitoba Fearless, n.d.) and played its inaugural season the following spring/summer (WWCFL, n.d.). The seven-team league brought together the AFFL’s three teams and two teams each from Manitoba (Manitoba Fearless and Winnipeg Nomads Wolf Pack) and Saskatchewan (Regina Riot and Saskatoon Valkyries) (Woodard, 2011). The league further expanded in 2013 with the addition of

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1 In 2009, the Calgary Rockies disbanded, and the Calgary Rage formed.
two teams in Alberta, the Northern Anarchy from Grande Prairie and Okotoks Lady Outlawz\(^2\) (Harder, 2013).

**National and international competition.** Further evidence of the development of women’s football nationally, as well as internationally, includes the organization of a national team to participate in the International Federation of American Football’s (IFAF) inaugural Women’s World Championship (WWC) in 2010 (Besson, 2010a). The tournament was hosted in Stockholm, Sweden and showcased teams from six countries (Noronen, 2013). Team Canada finished second behind the United States (Noronen, 2013). Furthermore, female football players from across the country came together in August 2012 in Quebec for the inaugural bi-annual Women’s National Challenge Cup with five teams representing Alberta, Atlantic Canada, Manitoba, Quebec, and Saskatchewan (Falloon, 2012). The event served as a selection camp for Team Canada for the second WWC (Trembath, 2012c). Six countries participated in the 2013 tournament in Vantaa, Finland,\(^3\) and Team Canada again earned silver in the final against the United States (Noronen, 2013).

**Lingerie Football**

Another version of football began in Canada in 2011 with the establishment of the Toronto Triumph in the Legends Football League (LFL) (known as the Lingerie Football League at the time) (“Lingerie Football League Announces,” 2011). Lingerie football\(^4\)

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\(^2\) After the 2013 WWCFL season, the Okotoks Lady Outlawz changed their name to Foothills Outlawz and opted out of the 2014 season due to an insufficient number of players on their roster (Greer, 2014).

\(^3\) The inaugural WWC involved teams from Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Sweden, and the United States (Noronen, 2013). The same countries, with the exception of Austria and addition of Spain, participated in the second WWC (Noronen, 2013).

\(^4\) While the LFL is no longer called the Lingerie Football League, I sometimes refer to the uniform as “lingerie” or to type of football played in the league as “lingerie football”
involves women playing football while wearing a bikini uniform, and it debuted in Los Angeles in 2004 as a single game known as the Lingerie Bowl, a pay-per-view alternative to the National [Men’s] Football League’s (NFL) Super Bowl halftime show (Simers, 2003; “The New,” 2010). Despite the cancellation of the Lingerie Bowl in 2007 through 2009 due to various disputes with host venues (Feschuk, 2009; Hutchinson, 2007; “Pants,” 2008), the LFL was established in the United States and began its first season in August 2009 (“The New,” 2010). The LFL introduced lingerie football to Canada in 2011, first in the summer with an “All-Fantasy Game” played in Hamilton, Ontario by American all-star players from the league, followed by the premiere of the first Canadian team, the Toronto Triumph, in the fall (Wallin, 2011a). In the Triumph’s inaugural season, the team lost their first game and, following the loss, the head coach released four players and the defensive coach (Li, 2011a). As a result, 16 of the remaining 22 players quit in protest over coaching and safety concerns (Li, 2011b). The Triumph quickly replenished their roster (Li, 2011c), but lost their remaining three games (Wallin, 2012a), including a 74-0 loss, “the most lopsided defeat in LFL history” (“Intel,” 2011, para. 1). Despite Toronto’s problems during their first season, a four-team Canadian expansion league, LFL Canada, premiered in fall 2012. Joining Toronto’s team were the BC Angels based in Abbotsford, British Columbia (Wallin, 2012b), and two teams from Saskatchewan, the Regina Rage (Wallin, 2012c) and Saskatoon Sirens (Wallin, 2012d).5

---

5 The LFL originally announced that the Canadian league would have six teams, with the Toronto Triumph joined by teams in Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, Quebec City, and Vancouver (Wallin, 2011a). The LFL did not provide an explanation for the eventual smaller four-team league in different cities, but the league may have had difficulty securing venues. For instance, an arena in Victoria, BC declined to host the LFL (Dheensaw, 2012).
For the 2013 LFL Canada season, the league “suspend[ed] operations” of the Toronto Triumph and established the Calgary Fillies less than three months before the season was scheduled to start (“Breaking News,” 2013; “LFL Canada Suspends,” 2013). Further, there was turmoil within the league leading up to the beginning of the season, which was initially postponed (“LFL Canada Announces,” 2013) then ultimately cancelled (Mitchell, 2013; Nolais, 2013).6

**Proliferation of lingerie sports.** While using sex to market women’s sport is not a new idea, the LFL may have served as a catalyst for a trend in women’s sports towards “lingerie” or “bikini” leagues. Since the inaugural Lingerie Bowl in 2004, and particularly since the 2009 establishment of the LFL, a number of lingerie/bikini sports leagues have been created in North America and beyond (see Appendix B). Some American examples include the Women’s Arena Football League (Staffieri, 2013c), Lingerie Basketball League (Lingerie Basketball League, 2012), and Beautiful Ballers ([sic] League (Chandler, 2013). Internationally, the LFL inspired the creation of two bikini football leagues in Australia (Estwick, 2011; “LFL Further,” 2012) and three in Mexico (Ayala, 2013; Guzmán, 2012).

The LFL is expanding internationally as well. The league launched a four-team Australian league in 2013 with teams in Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney (“LFL Further,” 2012).7 The LFL also announced plans to establish a minor league in Mexico in 2014, create a team in Mexico City to play in the 2015 LFL United States (LFL US)

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6 The cancellation of the 2013 LFL Canada season was not without precedent. The LFL US season was cancelled in 2012 when the LFL Canada season premiered (“Alert,” 2012). Similarly, when the Canadian season was cancelled, the LFL was launching its Australian league in 2013.

7 The 2014 LFL Australia season will feature a fifth team from Adelaide (“Breaking News,” 2014).
season, and eventually launch a standalone Mexican league (“LFL Global,” 2013). In July 2014, on the eve of the World Cup final, the LFL is supposed to host an inaugural “World Bowl” in Brazil, intended to become a quadrennial event played alongside the World Cup featuring an all-star team from each LFL league (de la Fuente, 2013b), including “LFL Europa.” The European league will officially launch in 2015 (“LFL Further,” 2012) with two German teams in Dusseldorf and Hamburg, and teams in Dublin Ireland, Manchester United Kingdom (de la Fuente, 2013a), and Paris France (“LFL Officials,” 2013), with future expansion planned for Italy and Spain (“LFL Europa,” 2013). Furthermore, the LFL has an “All-Fantasy” all-star world tour, previously hosted in Australia and Canada prior to the league’s establishment in both countries, as well as in Mexico (“A New,” 2010; Wallin, 2011a, 2012e, 2012f, 2012g). The LFL reaches even more countries through television contracts in “120 territories” (“LFL Projected,” 2013, para. 2) around the world, including in Africa (“LFL Strikes,” 2014), Asia (“LFL Further,” 2012), and South America (“Lingerie Football League Partners,” 2012).

**Current Literature**

The recent proliferation of bikini sports leagues will likely generate scholarship on the topic in the future. Strong and Maddison (2013) pointed out that there is little academic work about the LFL, and suggested that such work would be beneficial. Currently there is one study about the LFL, a media analysis of American coverage between 2009 and 2010, when the LFL US was first established (Knapp, 2013) (see literature review for “Sub-Question 3: Media” for more detail).

There is a growing body of literature about women’s participation in sport, including rugby, a gridiron code that is a relatively close cousin to football in which players are intentionally tackled to the ground to impede forward progress of the ball.
towards a goal line (e.g., Baird, 2010; Broad, 2001; Carle & Nauright, 1999; Chase, 2002, 2006; Chu, Leberman, Howe, & Bacher, 2003; Cleary, 2000; Ezzell, 2009; Hardy, 2013; Howe, 2003; O’Hanley, 1998; Palmer, 1994; Scrogum, 2005; Shockley, 2005; Taylor & Fleming, 2000; Wheatley, 1994). Women began playing rugby in large numbers around the world in the 1980s (Carle & Nauright, 1999), though they have played, or attempted to play in smaller numbers prior to that time (Cox, 2012). Similarly, women have been competing, or attempting to compete in football in the United States since the 1920s, when women’s teams played during the halftime of NFL games (Knapp, 2008).

Contemporary women’s football leagues emerged in the United States in the late 1990s (Knapp, 2008), almost two decades after women’s rugby. As such, the amount of research conducted about women’s football is minimal, especially in comparison to women’s rugby. When I first began my research in 2011, there were three current American studies about women’s football (Knapp, 2008; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009), plus one older American study from 1985 (Bridges, 1985). Since 2011 there has been the addition of one conference paper (Carter, 2012) and two articles by Knapp (2011, 2014) based on her dissertation (2008). These contemporary studies explored the experiences of female football participants in the United States (see literature review for “Sub-Question 2: Participants’ Experiences” for more detail); none took place in the Canadian context.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore how female football players are shaping and being shaped by their participation in women’s football leagues in Canada. To do so, I adopted Messner’s (2002) tri-level framework to look at two Canadian women’s football leagues at the following levels:

- Level of structural context (leagues);
Level of social interaction (players); and

Level of cultural symbol (media).

Focusing on the WWCFL and LFL Canada, I studied:

1. The leagues’ structures, including league rules and policies, the schedule of the season, and rules of the game (sub-question [SQ]1);

2. Players’ experiences playing football and participating in their respective leagues, including what they did and did not enjoy, the ways they perceived themselves and players in their league and the other league, along with their interactions with the media and their perceptions of how the media and others perceived them and their leagues (SQ2); and

3. Media representations of the leagues and players (SQ3).

I examined how these three levels interacted to shape and be shaped by the players.

Operational Definitions

The operational definitions for “sport” and “women’s football” are provided below as some might question the status of lingerie football as “sport,” and there are various understandings of “football” around the world.

Sport. Sports are “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 4). Both the WWCFL and LFL meet this definition of sport.

Women’s football. “Women” is defined by the minimum age limit set by a league, which is age 16 for the WWCFL and age 18 for the LFL. “Football” is also known as “tackle football,” “gridiron football,” or “American football.” Variations in the rules exist depending on where the game is played (i.e., Canada, United States), the
playing surface (i.e., indoors, outdoors), and the level of play (i.e., professional, collegiate, amateur). All versions, however, allow forward passes, with the offensive team throwing the ball towards the defensive team’s goal line, and involve players attempting to tackle the opposing ball carrier to the ground to halt forward progress.

Assumptions

Based on previous literature and my own experiences, my study includes the following assumptions:

*Sport participation is important and can be beneficial for participants.*

In accordance with the Canadian Sport Policy (Canadian Heritage, 2012), I assumed that sports can provide valuable, enriching opportunities for participants that yield a multitude of personal and social benefits, including improved physical and mental wellbeing. Further, sports, including contact sports, offer the potential for female empowerment (Blinde, Taub, & Han, 1993, 1994; Cotterill, 2010; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Knapp, 2011; Lawler, 2002; McCaughey, 1997; Theberge, 2003). As such, I assume that women’s football participation should be supported and encouraged, including through research.

*The media is a powerful cultural institution and has the potential to influence individuals’ thoughts and behaviours.*

The media is an influential force in today’s highly mediated society (Markula, Bruce, & Hovden, 2010) and disseminates powerful messages about cultural values. At the individual level, psychological research suggests that media consumption can influence individuals’ cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs (American Psychological Association, 2010). I believe that the media has the potential to shape understandings of women’s football and players’ experiences in
the sport, including the players’ feelings about themselves and/or their participation in the sport. As such, I conducted a media analysis to discover how women’s football leagues and players were represented, and I asked participants about their experiences interacting with members of the media and their impressions of media coverage.

**Research and Practical Contributions**

Studying women’s football in Canada will generate both research and practical contributions, as outlined below.

**Research contribution.** My thesis contributes to women’s sport research through my theoretical framework, context, sample, and combination of methods. My study is framed within Giddens’ (1984) duality of structure, which is not often used in sport research. It is a valuable framework because it prompts an investigation of both agents and structures, and how agents are not only shaped by structures but also how they are shaping the structures (see “Theoretical Framework” section for further elaboration).

Studying women’s football in a Canadian context extends the small body of football research, which is limited to American football leagues and athletes (Carter, 2012; Knapp, 2008, 2011, 2012; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009). Additionally, my media analysis adds to the minimal number of Canadian media analyses of “everyday” representations of women in sport (Crossman, Hyslop, & Guthrie, 1994; MacKay & Dallaire, 2009), as most focus on the atypical coverage that occurs during the Olympics (Duncan, 1990; Hie, 2005; Lee, 1992; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999; Vincent & Crossman, 2012; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002; Wensing, 2005; Wensing & MacNeill, 2010) and sport media studies largely focus on American media.

Including the LFL in my sample adds to both the football and media literature, as there are no studies looking at the LFL’s structure and its participants and there is only
one media study; Knapp (2013) examined media coverage of the LFL US when it first began. Further, media analyses are often presented in isolation rather than in combination with other methods; by looking at women’s football from three levels—structures, players, and media—through document analysis, interviews, and media analysis, my work provides a fuller picture of the structures within which female football players operate and how media accounts contribute to the players’ football participation experiences.

**Practical contribution.** My thesis builds on Robinson’s (2002) contention that an increase in sporting opportunities for females can be both empowering and exploitative for the athletes. My research offers the opportunity to consider the potentially empowering and/or exploitative aspects of women’s football. By studying league structures, media accounts, and players’ experiences within those structures, I am able to see how they do and do not serve players’ interests, and offer suggestions of how they can be changed to better meet the needs of their participants.

**Theoretical Framework**

My work is guided by duality of structure, as well as hegemony and particularly hegemonic masculinity and femininity, which are detailed in this section.

**Duality of structure.** My research question is framed within Giddens’ (1984) duality of structure, an integral component of his structuration theory, which posits that individuals are constantly shaping and being shaped by the social world around them. Duality of structure involves a relationship between structures, constituted by rules and resources, and knowledgeable agents, so that “the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction” (Giddens, 1984, p. 19). In other words, social structures are constantly
created and recreated by knowledgeable agents, whose actions are shaped by previously created structures. The duality of structure framework acknowledges individuals’ agency and the importance of their actions in shaping the social world, as well as the broader social context that shapes their actions (Paraschak, 2000).

**Agency.** Structures, constituted by rules and resources, affect agency, which is an individual’s capability to act (Giddens, 1984). Ponic (2000) explained that Giddens (1984) defined rules not only as discursively expressed rules like laws, but also as “underlying assumptions and ideologies”⁸ that drive human action [that] exist internally within agents and regulate the manner in which they think and perceive their own realities” (p. 54). Giddens divided rules into regulative rules, which I call “formal rules,” and semantic rules, which I refer to as “informal rules.” Every sport governing body, for instance, has formal rules outlining how to play their respective sport, and informal rules, such as the belief that the purpose of participating in sport is to win. In terms of resources, Giddens described two types, authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources, which I call “human resources,” are capabilities to command people, and allocative resources or, as I refer to them, “financial and material resources” are capacities to command material objects and phenomena.⁹

**Rules and resources.** Informal rules govern agents’ actions and formal rules are a manifestation of informal rules, though only certain dominant groups of people have the power to dictate formal rules that align with their own informal rules (Ponic, 1995).

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⁸ Ponic (1995) defined assumptions as “normalized beliefs, values and ideas” and ideologies as “sets of normalized assumptions” (p. 19).
⁹ I used these more accessible terms for Giddens’ (1984) work in keeping with C. Wright Mills’ (1959, as cited in Paraschak, 2013) suggestion that sociologists avoid academic jargon where possible in favour of more easily understood concepts.
Formal rules direct the valuation and distribution of resources and support or inhibit certain actions and behaviours, which further normalizes certain informal rules. Paraschak (2000) noted, “The reproduction of select social practices becomes naturalized, as does the reproduction of assumptions [informal rules] which underlie them” (p. 154). For example, government officials comprise a dominant group that decides how to distribute resources for sport in Canada. These officials may value the perceived national unity associated with the Olympics. Consequently, they create funding rules, which dictate the distribution of financial resources that favour sport organizations that participate in Olympic competition. Despite the fact that the three Olympic sliding sports (bobsleigh, luge, and skeleton) engage relatively few participants in Canada, the organizations for these sports receive financial resources that allow their athletes to train, compete, and, ideally, be successful at the Olympics. Funding Olympic sports, regardless of participation rates, becomes normalized, as does the belief that Olympic success is important (see Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

Practical consciousness. While agents have the capacity to understand their actions, it can be difficult to identify the naturalized assumptions that guide their actions. Much of actors’ “knowledgeability,” or understanding about “what they do, and why they do it” (Giddens, 1984, p. xxiii), resides in their practical consciousness. Giddens (1984) explained, “Practical consciousness consists of all the things which actors know tacitly about how to ‘go on’ in the contexts of social life without being able to give them direct discursive expression” (p. xxiii). Individuals may, for example, know how to “go on,” or act, in the context of sport as an athlete, coach, and/or spectator. Athletes may play while

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10 Bobsleigh, luge, and skeleton are not among the top thirty participant sports in Canada (Ifedi, 2008).
in pain, coaches may autocratically direct their teams, and spectators may demonstrate support for their preferred teams by wearing team colours, painting their faces, and cheering at games; each role has a different set of normalized behaviours that agents can enact with little conscious thought.

**Power.** Agents exercise power, which can be defined as an individual’s ability to achieve desired outcomes, through structures (Ponic, 2000). An individual’s power depends on his or her ability to align with rules and access resources (Paraschak, 2000). The more effectively an actor can do so, the more likely that individual is to achieve his or her desired ends. Structures privilege some people more than others based on social determinants like class, race, age, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability, thus some people fit within dominant structures better than others and are consequently more capable of attaining their desired results (Paraschak, 2000). For instance, sport participation requires financial resources, thus the institution of sport privileges people from higher social classes who have the money for registration fees, equipment, and other costs necessary to participate in their preferred sporting activities (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

**Structural reproduction and transformation.** Regardless of the extent of an agent’s power in any one situation, all individuals contribute to shaping the world around them, either through structural reproduction or transformation. Structures can be both constraining and enabling (Giddens, 1984), and individuals can act in ways that reproduce existing structures, which maintains the dominant social order, or they can alter structures

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11 Coakley and Donnelly (2009) defined class as “categories of people who share an economic position in society based on a combination of their income (earnings), wealth (possessions), education, occupation, and social connections” (p. 300, emphasis in original).
by acting in ways that challenge prevailing structures. Paraschak (2000) neatly summarized duality of structure in the following way:

In order to attain the resources (such as funding) [agents] require, [they] have to work within socially constructed, predetermined ways of behaving (or rules). As they follow these procedures to achieve their desired outcomes, they simultaneously reproduce the legitimacy of those structures (rules and resources) for others. On the other hand, when individuals challenge the existing structures . . . they undermine the unquestioned nature of the structures, providing an opportunity for change to be considered. (p. 154)

In my study, I looked at the ways in which female football participants are shaping structures (rules and resources) through structural reproduction and/or transformation, and how structures (rules and resources) are facilitating and/or constraining their actions.

**Hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, and hegemonic femininity.** Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony fits well with duality of structure. Hegemony is a process through which dominant groups exercise power over subordinate groups (Pongrac, 1991). While dominant groups can use coercion to exercise power, hegemony relies on an articulation of power through “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). As a result, subordinate groups “consent” to their domination, which allows dominant groups to maintain their power. Dominant groups obtain consent by creating a range of acceptable and conceivable actions and behaviours from which the subordinate groups choose, producing the illusion of freedom for the subordinate groups while actually fulfilling the dominant groups’ agenda (Beal, 1995). The everyday choices that people make through the hegemonic process create ideologies (Beal, 1995) that in turn become “commonsense” (Pongrac, 1991) (or part of individuals’ “practical consciousness,” in
Giddens’ (1984) terms), which the dominant groups must constantly work to reinforce (structural reproduction).

One “commonsense” notion, constantly reinforced through agents’ actions and through rules and the distribution of resources, is that of gender. Humans typically use the binary categories of “male” and “female” to categorize individuals based on biological differences and subsequently explain cultural differences between men and women (Connell, 2009). While the bisection of humans into these two groups may seem like a “natural” division, gender “is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category . . . which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins” (Spargo, 1999, p. 12). Gender is, in fact, something that humans “do,” rather than something that they “are” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Connell (2009) provided some examples of the different ways that women and men do gender; “we slip our feet into differently shaped shoes, button our shirts on opposite sides, get our heads clipped by different hairdressers, buy our pants in separate shops, and take them off in separate toilets” (p. 5). Agents’ actions are shaped by structures that offer different clothes, hairdressers, stores, and washrooms for males and females. Agents reproduce gender by, for instance, going to a “salon” rather than a “barber shop” to get their hair cut if they are female. The opportunity exists for agents to challenge the structures that support gender by choosing to act in ways that run counter to them, but the majority of rules and resources, defined by the dominant group, reward individuals who act appropriately according to gendered structures. The dominant group that benefits the most from the

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12 Spargo (1999) was referring to sexuality, rather than gender, but I feel that her point is also applicable to gender.
binary gender classification system in our patriarchal society is men, as explained in the following discussion of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

**Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity.** Connell (2009) described the gender order, or “overall gender arrangement . . . of contemporary societies” (p. 4); the organization of the gender order is centred on men’s dominance over women.

“Hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity” are Connell’s (1987) terms for the dominant form of masculinity and femininity in a social context. Hegemonic masculinity is “the culturally idealized form of masculine character (in a historical setting),” and it “stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole” (Connell, 1990, p. 94). Though there are multiple masculinities (and femininities) that humans can enact, hegemonic masculinity is the ascendant form over other masculinities as well as all femininities. Heterosexuality, according to Connell (1987), is the most important aspect of hegemonic masculinity, and hegemonic masculinity is characterized by the subordination of women and of gay men, who can be viewed as comparable to women due to their sexual attraction to men.

Hegemonic masculinity is an exemplary masculinity; even though hegemonic masculinity does not reflect the practices of most males, men generally benefit from the current gender order (Connell, 1987). Due to men’s ascendancy over women, men earn what Connell (1997) called the “patriarchal dividend”; men have greater command relative to women over rules and resources of institutions such as the government and military as well as of corporations, and consequently have a greater opportunity to earn higher incomes and accumulate material wealth. “Complicit masculinities,” as Connell

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13 Male sports stars are common exemplars of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).
Emphasized femininity, the most culturally supported pattern of femininity in a given context, “is defined around compliance with . . . subordination and is oriented to accompanying the interests and desire of men” (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Since the concept of hegemony centres on power, Connell (1987) believed that there is no hegemonic form of femininity because females lack power in the current gender order due to their overall subordination to men. Femininity is organized around compliance, not domination, thus, “no pressure is set up to negate or subordinate other forms of femininity in the way hegemonic masculinity must negate other masculinities” (Connell, 1987, p. 187).

**Hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities.** Using Connell’s (1987, 1995, 2000) work on masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, Schippers (2007) presented a conceptualization of gender hegemony that included both a hegemonic masculinity and a hegemonic femininity. Schippers focused on the “complementary and hierarchical relationship” (p. 94) between masculinity and femininity necessary to sustain the gender order. She argued that hegemonic masculinity depends on the construction of a complementary hegemonic femininity with oppositional and inferior qualities that support the dominance of men. For example, hegemonic masculinity may involve being physically strong, assertive, and authoritative, and hegemonic femininity must necessarily involve being weak, passive, and compliant in order to support men’s dominance over women. Further, the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity must remain unavailable to females because when women demonstrate such characteristics, they do not complement hegemonic masculinity and thus threaten the gender order. Consequently, when females
embody masculine characteristics, or what Schippers termed “pariah femininities,” they are stigmatized and sanctioned because they are “contaminating” (p. 95) to gender relations. For instance, if a woman is authoritative, she is stigmatized as a “bitch” to sanction her for enacting a valued masculine characteristic that contributes to male dominance—but only when embodied by men.

**Hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity, and sport.** Both Connell (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and Schippers (2007) acknowledged that hegemonic masculinity is a useful concept for examining sport. Schippers’ reconceptualization of Connell’s (1987, 1995, 2000) gender hegemony, with the addition of hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities, is useful for investigating women’s sport, as demonstrated in studies of women’s football (Packard, 2009) and roller derby (Finley, 2010). Football, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) described it, is a “body-contact confrontational sport” (p. 833); it is structured in a way that requires physical contact and consequently aggression, competitiveness, and a willingness to endure and inflict pain is often valued and leads to success in the sport (Messner, 2002). Such characteristics align with hegemonic masculinity, so when females play football, they enact pariah femininities and may face stigmatization and sanctions (Packard, 2009). Further, Schippers suggested that in order to understand what characteristics are valued in males, one should examine which characteristics are stigmatized in females. I did so through interviews with female football players, asking about others’ reactions to their participation, including members of the media, and by conducting a media analysis. By looking at negative reactions to and representations of women’s football, I could also see what characteristics are valued in men’s football and sport.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review relevant literature for each of the three sub-questions about sport league structures (SQ1), women’s sport participation experiences (SQ2), and media representations of women in sport (SQ3).

Sub-Question 1: Structure of the Leagues

*How are women’s tackle football leagues structured in Canada?*

Sports are structured predominately by men for men, and there can be problems when women try to gain access to these male-defined structures. In my review of literature for SQ1, I first present two models of sport with their corresponding characteristics, and I then outline three different women’s sport organizations to serve as examples of various ways that sport leagues can be structured. I also discuss the adoption of female-specific rules in some women’s contact sports.

**Models of sport: Power and performance versus pleasure and participation.**

Sport can be structured in a multitude of ways, with various orientations and objectives. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) outlined the two models of sport described in this section. The hegemonic understanding of sport is the power and performance model, which “has become the standard for defining ‘real’ sports in North American culture” (p. 93). Theberge (2000) also pointed out that “real” sport is understood to be men’s sport. Sport organizations that follow the power and performance model are highly organized and competitive, and emphasize strength, speed, power, domination of opponents, hard work, sacrifice, risk-taking, and playing in pain. Athletes are often selected through tryout processes, and they are at the bottom of a hierarchical structure with coaches and owners above them. An alternative to the power and performance model is the pleasure and
participation model, which is characterized by fun, inclusion, health, personal expression, and democratic decision-making structures. While the two models are not mutually exclusive, and sports can be organized in ways that employ elements of both, sports that align with the power and performance model are more likely to receive resources (e.g., funding) and attention.

**Structures of women’s sport organizations.** In this section I describe the different structures of three women’s sport organizations for Australian rules football, roller derby, and softball.

**Australian rules football.** Australian rules football is a male-dominated contact sport played predominately in Australia. Wedgwood (2005) studied the development of a Women’s League in the 1980s in an Australian state, and she noted the paradoxical situation that women can face when trying to begin playing a sport dominated by men:

On the one hand, the establishment of women’s leagues usually requires the support of male leagues for essentials such as coaching, access to grounds and facilities, sponsorship, administrative know-how, publicity and perhaps even legitimacy. At the same time, however, women who show they can play such sports undermine the public display of male physical superiority that such games represent, thereby often deterring the very support they need. (p. 398)

The Women’s League, indeed, initially relied on their (men’s) state sport governing body to provide coaches, fields, umpires, administrative support, and publicity opportunities, and each women’s team was affiliated with a men’s team for access to a pre-established club’s name, home field, and clubhouse and, ideally, the support of the men in the clubs. Despite the initial support from men’s clubs, when it became apparent that a number of the female players were lesbian, Wedgwood’s participants reported that the men’s teams
became disinterested in supporting the women’s teams and some men were openly hostile, making homophobic and derogatory comments towards female players. Over time, administrative and financial issues developed between the men’s and women’s teams, and eventually each women’s team decided to cease their respective affiliations and exist independently from men’s clubs.

There was also a falling out between members of the Women’s League and their state sport governing body because the women felt that the umpires that the governing body supplied did not take refereeing women’s games seriously and did not strictly enforce the rules. The issue came to a head during a game in which a number of players had been injured, and the players walked off the field because they felt the negligent officiating compromised their safety. Wedgwood (2005) explained:

> It was the desire of the women footballers to be taken seriously and treated with respect that came to the fore. But for men’s football organizations to do this would be to undermine the increasingly important role that hyper-masculine sports such as Australian Rules football play in ritually celebrating and reproducing hegemonic masculinity. (p. 411)

Initially, the small group of women participating in Australian rules football who had, for the most part, never played the game before, was relatively non-threatening to hegemonic masculinity. As the women gained skills and confidence in their playing ability, they presented more of a threat.

Wedgwood (2005) noted, “While participation in male-dominated sports is much easier for women with the support and approval of men or men’s organizations, it can mean having to play on male-defined terms” (p. 398), which can be problematic for women; existing independently from men’s organizations may be(come) a more desirable
option. Some men may feel threatened by women participating in an activity that helps support male dominance in the gender order, which can potentially explain their lack of support, if not blatantly hostile reactions.

**Roller derby.** Women’s sports leagues, like Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League, can be constrained by trying to fit within and emulate pre-established, male-dominated sports. Roller derby provides an interesting case to study because its most recent incarnation (there have been various versions since the 1930s) as a contact sport played predominately by females emerged in the early 2000s, led by a group of women in the United States (Cohen & Barbee, 2010). Roller derby leagues are “skater owned and operated,” which means they are primarily “women owned and women operated” (Beaver, 2012, p. 42, emphasis in original). Leagues follow a “by the skaters, for the skaters” philosophy and embrace a “do-it-yourself” ethic (Donnelly, 2012). The Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), the main international governing body for the sport, explicitly included this “by the skaters, for the skaters” philosophy in their mission statement (WFTDA, n.d.b) and supported it with membership regulations that require all member leagues to be governed democratically in principle and practice (WFTDA, n.d.a). The regulations also specifically stipulate that leagues must

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14 Historically, both women and men participated in roller derby, but the current roller derby revival was led by women and features female participants (Cohen & Barbee, 2010). Men have only recently begun to take up the sport in both co-ed and men’s-only competitions (Men’s Roller Derby Association, n.d.; Murray, 2012).

15 Some leagues are limited liability companies owned by all members, while others are registered non-profit organizations with league members being “volunteers” rather than “owners” (Beaver, 2012).

16 Beaver (2012) pointed out that “do-it-yourself” misleadingly implies individualism, and suggested that “do-it-ourselves” better reflects the collectivist nature of roller derby.

17 Not all roller derby leagues are affiliated with WFTDA. A league, especially when first established, may not meet all of WFTDA’s membership criteria. There are also other governing bodies, like the Roller Derby Association of Canada (Roller Derby Association of Canada, n.d.).
be at least 51%-owned by skaters and 67%-managed by skaters (WFTDA, n.d.a). The three American leagues that Beaver (2012) examined (two of which were affiliated with WFTDA) all had a democratically elected board of directors to forward recommendations related to operational and financial aspects of the league, and league members voted on all major decisions. One of the leagues only allowed skaters to be “league members” while the other two leagues allowed “non-skaters” to be league members and to run for board of director positions.

Being “skater owned and operated,” Beaver (2012) explained, is technically a necessity since leagues do not bring in enough money to pay outside administrators, but it has become a valued aspect of roller derby culture. For some teams, skater control and democratic decision-making extended to even gameplay decisions, with team members providing their coaches with input about things like starting lineups and game strategy.

Though there are some downsides to having predominantly skater-run organizations, particularly the time commitment required to run a league and organize bouts in addition to actually practicing and competing, overall Beaver’s (2012) participants were satisfied with the skater-controlled structure of roller derby, especially those who were involved with the sport since it first started. Beaver explained that the original roller derby organization, run by four female non-skaters, was intended to be a profitable business; many skaters felt exploited and most of them eventually broke off to form their own league with the “by the skaters, for the skaters” philosophy, which served as the model for most other leagues in the burgeoning roller derby revival. Skaters believed that as active participants, they were best suited to make decisions about the sport. Additionally, they felt that since they risked their personal safety by playing roller derby, they deserved to decide what they were required to do in the sport, especially since
they are not financially compensated to play and getting injured could severely affect their everyday functioning, including fulfilling their paying jobs.

Roller derby is a unique sport because it is a female-dominated contact sport that is not trying to emulate a pre-existing male sport. Admittedly, the first roller derby league was hierarchical in structure and potentially exploitative for athletes, more in line with the dominant model of sport. Women have since created a space for themselves to collectively define and organize their sport participation experiences, though not in an explicitly feminist manner, like the lesbian, feminist softball league described next.

Lesbian, feminist softball league. While softball is a non-contact sport largely played by females, softball leagues can still follow the power and performance model of sport, which runs counter to feminist values. Lenskyj (1994) described a lesbian,\textsuperscript{18} feminist softball league in Toronto that was “organized explicitly on feminist principles of cooperation and noncompetiveness” (p. 366). It was a standalone league, not sanctioned by any sport governing body, and men were not permitted to be involved as coaches, umpires, or administrators. The league was participant-centred and had an “expressive, process-oriented approach” rather than the “instrumental, goal-oriented” approach common in many sports leagues (Lenskyj, 1994, p. 365). League rules focused on fun (players were assigned to teams based on skill level to create balanced teams), participation (a fair play rule required each player to play a minimum number of innings each game), and safety (there were rules to prevent collisions, including the use of safety bases\textsuperscript{19}). This league was in line with the pleasure and participation model, and existed

\textsuperscript{18} Lesbians and lesbian-positive women were welcome to play in the league (Lenskyj, 1994).

\textsuperscript{19} A safety base is designed to prevent collisions between the runner and their opponent on first base. It is located adjacent to the first base, and the runner runs to the safety base.
outside of sanctioned, dominant understandings of sport; its participants were creating a feminist alternative to “malestream” sports (Lenskyj, 1994, p. 366). Even when women’s sports do exist within the malestream, they can still differ from men’s versions of the sport through alternative rules, as detailed next.

**Female-specific sport rules.** Women’s sports are predominantly considered “less than” the male standard (Messner, 2002). A contributing factor to what Messner (2002) called the “ghettoization” (p. 138) of women’s sport is the adoption of female-specific rules that differ from men’s sport. Sometimes novel women’s leagues, like Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League, do use modified rules for the purpose of “accelerating skill development and reducing the likelihood of injuries resulting from inexperience” (p. 410). The Women’s League initially followed modified rules used by (male) junior and youth leagues including playing shorter quarters, using a smaller field, and having fewer players on the field. None of the rules, however, altered the contact or skill-related aspects of the game, as is seen in other contact sports like ice hockey (hereafter referred to as “hockey”) and lacrosse, where body contact is limited relative to the men’s versions of these sports (Poniatowski, 2011; Shipon, 2006; Theberge, 2000, 2003). Despite the reduced contact in women’s hockey, female players are still required to wear more equipment than men; women have to wear a helmet with a full face mask while men just have to wear a helmet with a visor in international competitions (Olympic, n.d.). In lacrosse, women wear less protective equipment than men (because body checking and excessive physical contact is prohibited in women’s lacrosse), but the

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*Rugby is one contact sport in which women and men play by the same rules, use the same equipment and wear the same uniforms (Ezzell, 2009).*
lacrosse sticks that female players use differ from those used by males; women’s sticks have a shallower pocket, which facilitates the limited contact in the women’s game by making it easier to stick check the ball out of the flatter pocket (Shipon, 2006). Female lacrosse players are often further differentiated from males by wearing kilts while competing (e.g., Ontario University Athletics, 2013), as are female field hockey players. The rules for women’s field hockey in Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) competitions even specify, “No shorts are to be obvious under the playing kilt when a player stands or generally plays the ball” (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2013b, p. 41).

The idea that women’s sports are “ghettoized” when they have rules that diverge from men’s sport indicates that men’s sport is the standard by which all sport is compared. Further, the different rules, as Poniatowski (2011) argued with regards to hockey, often uphold hegemonic masculinity and femininity by reinforcing the idea that women are weaker than men and are in need of minimized body contact and additional protection to reduce the chance of injury.

Conclusion. The hegemonic understanding of sport, the power and performance model, is understood to be “real” sport, as is men’s sport. There are, however, various possible ways to structure sport, including the pleasure and participation model. Looking at three women’s sport organizations further demonstrated the multiplicity of ways that sport can be structured. The women in Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League aligned themselves with existing, hegemonic (male) sport and sport organizations, and experienced challenges from men in doing so. Roller derby participants created their own contact sport with aspects of the power and performance model, in terms of the characteristics of the sport, and the pleasure and participation model, in terms of the democratic, skater-controlled organization. Another alternative is
to create a league outside of “malestream” sport that embodies the characteristics of the
pleasure and participation model, the lesbian, feminist softball league like examined by
Lenskyj (1994). When women do play malestream sports, female-specific sport rules are
sometimes adopted, facilitating the ghettoization of women’s sport (Messner, 2002),
which reinforces hegemonic masculinity and femininity by reinforcing men’s sport as the
standard and women are not capable of playing by the same rules as men. In my study, I
examined two women’s football leagues to see the ways in which they were structured,
including the models of sport that they followed and how their sport rules compared to
the hegemonic male version of the sport, and the factors that influenced their structures.

Sub-Question 2: Participants’ Experiences

What are athletes’ experiences playing in tackle football leagues in Canada?

Women have increasingly gained opportunities to participate in a wide range of
sports, but they have often experienced difficulty accessing traditionally male sports,
especially those that involve aggressive physical contact (Chase, 2002; Fields, 2005;
Theberge, 2003; Wedgwood, 2005). In this section I review the previous research about
women’s football, and key aspects of the studies in relation to my topic are identified and
further explored along with other related research on women’s sport.

Previous women’s football research. In this section, I summarize the five
contemporary studies about women’s football in the United States. They describe the
benefits and constraints to women’s participation (Carter, 2012; Migliaccio & Berg,
2007) and women’s motivations to get involved as well as the development and
maintenance of their identities as football players (Knapp, 2011, 2014), and how they
were able to resist institutionalized gender norms by playing football (Packard, 2009).
Benefits and constraints. Exploring the benefits and constraints to women’s football participation, Migliaccio and Berg (2007) interviewed American football players on two teams in California. Participants indicated that common benefits were teamwork and a sense of family, meeting a diverse group of women, and the physical nature of the game. Participation constraints included injuries, money, time, and a strain on personal relationships, often due to the time commitment playing football required. The players also described perceptions of the media and the general public as a constraint to their participation.

Building off Migliaccio and Berg (2007), Carter (2012) explored female-specific challenges to participating in football on the Cincinnati Sizzle in the Women’s Football Alliance. She examined players’ “body management,” defined as the “specific measures . . . taken to protect the body, and heal the body when hurt or injured” (p. 3), which included equipment selection, pain and injury management, and strength and conditioning. Although women’s body management was similar to male football players, “there are obstacles that transform the ways in which women must manage their bodies while playing this physically demanding sport” (p. 4). For instance, wearing proper-fitting football equipment is important to prevent injury. Many women, however, had difficulty finding equipment that fit properly, in part because football equipment is typically designed for males’ size and stature and can often be too large or ill-fitting and uncomfortable for women. This issue was compounded by players’ lack of knowledge of how their equipment should fit due to their lack of experience playing the sport.

Motivations to participate and identity formation and maintenance. In a third study, Knapp (2011) looked at what factors influenced players’ decisions to play football, and how they developed their identities as football players on a Midwestern IWFL team.
Common reasons for beginning to play included a love of football, a desire to be a part of history as pioneers in women’s football, and the physicality of football, which many felt was unrivaled by any other sport. Most of the women identified themselves as physical people before beginning to play football, and though none had played organized football prior to their involvement, they had previous athletic experience at the intercollegiate level in various sports. Personal attributes and sport backgrounds contributed to their identity development as football players, as did the support they received from significant others, and socialization through the coach and veteran players.

Knapp (2014) continued her previous examination by looking at how the players developed and maintained football player identities on their specific team. Of note, one characteristic that the players enacted was “play the right way,” which involved a sense of accountability to the team to be physically tough by playing “smash mouth football,” and being mentally tough through focus and a competitive spirit. The “right way” was to play as men do, so that no one would question their identities as football players. By playing football, women challenge gender norms, as examined in the next study.

**Resistance to institutionalized gender norms.** Using Schippers’ (2007) conceptualization of the gender order, Packard (2009) examined four conditions of resistance that allowed female football players from a team in the (now defunct) National Women’s Football Association in the United States to resist institutionalized gender norms. First, resistance must be intentional. Most players acknowledged that they were participating in an unconventional activity for females. The idea of being pioneers in the sport appealed to them, and it largely contributed to their decision to play and to continue playing football. Second, resistance must involve engaging in a deviant activity. Football is a deviant activity for women not only because the amount of physical contact involved
deviated from passive femininity, but also because the women immensely enjoyed the physical aspects of the sport; their desire for and enjoyment of physical contact is associated with hegemonic masculinity and thus challenged institutionalized gender norms. The players were proud that they could “hit as hard as any man” (Packard, 2009, p. 336). Third, the deviant activity must occur in an otherwise legitimate social context to avoid being stigmatized and dismissed. Packard asserted that players who fulfilled traditionally feminine roles of wife and mother while engaging in masculine behaviours as football players “embodied the . . . necessary juxtaposition of femininity and masculinity necessary for resistance” (p. 339). Finally, resistance requires a well-organized group to provide legitimacy. It is easier to dismiss one individual than to marginalize a group of individuals, including the players in the study who belonged to a team and league with “all the markers of a legitimate organization” (Packard, 2009, p. 343). These four conditions allowed women football players to resist institutionalized gender norms.

Some of the themes that run through women’s football research are identified below and related to other women’s sport research. They include physicality in sport, community, reactions of others, and media coverage and representations.

**Physicality in sport.** Female football players consistently cited physicality and aggressiveness as an appealing aspect of playing the sport (Carter, 2012; Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009). Hitting, specifically, was important to the players, as Packard (2009) commented, “Hitting is inextricably linked to the way these women experience the game. Without it, the game would not be the same, and they would not feel the same way about it” (p. 331). The appeal of physicality and aggression was also expressed by female participants of other team contact sports, including hockey.
(Gilenstam, Karp, and Hendriksson-Larsén, 2008; Theberge, 2000, 2003), rugby (Chase, 2006; Chu et al., 2003; Ezzell, 2009; O’Hanley, 1998), roller derby (Cotterill, 2010), and Australian rules football (Wedgwood, 2004). Some football players felt that hitting was “a good stress reliever,” as one participant put it (Knapp, 2011, p. 43), and rugby and roller derby participants similarly felt that their sports provided an “outlet” for their aggression and physicality (Chase, 2006; Cotterill, 2010). Football players enjoyed engaging in aggressive physical contact in an activity that was previously not available to women, and doing something (hitting people) that was generally not allowed (Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007), as did hockey players (Gilenstam et al., 2008). Some players felt that they were generally physical people (Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007), and some of Chase’s (2006) rugby players felt that they had previously been perceived as having been “too physical” (p. 237) in other sports. Overall, women valued the opportunity that contact sports provided them to be physical.

**Community.** Participation on sports teams can provide women with a sense of community and belonging (Beaver, 2012; Cotterill, 2010; Ezzell, 2009; O’Hanley, 1998), which was the case with Migliaccio and Berg’s (2007) football participants, who described their team as a family. Teams can also provide a support group necessary for women participating in traditionally male-dominated activities like football, who might face stigmatization outside of the sport (Packard, 2009). The sport of football itself necessitates teamwork to be successful, and participants developed trust in their teammates (Migliaccio and Berg, 2007). Similarly, Carle and Nauright (1999) attributed the close friendships that developed between rugby participants off the field to the teamwork and bodily sacrifice required on the field to succeed in the sport.
Reactions of others. Migliaccio and Berg’s (2007) football players reported that the reactions of others were a constraint to their participation. The large time commitment that football participation required put a strain on some players’ relationships with significant others, as was also seen with Gilenstam et al.’s (2008) hockey players. As a result, some football participants felt that they might have to quit in the future, and they shared stories about teammates who had quit or whose romantic relationships ended because of football. Some people, especially parents, expressed concern about players getting injured playing football and rugby (Baird, 2010; Carle & Nauright, 1999; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007). One football player did not even tell her family that she played because she predicted that they would disapprove. Players sometimes experienced negative reactions from people outside their social networks, who expressed such sentiments as, “women can’t play football” (p. 282).

Media coverage and representations. Migliaccio and Berg (2007) reported that perceptions of the media were a constraint to their participants’ football involvement. For instance, a sports editor of a local newspaper for one team refused to publish more than one article per season about women’s football because he (or she) did not consider it to be a real professional sport and readers had previously complained that one article was too much coverage. In another instance, the photograph accompanying an article about one team featured the “more attractive members” (Migliaccio & Berg, 2007, p. 282), as identified by the team owner, wearing only their jerseys and high heels. Some players questioned the sexualized portrayal, while others thought that it was acceptable. Many studies about women’s sport participation merely mentioned the lack of media coverage that they received, but did not discuss representations that did occur (Gilenstam et al., 2008; Theberge, 2000). Carle and Nauright (1999) did note that women’s rugby was often
portrayed as a “novelty event” (p. 132). Similarly, roller derby participants’ biggest criticism of the media coverage for their sport was that roller derby was largely presented as a spectacle, rather than as sport (Cotterill, 2010).

**Conclusion.** Previous football research indicated that football players consistently expressed enjoyment of the physicality involved with playing the sport. Additionally, the feeling of community amongst teammates was an important and positive aspect of their participation. These two benefits were found for other contact sport participants as well. Two constraints to women’s football participation included reactions from others and media coverage and representations. In my study, I examined the positive and negative aspects of women’s football participation, and I asked players about others’ reactions to their participation as well as their own perceptions of media coverage and representations of themselves and their leagues.

**Sub-Question 3: Media Representations**

*How are women’s tackle football leagues and players represented in the Canadian media?*

The media plays a significant role in shaping “meanings and values assigned to sporting events, while at the same time trivializing or ignoring others” (Martyn, 2003, p. 159). Most people experience sport through media (Jhally, 1989), and the media routinely trivializes and disregards female athletic accomplishments. As in all other aspects of sport, males dominate sports media as producers, commentators, and journalists, as well as the subjects themselves (Hie, 2005; King, 2007; Pedersen, Whisenant, & Schneider, 2003; Messner & Cooky, 2010). Robinson (2002) asserted that male journalists ignore female athletic accomplishments “they would never overlook if men were achieving them” (p. 92). The underrepresentation of women’s sports and female athletes in the
media is well documented, with females consistently receiving significantly less media coverage relative to males (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Clavio & Eagleman, 2011; Crossman, Vincent, & Speed, 2007; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2008; Messner & Cooky, 2010; Pedersen et al., 2003; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). Qualitative media analyses have also revealed gender disparities in the ways that female sport is covered in comparison to male sport. The media commonly marginalizes and trivializes female athletes in a number of ways, as described below.

**Infantilization.** Adult female athletes are infantilized when they are referred to as “girls,” “young ladies” and other diminutives, while adult male athletes are rarely called “boys” (Hie, 2005; Jones, 2004; Vande Berg & Projansky, 2003; Weiller & Higgs, 1999; Wright & Clarke, 1999). Female athletes are also referred to by their first names more often than male athletes (Duncan, 2006; Koivula, 1999; Weiller & Higgs, 1999). Duncan (2006) explained that the use of female athletes’ first names suggests a subordinate status in a “hierarchy of naming” (p. 242) whereby children and subordinates are commonly referred to by their first names while those in dominant positions (often men) are addressed using their titles and last names (e.g., “Mr. Smith”).

**Sexualization.** The sexualization of female athletes was found to be common in media studies done in the early 2000s (Fink & Kensicki, 2002), including through sexualized imagery (Davis, 2001). Davis (2001) explained that photographs may “deliberate[ly] focus on particular, sexually significant body parts for the purpose of sexual titillation” (p. 247), or emphasize body postures that are intended to be sexually titillating. Photograph captions may also contribute to sexualization by indicating, often through wordplay, that the image is meant to be a “moment . . . of sexualized comic
relief” (Davis, 2001, p. 247). Sexual humour related to women and women’s sport was also common in television sportscasts; Eastman and Billings (2000) noted the “comic or sexy coverage” and “predominately sarcastic tone” (p. 210) used by sportscasters on the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) when covering women’s sports and suggested that such coverage was a way of disparaging women’s sports. Messner, Duncan, and Cooky (2003) found that, out of the marginal coverage that women received, a number of stories were “a gag feature or a story on a marginal, but visually entertaining, pseudosport” (p. 41). Examples included a nude female bungee jumper and a female World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) wrestler who posed for *Playboy*. There was also “the (often humorous) sexual objectification of athlete women and nonathlete women” (Messner et al., 2003, p. 41), like tennis player Anna Kournikova or bikini-clad female spectators at baseball games. Duncan and Messner (2005) may have even used lingerie football as an example of sexualized coverage; they mentioned a news story about “a promotional ‘football game’ in which the women players would compete while wearing lingerie” (p. 15), though they did not explicitly refer the Lingerie Bowl (which preceded the LFL and took place around the year of the study).

**Heterosexuality and other appropriate female behaviour.** Female athletes’ sexuality, specifically their “compulsory heterosexuality” (Wright & Clarke, 1999), is highlighted when they are depicted fulfilling traditionally heterosexual roles like mother and wife or girlfriend of males (Messner & Cooky, 2010; Poniatowski, 2008; Vande Berg & Projansky, 2003; Weiller & Higgs, 1999). Additionally, media coverage commonly emphasizes physical and emotional characteristics displayed by female athletes that are traditionally associated with femininity, like being graceful and being cooperative rather than competitive (Christopherson, Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Fink & Kensicki, 2002;
Further, media coverage often overrepresents female “appropriate” sports (e.g., individual, aesthetic) and underrepresents female “inappropriate” sports (e.g., team, contact) (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002; Kim, Sagas, & Walker, 2010; Koivula, 1999; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Focusing on heterosexuality and other “appropriate” female behaviour enacted by female athletes reinforces hegemonic femininity, and suggests that feminine roles are more important than athletic identities (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Vande Berg & Projansky, 2003).

(Male) Others as experts. Two studies have provided examples where others, besides female athletes themselves, were portrayed as experts and able to speak on behalf of sportswomen. In Vande Berg and Projansky’s (2003) examination of televised men’s and women’s professional basketball games, they noted that women’s athletic successes, unlike men’s, were frequently presented “as primarily the result of listening to the strategic advice of (often male) experts, not the result of sportswomen using their own intelligence, knowledge of the game, or competent physical enactment of athletic strength and skill” (p. 33). In Hie’s (2005) analysis of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s television features of athletes during the 2004 Olympics, she found that male athletes always spoke for themselves, while female athletes were more often represented through interviews with others, like coaches, family, and friends.

Gender marking and comparisons to males. Gender marking frequently occurs for women’s, but not men’s, sport, by specifying that the athletes on a team or participating in a sporting event are female (Koivula, 1999; Weiller & Higgs, 1999). Sports team names, for instance, can be gender marked in a variety of ways, including prefixing team names with “Lady” or adding feminine suffixes like “ette” (Eitzen & Zinn,
such as the Capital Area Lady Gladiators in the MWFL. In National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) college basketball, the women’s tournament is gender marked as the “Women’s Final Four,” while the men’s version of the tournament is simply called the “Final Four,” which indicates that men’s sport is the standard and makes women’s sport sound “derivative, a poor cousin to the real deal” (Duncan, 2006, p. 247).

Further, men’s sport as the standard often frames interpretations of women’s sport (Bruce, 1998). Comparisons between female athletes and their sports to male athletes and men’s sports are frequent (Hie, 2005; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999; Kian et al., 2008; Pirinen, 1997; Poniatowski, 2011; Poniatowski & Hardin, 2012; Vande Berg & Projansky, 2003; Weiller & Higgs, 1999). Wensing and Bruce (2003) asserted that comparisons between males and females, as well as a focus on non-sport factors like appearance, personality, relationships and personal life (see also Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hie, 2005; Pirinen, 1997), “demeans female performance and reinforces the idea that, for women, sports performance and success are secondary to other things, including male sporting success” (p. 388).

**Exceptions to the norm.** It is important to note that exceptions to the common representations described above do exist. Wensing and Bruce (2003) argued that national identity can sometimes override gender as the “primary media framing device” (p. 387), especially in large international events like the Olympics; members of the media disregard the traditional ways of framing female athletes in favour of representing them as strong national symbols (see also Bruce, 2008). Wensing and Bruce pointed to media coverage of Australian runner Cathy Freeman at the 2000 Sydney Olympics to illustrate this point, because the traditional practice of gender marking women’s, but not men’s,
events was reversed in this instance; Freeman’s race was widely referred to as “the 400m,” while the men’s race was typically gender marked. Wensing and Bruce explained, “To Australians, there was only one 400m at the Olympics, and Cathy Freeman was in it” (p. 391). This privileging of national identity could explain why female athletes, generally ignored in the everyday reporting of sports (Messner & Cooky, 2010), typically receive an increased quantity of coverage at events like the Olympics (Poniatowski, 2011), often proportionally similar to coverage of male athletes (Eastman & Billings, 1999; King, 2007; Tuggle, Huffman, & Rosengard, 2007; Tuggle & Owen, 1999; Vincent et al., 2002).

**Promising changes.** Studies of various university campus media indicate some positive changes in the ways that female athletes are represented. For instance, Kane and Buysse’s (2005) longitudinal analysis of the photographs on media guide covers for NCAA Division IA sports noted “an unmistakable shift towards representations of women as serious athletes and a sharp decline in gender differences” (p. 214) in the way female athletes were represented compared to male athletes. In an examination of two student newspapers at a Canadian university, MacKay and Dallaire (2009) found that female athletes not only received more coverage than male athletes in terms of the number of articles and photographs, but females were not sexualized and were rarely trivialized. They suggested that the younger generation of university students reporting for the newspapers, who grew up with both males and females playing sport, may have ‘redefined the language of athleticism as a ‘sports vocabulary’ rather than a ‘gendered sports vocabulary’” (p. 36).

In televised sports programs and events, Duncan (2006) noted one area of progress; sportscasters and commentators “are becoming less likely to attribute failures to
women’s lack of talent and more likely to attribute successes to women’s skill and
strength—in short, to their agency—in proportions that match the attributions of men’s
failures and successes” (p. 248) (see also Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000). Messner and
Cooky (2010) also noted a decrease in sarcastic and sexualized television coverage of
females on select American newscasts.

Exceptions to the changes. Despite some positive trends towards more equitable
coverage, both quantitatively and qualitatively, there are often “buts” related to these
results (Bernstein, 2002). For instance, female athletes at the 1996 Olympics received
almost the same amount of airtime as male athletes in the National Broadcasting
Company’s television broadcast, but the majority of coverage for females was of socially
acceptable individual female sports, like gymnastics and diving (Tuggle & Owen,
1999). Female athletes received more coverage than male athletes in two Canadian
campus newspapers, but male athletes were more likely to be featured on the front page
(MacKay & Dallaire, 2009). There was a decrease in sexualized American television
coverage of female athletes, but “this may in part reflect that women in any form were
increasingly absent from the broadcasts” (Messner & Cooky, 2010, p. 5), since the
amount of American television coverage of female athletes reached an all-time low in the
20-year history of the Gender in Televised Sports report, from 5.0% in 1989 to 1.6% in
2009. These “buts” indicate the continued presence of traditional gender ideologies as
well as the value associated with women’s sport; females athletes are expected to
conform to traditional gender ideals by participating in “feminine” sports, while men’s

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21 Vincent et al.’s (2007) study of American, British and Canadian newspaper coverage of
the 1996 Olympics contradicted Tuggle and Owen’s (1999) finding; they did not find that
the majority of coverage for female athletes was in socially acceptable individual sports.
sport is more culturally valued and thus featured as front-page news and on televised sports news and highlights shows.

**Women’s football media analysis.** Analysis of women’s football coverage is limited to Knapp’s (2013) examination of media related to the LFL for a two-year period when the league began in the United States in 2009. Knapp argued that the “level of sexual objectification of the women in the [LFL] was comparable to soft porn” (p. 8). Sexual objectification was the most dominant theme of her analysis, which was evident through sexualized team names, such as the Los Angeles Temptation and San Diego Seduction, and discussions of girl-on-girl action. The ways that the league was described (e.g., “a tease masquerading in football,” p. 9), the focus on the uniforms, and sexualized fantasies about the players suggested that the players were merely objects of male desire and reinforced the league as “just another form of soft porn.” The second most common theme was that “real women play lingerie football,” where “real” women were beautiful and played lingerie football. Female football players in other leagues as well as female athletes in other sports were portrayed as unattractive and unfeminine. Third, “men take care of business” in the LFL by dominating positions of authority including coach, founder, and owner. Fourth, the league was “promoting white-defined beauty” by focusing on white, and especially blonde, women in their promotional materials including calendars, posters, and other merchandise. Though there were women of colour in the league, the majority of the LFL players were white and overrepresented in marketing materials. Finally, many of the players expressed “narratives of empowerment,” because they were able to meet the athletic demands of a male-dominated sport. Overall, Knapp asserted that media representations of the LFL and its players supported dominant cultural notions of femininity.
**Conclusion.** There has been progress in some areas of media representations of female athletes, such as coverage during the Olympics. Many studies, however, still show significant evidence of a consistent marginalization and trivialization of female athletes through underrepresentation, infantilization, sexualization, a focus on heterosexual roles and feminine characteristics, reliance on (male) others as experts, gender marking, and comparisons with males and men’s sport. Competent female athletes challenge men’s dominance in not only sport but in the gender order; thus, representing women in these ways attempts to minimize the impact of their challenge. Knapp (2013) found that representations of the LFL and its participants reinforced traditional notions of femininity. I examined the ways that women’s football, a “masculine,” female “inappropriate” sport, and female football players are represented in the Canadian media and compared those patterns to the research findings.
CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methods

In this chapter I review my research design and methods, the reliability and validity of my study, and its delimitations and limitations.

Research Design and Methods

I used participant-observation and observation to gather preliminary observations of the LFL and the WWCFL, and I collected data through interviews and documents, including league documents and newspaper articles.

Participant-observation and observation. I participated in a tryout for the LFL’s Toronto Triumph in April 2012, and I also attended a game in Toronto in October 2012 between the Triumph and the BC Angels. These experiences allowed me to observe the league’s operation and generate questions for my interviews. I attended two WWCFL practices, one each for both teams in my sample. After one practice, I also went to a restaurant with a number of participants on one team and some of their friends. Unfortunately due to the timing of my data collection coupled with geographic constraints, I was not able to attend a WWCFL game. Through these experiences, I gained experiential knowledge that contributed to my understanding of the leagues.

Interviews. I conducted semi-structured interviews with WWCFL administrators (no LFL administrators responded to my interview requests) as well as players from the WWCFL and LFL. I used open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the league structures and the players’ experiences in their leagues. Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to “solicit individual’s feelings, experiences or knowledge(s)” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 81). I interviewed WWCFL administrators to learn about the league structure including league rules and policies, schedule of the season, rules of the
game, and the recruitment process to understand the context in which the players played football, and the factors that have shaped the league’s development (see Appendix C). I spoke with players to learn what they did and did not enjoy about their participation, the ways they perceived themselves and players in their league and the other league, along with their interactions with the media and their perceptions of how the media and others perceived them and their leagues (see Appendix D). In interviews with LFL players, I also asked questions about the league’s structure since I was not able to speak with any LFL administrators.

Participant recruitment and selection. The number of participants needed for qualitative research varies between studies, but the main consideration is the number of participants necessary to answer the research question(s) (Markula & Silk, 2011). The researcher’s resources and time are also important considerations, and Markula and Silk (2011) suggested that a sample of 10 or fewer participants could be appropriate for a master’s thesis. I interviewed a total of 10 people: two WWCFL administrators, and eight players with four from each league.

WWCFL. I recruited the WWCFL administrators through e-mail (see Appendix E). They had extensive involvement in women’s football in Western Canada and in the development of the WWCFL, and I had previously interviewed them in 2009 for an undergraduate paper about women’s football in Canada.

A WWCFL administrator helped with the WWCFL player recruitment process. She forwarded a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix F) to the team administrators for the two Saskatchewan teams in the league, who then forwarded the e-mail to the players on their teams. The players were instructed to e-mail me if they were interested in participating, which ensured that administrators did not know which players responded
and who I ultimately interviewed. I set a date by which players had to respond, and fifteen players responded by the date, nine from one team and six from the other. I randomly selected two interview participants from each team by pulling names out of a hat.

LFL. There are only a few LFL administrators, and I approached them through e-mail (when e-mail addresses were publicly available) and Facebook, but I did not receive any responses. I then contacted LFL Canada coaches through the same channels, but I did not receive responses from them either. Ultimately, I did not interview any LFL administrators or coaches.

Recruiting LFL players was a challenging, almost yearlong process. I started recruiting in March 2013; I did not conduct my first interview until September 2013, and my final interview was in December 2013. Since I could not recruit LFL players through league administrators, as I did for the WWCFL, I contacted players directly, mostly through Facebook but occasionally by e-mail, whenever possible. I received two responses from two players; one player apologized that she could not participate because, “I was requested by the League not to give you any further Information [sic] at this time.” A second player said that she would be happy to participate, but she would first have to receive clearance from the league to do so. She did not get back in touch with me, so I assumed that she was also told not to contact me. After I received these responses, I focused on recruiting players who were no longer playing in the LFL, and then the 2013 LFL Canada season was cancelled so none of the players were returning to the league for the season. A few of my colleagues knew LFL players, so they forwarded a recruitment e-mail to their LFL contacts on my behalf that asked interested participants to contact me directly to set up an interview (see Appendix G). I was eventually able to conduct interviews with four players by directly contacting them or having a colleague contact
them, and then through snowball sampling. Three other players contacted me expressing interest in participating, but they did not respond to my follow up communications to set up interviews. An additional two players told my colleagues that they were interested in participating, but they did not actually contact me. I did not want potential participants to feel pressured to participate in an interview, so I did not have my colleagues follow up with them.

Player recruitment criteria. There were three recruitment criteria for players. All players had to be at least 18 years of age so that they could legally consent to their participation. They had to have played in at least one game in their respective league to ensure that they were veteran players rather than rookies who may have never played in a football game before. Finally, participants must have only played football in a league in Canada. I included the last criterion to exclude the LFL US players who played on LFL Canada teams, because they did not fully participate in all aspects of the LFL Canada, notably team practices and team promotional events; they flew in and spent as little as one day with their teams prior to games (Trembath, 2012e).

Interview participants. Background information about the WWCFL administrators and players and LFL players is described below, including basic demographic information, previous sport experience, previous administration experience, if applicable, and involvement in their respective leagues. When reporting results, I shared as much information about participants as I believed was necessary to provide context for their responses without compromising their identities. Protecting the identities of my participants was my foremost concern, especially given the small population size of both leagues, and particularly the LFL. Between the two WWCFL teams in my sample, there were approximately 90 players (though some of them would have been rookies and
thus ineligible for my study). By presenting their background information in aggregate form, I felt that their identities were protected. The number of LFL Canada participants eligible to participate was approximately 50. Given the amount of exposure that the LFL and its players received, I felt that LFL players could be more easily identified than WWCFL players, even by people outside of the league like fans, so I provided extremely limited background information about them. Although the number of WWCFL administrators is very small (there have only been eight since the league’s inception), both administrators told me during their interviews that I could identify them by name if I wanted, which I did not do (as per my Research Ethics Board application) but I was able to provide more background information about them than I would have otherwise felt able to share.

WWCFL administrators. The two administrators were in their forties, they were involved in the establishment of the WWCFL, and they were members of the inaugural Executive Board. Prior to the formation of the WWCFL, both were involved in the teams in their respective cities as both players and administrators. After their two-year terms as Executive Board members, they continued their involvement in the league as administrators for their respective teams. One participant was solely an administrator while the other was also a player.

Both administrators had experience in various sports in public school\textsuperscript{22} and at the community level, and one administrator had competed in two sports at a national level. The sports that they had played were all team sports. One administrator had wanted to play football as a child, but her mother would not allow her to play, even though her

\textsuperscript{22} By “public school” I mean school from grades one through 12; participants variously referred to playing sports in “elementary school,” “junior high school,” and “high school.”
brother played and her father was a coach. She began playing touch football in a community league during her adolescence because it was the only type of football available to females at the time. She was extensively involved in the football community in her city and province as a player, administrator, and coach for different types of football, including touch, flag, and tackle, and at various levels (i.e., community, provincial, national, international) for both males and females. Though the other administrator had extensive sport participation experience, she did not have any football or sport administration experience prior to her involvement in football.

**WWCFL players.** The four WWCFL players ranged from their early twenties to late thirties. All participants were employed, including one post-secondary student who was employed part-time. One participant was married and had a child. A player on each team had played in the WWCFL for one season and the other two had played two seasons. One player from each team played on defense and the other two were on offense, though two participants (also one from each team) had experience playing both offense and defense. All four players were preparing to play in the 2013 season at the time of the interviews, though two players, one from each team, had injuries (one football-related and the other from a previous injury not caused by football) that may have prevented them from fully participating in the season. Three participants were currently or previously involved in an administrative capacity on their respective teams.

All players had previous sport experience in a range of sports, though predominately team sports. They had played a variety of sports in public school, such as basketball, volleyball, and track, and one participant had played a sport at a collegiate level. Three participants were also involved in sports leagues in their communities during their childhood, and three participants were playing on at least one sports team prior to
joining their respective football teams. One player had competed at a national level in one sport.

Half of the players played touch football in a community league, and one participant had played football on her high school team. Another participant said that she had wanted to play on her high school football team, but she decided to continue her involvement in a more socially acceptable sport for females that she could continue playing after high school; she did not foresee the same future opportunity to play football. She also said that she decided not to play because she did not want to “deal with” discrimination that she believed she would face as the sole female on a male team in a male-dominated sport. In addition to the participant who played high school football, two other participants had experience playing contact sports prior to joining the WWCFL.

**LFL players.** The four LFL players were in their twenties or thirties. Three players had been planning to play in the 2013 LFL Canada season prior to its cancellation. Two of these players said that they would play in the league again if it returned to Canada in the future, and the third said that she would not play. The fourth player had decided after playing in the first season that she would not return to the league. All participants were involved in sports growing up in school and/or at the community level, some at an elite level. Some participants had experience playing non-tackle football prior to playing in the LFL. None of the participants had prior football experience, but some had played contact sports.

**Interview process.** Interviews took place after I obtained ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor. All interviews were confidential and I did not include any identifying information when reporting and discussing my results to protect the anonymity of the participants. Interviews were either in person (n=6) or over
the telephone (n=4). I tried to conduct the interviews in person, whenever possible, to help build rapport with the participants (Amis, 2005). The interviews took place at a time and location, if applicable, of the participants’ choice. Before each interview, I provided participants with a letter of information (see Appendix H), consent form (see Appendix I), and consent form for audio recording (see Appendix J). When interviews took place in person, participants provided written consent by signing the consent forms. Telephone interview participants provided a statement of consent through e-mail. All participants allowed me to audio record their interviews.

Analysis. I reviewed the audio recordings of the interviews with administrators and players and transcribed them verbatim into a Word document. Transcribing the interviews allowed me become familiar with the data, which helped with interpretation (Amis, 2005). I uploaded the documents into NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software and coded and analyzed the transcriptions. I looked at how the leagues were structured and what factors influenced their structure and players’ experiences within the leagues. I identified emergent key themes and created subthemes for each theme to address sub-questions one and two.

Textual analysis. Given that written communication is a predominant form of communication in contemporary society, textual analysis has become a popular method of analysis to interpret the content and meaning of preexisting texts (Markula & Silk, 2011). I conducted qualitative textual analyses of two types of written communication: league documents and newspaper articles.

League document analysis. Participants provided me with league documents, like the WWCFL By-laws, which outlined league policies, procedures, and codes of conduct. I obtained a copy of the rule book that the WWCFL follows through Football Canada. I
also relied on material published online, like the LFL’s press releases. Using a document analysis helped triangulate my interview data about the leagues’ structures.

**Media analysis.** I used newspaper articles for my media analysis, though there are many sources of media from which to choose. Newspapers are a popular source of information and they have a large potential reach, especially by publishing their content online. ProQuest Canadian Newsstand Complete database was used to access newspaper articles. Canadian Newsstand is one of the world’s largest newspaper collections; it is updated daily and offers full text access to almost 300 Canadian newspapers (Canadian Newsstand, n.d.).

I used the search term “lingerie football” to access articles about the LFL. I set my search query to include articles beginning on January 1, 2012, because the LFL started announcing the teams for its Canadian league that month, and to search until December 1, 2012, which was two weeks after the inaugural LFL Canada season ended. For articles related to the WWCFL, I used the following search terms: “Western Women’s Canadian Football League,” “Alberta Female Football League,” “Calgary Rage,” “Calgary Rockies,” “Edmonton Storm,” and “Manitoba Fearless.” Though the first WWCFL season took place in 2011, women have been playing football in Western Canada since the early 2000s, first on the Calgary Rockies (which was later disbanded and the Calgary Rage formed), followed by the Edmonton Storm and Manitoba Fearless and then in the Alberta Female Football League. I believe the above search terms provided a more complete picture of media and public perceptions of women’s football in Canada, which has existed for a decade in Western Canada. Further, the number of articles about the LFL greatly outnumbered the number of results using the search term “Western Women’s Canadian Football League.” Adding additional search terms about the relevant football
opportunities in Western Canada that preceded the WWCFL increased the number of articles related to the league included in the analysis. When conducting the searches for WWCFL-related articles, I did not set a date limiting the earliest article because I wanted to include as many articles as possible, and I limited the most recent articles to July 28, 2012, two weeks after the 2012 WWCFL season ended.

It seems to be common practice for newspapers to have a number of sports-related topics in one article. For instance, an article titled “Blue Jays will host camp at Optimist Park” (Anonymous, 2011) has ten different brief sports stories. Out of the 744 words, 63 words are about the WWCFL. Taking into consideration my time and resources, I delimited my study to articles in which 50% or more of the words in each article were about either league. I also excluded duplicate results (e.g., the same article in two different newspapers), irrelevant results (e.g., articles about the LFL US, not LFL Canada), and non-article results (e.g., table of contents that referenced a LFL article in the issue). Using these exclusion criteria, I included 78 out of 159 WWCFL-related articles and 152 out of 491 LFL articles in my media analysis.

After conducting searches in Canadian Newsstand using the previously described search terms, I copied and pasted each search result into a Word document, including the headline, article and, if applicable, photograph caption(s). (The database did not provide copies of images that accompanied articles, but did indicate the presence of photographs and the accompanying captions, if applicable.) I uploaded the document into NVivo and coded and analyzed the newspaper articles to examine the ways that women’s football and female football players were represented. I identified emergent key themes and created subthemes for each theme to address sub-question three.
Reliability and Validity

Reliability is present when “the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). It is important to have clearly defined codes and to constantly compare the data with the codes throughout the coding process to ensure that codes are applied consistently (Gibbs, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009), which I endeavoured to do by having a description of each code. For example, I coded phrases as “entertainment” when they suggested that women’s football was entertainment or a performance or made references to spectators.

Validity means that the results “accurately represent the phenomena to which they refer and . . . are backed by evidence” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 267). Creswell (2009) presented a number of strategies to ensure validity in qualitative research that I adopted in my study, which I describe in this paragraph. Triangulation uses data from different sources to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). In my study, I used interviews, league documents, and newspaper articles to answer my main research question, and this convergence of sources adds to its validity. Before beginning research, it was important for me to reflect on my background, because it shapes every stage of the research project from choosing a topic and formulating interview questions to interpreting the data and writing the results. I included my reflections (see Appendix K) to help clarify my biases as a researcher. When writing the results, I used two strategies. The first was to use rich, thick descriptions to express the results, which Stake (2010) described as detailed description (rich) that connects to theory (thick). Second, I discussed information that was contrary to the themes presented, which acknowledged that not all data fit perfectly into the themes.
Delimitations and Limitations

My research was delimited to two women’s football leagues in Canada, the WWCFL and LFL, and further delimited to two teams within the WWCFL. My study is not meant to be generalized to other women’s teams, leagues, or sports but to contribute to an understanding of women’s sport organizations, sport experiences, and media representations. Other limitations and delimitations are outlined below.

Sample. A limitation of my sampling method for players is that interested participants had to contact me to set up an interview. Certain people, like those who are outgoing and passionate about women’s football, might have been more likely to volunteer to participate than players who, for instance, are introverted and less invested in the sport. Thus, the former group of players may have been more likely to respond to my e-mail than the latter group. The purpose of my sampling method, however, was to ensure anonymity so that the administrators in the WWCFL and my colleagues, who forwarded my recruitment e-mail, would not know who I interviewed. I considered this to be of upmost importance because I wanted interview participants to feel comfortable expressing their opinions without the concern of being identified or potentially facing sanctions.

The newspaper articles used in my media analysis were delimited to Canadian newspapers from one database. I recognize that there may be articles from newspapers that were not available through this database because it included only newspaper articles published by mainstream newspaper chains (e.g., Postmedia Network, Torstar) and did not include the wealth of other media forms that contribute to media representations of women’s football, such as blogs and social media. Content analyses that investigate how female athletes are portrayed through online media are emerging (Jones, 2004, 2006), but
that is a topic for future study. For my present research, I believe that Canadian Newsstand database provided a comprehensive data set to answer sub-question three.

The newspaper articles were further delimited to articles in which 50% or more of the words in each article were about either league. While the articles in which less than 50% of the words were about the leagues would have likely added interesting insights to my analysis, the time constraints to completing my thesis, given the other data I collected and analyzed, made this delimitation necessary.

A number of the articles included in my sample were written by a small number of journalists such as Greg Harder and Sean Trembath, whose articles typically appeared in Regina’s Leader Post and Saskatoon’s Star Phoenix, respectively. Thus, the same people provided a large amount of media coverage for the WWCFL and LFL Canada, limiting the diversity of opinions expressed about both leagues.

**Methods.** A general limitation of a media analysis is that it “only highlights the current situation and does not explain why” (Grau, Rosselli, & Taylor, 2007, p. 64). After conducting my media analysis, as the researcher, I could only theorize about why the results occurred. Another limitation of media analyses is that multiple interpretations are possible for every media text and are influenced by consumers’ backgrounds and the sociocultural context in which they reside (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). As a consumer, I may have not only interpreted the text differently than intended by the media producer, but differently than other audience members as well. Media analyses do not examine the audience’s interpretation of the media content (Bruce, 1998; Kane & Maxwell, 2011). To offset this limitation, my study assessed the administrators’ and players’ interpretations of media coverage about their respective leagues.
CHAPTER 4

Results: League Structures

How are women’s tackle football leagues structured in Canada?

The following five themes about the leagues’ structures are described in this chapter: purpose, distribution of power, alignment with existing (male) football organizations, safety, and time-consuming commitment. These themes emerged through analysis of interview transcripts with WWCFL administrators and players from the WWCFL and LFL as well as league documents, including WWCFL By-laws and LFL press releases, and media about the leagues.

Purpose

The WWCFL and LFL have fundamentally different purposes. The WWCFL is a non-profit amateur sports league designed to provide women with opportunities to play football. The LFL is a for-profit sport entertainment business that uses women’s football as a means of making money. Though the LFL is a business, it is not technically a professional sports league because its players are not paid.23 The WWCFL is more participant-centred, while the LFL is necessarily spectator-centred.

Slogans, mission statements, and logos. The leagues’ slogans, mission statements, and logos demonstrate a difference between the two leagues’ purposes. The WWCFL’s slogan is, “Breaking stereotypes, one yard, one tackle, one touchdown at a time” and the logo features the silhouette of a player catching a football (WWCFL, n.d.a). The silhouette does not have any features that indicate that the player is a female, such as a ponytail or long hair.

23 When the LFL first began in the United States in 2009, the players initially received financial compensation, but the LFL eventually ceased paying players in March 2011 (Li, 2011c).
The LFL’s slogan, mission statement and logo have changed since the 2012 LFL Canada season. Even the league’s name changed—from the Lingerie Football League to Legends Football League—when the LFL’s founder, owner, and commissioner Mitchell (Mitch) Mortaza, announced the league’s major rebranding effort in January 2013 (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013). The LFL’s original slogan was “True Fantasy Football” (Lingerie Football League, 2012a), presumably for spectators, as the mission statement on the league’s website declared, “The Lingerie Football League has become the Ultimate Fan-Driven Live Sports Phenomenon - Blending Action, Impact and Beauty” (Lingerie Football League, 2012b). The LFL’s new slogan is “Women of the Gridiron” (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 14), and the website no longer has a mission statement. The logo prior to the rebrand had the letters “LFL” flanked by a female silhouette on either side, and now the redesigned logo has the “LFL” lettering within a crest that does not include the “sexy female figures” from the previous version (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 12). In the LFL’s press release announcing the changes, Mortaza explained:

We have now reached a crossroad of gaining credibility [sic] as a sport or continuing to be viewed as a gimmick. In the coming years we will further establish this sport in the US, Australia, Europe and Asia as the most known form of American football globally. In order to reach the next milestone, we feel the focus has to be the sport and our amazing athletes. (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 9)

**Understandings of the WWCFL’s purpose.** Administrators and players echoed the WWCFL’s slogan of “breaking stereotypes.” They believed that the WWCFL’s purpose, first and foremost, was to provide opportunities for women to play football, a
sport from which they have historically been excluded. As one player stated, the purpose was to “give women an opportunity to play a sport . . . that they haven’t been able to before. For, you know, for whatever reasons. Society, how society views women playing male . . . dominated sports.” By providing women with opportunities to play football, WWCFL members felt that they were bringing awareness to women’s capabilities and sport participation and challenging dominant perceptions of football as a man’s sport, as illustrated by one player who felt that the league’s purpose was to “bring awareness to women and sport, and to bring awareness that football is not just a guy’s sport.” Additionally, players felt strongly that they were role models for females, especially young girls who are interested in playing football but might not otherwise feel that they have the opportunity to do so.

**Understandings of the LFL’s purpose.** As a business, the LFL’s purpose is to earn money, and its ability to do so is based on providing an entertaining sport product, which all of the players acknowledged. A non-returning player commented, “I think the Commissioner [Mortaza] is making a lot of money off of all of us.” One returning player said, “The purpose of the LFL is to entertain. The LFL is like the NFL and . . . any other sport that is on TV . . . it’s there to entertain people.” Though LFL players acknowledged that the LFL’s purpose was to make money and provide entertainment, they all felt that the league also served a different purpose for the athletes themselves, as one non-returning player described:

There’s two different ways to look at the purpose for the LFL. One purpose is from Mitch [Mortaza] himself. His purpose was to create . . . a show. . . . I think . . . it was supposed to be, basically fifty percent sport, fifty percent show. . . . What I think the women who play in the league are trying to do is they’re trying to
establish a women’s football league. ... I think, almost every woman that goes 
... to try out has the dream of being a professional athlete. And I think the LFL is 
one of few opportunities that can offer that to women. Particularly in Canada 
where we don’t have a lot of professional opportunities.

She acknowledged that LFL players are not currently paid, but she said that Mortaza told 
players that “in the next couple years, they are planning to pay the top players . . . on each 
team. So the top five percent, or whatever it is, of the league would get a regular salary.”

She felt that “a lot of the women . . . go into it thinking this could be a chance at being a 
professional athlete that is paid. That you could have a career as a professional athlete, 
and that’s pretty exciting.” Similarly, a returning player said that the purpose of the LFL 
is:

what it is for any sport now is entertainment, if you’re a spectator. If you’re a 
person playing in it, then, . . . it’s an opportunity. There’s no other sport in the 
world where you get to play on . . . the grand stand that you do in the LFL, for 
women at least.

In terms of “grand stand,” she referred to playing in front of large crowds of spectators, 
being involved with “cool media things” and having the league cover costs associated 
with playing (e.g., travel). Thus, even though the overall purpose of the LFL was to make 
money and entertain, the league also served a different purpose for the players by 
“giv[ing] women a chance to play high [level], competitive football,” as one player stated, 
and having a professional sport-like experience.

**Conclusion.** The two leagues serve different purposes. The WWCFL is a non-
profit participant-centred sports league focused on providing opportunities for women to 
play the male-dominated sport of football. Meanwhile, the LFL is a for-profit business
designed to make money through a spectator-centred entertainment sport league in which women play football while wearing lingerie. The LFL rebranded itself to shift the focus in its name, slogan and logo from the sex appeal of its athletes to just its athletes. For LFL players, the league provided them with an opportunity to play a high level of football in a professional sport-like environment.

**Distribution of Power: Decision-Makers and Decision-Making Processes**

The distribution of power among decision-makers and decision-making processes differ in both organizations. The WWCFL is more democratic and transparent in its decision-making processes, while the LFL is more autocratic and opaque.

**WWCFL decision-makers.** The WWCFL has a Board of Directors and Executive Members for league-level management, and then each team has its own management structure for team-level decisions and representation at the league level.

**Board of Directors.** The WWCFL has a Board of Directors (Board) who, according to the WWCFL By-laws (By-laws), “have full control and management of the affairs of the WWCFL” (By-law 1.02). The Board is comprised of one representative from each team, each with one vote (By-law 1.01). An administrator said that the founding members of the WWCFL felt this was a fair way to make decisions, as each team was equal in terms of the voting process. Teams decide internally who represents them on the Board, but an administrator noted that General Managers (GMs) or other team administrators, like Presidents, commonly fulfilled the role.

**Executive Members.** The WWCFL has five Executive Members (Executive)—President, Commissioner, Treasurer, Secretary, and Registrar—who are responsible for the day-to-day activities related to running the league (By-law 2.01). The By-laws outline the specific duties of each Executive Member (By-law 2.02). An important function that
the Commissioner fulfills is setting the schedule each season. The Executive provides
guidance and brings forward suggestions to the Board, and ultimately implements the
decisions of the Board (By-law 2.01). The Executive does not have a vote in Board
decisions (except in the case of a tie, in which case each Executive Member casts a vote
to determine the Executive’s tie-breaking vote) (By-law 2.02). The Executive positions
are volunteer roles with two-year terms. Anyone is eligible to put forward an application,
and then the positions are voted upon at the league’s Annual General Meeting (AGM). So
far in the league’s existence, current or former players have fulfilled the Executive
positions with the exception of “outside” member, who was the mother of a player. One
administrator said that she hopes that in the future the Executive will be composed of all
outside members to prevent situations with conflict of interests. Having outside members
in these roles would also reduce the burden of responsibility on players and team
administrators, who already have to dedicate a lot of their time to fulfill the
responsibilities related to their own teams.

The administrators that I interviewed viewed this Board and Executive structure
as standard, and noted that the decision to structure the league this way was based on the
inaugural Executive Members’ previous experience on Boards and within sport
organizations. One administrator that I spoke with played a large role in researching and
creating the league structure and By-laws. She said that she pulled “best practices” from
“about four or five organizations” to create them.

**Team management.** Teams have the autonomy to structure their teams as they see
fit. A team’s GM (or President) usually oversees the operations of the whole team, often
working in conjunction with an executive committee composed of positions similar to the
WWCFL Executive (e.g., President, Vice-President, Secretary, etc.), and the head coach.
One administrator explained that a GM or President is “responsible for all the off-field activity as well as liaising with the coach” while “the head coach is responsible for his coaches and on-field activity.” In addition to a head coach, teams usually have an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator, and potentially a number of position-specific coaches as well. Coaches usually have extensive experience coaching male football programs, and may be former players themselves, from leagues including the Canadian [Men’s] Football League (CFL), CIS, and Canadian Junior [Men’s] Football League (CJFL). The head coach may volunteer for the position, or he (or she) may be selected by the GM and/or the team’s executive committee. Players, or occasionally former players, typically fulfill team management roles. Positions may be filled on a volunteer-basis, as was the case for one team, or through an election, as was the case for another team who held a vote at the team’s AGM. Each team’s management is responsible for organizing and running their home games. Both administrators were involved with their respective team’s management; two players currently (at the time of the interviews) held team administrative positions and one player previously did.

**WWCFL decision-making processes.** The By-laws outline rules for many aspects of the league, including Board meetings (By-law 3.0), player and team registration (By-law 5.0), and games scheduling and conduct (By-law 9.0-10.0). “The Conduct of Game” section (By-law 10.0) even includes specifics like the “Location of Teams at Half Time/Completion of Game,” which details, “At half time and completion of the game, teams will move to opposing end zones as agreed upon before the game or dressing rooms if so provided” (By-law 10.05). Some By-laws have pre-established

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24 All WWCFL head coaches are male and the coaching staffs are almost all exclusively male, with the exception of a couple of female coaches.
consequences for infractions. For instance, recruiting current players from other teams is prohibited (By-law 6.01), and the punishment is a $250 fine and potential one-year suspension from the league for the individual(s) attempting to recruit a player (or players) (By-law 6.02). Other By-laws outline a number of possible sanctions, as seen in the section about “Acting in Manner Detrimental to WWCFL”:

The WWCFL reserves the right to discipline any player, team representative or team official who comments or acts in a manner detrimental to its operation or reputation of the league such as, publicly denouncing the league, making derogatory public comments (including social media) about the league, teams or officials. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, reprimand, suspension, or disqualification of any player, team, league or team official and/or forfeiture of game(s). (By-law 11.05)

There is also a specific procedure in place for teams to submit protests (and subsequently appeal decisions) (By-law 11.0). Teams can submit a protest within a pre-defined timeframe “stating the regulation or sub-section on which the protest is being based, and the remedy sought” (By-law 11.01), which is then reviewed by a three-member Incident Review Committee (IRC) approved by the Board (By-law 11.02). The IRC must communicate a ruling within four days of the protest submission. The IRC’s decision may then be appealed, in which case a different three-member Appeals Committee approved by the Board reviews the appeal and releases their ruling within three days of the appeal submission (By-law 11.03).

The By-laws outline a mechanism for league members to bring forward issues to the Board and Executive. Members-at-Large can contact the President in advance of a Board meeting to add an item to the agenda and for permission to speak at the meeting
(By-law 3.04b). One administrator said that though this procedure was in place for members to address the Board, most members communicated with their team’s management, and their team’s representative member then relayed feedback to the Board.

The By-laws themselves can be amended through a majority vote by the Board, which must be ratified at the AGM held in the fall (By-law a). If a By-law fails to be ratified, it ceases to be in effect (By-law b). There is a formal process in place through Football Canada to make changes to the Rule Book.

**LFL decision-makers.** The LFL decision-makers include league administrators, team management, and officials, but the Commissioner’s reach extended to team management and officials’ decisions.

**League administrators.** The LFL’s founder, owner, and commissioner Mitch Mortaza, seems to make all decisions about the league, sometimes in conjunction with Heather Theisen, the LFL’s Chief Operations Officer and Creative Director. One non-returning player stated, “Mitch [Mortaza] does everything. He has . . . his hand in everything and everything goes through him.” The other non-returning player said, “[Mortaza] is ‘the league’” and “whatever he says, goes.” Mortaza and Theisen travel to all LFL games along with what one player referred to as the “LFL Road Crew,” who are responsible for setting up the arena (e.g., laying down turf, putting up LFL banners and signage) and the operation of the games, as well as photographing and filming them. The LFL has a broadcast team comprised of a play-by-play announcer, a colour commentator, and a sideline reporter (“LFL Names,” 2012). Mortaza fulfilled the role of sideline reporter for the majority of the games in the LFL Canada season. Partway through the 2013 LFL US season, Mortaza took over the role of play-by-play announcer (“Mitchell
Mortaza,” 2013) and continued this role in the inaugural 2013 LFL Australia season (“Respected Australian,” 2013).

**Team management.** All teams have a head coach complemented by at least one assistant coach, and most coaches are male.\(^{25}\) Mortaza hires coaches for each team, and he confirmed in a newspaper article that coaches are financially compensated, though he did not reveal details of the remuneration scheme (Luba, 2012).\(^{26}\) Mortaza’s explanation for why coaches receive a paycheck while players do not was, “The time requirement on them is quite a bit more than players” (Luba, 2012, para. 15).

Mortaza can exercise control over coaching decisions. For example, he assigned each Canadian team “free agents”\(^{27}\) to their rosters from the LFL US, which was on its off-season during the LFL Canada season. While protecting the identities of my participants prevents me from providing specific details of examples that my participants shared, one player said that Mortaza tried to influence her coach’s game roster selections and once threatened to pull a player partway through a game, which would normally be a coach’s (or referee’s) decision. Another player described how her team altered its playing strategy during a game based on Mortaza’s directions. She also suggested a couple of times during her interview that players’ off-the-field actions could affect their selection

\(^{25}\) The Regina Rage had a unique coaching situation in the 2012 Canadian season; after two coaching staffs were fired, two LFL US players who were playing on the team began coaching the team as well (“LFL Canada Week 3,” 2012).

\(^{26}\) A former LFL US coach revealed that during his involvement in the 2011 season, coaches were paid per game; head coaches earned $1,200 for a win and $700 for a loss, and assistant coaches received half of this amount (ClevelandSports360, 2013).

\(^{27}\) In professional sports leagues, a “free agent” refers to a player who either does not have a contract with a team and is thus eligible to sign with any team, or has a contract with a team but is able to solicit contract offers from other teams. All LFL players sign a one-season contract, so technically every player becomes a “free agent” at the end of each season. Individuals involved in the LFL commonly use professional sport terminology, whether appropriate or not, to describe the league.
for a game roster. She said that players have to be careful about what they say and do in public because “if [you] misrepresent the league or anything at any given point, you know, you may not necessarily be playing that next game.” Though she did not expressly indicate that Mortaza would be responsible for the decision to not allow a player to participate in a game, another player shared:

The Commissioner’s [Mortaza] . . . very aware of what we say and how we say it about the league and if you start casting negative light on the league as a player there’s a very good chance that he’ll either bench you or kick you out of the league.

Neither player, however, said that such an incident had occurred. In another instance of league officials exercising control over team rosters, a third LFL player said, “Before a game . . . if they [Mortaza and Theisen] don’t feel that you fit into your uniform properly, they have threatened to pull you from the game.” She said that before each game players would line up in their locker rooms in their uniforms, and Theisen would do “body checks” to “make sure you’re not hanging over” the uniform. Again, the player did not say that anyone was actually pulled from a game as a result of a body check.

**Officials.** Mortaza’s influence extends beyond coaching decisions, as three of the four participants felt that he also influenced refereeing decisions. A non-returning player

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28 The player further described aspects of the “body checks” that occurred prior to each LFL game:

I guess they don’t do a tan check but they do . . . emphasize that we all have to be tanned for the game. Or you’ll get in trouble. Um, and then they do a pasties check, which [are] the nipple covers. So they . . . make sure that you have nipple covers . . . . And then they also do a thong check . . . . So they wanna make sure that you have panties underneath as well.

29 In the first game of the LFL Australia’s inaugural 2013 season, a player was told by LFL officials that she wasn’t allowed to dress and play immediately prior to the game (Black, 2013). The player said officials told her that she wasn’t “lean enough” (Black, 2013, para. 5). She is no longer a part of the league.
described a specific instance when he overturned the officials’ call, while two other players spoke more generally about their perceptions of his control over referees’ decisions. One non-returning player said that in the referee meetings prior to the games, her coaches told her that Mortaza would tell the referees “to call as little as possible. To only call it unless it’s really obvious, and to let the game go.” She felt that instruction resulted in referees relying on Mortaza’s direction to make calls, “[Referees] will look to Mitch [Mortaza], who sits on the sideline, to know whether to make a call or not. And they will confer with him. So . . . he will direct them on how to make calls.” A returning player felt that officials were not educated in the game rules of the LFL, so “if the officials aren’t sure of something, then they go to the Commissioner, and . . . ask him . . . what the ruling should be.” She went on to say, “I’m not saying it happens, but obviously like, you know, asking a Commissioner can sway the game completely . . . He wants to sell tickets, he wants people to come back, you know?”

**Player involvement.** LFL officials heavily relied upon players to promote the league, their teams and their games, as is further detailed in the “Time-Consuming Commitment” theme in this chapter. Each team had at least one player who was designated as the team’s Marketing Manager. They were responsible for arranging events where their teams could promote and sell tickets to their games. Though these players had a formal role within the league’s structure, they did not have input regarding league decisions. Even though events, and sometimes media appearances, were organized at the team level, they always required approval from the league, as one returning player explained:
We had to get any marketing, anything like that has to a hundred percent . . . be approved by the league. . . . And then for us to go and do media things, . . . it would have to be approved by the league as well.

**LFL decision-making processes.** From the players’ perspectives, Mortaza was responsible for making almost all decisions. Players had to sign a contract, which included, in part, “Club Team Rules and Regulations.” The rules stated that “the Club Team and the League” were responsible for making decisions. The common consequence for failure to comply with a rule was being released from the team. In some instances, the contract clearly outlined actions that would be penalized, such as:

> Player shall not in way *[sic]* sabotage, organize, participate or threaten *[sic]* to start a strike amongst other players or club teams against their respective Club Team, League or other Club Teams. The Club Team and the League reserves the right to release Player from the Club Team at any time for sabotaging, organizing, participating or threaten *[sic]* to start a strike.

In other cases, the rules were vague. For example, “The Club Team and the League reserves *[sic]* the right to release Player from the Club Team at any time for failure to follow reasonable standard player conduct or for inappropriate behavior on and off the field.” In the case of disputes, the contract outlined a legal arbitration process:

> After execution of this [contract], any dispute regarding any aspect of this [contract], or any act which allegedly has or would violate any provision of this [contract], must first be determined and settled by binding arbitration by one (1) arbitrator who shall be selected by mutual agreement of the parties . . . . The arbitrator is directed to award to the prevailing party reasonable attorneys’ fees, costs, and disbursements, including reimbursement for the cost of witnesses,
travel and subsistence during the arbitration hearings. Any award rendered shall be final and conclusive upon the parties and a judgment thereof may be entered by the appropriate court having jurisdiction.

According to the contract, there was no internal mechanism for dispute resolution.

In summer 2013, the LFL announced its “Sportsman [sic] Initiative” program to address issues with players and coaches. The program was described as follows: “The ‘Sportsman Initiative’ will involve a (2) strike policy where the 1st strike results in a warning unless it is a serious offense and the 2nd strike results in suspension and/or banishment from the league” (“LFL Launches,” 2013, para. 2). Potential on-the-field issues were listed as “unsportsmanlike conduct” and “purposeful pulling of uniform of opponent” (“LFL Launches,” 2013, paras. 6-7), and possible punishable off-the-field conduct included “player / coach conduct,” “commitment to team obligation,” “defamatory / slanderous remarks,” and “substance abuse” (paras. 9-12). Again, no process was outlined for players (or coaches) to appeal decisions.

**Conclusion.** The distribution of power greatly differs between the two leagues. In the WWCFL, each team is equally represented on the Board, and league members elect the Executive Members. Teams have autonomy to structure their teams as they see fit. League rules are clearly laid out in the By-laws, often with the consequences for infractions included, and the opportunity for protests and appeals are available with the decision-making processes detailed in a transparent manner. Members can become involved in league decision-making processes by running for Executive positions, exercising their right to vote for Executives, and bringing forward issues to the Board. Additionally, there are ample opportunities for members to become involved at the team-level, which could lead to representing their teams on the Board.
The LFL has a highly autocratic structure with the Commissioner controlling the majority of decisions about the league and its teams, sometimes including coaching and refereeing decisions. The player contract outlines “Club Team Rules and Regulations,” but decision-making processes are not clearly laid out and there is no internal appeal process provided, only an external legal mechanism. Players have next to no opportunities to engage in decision-making processes.

Alignment with Existing (Male) Football Organizations

The WWCFL closely aligns with existing football organizations through affiliation and support, following established football rules, and scheduling its season around male football programs. The LFL in some cases unofficially associates itself with professional men’s football organizations, and both aligns with and intentionally deviates from existing football rules.

WWCFL affiliation and support. The WWCFL is affiliated with Football Canada, the sport’s national governing body that oversees Canadian amateur football. There is a provincial sport organization (PSO) to govern the sport in every province, and each player must register with her respective PSO (By-law 5.01a), which allows WWCFL teams to have insurance coverage through their PSO. By virtue of the teams’ respective PSO memberships, the league is affiliated with Football Canada.

The establishment of the two Saskatchewan teams was partly facilitated by Saskatchewan’s PSO. In fall 2010, Football Saskatchewan hosted a football camp in Saskatoon, which two of my participants attended. The purpose of the camp was to gauge the number of women interested in playing football. Shortly afterwards the two teams in the province were established. The Technical Director of Football Saskatchewan was involved in the early organization of the Regina Riot, and Football Saskatchewan’s
Executive Director and a Vice President of the Board of Directors are the Saskatoon Valkyries’ head coach and GM, respectively. Further, Football Saskatchewan has provided funding to the two teams, and granted five Athlete Assistance Awards\(^{30}\) worth as much as $1,750 to students on each team annually since the inaugural WWCFL season in 2011 (Football Saskatchewan, 2013). The Regina Riot has also received support from the Saskatchewan Roughriders, a CFL team based in the city, in the form of uniforms, equipment, and administrative support; one of the Roughriders’ vice-presidents was involved in establishing the team. One player felt that Football Saskatchewan’s support “helped legitimize” women’s football in the province, “We’re part of like, the whole group . . . it’s not just like we’re a little club team doing something. We’re football in Saskatchewan.”

**WWCFL rules.** All leagues sanctioned by Football Canada are expected to follow the *Canadian Amateur Rule Book for Tackle Football* (*Rule Book*), and the *Rule Book* states that “If or when leagues wish to deviate from these rules it is the expectation that they will do so only after consultation from the appropriate officials group and Provincial Sport Organization (local, provincial or national)” (Canadian Amateur Football Association [CAFA], 2012, p. xvi). The WWCFL closely follows the *Rule Book* with almost no deviations. One change from the *Rule Book* is the WWCFL’s “Mercy Rule” (By-law 10.02) that allows a team losing by 30 or more points to request to play with “running time” instead of “stop time.” While such a rule is not seen in elite-level leagues like the CFL (Canadian Football League, 2013) and CIS (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2013a), a similar rule is in place in other leagues like the Maritime [Men’s] Football

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\(^{30}\) Football Saskatchewan also grants annual Athlete Assistance Awards to students on CJFL and CIS teams in the province (Football Saskatchewan, 2013).

By following the Rule Book, women in the WWCFL not only play football following the same rules as men, but the same rules as Canadian men. There are differences in the way that football is played in Canada compared to the United States in regards to the size of the field, number of downs, number of players on the field, and some other aspects of the game. One administrator emphasized, “I live in Canada. If we’re [women] gonna play football, we’re gonna play Canadian football.” She mentioned that the MWFL does not play 12-a-side football, but she was adamant that the WWCFL would “play 12-man [sic] football because that’s what kind of football is played in Canada. Canadian football is 12-man football.”

For the first two WWCFL seasons, games were 48 minutes in length with 12-minute quarters, which the Rule Book recommends for “players at the High School level and below” (CAFA, 2012, p. 2). Beginning in the 2013 season, the WWCFL started playing 60-minute games with 15-minute quarters, in line with the timing outlined in the Rule Book and more elite-level leagues like the CJFL.

**WWCFL resources.** Football is a sport that requires an abundance of resources. WWCFL teams can have up to fifty players and all of these players need uniforms and equipment. In addition to the large number of players on a team, there are also numerous coaches, plus a GM to coordinate all of these people. To play a football game, the

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31 Though the MWFL generally follows the Rule Book, the league plays 11-a-side four-down football, which is more akin to the rules used in football leagues in the United States than those in Canada, but on a Canadian regulation-sized field (MWFL, n.d.).
WWCFL mandates that there must be five on-field officials, a three-person “stick crew”\textsuperscript{32} and one timekeeper (By-law 13.0). The football field itself needs to have uprights,\textsuperscript{33} which are not available on all fields. Youth football leagues and high school football programs typically start in August and run through the fall, and it would be difficult for the WWCFL to compete with these longstanding, pre-established (male) leagues for resources. As a result, the WWCFL season takes place in the spring and summer. One administrator stated, “We can’t get into August, ever, because we would lose the resources of . . . the fields . . . and the refs.” Additionally, some of the WWCFL teams borrow equipment and/or uniforms (i.e., pants) from other (male) football teams, and many WWCFL coaches also coach male teams. The administrator explained that, in designing the league’s schedule, she and the Executive wanted to ensure that the coaches had time off after the women’s season before their responsibilities coaching youth and/or high school football began:

In July, we like . . . to finish so the coaches that do coach in the youth programs or in the standard fall programs actually might have a couple weeks off between coaching women’s and then men’s. Cuz it makes it for an awfully long year. It would go from January, cuz most teams start practicing January/February, indoors. And they’re not done until the end of October for the regular fall programs. And so, it’s a long season if you’re involved with both.

The WWCFL season taking place in the off-season of most (male) football programs allows the league to access both material (equipment, uniforms, fields) and human

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{32} The stick crew marks the position of the ball, the downs, the number of yards to a first down, and the line of scrimmage for each play.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Uprights are the two vertical posts above the crossbar on a football goalpost. The football must be kicked between the vertical posts to score a field goal.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
(coaches, officials) resources that would likely be unavailable or difficult to procure when the other (male) leagues take place.

**LFL affiliation.** The LFL is not affiliated with any football organizations. Football Canada does not sanction the league, and one WWCFL administrator said that Football Canada and its PSOs, at least in her province, are not interested in any affiliation with the league. In some ways, the LFL unofficially aligns itself with men’s football leagues. The entire “lingerie football” concept began with the Lingerie Bowl taking place as an alternative to the NFL’s Super Bowl halftime show. The LFL intended to align the inaugural Canadian Lingerie Bowl in 2012 with the CFL’s 100th Grey Cup game in Toronto by originally scheduling it to take place the night before (Wallin, 2011a). For reasons unexplained, the game was rescheduled to one weekend earlier on November 18 in Abbotsford, BC. The BC Lions ended up having a playoff game at the same time in Vancouver, so the Lingerie Bowl was shifted again to one day earlier on November 17 (“Title,” 2012).

**LFL rules.** There is no official LFL rule book publicly available, but the LFL website outlines the basic rules (Legends Football League, n.d.). LFL games take place on a 50- by 30-yard field, typically in indoor arenas. Given the small field with no uprights, the game differs from the WWCFL and traditional football (e.g., fewer players, no field goals), but there are similarities to the rules of the [Men’s] Arena Football League (AFL) (e.g., smaller field, similar number of players) (see Appendix L).

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34 LFL US games have also been rescheduled to avoid conflicting with men’s sport events (e.g., “Chicago,” 2014).
35 LFL Australia games take place in outdoor stadiums (e.g., “1st LFL,” 2013), presumably because indoor hockey arenas are less prevalent in Australia.
The rules of the game, as players pointed out, change from season to season. When announcing rule changes, the league has explicitly stated that the changes are “an effort to continue to evolve toward more traditional play” (“Kickoffs Now,” 2013, para. 1). For instance, in LFL US seasons prior to the LFL Canada’s debut, teams were required to pass twice and run twice during any one set of four downs (“LFL Experiments,” 2012), and this two-pass, two-run rule was eliminated for the inaugural 2012 LFL Canada season. For the inaugural 2013 LFL Australia season, the league announced two rule changes. First, kickoffs, which were previously only done at the beginning of each half, would take place after touchdowns as well (“Kickoffs Now,” 2013). A rule limiting onside kicks was also removed; previously teams could only do an onside kick if they were losing and there was less than five minutes remaining in the game (“Kickoffs Now,” 2013). Mortaza explained the reasoning for the changes:

Special teams are a key component of football which we feel has been relatively ignored by our teams. These rule modifications will create a greater focus on the final phase of football in the LFL. (“Kickoffs Now,” 2013, para. 4)

Not all rule changes, however, “move the LFL game closer toward traditional football” (“LFL Experiments,” 2012, para. 1). For example, in the 2012 LFL Canada season, the length of the game changed from two 17-minutes halves to four eight-minute quarters, shortening the game from 34 minutes to 32 minutes. Though changing the format from halves to quarters is more in line with the traditional football game format, the length of the game is almost half the time of a traditional 60-minute game. One player provided another example of a rule change that did not bring the game in closer alignment.

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36 Special teams are the players on the field during kicking plays.
with traditional football; she had heard that quarterback sneaks\textsuperscript{37} were going to be prohibited following the 2012 LFL Canada season, though the LFL has not released any official statement announcing this rule change.

The LFL clearly deviates from traditional football through its uniform and equipment. The LFL uniform has been described in the media in different ways, including: “lingerie” (Luba, 2012), “bra and panties” (Hsieh, 2011), “bras and booty shorts” (Corbella, 2011), “bikinis” (Li, 2011b), and “stylized underwear” (M. Stewart, 2012a). LFL interview participants referred to the uniform as “a sports bra” and “boy shorts,” “short bottoms,” and “panties,” but also as “lingerie” and “underwear.” The players’ uniforms included ribbons, bows, lace, and a garter worn on one leg. Players also wore lacy choker necklaces with a bow in the centre for photo shoots and during warm ups prior to games (one player assured me that they were “never, ever” worn during games for safety reasons). Part of the 2013 LFL rebranding effort to move away from the name “lingerie” included rebranding the bikini uniform as “performance wear” by removing the “lingerie aspects” (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 11). Since the 2012 Canadian season, the uniforms no longer have ribbons, bows, lace or garters.

In terms of equipment, players wear hockey helmets with half visors, shoulder pads, elbow pads, kneepads, and mouthguards. The hockey helmets with clear half visors make players’ faces more clearly visible to spectators and television cameras; the face mask on a football helmet would more fully obstruct a view of their faces. The shoulder pads were specifically designed for the LFL by Rawling’s, a sports equipment manufacturer.

\textsuperscript{37} A quarterback sneak is a play in which the quarterback receives the snap from the centre and rushes forward. The play is effective for small gains, thus teams commonly use it when they only have to move the ball a couple yards to score or earn a first down.
manufacturing company that sponsors the league (Legends Football League, 2013). These specially designed shoulder pads cover players’ shoulders and do not have a chest plate or back pads like traditional shoulder pads, which allows players’ cleavage to be displayed.

**Conclusion.** The WWCFL aligns as much as a possible with existing football organizations. The LFL unofficially aligns itself with men’s sport organizations. While the league’s football rules notably diverge from traditional football in terms of its uniform, equipment, and indoor setting, league officials otherwise seek to align their rules with it.

**Safety**

Playing football requires aggressive physical contact, thus safety is often a concern for individuals involved in the sport. Ensuring player safety is important in the WWCFL, and less so in the LFL, according to some players.

**WWCFL rules and resources.** The importance of safety in the WWCFL is evident through the league’s formal rules and informal practices. When asked about what rules are in place in the league related to player safety, one administrator responded that the rules in the *Rule Book*, which the league follows, ensure player safety. Indeed, player safety was emphasized throughout; the *Rule Book* states that the purpose of the rules is first to “to protect the player” (CAFA, 2012, p. xvi). Under the “Points of Emphasis” section near the beginning of the *Rule Book*, the importance of safety is clearly stated: “It should be emphasized that player safety is our prime concern and should not be compromised. All other issues become secondary” (CAFA, 2012, p. xvi).

The *Rule Book* outlines the mandatory equipment required to play: a helmet (approved by the National Operating Committee on Safety in Athletic Equipment), mouthguard, shoulder pads, hip pads with a tailbone protector, knee pads, thigh guards,
and footwear that meets certain specifications (e.g., no metal cleats or cleat tips). The WWCFL emphasizes some safety-related rules about equipment found in the Rule Book by reproducing them in the By-laws (By-laws 14.02-14.06). According to the Rule Book, not wearing all of the mandated equipment is penalized with a loss of yards and immediate substitution of the offending player out of the game. Playing without a mouthguard is a serious rule infraction that can be penalized similarly to Unnecessary Roughness and Rough Play in some instances. Unnecessary Roughness and Rough Play (e.g., piling on, spearing, horse collar tackling) are penalized differently and more severely than other fouls, which indicates that they are strongly discouraged, likely because of the increased chance of injury such actions cause. For instance, Rough Play results, in part, in disqualification of the offending player, which cannot be declined by the non-offending team. Under the By-laws, any player or team official who is disqualified from a game is further punished with an automatic suspension from the next game (By-law 11.04a).

The By-laws outline league-specific rules related to safety. Pregnant players are not allowed to play (By-law 5.01d). As previously mentioned, the league has a mercy rule that allows teams losing by 30 or more points to request to play with “running time” instead of “stop time.” In a game with a lopsided score, presumably caused by a lopsided skill level between teams, playing with running time allows the game to end earlier than it normally would and potentially prevents players from the less-skilled, losing team from getting injured. The WWCFL also instituted a by-law that came into effect in the 2013 season that requires all coaches to become certified through the Coaching Association of Canada’s National Coaching Certification Program (By-law 12.03). By their second year in the league, all coaches must obtain “Introduction to Competition” certification for
football. The purpose of this by-law is to ensure that coaches are competent and can teach players proper football skills and techniques.

Neither the Rule Book nor the By-laws require any medical personnel to be present at games. The presence of medical personnel seems like it would be a necessity when the Rule Book states: “The diagnosis and treatment of injuries is a medical problem and should, under no circumstances, be considered a province of the coach. A coach’s responsibility is to see that injured players are given prompt and competent medical attention” (p. xvi). Further,

A player removed from a game suffering from a wound or laceration . . . shall be given appropriate medical treatment. He [sic] may not return to the game without approval of medical personnel (i.e.: Trainer, M.D., any type of medical personnel). (p. xvi)

Both administrators, however, said that the presence of medical personnel at games (if not practices as well) is standard practice in football. Seven of the nine WWCFL teams listed trainers as part of their team’s staff for the 2013 season on their websites. Some teams had multiple trainers, some of whom were physiotherapists, and a couple of teams even had a team doctor and a team surgeon.

Some teams also have equipment managers who attend practices and games. They play an important role in contributing to player safety by ensuring that players wear properly fitted gear. Two players praised their team’s equipment manager for his knowledge and dedication; “[He’s] really good at assessing and knowing how things are supposed to fit. And if things are uncomfortable, . . . he’ll fix it up for you.” Her teammate agreed, “He is amazing. And he’ll find you stuff. . . . If he doesn’t have it, he will find it. And it will be quick.” Additionally, one team purchased “Zena” shoulder pads
for its players, which are specifically designed for women, complete with two different chest plate sizes (A or B).

**LFL rules.** In the LFL, safety is a controversial topic, with some players feeling that their safety was neglected while league officials maintain that the LFL had many safety-related measures in place. A 2012 LFL press release stated, “The LFL features the most comprehensive medical structure of any women’s tackle football league in the world with pre-season medical examinations, pro-sports caliber medical groups, hiring of LFL dedicated medical directors . . .” (“LFL Partners,” 2012, para. 4). Players confirmed that medical personnel were present at all games, and teams may have their own trainers who attend practices as well.

The LFL’s statement above about their medical structure came with the announcement that they implemented the Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT) program in the league (“LFL Partners,” 2012). ImPACT is a computerized concussion evaluation system, and it is used in professional men’s sports leagues like the NFL and National [Men’s] Hockey League (“LFL Partners,” 2012). One returning participant said that players were required to do the ImPACT testing prior to the beginning of the season. Players had to sign and submit a document to the league that stated:

I attest that I have read and understand my role in the concussion protocol and forwarded any questions or concerns I may have to my respective Medical Director, and this signed Document must be faxed to the League office as well as my completion of the ImPact assessment prior the [sic] first game.

She said that she knew a player who sustained a concussion, but she was unsure if the ImPACT test assisted in her concussion diagnosis, or “if she ever wrote that test again
after the fact or anything like that.” The player also mentioned that the LFL was supposed to be putting devices on players’ helmets to measure the impact players experience from hits on the field. Indeed, in fall 2013 the LFL announced a partnership with GEN1 Impact Indicators to help to detect concussions (“LFL Announces Sponsorship,” 2013). As this announcement came after the 2012 LFL Canada season, it has yet to be implemented in Canada.

Another announcement that came in 2013, after the LFL Canada’s inaugural season, was the creation of a new safety program called LFL Safety. A press release outlined the program, which involved the implementation of two safety-related rules (“LFL Safety,” 2013). The “Quarterback Slide” rule permitted quarterbacks to slide feet-first to avoid getting tackled (this rule did not apply when quarterbacks were running to advance the ball). The “Defenseless Receiver” rule would “protect receivers that are going up to catch a football” (“LFL Safety,” 2013, para. 1), though the press release did not indicate exactly what the rule was. Additionally, the release stated, “Any violation of either rule will result in an unnecessary roughness penalty on the field and possible game suspension by the league office” (“LFL Safety,” 2013, para. 1). The press release stated that the league would create a committee comprised of players and coaches from the LFL’s three leagues (Australia, Canada, and US) to oversee the LFL Safety program, but it did not detail what that would involve.

**LFL equipment and uniform.** Though the LFL has implemented safety-related programs and rule changes, the players’ concerns about safety were mainly related to the equipment and uniform they were required to wear, and compounded by the facilities in which they played with boards and artificial turf. One returning player, however, felt that the equipment and uniform were sufficient. She said that she would not change anything
about the protective equipment. In response to safety concerns related, in part, to the equipment, which were brought to light after the majority of the Toronto Triumph players quit in 2011 (Li, 2011b), Mortaza maintained, “We at the LFL consistently test our equipment to insure the highest degree of safety and challenge our partners to continue to develop the next generation equipment that will further protect our players” (Wallin, 2011b, para. 5). As previously mentioned, players wore a bikini and the following protective equipment: hockey helmets with half visors, league-specific shoulder pads, and mouthguards. Most players wore elbow pads, kneepads, and knee-high socks to prevent turf burn. The “Club Team Rules and Regulations” in players’ contract did not outline the equipment that players were required to wear, but did mention, “Watches, jewelry, and other items deemed dangerous are prohibited while participating.”

**Shoulder pads.** Players noted that they only wore the specially designed shoulder pads for their games. During practices, they wore traditional football shoulder pads, which provided them with more protection. One returning player acknowledged that “during the games . . . our shoulder pads are a lot smaller than our practice pads,” but she felt, “your collarbone is protected by [the game] pads, which I think is really important.” Meanwhile, the other returning player felt they were ineffective, “When it comes to game time, the shoulder pads that you’re wearing compared to even the ones in practice . . . are like nothing. . . . They’re very light and, uh, they’re basically just like foam or whatever.” Similarly, a non-returning player said:

The pads that we played in [during games] were these foam shoulder pads that didn’t really, I mean, they protected us but, they weren’t true football pads and I think that, you know, that doesn’t help very much to protect us from injury.
She did acknowledge that the shoulder pads have been redesigned since the 2012 LFL Canada season “to be harder”; the LFL’s press release announcing the rebrand in January 2013 stated that the shoulder pads were redesigned to “increase protection” (“Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 13), though they still do not have a chest plate or back pads. The other non-returning player talked about getting bruised ribs and frequently getting the wind knocked out of her when she was tackled due to the lack of protection around her midsection, which would be amplified by playing in an indoor arena with boards surrounding the field.

**Helmets.** The two non-returning players did not feel that hockey helmets fit properly and provided adequate protection while playing football, while a returning player felt that they did. A non-returning player explained, “The helmets that we wear . . . they don’t necessarily fit right. . . . They were just one piece of foam all the way around. . . . They could adjust forward and back, but they don’t adjust from the side.” She thought that LFL players should wear football helmets, “I think you have to wear the equipment for the sport,” though she did acknowledge that it would likely be dangerous to play in football helmets without also wearing proper protective body padding because football helmets are heavy and hard. Meanwhile, one of the returning players felt that if hockey helmets were good enough for hockey players, they were good enough for football players because in hockey, players “collide and . . . they’re going at the same speed [as football players], if not faster because . . . they’re on ice skates.” Another non-returning player disagreed, because in hockey “you’re not running into someone head-first. I don’t think a hockey helmet is sufficient . . . to protect your head [in football].” She acknowledged that proper tackling technique is important to avoid head injuries, but “we don’t get all that much time to learn how to tackle so, we’re not professionals at it.” The
other non-returning player said that playing on a field hemmed in by boards also meant that she had hit her head against the boards.

**Rugby comparisons.** Three players compared the amount of equipment that LFL players wore to the amount that rugby players wear. One returning player said that the protective equipment worn in the LFL is “just something extra” relative to rugby (though she did also say, “I probably expected more” in terms of protective padding and, “I would love more padding. Like, I’d take it . . . if they had it”). The other returning player pointed out, “In rugby, you know, contact happens like [in football] too. And [rugby players] don’t wear anything.” Meanwhile, a non-returning player felt that justifying the minimal protective equipment (relative to traditional football) worn by LFL players by comparing them to rugby players was not a valid comparison because football and rugby are two completely different games with different processes for scoring points. She felt that adequate head protection was especially important in football because “in football . . . wherever the ball lands is . . . where the line of scrimmage is. . . . So you have to lead with the ball and, . . . basically your head. Whereas rugby it’s not really about every yard.” In rugby, the ball predominately moves backwards.

**Minimal attire, elbow pads, and knee pads.** One player who was not planning on returning to the league commented, “It’s absolutely ridiculous to play on turf, wearing nothing.” Turf burn was the common consequence of wearing minimal attire and playing on turf. Elbow pads and kneepads were available for players to wear to help prevent turf burn, but were generally ineffective as the player stated, “As soon as you go down, they slide.” Some players chose not to wear them, as one player who did not wear them said, turf burn is “an inevitable thing.” Indeed, all LFL players mentioned getting turf burn and
how much it “sucks.” One non-returning player explained her experience with turf burn in detail:

I have scars from turf burn. . . . because you slide and it’s . . . your skin, on plastic, basically. I’ve had wounds that would take months to heal. I actually had to get burn pads to wear because they would just be oozing. . . . to the point where . . . if I didn’t wear these burn pads, . . . my pant would adhere to my wound. So I had to . . . wear them until the wound would actually scab over. And then of course . . . it’s just in time for the next game where they open up again.

Another non-returning player similarly mentioned that she experienced “weeks of never-healing turf burn.”

**Equipment modifications.** Players expressed different opinions about whether modifications to the requisite equipment were allowed in the league. One returning player said:

I saw a couple players that . . . were permitted to wear . . . kind of like a protective padding . . . and . . . I’ve seen players that wear extra support for their shoulders . . . . So the league wasn’t necessarily against permitting players to wear extra protection . . . . You did have to ask the league, ‘Would this be okay if I wore this?’ but I’ve never heard them say, ‘No.’

A non-returning player disagreed, “Mitch [Mortaza] is not . . . open to changing the uniform [or equipment].” She provided examples of instances in which she, her coach, and an athletic trainer for the league asked to wear additional apparel or make minor modifications to the equipment that would increase player safety that were turned down, even though, “I’ve seen some players in the US who have worn [arm sleeves]. Or they’ve worn modifications. But, I don’t know, we’ve always been told, ‘No.’” Arm sleeves, for
instance, would help protect LFL players against turf burn by minimizing the skin exposure on their arms without modifying the uniform itself.

**LFL officiating.** Three players discussed the poor officiating in the league as rules were inconsistently applied and resulted in “dirty,” and potentially dangerous, play on the field. A returning player said, “I felt like the rules changed every single game. . . . There was no . . . consistency.” A non-returning player agreed, “There was a lot of football rules that were in some games called, [and] some games they weren’t called.” She felt that referees “wouldn’t call certain things so it made the games very dirty. Um, you know, a lotta dirty tackles, a lot of dirty plays on the line.” The other non-returning player similarly stated, “I’ve seen a lot of head shots. [A player] was kicked in the head when she was down. And it was completely malicious.” A returning player was not sure if the inconsistent calls occurred because referees were not taking their job seriously, or it was caused by “the league not issuing out . . . a standard set of rules” so the referees were not educated in the game rules. A non-returning player thought, “Most of the referees that work the games are flag football referees,” rather than tackle football referees so they were not familiar with tackle football rules or the LFL’s rules. As well, she believed that before games Mortaza told the referees:

> to make as [few] calls as possible. And that’s why you see . . . a lot of roughing and a lot of girls [sic] getting head shots. And no calls being made, and . . . no people penalized cuz it’s good for TV. . . . If they have those shots, . . . they can make a highlight reel.

**Conclusion.** Player safety is supported in the WWCFL through following the Rule Book and the league’s own safety rules as well as knowledgeable human resources who ensure that players learn proper football skills, their equipment fits properly, and their
injuries are diagnosed and treated. In the LFL, player safety was a more contentious issue with league officials maintaining that the league had a high-quality medical structure and ensured “the highest degree of safety” in terms of its equipment, and players expressing experiences with the league’s rules, equipment, and poor officiating that countered that claim.

**Time-Consuming Commitment**

Involvement in the WWCFL and LFL required a large time commitment both on and off the field for players.

**WWCFL schedule.** Players’ involvement in the WWCFL requires on the field commitments, including games, pre-season and post-season training, and in-season practices, plus off-the-field involvement including team promotion, recruitment, fundraising, volunteering, and social activities.

**Games.** The WWCFL season starts near the beginning of May, often with a pre-season Jamboree where teams take part in a series of short exhibition games that occur in one day. In the regular season, teams play a total of four intra-conference regular season games, two home and two away, on Saturdays or Sundays. The regular season ends in June, and then playoffs take place with Conference Semi-Finals, followed by Conference Finals, and then the league wraps up with the League Championship in mid-July.\(^{38}\) Home field advantage for the Conference Semi-Finals and Finals is given to the highest ranked

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\(^{38}\) The schedule for the 2013 WWCFL season was atypical due to the IFAF WWC, which took place from June 30 to July 6. In order to finish the season before players and coaches on Team Canada left, the season was condensed into a seven-week schedule that did not include the Jamboree or Conference Semi-Finals and ended mid-June. The WWC takes place every three years, so similar WWCFL-schedule adjustments may occur in future years, as the By-laws acknowledge: “In order to accommodate the Women’s World Championships, an alternative playoff structure may be approved by the Board in years when these championships are held” (By-law 9.04e).
team of each matchup. The host of the League Championship is selected by the Board prior to the beginning of the season through a bid process.

**Pre-season and post-season.** Though the WWCFL season begins in May, teams often host a fall camp for rookies around October. For veterans, optional off-season conditioning often begins in October, which is either organized by their respective team’s Board or by smaller factions of teammates, who may try to set up workout groups in order to motivate each other. For instance, one team organized a weekly workout session at a local CrossFit® gym.

**Practices.** Teams begin official indoor practices as early as January or February, often practicing once a week in a gymnasium before moving to an indoor facility with artificial turf. Some teams may also host a winter or spring camp to attract rookies. There are currently no tryouts for any of the teams. Any woman who is interested and able to commit to play on a team is welcomed to do so. Teams will typically begin practicing twice a week in March or April, and they practice outdoors as soon as the snow melts and the fields are available. This often occurs in April, but it is highly dependent on the weather. For instance, at the time I conducted interviews in early April 2013, there was still an abundance of snow on the ground so neither of the teams had been able to practice outside. During the season, most teams practice twice a week and often held a third no-hitting practice on nights or mornings before games to run through plays and special teams without hitting.

Traveling to practices and other team events was extra time consuming for some players who lived significant distances away. One participant mentioned that a few players on her team lived up to one and a half hours away, and during the season they had

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39 CrossFit is a high-intensity fitness program.
to travel back and forth a number of times per week. (On another team, a couple of players actually moved from a different city to play on their team.)

**Off-the-field involvement.** In addition to the on-the-field commitment, players also had to dedicate significant amounts of time for promotion, recruitment, and fundraising events for the team as well as volunteering in the community. These activities were organized autonomously at the team-level. At this time, there are no league-wide promotion or fundraising initiatives. One administrator felt that “there’s not enough (pause) visibility or even consistency within the teams and the league right now to try and market us as . . . one unified program.” The other administrator, though, said that she would like the league to coordinate a league-wide marketing campaign to demonstrate the size of the league (“We have one more team than the CFL”\(^{40}\)) to hopefully attract sponsors.

Administrators and players named a long list of activities with which the teams were involved. Teams volunteered at events for local football clubs, PSOs, and CFL teams. For instance, one team runs the concessions and merchandise stand at their local university football games. Another team partnered with a local roller derby team, and the football players take tickets and sell merchandise and 50/50 tickets at roller derby bouts in exchange for the roller derby players to do the same at their games. Teams participate in local events, like 5K runs, Santa Clause parades, and charity fundraisers. Since running a football team is a costly endeavour, ranging from $25,000 to $75,000 per season, teams need to fundraise for themselves as well. To do so, they may host steak nights with silent auctions at local restaurants, volunteer at bingo nights, and run barbecues. Players have to

\(^{40}\) At the time of the interview in the 2013, there were nine teams in the WWCFL, one more than the CFL. The 2014 season featured eight teams, on par with the number of teams in the CFL.
pay an annual fee to participate, ranging from $250 to $500, and one team has a sponsorship program that allows players to reduce their fee by finding personal sponsors for the team’s Adopt-an-Athlete program and selling advertising space in the team’s game day program. Additionally, teams have social events for the players, like bowling or pub nights.

All of these events have to be organized, coordinated, and attended by team members. As previously mentioned, each team had their own Board primarily composed of players. Additionally, teams may have committees with which players can be involved to help with the organization of such events. For instance, one player was on her team’s Fundraising Committee.

When asked what players wore when volunteering at events, players responded that that they usually wore some sort of team apparel, like hoodies, but not always. “It depends,” one player said. “Like at the roller derby, we just wear our normal clothes . . . and help out.” She explained that her team’s community involvement, “It’s not just to bring in the fans, it’s because we wanna show to our community that . . . we’re more than just a bunch of girls [sic] who want to play football. Like we want to actually make a difference.” Others echoed these sentiments about the importance of community involvement, “I think as a whole team, outside of . . . playing and stuff, . . . you have a role in the community.”

**LFL schedule.** LFL involvement required a large time commitment for games, tryouts, training camps, practices, additional conditioning, and off-the-field activities.

**Games.** In the LFL Canada’s inaugural season in 2012, each team played two home and two away games on Saturday nights (with the exception of one Sunday game) between the end of August and October, and the season culminated with the two teams
with the best records playing in the Lingerie Bowl in November. In December, the BC Angels also played in the inaugural Pacific Cup, a game in the United States against the LFL US team, the Seattle Mist.\(^{41}\)

On weekends when players had games, they would travel to their games on either Friday night or early Saturday morning and spend the day preparing for the game that night. They returned home either the night of the game or the next morning. The league covered transportation, accommodations, and meals for the fourteen “active” roster players selected to travel to away games. A player said that the active roster was often announced the week of a game. The “Club Team Rules and Regulations” of the player contract states, “If Player commits to any game and fails to travel to an away game or home game as scheduled by Club Team for any reason, Club Team will have the right to release Player.”

**Tryouts and training camps.** In the first LFL Canada season, tryouts took place in March and April.\(^{42}\) Teams often had two tryouts, and coaches and/or league representatives would invite select recruits to attend a three- or four-day weekend “mini camp,” after which a final roster of twenty players would be selected. Some teams also kept additional players on a “practice roster”; these players did not play in games, but participated in practices in order to develop their skills so that they may be selected for the team in the future. As previously mentioned, each team had “free agents” from the

\(^{41}\) The Pacific Cup was intended to be an annual game between the BC Angels and Seattle Mist, but after the cancellation of the 2013 LFL Canada season, the Los Angeles Temptation played in lieu of the BC Angels (“LFL Announces First,” 2013; “Pacific Cup,” 2013).

\(^{42}\) In the second season, tryouts took place later in May and June, and in July for the league’s new Calgary Fillies franchise, which was announced at the end of June (“Breaking News,” 2013).
LFL US. The free agents did not attend practices, but each team had at least one weekend-long training camp prior to the start of the season that the free agents attended.

**Practices.** Teams would practice two to four times per week, depending on the team and the point in their season. One player mentioned that some teams in the LFL US had longer practices on the weekends rather than multiple shorter practices on weeknights due to the long distances some players had to travel; some LFL US players lived “eight to ten hours away [and] they have to take a plane to get to their practices.” Though no one on her team lived that far away, she mentioned that players lived up to three hours away, and that prior to the 2013 LFL Canada season cancellation her team was considering adopting a similar weekend practice schedule to reduce the weeknight time commitment and amount of travel required.

**Additional conditioning.** In addition to team practices, players were supposed to work out on their own time, as a returning player said, “It’s expected that each girl [sic] will be training on her own. Um, for like cardio and strength and so on.” The purpose of working out was not only for performance-related reasons, but appearance-related reasons as well, she explained:

> Everybody’s responsible for their own fitness level and everything like that. So we were all expected to be in the gym, eating healthy, and everything like that on our own time. . . . We were supposed to, you know, you had to . . . look the part to be on the field as well as have the skill.

A non-returning player agreed, “Not just fitness . . . but how you look is very big in the league too. So, you know, make sure you look a certain part. Um, you look active. You’re staying fit.” The other non-returning player confirmed, “You have to be fit. . . . They
[league officials] have told players before that they need to lose weight.” The uniform only comes in one size, so all players must be able to fit into it.\

One player said that leading up to her first season in the LFL, “I didn’t know what to expect and I wasn’t in as good a shape,” so she hired a personal trainer and went to the gym “almost everyday.” Preparing for her second season, she said she reduced the amount of time that she spent at the gym to about two to three times a week because, “I wasn’t as worried about my body shape. I was in better shape. I knew what was expected of me. I knew what the physical demands were.” Another participant said that players were expected to be “at gym . . . two times a week . . . at least. If not more. Most of the girls [sic] do more anyways.” Meanwhile, one player felt that most of her teammates did not spend additional time outside of practices working out, “Everybody was . . . responsible to do training on their own, which I don’t believe anybody did.”

Off-the-field involvement. Off the field, players also had responsibilities that they had to fulfill. Promotion was done at the team-level, as one player stated, “Everything that we do marketing-wise is a hundred percent on our shoulders.” Players on each team were responsible for promoting and selling tickets to their home games. One player said, “The league expected from the players a lot of promotion. . . . It was up to us to sell tickets.” Another player agreed, “Part of being in the LFL is that you are required to sell tickets. . . . We did a lot of promotional work.” At least one player from each team was designated as a team Marketing Manager who was responsible for

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43 One participant spoke of having to wear a pushup bra to fill the uniform top. (She told me matter-of-factly that the bra made it much easier for her breasts to slide out of her top while she was playing; sometimes her pastie was in place, while other times it was not.) Another player experienced the opposite problem; the top was too small for her. She said, “I had to . . . concoct this sports bra experiment that I could . . . tape to our actual uniform so that . . . everything stayed in.”
planning promotional events. Marketing Managers were expected to contact local bars to solicit sponsorships, which ideally involved the bars purchasing large numbers of tickets as well as allowing players to do a “meet/greet” and sell tickets to patrons. One player said that her team did “probably one event a week, . . . if not more. But at least one event a week.” Another player similarly said that there “was usually something every weekend.” When asked if there was a quota of tickets that each player had to sell, a player responded:

They’ve tried making us sell a certain amount but . . . it’s kinda hard to enforce cuz, you know, they would say, “Okay, you have to sell a hundred tickets.” But, I mean, what are they gonna do if you don’t? So, we kinda understood that, yeah, we need to sell a lotta tickets.

League officials also wanted players to be active in their communities to provide positive exposure for the league and their teams. One player explained, “The LFL’s really into being a part of the community. So they really encourage . . . the girls [sic] . . . to be a part of something in their community . . . and volunteer.” Teams sometimes participated in fundraising events for charities, whereas it was essential for WWCFL teams to organize and participate in fundraising activities to raise money to support themselves.

Additionally, players were supposed to generate media coverage. One participant said that players on her team wrote media briefs and they were interviewed almost every day in the month leading up to the launch of the Canadian league in 2012. Players were expected to be active on social media to promote themselves, their team, and the league, too. One player explained, “Social media was very big . . . and we were expected to get the brand out there. Get the name out there. Get ourselves out there.” Most players set up Facebook pages and other social media accounts.
When making appearances, players were supposed to wear their team’s tank top with black shorts or pants, or their team’s track suits. One player also said, “Eye black was necessary. We had to, you know, give . . . that football look.”

Conclusion. Involvement in the WWCFL and LFL was a time-consuming commitment for players not only to learn, practice, and compete in the sport but also to promote their teams and leagues through promotion, recruitment, volunteering, and fundraising events. Fundraising was integral in the WWCFL for teams to raise money to support themselves, whereas LFL players focused on promotional events for their home games to earn the league money through ticket sales. LFL players were also expected to spend time working out to achieve and/or maintain the league administrators’ ideal body size.

Chapter Conclusion

The WWCFL and LFL have fundamentally different purposes and consequently different structures. The WWCFL is a non-profit sport organization that provides women with opportunities to play football. It is democratically organized with clearly laid out rules and transparent decision-making processes that allow players to take up positions of power and to provide input about decisions. The LFL is a business whose purpose is to make money by providing entertainment to spectators through sport. The league has an autocratic structure with the Commissioner making the majority of the decisions for all aspects of the league. There are minimal opportunities for player involvement in decision-making processes.

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44 Eye black is grease applied under athletes’ eyes, commonly used in football. It reduces glare from sunlight and stadium lights, but athletes may also wear it for aesthetic purposes.
The WWCFL strives to align itself with existing (male) football organizations through affiliation with Football Canada, PSOs, and other football programs, by closely following established football rules, and scheduling its season around existing (male) football seasons. The LFL unofficially aligns itself with professional men’s leagues, and strives to adopt traditional football rules up to the point that is possible while still maintaining the bikini uniforms and alternate equipment and playing in small, indoor facilities.

Player safety was important in the WWCFL and potentially less so in the LFL. The WWCFL demonstrated its commitment to safety through its rules and resources. The league followed Football Canada’s *Rule Book*, which had many safety-related rules including specific protective equipment to be worn, and the league’s own safety rules, like mandatory coaching certification completion by all coaches, and informal practices, like having trainers and medical personnel attend practices and games. The LFL promoted its safety-related programs and rules through press releases, but some players felt that the league’s equipment and uniform, compounded by the facilities in which they played and untrained officials who did not strictly enforce football rules, contributed to unsafe playing conditions.

Involvement in the WWCFL and LFL required large time commitments from participants for activities both on and off the field. As a non-profit organization, the WWCFL required more of its participants’ time to be dedicated towards fundraising for their teams to sustain their operations, whereas the LFL was a for-profit business so players did not fundraise for their teams. LFL players did heavily promote their home games, as ticket sales were a source of the league’s revenue. LFL players had the additional responsibility of engaging in off-the-field workouts to maintain an acceptable
body size, as determined by LFL administrators and reinforced by the league’s “one size fits all” uniform.

In the next chapter, I examined the players’ experiences in the leagues.
CHAPTER 5

Results: Players’ Experiences

What are athletes’ experiences playing in tackle football leagues in Canada?

In this chapter, the following four themes about the players’ experiences playing football in their leagues are described: enjoyment of physicality, importance of teammates, men as the standard, and reactions towards participation. These themes emerged through analysis of interview transcripts with WWCFL and LFL players. Since the WWCFL administrators were current (at the time of the interview) or former players, I included some of their responses, where appropriate, for questions that overlapped between interviews with players and administrators, such as their interpretations of media coverage for their league.

Enjoyment of Physicality

The physicality involved in football was a motivating factor for many players to become involved in their respective leagues, and it was a reason they enjoyed playing the sport. A WWCFL and a LFL participant, both with previous contact sport experience, told me, “I like contact.” The WWCFL player went on to explain, “The contact is a lot of the reason, I guess, (laughs) of what attracted me to football. . . . The aggressiveness of the sport. The contact. . . . Or physicality is probably the better word. Physicality.” The LFL player said that she was interested in joining the LFL, in part, because, “I wanted to get back into playing a contact sport, cuz that’s kinda where my background lies in athletics.” Similarly, one WWCFL administrator who liked playing contact sports was specifically looking for a contact sport that she could play, and that was how she first learned about and joined the women’s football team in her area. Another LFL player,
when asked what she enjoyed about playing football, responded, “Well definitely the
physical aspect of it. That’s one of the reasons why I got into it.”

Players specifically referred to hitting people as an aspect that they liked. Part of
what drew one LFL player to the sport “was that you get to hit people!” A WWCFL
player recounted, “The first hit that I made . . . I fell in love with it [football].” Another
WWCFL player confirmed, “There’s something about hitting people” that she really
enjoyed.

The ability to hit people was a novelty for some players, as one LFL player stated,
“I had never played a full contact sport before.” A WWCFL participant said that she
started to play football because, “I just wanted to try it . . . I just really wanted to hit
someone. (laughs) That’s all.” One LFL participant with extensive experience playing
non-tackle football said that incorporating contact into the game made it even more
intense and exciting to play:

Just knowing that you’re gonna be able to like just lay into something. . . . The
intensity, the adrenaline, the domination, everything . . . is just amplified so much
with . . . this game. . . . Compared to my other [non-tackle] football leagues . . .

That’s why I love playing it.

She had not had the opportunity to play tackle football since the cancellation of the 2013
LFL Canada season, and she and another LFL player who also played non-tackle football
both commented that they missed the tackle aspect of football:

“Being able to . . . tackle someone . . . a hundred percent adds to everything. It’s
something I really, really miss.”

“I miss tackle football. I miss tackling. I miss . . . the physical . . . aspect of it.”
WWCFL players felt that an interest in and desire for contact was central to enjoying, and to being successful in the sport. (LFL players did not express this sentiment.) One player said, “You have to be willing to take a hit. You have to be willing to deliver a hit. . . . We don’t want the ones that are gonna shy away from the hits.”

Another player similarly stated, “You have to be willing to deliver hits as well as take a hit,” and she acknowledged that hitting is not for everyone, “We’ve had people come out and they’ve tried it, and . . . they thought they would be okay with the tackling, but they’re not.” A third player warned, “If you’re afraid of getting hurt, then honestly football’s not your thing.”

**Reasons for enjoyment of physicality.** Participants provided a couple of reasons for enjoying the contact aspects of the sport. They felt that the physicality required in football provided an outlet for aggression. Additionally, their previous exclusion from the sport and sanctions against aggression in other sports made the contact aspects of football enjoyable.

**Getting aggression out.** Players from both the WWCFL and LFL expressed that the physical aspect of the game allowed them to “get aggression out,” as a WWCFL player described it. Another WWCFL player said, “I got a little aggression. Sometimes, you gotta take it out,” and football allowed her to do so. Two LFL players similarly stated:

“You know you’ve had a rough day, you’re having a rough week, . . . you can just go out and let out . . . all your aggression there.”

“There’s definitely days where I’m like, ‘Oh, . . . I wish I could go out on the field right now and just tackle someone.’” (Laughs)"
Previous exclusion and sanctions. Women’s previous exclusion from football may have contributed to their enjoyment of the physicality in the sport. The WWCFL administrators, who were older than the players and thus may have experienced greater discrimination against playing football while they were growing up, especially expressed the idea that women playing football and being physical was deviant. One administrator, as previously mentioned, wanted to play football when she was a child but her mother would not allow her to play. The other administrator confirmed, “Coming through school, . . . I was [told], ‘You can’t play tackle football. This is for men only. And only the boys can play.’” She explained:

Men and boys have . . . been allowed to be . . . physical, well, forever. Women now have the opportunity to be that physical. And there’s nothing like it. . . .

There is something just completely exhilarating and empowering . . . [about] how you as a woman can feel playing a sport you’re not supposed to be playing, apparently. But . . . we are.

Players’ longstanding exclusion from the sport and opportunities to engage in the kind of physicality that football required created a feeling of deviance that made playing football and being physical enjoyable for participants.

Furthermore, two WWCFL players identified themselves as having always been more aggressive and physical than other people when they played sports. Even in non-contact sports like baseball, one player explained, “If some girl was in my way on the base, I’d take her out.” Their level of aggressiveness and physicality was regulated and sanctioned in other sports. The other player said, “Usually I’m the one getting in trouble for hitting people too hard. . . . In other sports, I get in trouble for being too aggressive.
But I can do it here [playing football]! And people seem to like it.” In football, far from being sanctioned, aggression and physicality are desirable and rewarded.

**Conclusion.** Players in both leagues enjoyed the physicality involved with playing football. It was a reason that attracted them to playing and kept them involved in the game. Hitting people was something that they especially enjoyed. Some players had not had the opportunity to play a contact sport before, and for a couple of LFL players, contact was something that they missed while playing non-tackle versions of football after the cancellation of the 2013 LFL Canada season. WWCFL players felt that people who did not enjoy and desire contact would not like playing football. A couple reasons emerged for why participants enjoyed the physicality of the sport. Players felt that being physical on the football field provided them with an outlet for their aggression and stress. Additionally, women’s previous exclusion from the sport and from engaging in the kind of physicality that football allowed, and that was often sanctioned in other sports, made their eventual inclusion and engagement in contact enjoyable.

**Importance of Teammates**

All of the players in both leagues spoke positively about their teammates. Players described their close friendships and the “family” feeling on their teams. A non-returning LFL player said, “You find your best friends in this league.” The other non-returning LFL player further emphasized this point, “I made some of the best friendships that I will ever have in my entire life with the women that I played with.” A WWCFL player similarly stated, “I’ve . . . grown so close to [my teammates] that I would almost consider . . . some of them my best friends and I’ve only known them for . . . a year.” She also explained how becoming involved in the WWCFL and getting to know her teammates helped her transition to living in the city when she moved there to attend university.
Further, WWCFL and LFL players, two from each league and all from different teams, referred to their team as a “family.” A WWCFL player said, “I enjoy the team aspects and community . . . . We say it a lot, but we always feel like kind of a family.” Another WWCFL player echoed, “It’s not just about the sport. It is about the social aspect, it is about being part of a large family.” Similarly, LFL players stated:

“We were . . . very, very close-knit . . . . It was almost like family.”

“It definitely becomes a family.”

Many players felt that their teammates positively contributed to their experiences in their leagues, and that their experiences would not have been the same without them. A non-returning LFL player declared, “The main thing that makes the league so great is the other women that you’re playing with.” The other non-returning LFL player shared, “You develop such strong, close bonds with these women, . . . and I’ll cherish that more than anything . . . now that I’m not in it anymore.” The positive experience that one LFL player had with her teammates motivated her to stay involved in the LFL. She said that having such a great team “really made that first year so special for a lot of us that we . . . continue to play” in the league. Even a non-returning LFL player echoed this sentiment, “I’d say that the number one reason why women continue to play on the team is because of the other women on the team. And I think that’s the bottom line . . . for most girls [sic]. It’s the camaraderie.” A WWCFL player said that she was “very driven by the social aspect” of being involved in her team; she really enjoyed spending time with her teammates, both on and off the field.

Indeed, the friendships and camaraderie extended beyond the football field and even beyond the football season as players spent time with their teammates outside of league-related activities. One WWCFL player talked about going out for “wing nights”
with her teammates after the season; she joked, “If we go for three weeks without seeing each other, it’s like, ‘I’m actually kind of lonely, so let’s go to wing night.’” Some LFL teammates got along so well that they began to live together. Players in both leagues started playing with teammates in non-tackle football leagues together.

**Reasons for the importance of teammates.** Two LFL players believed that the camaraderie they felt on their team was a rare experience. One player said, “The women on the team are second to none. . . . I’ve played [sport] for . . . numerous years and I’ve never had this kind of camaraderie.” Another LFL player with extensive sport experience similarly commented, “Our team was so amazing. We had the best girls [sic] on our team. . . . It’s something that doesn’t happen that often in your life, to get a group of girls like that together.” The first player thought the league’s minimal uniform brought a group of likeminded women together:

The fact that you’re playing tackle football and in *this* . . . format where you have the lingerie added. There’s [sic] very few women that would consider doing it. So . . . you end up bonding with a lot of people that have similar interests to you.

Meanwhile, the other player did not necessarily think that any unique aspect of the LFL, like the uniform, created the strong sense of camaraderie. Instead, she felt it was the competitive aspect of the LFL, which can be present in other leagues, that facilitated the experience:

Any sport . . . where you’re really competitive . . . I find that . . . team camaraderie also goes up because . . . you’re supporting each other, . . . and you have to put in the hard work to make you successful and if you’re playing, like, beer league soccer on a Sunday, you’re definitely not gonna feel the same connection with . . . your teammates.
The non-returning player as well as the other returning player commented that the amount of time they spent with their teams for football-related activities both on and off the field also facilitated the close friendships with their teammates. The non-returning player explained, “You’re practicing with these people three times a week. You see them all the time. . . . You’re doing all these activities outside of practice too, so . . . you get to know them really well.” Further, she felt that there was an antagonistic relationship between league officials and players, which strengthened the friendships among the players. She explained:

There’s always kind of a battle with the league, . . . so you kind of become an army, . . . you gotta stick together, in order to survive it. Otherwise you won’t.

(Laughs) Um, so you know, we become the support system for each other.

The other non-returning player agreed, “You definitely build different relationships because . . . these women understand what you’re going through.” She referred not only to issues between the players and league officials but also to the “stigma” associated with the league that may have resulted in criticism from family, friends, members of the media, and the general public. She went on to talk about a “sisterhood” among all the players in the league:

We’re all in this together. We all understand what the league is about. We know how the league is run. . . . I’m sure some of . . . the negative experiences that we’ve had with the Commissioner [Mortaza], they have had too but we all . . . put that aside to play.

The importance of the players’ teammates extended to the football field as well. Football is the “ultimate team sport” (Migliaccio & Berg, 2007, p. 275), and some participants from both leagues mentioned how every player on the field has to work
together to be successful. A LFL player pointed out, “This isn’t a one-on-one sport. . . .
Everything you do affects the other people on the field. Everything that the other people
on the field do affects you.” A WWCFL player illustrated this point, “If one person isn’t
doing their job, the whole team breaks down. . . . If I miss a block, and our quarterback
gets creamed, . . . then . . . we lose yards.” A WWCFL administrator emphasized the
importance of every player on the field, “Whatever position you are playing, you are a
part . . . of the success, and, well, failure too, . . . of that team.” Players need to know their
own position and their role for every play and, additionally, they have to trust that their
teammates are doing the same, as one LFL player described:

The plays in football . . . all depend on . . . every person on the field doing the
right thing for that play. So . . . every single person on the field has to rely on the
other person to do their job for that play to work and for you to be successful.
She felt that the level of trust required among teammates facilitated a close bond, which
might not occur playing a sport like “soccer where, yes, your teammates have to help you
. . . but . . . it’s not as crucial for every play.”

Conclusion. All of the players in both leagues spoke positively about their
teammates. Players described their close friendships with their teammates, the “family”
feeling on their teams, and how their experiences in their leagues would not be the same
without their teammates. Their close friendships were facilitated by the amount of time
that they spent with their teams both on and off the field. For the non-returning LFL
players, their teammates were an important support system for them due to the internal
and external criticism directed towards the league and their involvement in it. The
importance of teammates extended to the field in both leagues as well, because in football
all the players have to work together to be successful.
Men as the Standard

Men were clearly the standard by which participants compared their sport and experiences. Nearly every participant compared women’s football to men’s football, and WWCFL participants in particular did so in ways that indicated that men’s football was superior to women’s football.

Point of reference. Men’s football, especially elite men’s football, was a point of reference for players when discussing their leagues. A WWCFL player said that the league was “exactly the same as [the] CFL. It’s . . . the same rules. Now we’re going with the same time frame.” Another WWCFL player pointed to CIS football and the CFL, and said that the WWCFL is “exactly the same thing as, you know, the University of Regina Rams or the Saskatchewan Roughriders, only we’re female and we don’t get paid. . . . [Or] we don’t . . . get a free education.” LFL players also made references to other men’s professional sports and athletes. For instance, a non-returning LFL player commented about how LFL players differed from professional male athletes, “We’re not professional athletes like NFL players or basketball players where we have the ability every single day to go see a personal trainer, to go get massages.” A returning LFL player also mentioned the NFL and NBA when she was discussing Mortaza’s influence over LFL referees’ calls during games, “Officials in other sports don’t call up . . . the [Commissioner] of the NFL or . . . the NBA, and be like, ‘Oh, what should this call be?’ . . . That’s just not how sports work.”

Men’s football is the best, and women’s football is slow. All WWCFL players and one administrator not only compared women’s football to men’s football, but they did so in ways that implied that men’s football was the unquestioned standard in football. They referred variously to men’s football as “real,” “legitimate,” “standard,” and
“regular.” For instance, a WWCFL player said, “This year we’re playing fifteen-minute quarters. . . . So it’s like a legitimate [emphasis added] football game now.”

They also indicated in different ways that men and/or men’s football were superior to women and/or women’s football. After talking about CFL players and how large they were, a WWCFL player said, “It’s nice that I can do this [play football] on my level.” Similarly, an administrator said that the WWCFL “gives women an opportunity to play football against other women. Against other humans that have the same physical capabilities as they do.” Their comments suggest that women have different, and presumably inferior, physical capabilities compared to men and play football at a lower level. The administrator said that her goal for the WWCFL was to eventually expand into a Canada-wide league, “playing the same game at the same competitive level. I mean, not as fast or strong, but the same competitive level as . . . the men’s program.”

They all said that, compared to men’s football, women’s football is slow or that female football players are slower than male football players:

“It’s a little different game. It’s a lot slower [emphasis added].”

“You have to understand that women’s football is a lot of people who have just started playing football and they’ve never done it before. . . . And, so it’s a little slower [emphasis added].”

“Basically you put the equipment on us, and other than some of us are a little bit slower [emphasis added], like there [is] the occasional girl [sic] that is like super fast, but, put the equipment on, and we play just as hard, and look just as good as any guys do out there.”
“It’s exactly the same. . . . Just, shorter people. (Laughs) And, well, lighter. A little bit lighter. Maybe less fast [emphasis added]. But . . . still, it’s the same thing."

“It looks like a real game of football, it’s just not quite as fast [emphasis added].” Speed was clearly privileged by WWCFL participants as an important skill in football, and it was one that they believed men demonstrated more so than women. LFL players did not discuss the speed of their game or participants, and only one LFL player suggested that men’s football was superior to women’s football, “I viewed [the LFL] as football at the highest level that women could play. . . . I felt that it was . . . not obviously anything even equivalent to . . . the NFL but it was up there for women’s sports.”

Conclusion. Men’s football was a common point of reference for players’ interpretations of their participation and sport. Almost all participants compared women’s football to men’s football in some way. LFL participants mostly referenced men’s football (or other professional men’s sports) to compare how the LFL was structured rather than to compare LFL players’ skill level to male players. WWCFL participants said that their sport was played the same way as men’s football, but also pointed out ways that men’s football and athletes were different, and superior.

Reactions towards Participation

The feedback that players received about their involvement in football was mixed. Participants discussed reactions from family members, friends, co-workers, clients, the general public, and members of the media. WWCFL players were largely positive about the reactions of others, including media coverage. Upon further discussion, they revealed some negative comments that they had encountered. LFL players were more likely to
express negative reactions they had experienced, but they all received at least some support from family members and friends.

Everyone from both leagues talked about the support they received from family, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, clients, and random strangers. Family, friends, and co-workers watched their games. Three WWCFL players felt that family members were proud of them for participating. Only one LFL player expressed that her “ninety-something” year-old grandmother was very proud of her, and would carry around newspaper clippings of her to show people. Her younger brother also thought it was “totally bad ass” that she played in the league. A WWCFL player said that when she wore team apparel in public, like at the grocery store, people would sometimes strike up conversations with her to ask about the team and how they were doing. A couple of her clients at work surprised her once by telling her that they watched one of her games on television (some of her team’s games were broadcast locally), and co-workers had attended games. A LFL player also felt supported by her co-workers, “All my co-workers loved it. They thought it was the coolest thing ever. They came out . . . to games. . . . They liked my LFL Facebook profile page.”

All of the LFL players said that family and/or friends were not necessarily in favour of their participation but still supported them by watching their games:

“At the beginning I was like a little nervous about what my dad would think. . . . It was interesting but, you know what? He was super supportive and . . . watched all of my games.”

“Even my dad, who wouldn’t necessarily wanna see . . . a bunch of guys coming out to watch me playing in . . . sports bra and panties, or whatever, . . . was very supportive. He would come to my games.”
“My parents, they didn’t understand why I played. Some of my friends didn’t understand why I played. They . . . thought it was cool, but they were kind of thrown off from the uniform and . . . the, sort of the sexual promotion.”

“A lot of my friends, . . . they weren’t really sure about the league . . . [but] they all came to support.”

**Concern about injury.** Even though people were supportive, some still had concerns. Most WWCFL players and one LFL player reported that some family members, particularly female ones like mothers and grandmothers, were concerned about them playing football for safety reasons. These family members were worried that they would get injured. The LFL player said that her parents “came to the games, and . . . they couldn’t watch. They had their eyes covered for most of the games . . . . cuz I was getting hit . . . . Neither one of my parents wanted me to play a contact sport.”

Players did not interpret their family members’ concern about them getting hurt as a negative reaction to their football participation. A WWCFL player explained, “My grandma doesn’t like me hitting, but it’s not negative. She just doesn’t like me hitting people. Or being hit.” Further, the players mostly interpreted their family members’ concerns as being for their wellbeing in general, which a WWCFL player considered to be a “legitimate” concern, and one unrelated to their gender. One WWCFL player felt that even though her grandparents were “just like ‘. . . be careful. Please take care of yourself.’ . . . It’s not negative in the sense that . . . I’m a woman playing . . . a non-traditional sport.” Two WWCFL players said that some family members expressed the same concern for male relatives who played contact sports like football or hockey, though one of them did admit that she believed her grandmother’s concern was related to the fact that she was female:
I think, my grandma’s maybe a little more old-fashioned. It’s like, back in the day, girls didn’t hit. . . . But she’s been that way. . . . in all the sports I’ve played, . . . (pause) I think it’s more of the ‘girls playing sports’ aspect than ‘girls playing football.’ She’s always been like, ‘Why are you playing those sports and running around?’ and stuff like that.

Despite the concerns about injury, the players’ family members still supported them by attending games.

One WWCFL player reported that some people, like her best friend, were concerned about how her football participation might adversely affect her reproductive organs and her ability to have children:

I had my best friend question me once. Like, she’s supportive of it but she’s like, “I just don’t understand, like, don’t women’s reproductive systems . . . don’t they get hurt? . . . Can they have babies?” . . . I have had other people, you know, question that. They’re like “You could potentially be harming yourself so you never have kids.”

Unlike players’ more favourable interpretations of family members’ concern for their wellbeing, this player interpreted her peers’ concerns as negative and adversarial.

**Disapproval.** Both WWCFL and LFL players experienced disapproving reactions from others, including members of the media, with regards to their football participation. The WWCFL players experienced reactions that were related to women playing football, and beliefs about female capabilities and appropriate behaviour, whereas the reactions that LFL players experienced seemed to be based on women playing football in lingerie and the purpose of the LFL.
A couple of WWCFL players felt that some people did not understand their enjoyment of physicality (discussed earlier in this chapter). One player told me, in a voice that sounded like she was making a confession, “I like contact. I do,” but she felt that, “Some people don’t understand. They look at me funny.” As an example, she said, “When I tell [my grandma] I love hitting people, she looks at me.” Another WWCFL player similarly said about her grandmother, “I don’t think she gets what we’re doing. She’s like, ‘Why would you want to?’”

One WWCFL player related a story about her experience being interviewed on a local radio station when the league was first getting started. The host was a former professional football player, and she described his reaction to the idea of women playing football as, “Pff. Women doing this? I don’t think so. How are you gonna stop a three hundred pound linebacker?” She retorted, “We’re playing against other women. Not you,” to which he responded, “Ughh, women!” Another WWCFL player said that she avoided reading online media coverage because “you get posted comments all around the articles and stuff. And . . . a lot of times I’ll read stuff like . . . ‘It’s a men’s sport. . . .’ And . . . ‘Women belong in the kitchen,’ that kind of crap.” She also experienced negative reactions from some of her university classmates. She said that some of them thought that football was “too aggressive” and “women shouldn’t be involved.” She also experienced “people who say they wouldn’t come out and support . . . because . . . it’s not quality entertainment. Like . . . ‘Oh, I would never come and watch [women’s football]. Like ever.’”

LFL players were well versed in the criticisms about the LFL and their participation in the league. One player said, “There were a lotta negative . . . views,” which she summarized:
Lots of people . . . felt like it was just, you know, a sex scheme . . . and that it’s to get, you know, guys to come watch you. . . . [Men] thought it was kind of like a prissy sport, and that, you know, it wasn’t real tackles and . . . a lot of people think that what we do . . . is scripted, which it’s not at all.

In workplace settings, involvement in the LFL was subject to disapproval. Two LFL players mentioned that there were players who did not use their real names in the league because of their professions, or did not disclose their involvement in the league at work, as one of the players explained:

I know there [were] . . . girls [sic] on the team that had to change their name. Or had to lie about, you know, why they were going away for a weekend because they knew that . . . their boss . . . or their company . . . would not be okay with them playing in the league.

One returning player said that a couple of her friends approached her and said that they did not think she should be involved in the league because it might affect her ability to get a job in her desired field (public service) in the future; she disagreed and felt that it would not affect her chances, and if it did she would live with those consequences. Meanwhile, a non-returning player who was also interested in a career in public service attempted to minimize the amount of information available on the internet that connected her to the LFL after she chose to not return. She no longer had her Facebook page or other social media for her as a LFL player, but she understood that there was still information online that linked her to the league. She said it “weighs a little heavier on my mind” because she was unsure of how her past involvement in the league might impact her future employment opportunities. One non-returning participant did feel that she did not get a job when she was playing in the league because she disclosed her involvement during an
interview, and she got the sense that the interviewer disagreed with the league and consequently did not want to hire her. (While this assertion would be difficult to prove, she felt that she was very qualified for the position and she knew that it was just between her and one other candidate.)

**Not taken seriously.** One WWCFL player felt that when the league first started, some coverage in other cities “just seemed like they didn’t understand . . . and were just . . . not really taking it seriously.” A LFL player felt similarly:

> I think some of the media thought it was a bit of a joke. I think they just thought, “. . . It’s a bunch of scantily clad women playing a sport they don’t really know how to play.” And so, because of that they didn’t really give us the attention that we deserved.

Another WWCFL player described a couple of instances when media pieces conveyed incorrect information. For example, in a televised news segment, the game footage shown did not correspond with what the reporter was talking about. The player interpreted the sloppy editing and lack of attention to detail to mean a lack of care about the team and the story about them.

**Ignored.** Though one WWCFL player was satisfied with the media coverage for her team, she felt that teams in other cities did not receive the same level of attention and respect in the media that her team experienced. She recalled the inaugural WWCFL Championship game, which was held in Lethbridge, Alberta after the under-18 Football Canada Cup. She said that the members of the media present for the Canada Cup did not stay to cover the WWCFL game afterwards. (She suggested that they might not have stayed because the Lethbridge team was not in the WWCFL Championship.) While the two WWCFL administrators were happy with the quality of the media pieces about the
teams and the league, they also felt that the quantity of coverage should increase. One administrator summarized:

Almost every interview we’ve ever had has been positive. I can’t recall anything that’s ever been negative about women’s football. We’d like more. We’d like the articles to be longer. We’d like them … to have more people in them, more pictures. And we’d like them to do it more regularly. But, from the perspective of what’s been done, we’ve been quite satisfied with the comments … and the portrayal of women’s football in the media.

**Mistaken for the LFL.** Almost everyone from the WWCFL commented that the LFL’s presence in Canada brought media attention to the WWCFL because articles about the LFL would often mention the WWCFL as well. One player said, “The biggest thing with them [the LFL] is it’s free publicity for us. Because any time they’re mentioned, we’re mentioned in return.” One administrator admitted, “The press that they’ve got[ten] has been in some ways *almost*, I’ll say almost beneficial to the [WWCFL] because it has heightened the awareness of women’s football.”

Due the large amount of media attention directed towards the LFL, WWCFL members said that people commonly thought that they were involved with the LFL. An administrator said that it’s “been so much about *them* [the LFL] in the media that when . . . we tell [people] about playing football, they assume that we’re playing lingerie football.” One player confirmed, “That’s always the first thought.” She said, “Most of the time that I have to explain first that I have all my stuff [equipment and clothing] on.” Another player described, “If they give us ‘the look’, like we know the look, (laughs) like, ‘Oh, you play for the [team name]?’ And we’re like, ‘Yeah, we’re the league with clothes.’” For another player, when she told people that she played football, “they’d make
a joke . . . ‘Oh, is it the LFL you play in? Ha ha ha . . .’ Like, I heard that . . . joke a lot.” WWCFL players said that people often did not know that women’s football existed or that it existed in a form besides the LFL.

**Shaping reactions.** All interview participants, with the exception of one WWCFL player, had experience interacting with members of the media and being interviewed at least once. The WWCFL administrators had been promoting women’s football in the media for years. Members from both leagues actively sought media coverage by sending out press releases, calling into radio stations to promote upcoming games, and contacting other media outlets to get coverage. Both WWCFL administrators said that it was “tough” to garner media attention and involved, as one administrator said, “continuously hammering the media.”

LFL players felt that they were really important for shaping understandings of LFL and its purpose (at least the purpose for the players themselves) when speaking to the media, family, friends, and others. One non-returning player said:

I thought, . . . I’m educated enough and I’m outspoken enough that I’d be able to maybe, *hopefully*, change the . . . outlook that people have on it. So if I was a part of it . . . I could spread a message that it’s not just about, you know, sexy women playing a sport. It’s about female athletes who just wanna play a contact sport.

The other non-returning player strongly felt that players were most important for influencing representations of the league:

As long as the right people are representing the league, . . . it won’t get that negative tone and won’t get that negative feedback . . . that you would expect. So really I think, . . . the women of the league are what make the league. And *they’re* the ones that make it successful. If it wasn’t for the women that it attracted, and
the women that are currently in place who are all very intelligent women, . . . the league wouldn’t be what it is and it wouldn’t have the popularity that it does.

**Conclusion.** WWCFL and LFL players felt supported by people who were important to them, even if people they cared about (e.g., parents, grandparents) expressed concern about them playing, including fear of injury. Other negative reactions included outright disapproval, not being taken seriously, and being ignored in the media. WWCFL participants also mentioned that people commonly thought that they played in the LFL because they did not know that women played any other version of football. Participants played an important role in seeking out media coverage, and they felt that they were able to positively influence others’ reactions to their participation and leagues.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Players in both leagues really enjoyed two aspects of their football participation: the physicality involved in the game, and their teammates. Players, especially in the WWCFL, interpreted their involvement in the sport through comparisons with men, who served as the standard by which they deemed women’s football inferior. Participants experienced support for their football participation, tempered with concerns about injury, disapproval, not being taken seriously, and being ignored in the media. WWCFL participants were also accustomed to their league being mistaken for the LFL. Participants in both leagues worked to garner media coverage, and they felt that they played a role in shaping others’ reactions to their participation.

In the next chapter, I examined media representations of the WWCFL and LFL and their players.
CHAPTER 6

Results: Media Representations

How are women’s tackle football leagues and players represented in the Canadian media?

The results of a media analysis of newspaper articles about both leagues indicated that understandings of men’s football shaped interpretations of the WWCFL (men’s game no more!) and the LFL (men don’t play football in lingerie). Furthermore, the LFL’s sexualized uniform influenced representations of the league as a business, pseudo sport, and entertainment (“sport” entertainment business).

WWCFL: Men’s Game No More!

In WWCFL coverage, there were references and comparisons to males and men’s football throughout the articles as well as descriptions of women’s previous exclusion from football due to their gender and their resultant lack of experience playing the sport.

Previously the domain of men. Football was explicitly expressed as “a game that traditionally has been the domain of men” (Cameron, 2010, para. 10). Other journalists described it as a “so-called all-male activity” (Schmidt, 2010, para. 1), and “one of the last bastions of male machismo” (Fortney, 2011, para. 5). Consequently, Valerie Fortney (2011) predicted that some people “might be surprised to hear about so-called members of the fairer sex taking on tackle football” (para. 8). Kevin Mitchell (2011a) described the “group of pioneering Saskatoon women” who were “working to coax [emphasis added] tackle football across gender lines” (para. 2), while Ashley Prest (2009) stated more strongly, “The Manitoba Fearless, Manitoba’s first tackle football team for women” had, in fact, “tackled [emphasis added] the gender barrier” (paras. 1-2). An article in the

**Novel and historic.** There was a sense of novelty with regards to the WWCFL, the teams, and women playing football in general, demonstrated through the use of the words “new” (e.g., Schmidt, 2010, para. 2), “fledging” (e.g., Harder, 2011, para. 1), “nascent” (Fortney, 2011, para. 6), “inaugural” (e.g., Lambert, 2011a, para. 5), “debut” (Mitchell, 2011b, para. 3), “first” (e.g., Zdeb, 2008, para. 4), “first-ever” (e.g., Zary, 2011, para. 2), and “only” (as in, “the only women’s tackle football team in the city” (Cameron, 2010, para. 2)). For instance, Cory Wolfe (2010) of Saskatoon’s Star Phoenix wrote, “Dozens of Prairie women are preparing to tackle something new -- [sic] each other” (para. 1). Furthermore, there was a sense of historic significance around what the WWCFL and teams were accomplishing by existing and playing football. A headline declared, “Riot Ready to Make History” (Hamilton, 2011a), and another article stated, “Women in Regina have the opportunity to tackle history” by playing football with the Regina Riot (Slater, 2011a, para. 1). An article in the Taber Times similarly announced, “Women who want to try something new and be part of sports history will have a chance if they become part of the Lethbridge Steel. For the first time ever, a women’s football team is being formed in Lethbridge” (Price, 2009, para. 1-2). In the Fort Macleod Gazette, Steel president and player Rebecca Medel agreed, “This is history in the making” (“Women’s Tackle Football,” 2011, para. 6). Regina Leader Post writer Craig Slater (2011b) elevated the historical weight of the Regina Riot’s first touchdown by suggesting that it was significant enough to have a corresponding trivia question. He advised, “The quarterback-receiver duo of Aimee Kowalski and Alisha Beler will forever
be the answer to trivia questions as the combination that produced the Riot’s first
touchdown in Western Women’s Canadian Football League franchise history” (para. 2).

Fortney (2011) referred to female football players as “pioneers” (paras. 6, 21, &
24) and “path-forging females” (para. 24). Her article was titled, “Tough Calgary Women
Tackle a Movement in Sports,” and other headlines read, “Fearless Women Blazing a
Trail” (Prest, 2008), and “Breaking New Gridiron Ground” (Lambert, 2011a). Women
were not merely described as playing football, they were part of a “movement,” they were
“blazing a trail” and “breaking . . . ground”; they were changing the sport opportunities
available for females. Calgary Rage football player, Janet Naclia (2012), wrote an article
titled, “I Am Football Player: Hear Me Roar,” and said that she and her teammates were
“taking ownership of the glorious game of football for [our]selves and paving the way for
future generations” (para. 15). Further, female football players were constructed as
changing people’s preconceived notions about women playing football, as Chris Jaster
games wouldn’t look like football got a wake-up call Sunday afternoon” (para. 1) at a
game between the Manitoba Fearless and Regina Riot.

Previously excluded. Women’s previous exclusion from football was not due to
their lack of interest in the sport. In many articles, players expressed their longstanding
desire to play but lack of opportunity to do so. Becky Wallis, a 26-year-old45 Regina Riot
player expressed, “I have always had an interest in football, always had an interest in
playing. . . . I just never had the opportunity” (Slater, 2012a, para. 6). Other players
explicitly linked the lack of opportunity that Wallis described to their gender. Lethbridge

45 The players’ ages are included if they were provided in the article, and they reflect a
player’s age at the time the article was written.
Steel player Ina Tams stated, “I’ve always wanted to play football ever since I was a little kid, but I was never allowed to because I was a girl” (Price, 2010, para. 8). Linda Craig, who played on the first Western Canadian team, the Calgary Rockies, and helped establish the WWCFL and the Okotoks Lady Outlawz, agreed that when she was in high school “in the ’80s, football just wasn’t open to girls . . . . I’ve been looking for a team for a long time” (McDowell, 2008, para. 5). The sense of gender-based exclusion was not limited to older players; even 16-year-old Kaitlin Fisher of the Regina Riot said, “I wanted to see what it was all about because you always see the guys play tackle football and the girls never get to play it” (Graham, 2011, para. 10).

Playing football was a “dream come true” (Prest, 2008, para. 4) for Tannis Wilson, who established the Manitoba Fearless, as well as Cheryl Hurlburt, founder of the inaugural Western Canadian team, the Calgary Rockies. Wilson expressed, “I’m 40 and I’ve wanted to play since I was nine years old. I’ve had to wait for a considerable amount of time but you can’t give up on your dream” (Prest, 2008, para. 13). Hurlburt similarly echoed, “I’ve watched the game since I was about five and loved it . . . . So to be on the field at my age [44], when I didn’t know if this dream would ever come to fruition, it’s phenomenal” (MacGillivray, 2008, para. 3).

**Lack of experience.** The novelty of women’s football predictably resulted in an overall lack of football playing experience on all of the teams. There was a large focus on players’ lack of football experience, which more subtly supported the notion that football was previously a man’s game. Players were portrayed as proficient athletes in other sports; their athletic backgrounds were often described, and a number of players had extensive sport experience, including non-tackle versions of football, and other high-level sport participation, like at the collegiate level in both Canada and the United States (e.g.,
Mitchell, 2011a, 2011b). When it came to football, however, most players were “as green as the turf” (O’Leary, 2010, para. 10).

**Not as good as men.** A focus on players’ lack of experience also assured that even though women were “playing the same game, same rules, same crack back blocks as the men” (Prest, 2008, para. 2), they were not playing it as well as men. There were some explicit comparisons between the women’s level of play and that of males. Calgary Rage player Janet Naclia (2012) wrote, “I’m not so bold as to compare myself to the Titans in the CFL” (para. 15). Chris Zdeb (2008) wrote about Edmonton Storm player Nicole White, “The avid Edmonton Eskimo fan says the women’s team isn’t anywhere close to being able to play like her favourite CFL team” (para. 25). Some comments noted the level of experience of players’ relative to boys. Near the beginning of the Regina Riot’s inaugural season, player Claire Dore commented, “Compare us to a group of high school boys who have been playing for five or six years. It’s innate to them,” whereas she and her teammates were just learning how to play (Hamilton, 2011b, para. 17). Regina Riot’s head coach Jon Baxter even compared his players’ experience level at the beginning of their first season to that of ten-year-olds: “Their experience was equivalent to second-year atoms” (Harder, 2011, para. 6).

**Men as experts.** Due to women’s previous exclusion from football and lack of experience in the sport, all of the coaches on all the teams were men. Head coaches were often referenced in media pieces, including their football credentials like their playing and coaching experience, as well as their coaching staff. For example, “Handling the clipboard for the Steel will be Blair Takahashi, who is the head coach of W.R. Meyers football program in Taber. . . . Four assistants from various programs have also signed on
to lead this group” (Schmidt, 2010, para. 7). Head coaches were often interviewed and quoted in articles.

The importance of coaches for teaching inexperienced women how to play football was emphasized. Jeff Yausie, head coach of the Saskatoon Valkyries, said, “Football is a really complicated game, so they really need good coaching” (Zary, 2012, para. 10). Veteran players on the teams were also sometimes mentioned as important leaders for rookie players, “Brower’s veteran presence will no doubt lead the younger players” (Woodard, 2012, para. 8). Rookie player Cali Harris on the Lethbridge Steel confirmed, “I’m learning a lot from the veterans” (Woodard, 2011, para. 17).

The role of the coaches in a team’s success was mentioned. For instance, Candice Bloomquist, quarterback of the Saskatoon Valkyries, “attributes the team’s success to strong coaching. . . . ‘The coaches were great. They really broke it down into the component parts so that we could learn it slowly, and then put it all together into the whole game’” (Trembath, 2012a, paras. 11-12). Coach Yausie said of the Regina Riot, “Obviously they’re well-coached” (Hartshorn, 2011, para. 14).

**Conclusion.** In WWCFL coverage, football was portrayed as having previously been the domain of men, and women playing football in the league was portrayed as novel and historic. Articles described women’s prior exclusion from the sport and their consequent lack of experience playing football. Female football players were portrayed as not good as men and reliant upon their male coaches’ expertise to learn the game and be successful.
LFL: Men Don’t Play Football in Lingerie

In LFL coverage, the league’s uniform and minimal protective equipment was the predominant focus and the basis of differentiation from men’s football and the devaluation of its historical importance.

Never a man’s domain. Lingerie football is not, and never has been, a man’s domain. Lingerie football is different from how men play football in terms of rules, especially in comparison to the NFL and other non-arena football leagues, but most of the focus was on the rules related to the uniform and equipment. Men don’t, as many critics of the league pointed out, play football (or any sports) in lingerie or without adequate protective equipment. Some males ridiculed the idea of playing sports in lingerie by reversing the scenario; Vancouver columnist Gordon Clark (2012) joked about a “Guy’s Gonchies Football League” (para. 8), and in Tom Bentley-Fisher’s (2012) tongue-in-cheek Letter to the Editor, he said that he assumed that the LFL would be an “equal opportunity venture” and asked if that meant “the guys will be scrimmaging in their long johns” (para. 2). Colin Butler (2012) sarcastically suggested “having the Codpiece Cowboy Rodeo in a double-bill with the LFL” (para. 5). Others also pointed to the lack of protective equipment worn by LFL players as diverging from men’s football. Vancouver columnist Daphne Bramham (2012) pointed out, “B.C. Lions quarterback Travis Lulay or receiver Geroy Simon don’t play football clad only in jock straps, shoulder pads and helmets without faceguards” (para. 1). Shelese Wozney (2012) was similarly concerned about the lack of protective equipment worn by LFL players as she inquired, “Why do the men get a league where they are fully padded and protected and yet women only get shoulder pads, knee pads and a hockey style helmet? Where is the equality in safety for both men and women?” (paras. 6-7). The minimal uniform and equipment worn by LFL
players was thus the most common point that people used to criticize, dismiss, and make fun of the league.

**Novel, but not historic.** In terms of media coverage for the LFL, there was a sense of the league’s novelty that was similar to the WWCFL. For example, “This Saturday, the fledgling Lingerie Football League makes its debut in Mississauga [Ontario]” (J. Stewart, 2012, para. 1). The sense of historical significance present in the WWCFL articles, however, was absent in articles about the LFL. In fact, a male journalist mocked the historical significance of the LFL, writing about the Regina Rage’s first home game, “Local sporting history was made on Saturday night, when a Regina-based football team finally got to play indoors... I was anxious to see how much support the landmark contest would garner ... [ellipses in original] er, garner” (Vanstone, 2012, paras. 1 & 8). There were two LFL players who referred to themselves and their teammates as “pioneers” of the LFL (Harder, 2012e, para. 10; Trembath, 2012e, para. 21) and a thrice-cited statistic was that the LFL US was “rated the top live sports series in the history of MTV Networks” (Chin, 2012, para. 3; Colpitts, 2012, para. 3; J. Stewart, 2012, para. 1). Otherwise, the only sense of history with regards to the LFL came from critics saying that many people worked hard throughout history to promote women’s rights, and the LFL was not advancing them. Critics expressed these sentiments through Letters to the Editor across the cities with LFL teams. Saskatoon resident Megan Schick (2012) wrote, “This league is a backlash to feminist movements fighting for equal rights and treatment of women. We must take a stand and protect the progress we have made over the past decades” (para. 5). “K. Panko” (2012) wrote to Abbotsford’s The News that she felt the

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46 Though K. Panko (2012) used an initial in place of her first name, she identified herself as a woman in her letter, “I felt compelled as a woman to respond” (para. 2).
LFL “is demeaning and degrading to all female amateur and professional athletes, who have long struggled to be allowed to play sports and be recognized as true athletes” (para. 6). Reginan Judith Hansen (2012) expressed similar concerns, “The sexualization of women takes away from the years of hard work by women, who believe rightly, that they deserve respect and praise for their athletic abilities” (para. 3).

Rather than challenging expectations and stereotypes of females, as seen in WWCFL coverage, the LFL was generally represented as reinforcing them. Janet Austin, Chief Executive Officer of the Vancouver YWCA, called the LFL “an extreme manifestation of sexualization of women” (Bramham, 2012, para. 17). Regina YWCA shelter director Kendra Garcia-Strong (2012) asserted, “There is no doubt that the new Lingerie Football League further reinforces the objectification of women and their treatment as second-class citizens” (para. 1). Schick (2012) contended:

This league furthers sexist stereotypes. It indicates that the worth of a female is directly related to her appearance. . . . Women have been told time after time that our value lies in our appearance, and that our worth and purpose lie in our sexuality. (paras. 2-4)

In a Letter to the Editor, Saskatoon resident Nicole Braun (2012) neatly critiqued the premise of the LFL:

I get that people feel threatened by women participating in football because the sport is heralded as the ultimate domain for tough guys. Having women play football in skimpy attire is simply a way to appease some cultural discomfort with their exceptional athleticism, strength, power and skill. Their pretty makeup and toned bodies reassure us that the women are sexy objects first, and athletes second. Phew. (para. 1)
As seen in Braun’s letter, people frequently acknowledged LFL players’ athleticism and talent, but disagreed with the league and its lingerie uniform. Calgary Rage player Erin Walton (2011) explained:

I don’t doubt that the Lingerie Football League teams have athletes on their rosters, but I do very much dislike the notion that the only way to sell women’s sports is to have it laced (no pun intended) with sex. (para. 2)

Richmond, BC resident Kim Kemp (2012) echoed, “I have no doubt that these women are very good athletes, and I would encourage them to find a more respectable way to share their athleticism and their talent” (para. 4). Kemp thought that it was “pathetic” (para. 1) that women participated in the league. LFL players were occasionally blamed for contributing to the objectification and sexualization of women, as Regina resident Katherine Lawrence (2012) wrote, “Players are willing pawns in a scheme that debases them, and by extension, all women” (para. 3).

Not all LFL players, however, eagerly accepted the lingerie uniform. Kate Marshall, a player on the BC Angels and LFL Canada’s Defensive Player of the Year as well as Mortaza Award winner, expressed reservations about the league’s uniforms prior to trying out for the team, “The negative part of it - the fact that you’re playing in no clothing - that’s the only negative” (“North Van,” 2012, para. 10). She admitted, “The only person that’s telling me not to do it is the other half of my conscience” (“North Van,” 2012, para. 4). Fellow BC Angel Stephanie Manou similarly “wrestled with the issue of objectification before trying out” (Weber, 2012, para. 13). She ultimately decided, “within the context of the league, she can be a positive role model” (Weber, 2012, para. 14). She said:
I get both sides of the argument. . . . Do I think this is the ideal of what women should stand for? No. But by being a part of it, being a positive role model with positive values, I can help shape what the league will look like in Canada. I want to inspire other women to get involved in athletics, and not just the traditional female sports. I wanted to show that women could play contact sports as well.

(Weber, 2012, paras. 15-16)

She felt that she was succeeding in doing so, because “men and women come up to us after the game and say they’re blown away by the level of athleticism and that they didn’t know women could hit so hard” (Weber, 2012, paras. 7-8).

**No previous exclusion.** Lingerie football was invented in recent years as a sport designed exclusively for women to play, and the LFL was just starting in Canada in the time period covered in this media analysis, so its players did not have a history of exclusion from their sport like WWCFL players. LFL players did not express the same longstanding desire to play football as seen with the WWCFL players. Such sentiments expressed by players in Regina and Saskatoon would likely have been met with the question of why they did not play in the WWCFL for the Regina Riot or Saskatoon Valkyries. One female journalist did point out that there were no women’s football leagues in BC, and one BC Angels player had been planning on trying out for a LFL US team before she learned that the league was coming to Canada (M. Stewart, 2012a).

**Lack of football experience.** Like WWCFL players, most LFL players had never played football, as Craig Slater (2012b) pointed out, “Most women have yet to experience tackle football, and [Janell] Wiebe [of the Regina Rage] is one of them” (para. 14). Some players were (men’s) football fans, but had not actually played, like Candace Friesen of the Saskatoon Sirens, “I’ve never played football before, but I love football. I’m a huge
[Saskatchewan Rough]Riders fan and I’ve always liked the sport” (Trembath, 2012b, para. 11). Other players had at least some, if not extensive, non-tackle football experience (M. Stewart, 2012a). Despite the players’ lack of football experience, they all had previous backgrounds in other sports, some at elite levels, which were described. Overall, LFL players were portrayed as athletic albeit in sports besides football.

The Commissioner is the boss. The LFL’s Commissioner, Mortaza, was frequently interviewed and quoted in articles. He was the predominant voice of the league. Aside from generic references to “league officials” (e.g., Trembath, 2012b), there were only two instances when someone other than Mortaza spoke on behalf of the league, one male spokesperson (Luymes & Ip, 2012) and one female administrator (Hutton, 2012a). The teams’ coaches were occasionally quoted but not to the extent seen in WWCFL coverage. The LFL did have two female coaches, but only one was quoted once (Harder, 2012a). Additionally, coaches were not, with a couple of exceptions (Mitchell, 2012a; Trembath, 2012b), portrayed as “experts” upon whom players relied to learn how to play football like in WWCFL articles.

Conclusion. Coverage of the LFL largely focused on the league’s uniform and equipment, which greatly differed from men’s football; a number of people pointed out that men do not play football (or any sports) in lingerie or without adequate protective equipment. The LFL was portrayed as novel, but the sense of historical significance seen in WWCFL articles was absent. A sense of history largely came from critics saying that many people worked hard throughout history to promote women’s rights, and they felt that the LFL was not advancing them. Due to the novelty of lingerie football, players were not portrayed as having experienced the same longstanding exclusion from the sport that was seen with WWCFL players, but LFL players’ lack football experience was
mentioned. References to coaches were not as frequent as in WWCFL coverage, but LFL Commissioner Mortaza was the voice of the league.

**LFL: “Sport” Entertainment Business**

A dominant theme in LFL coverage, which was not present in WWCFL articles, was the portrayal of the league as a business, as questionably a sport and as (objectionable) entertainment. The lingerie uniform was described by the league’s Commissioner and by players as a necessary marketing strategy to attract media attention and spectators, who were encouraged to “Come for the lingerie, stay for the football.”

**Business.** The LFL was consistently constructed as a business through the vocabulary used by the Commissioner himself as well as others writing about the league. The league was called a “business” (e.g., “Back Chat,” para. 15), a “venture” (e.g., M. Stewart, 2012a) and a “sports property” (Harder, 2012e, para. 17). It was often called a “product” (e.g., Harder, 2012c, paras. 2, 5, & 7), including a “sports product” (Mills, 2012d, para. 14) and “football product” (e.g., Hutton, 2012a). Mortaza was referred to as a “business man” (Richardson, 2012, para. 4), “entrepreneur” (Redekop, 2012, paras. 5 & 10), and “promoter” (e.g., Clark, 2012, para. 3), and there were references to the LFL making “money” and “profit” (e.g., Tucker, 2012, para. 1). One male critic of the league called it “a ploy for bucks” (McMiller, 2012, para. 9).

Marketing terminology was used; there were talks of “building the brand” (e.g., Mills, 2012a, para. 14), and the lingerie uniforms were referred to as a marketing “tool” (Trembath, 2012b, para. 3), “strategy” (e.g., M. Stewart, 2012a, para. 29), “scheme” (Mills, 2012b, para. 22), and “gimmick” (“Angels upset,” 2012, para. 13). A couple of people wrote that the league is “using sex to sell football” (e.g., Clark, 2012, para. 3).
There were references to the “market” and the spectator “demographic” for the league (e.g., “sports-oriented males in the 20 to 35 age bracket”) (Mackenzie, 2012, para. 2).

Some people evaluated the LFL’s value in economic terms, like the potential for the games to draw in spectators from the surrounding area and result in sales at local businesses around the venue (e.g., Luymes & Ip, 2012). Others pointed out that “the market” will determine the viability of the league (Hutton, 2012b, e.g., para. 2). A male administrator at one of the venues hosting the LFL asked, “It’s something different - a little on the risque side - but why not give it a chance and see if the market will bear it?” (Hamelin, 2012, para. 7).

By contrast, the WWCFL was never portrayed as a business. In one instance, Brandon, Manitoba was referred to as “a small market” (Jaster, 2012, para. 14) in a discussion about the possibility of starting a WWCFL team there. The term “demographic” was only ever used to describe the participants, not the audience. For example, “The squad is made up of a very diverse group and will have quite the gap between [age] demographics” (Schmidt, 2010, para. 8). Otherwise, no business terminology was used in WWCFL articles.

**Not about the sport.** Many people indicated their skepticism towards viewing the LFL as a sport, as indicated by the number of writers who used quotation marks around the word “sport” (e.g., Lucyk, 2012, para. 1; Wirrell, 2012, para. 3). Others called the LFL a “base sport” (Welsh, 2012, para. 5), “prurience disguised as sport” (Butler, 2012, para. 6), and “a step up from mud-wrestling” (Warick, 2012, para. 21). The WWCFL’s status as a sport, meanwhile, was not questioned. Evidently, the LFL was commonly

47 The assumption that the male spectators are heterosexual is never made explicit when discussing the LFL’s target audience.
dismissed as sport due to the lingerie uniform and the consequent focus on the “sex appeal” of its players. In order to be a sport, it appeared that people felt that the league’s focus must be on the sport, rather than extraneous aspects like players’ (attractive) appearances. For example, Gerda Peachey (2012) argued in her Letter to the Editor, “If LFL was about football, you would not be able to tell the sex of the players under all their protective padding” (para. 5).

In a number of instances, writers referred to the LFL as the “lingerie league” (e.g., Mitchell, 2012a; M. Stewart, 2012a). Dropping the sport, football, out of the name entirely subtly indicated that the lingerie, rather than the sport, was the most important feature of the league. Referencing only the lingerie uniform also suggested a focus on players’ appearances, which was reinforced by a LFL press release about team tryouts. The league’s instructions for prospective players were reproduced in a number of articles that publicized the tryouts:

LFL Canada strongly encourages prospective athletes to come prepared to participate in strength, speed and agility drills. Also, dress attire is cute gym wear (sports bra and shorts) with sneakers ... [ellipses in original] In addition, athletes are asked to bring a photo to leave behind and to arrive 30 minutes before the scheduled start time. (Hutton, 2012c, para. 16)

Megan Stewart (2012a) noted the instructions with regards to “cute” apparel and the “head shot” and called the tryout “essentially a casting call” (para. 30). She also shared a comment by Stephanie Manou, a star player on the BC Angels, “One of the first things [Mortaza] said to me [was]: expect to be one of the league MVPs [Most Valuable Players] because you are articulate, you’re easily marketed and you’re good-looking” (para. 16). The MVP award is traditionally given to an outstanding player based on his or
Manou was indeed a talented player, and while her game play, and while Manou was indeed a talented player, her quotation suggests that in the LFL, being a MVP is related to appearance and “marketability” rather than athletic ability.

Another incident that suggested the league’s lack of focus on the sport occurred when a fight took place at a LFL game between spectators in the stands. The LFL posted footage of the “brawl” on their YouTube page (Legends Football League, 2012) and, as Kevin Mitchell (2012b) pointed out, it was the only highlight clip from the game that they posted. A male administrator at the venue where the confrontation took place commented, “(LFL Canada) should be promoting their product instead of the fights in the stands” (Mitchell, 2012b, para. 10).

(Objectionable) Entertainment. The LFL’s focus on non-sport aspects, primarily due to the lingerie uniform and its related marketing strategy, reduced its credibility as a sport. Kevin Mills (2012c) explained, “Critics maintain it is sexually based entertainment rather than sport” (para. 27). Consequently, the league was largely constructed as entertainment, which many still felt was “objectionable” (Duggan & Tucker, 2012, para. 5), or at least dubious—“It’s not exactly the kind of entertainment that puts this city on the cultural map” (“Editorial,” 2012, para. 4). Gertie Pool (2012) wrote a Letter to the

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48 Manou had a successful LFL Canada season on the field as the league’s rushing leader, making up 87% of her team’s rushing yards, with an average of 6.9 yards per carry and 84.3 yards per game and a total of five touchdowns (Staffieri, 2013d). She was named co-Game MVP in her first LFL game and she was nominated for LFL Canada’s MVP and Offensive Player of the Year awards (“LFL Canada Opens,” 2012; Staffieri, 2012).

49 The LFL garnered some publicity through posting the clip of the spectator brawl in the stands; popular sport gossip website Deadspin wrote about it (Dickey, 2012), and the clip then spread through other news and sports websites (e.g., Davis, 2012; Strauss, 2012). Chris Mangatal (2012) reported, “Mortaza believes even though it’s never good to see people get hurt, it brings a level of legitimacy to the sport” (para. 7). The game had a second fight in the stands and two streakers on the field (Mitchell 2012b). Mortaza stated, “This happens in soccer, it happens in every major sport” and he felt that the incidences indicated that “fans saw the potential for the sport” (Mangatal, 2012, para. 2).
Editor that described the LFL as “low-down under-par garbage entertainment . . . filled with obscene, distasteful, offensive and repugnant dress and behaviours” (paras. 5-6).

Some people did not even think that the LFL should be considered entertainment:

Regarding lingerie football: Surely we have come farther, as a society, than to believe this type of display is entertainment? . . . I am distressed to think that Regina will support this type of degrading display of sexism and call it entertaining. (Hansen, 2012, para. 1)

The association of the LFL with entertainment also resulted in its construction as a performance. It was called a “show” (e.g., Colliar, 2012, para. 12; Trembath, 2012d, para. 18), a “production” (Trembath, 2012d, para. 12), and a “spectacle” (Corbett, 2012, para. 2; Hutton, 2012b, para. 4)—including a “pathetic, demeaning spectacle” (Bramham, 2012). Some referred to the uniforms as “costumes” (e.g., J. Stewart, 2012, para. 1), and one male journalist talked about the “pageantry” (Trembath, 2012d, para. 7) at a game. Furthermore, the LFL itself reinforced the idea of the league as entertainment and performance through their press releases that commonly compared the league’s success to that of WWE, characterized as a “popular sports franchise” in the league’s releases (e.g., “Lingerie Football League Re-brands,” 2013, para. 10). This comparison is noteworthy because the WWE is, as the ‘E’ in the name indicates, entertainment in the form of scripted, theatrical wrestling, rather than a sports league. Mortaza mentioned this LFL-WWE comparison in one article (Baker, 2012a), and a male journalist also described the LFL game that he attended as “a WWE-style clash of Good vs. Evil” (Vanstone, 2012, para. 5). A male columnist sarcastically pointed out that the LFL headquarters “are in that famous football epicentre of West Hollywood, Calif.” (Clark, 2012, para. 9), as Hollywood is famous for its entertainment, not sport, industry.
Articles that provided LFL game coverage reinforced perceptions of the league as entertainment. Sean Trembath (2012d) wrote of one game, “The event had the air of sports entertainment” (para. 5). Elements that contributed to this “air” included “showboating after big plays” (Trembath, 2012d, para. 5), “bone-jarring hits, some of the late and excessive variety. . . . [and] trash talk that escalated into postwhistle scrums” (Harder, 2012b, para. 5). The size and composition of the audience and their enjoyment and reactions were often included in game coverage. The crowd was typically constructed as a “small-but-enthusiastic” (“Angels Upset,” 2012, para. 2), “predominantly male” (e.g., “Angels Dust,” 2012, para. 2) group who were “clearly entertained” (Vanstone, 2012, para. 6) by the “hard-hitting, eye-opening affair” (Harder, 2012d, para. 9). For instance, Kevin Mills (2012f) wrote, “The crowd was small, but it was lively, cheering, standing and even doing the wave as the hard-hitting action unfolded” (para. 2). Almost all spectators interviewed were males and they were often surprised and impressed by the level of play. One male spectator admitted, “I was expecting some sloppy, soft hitting stuff. But, you know, these girls [sic] actually hit pretty hard so good on them. They’re athletes. I’ll come again” (Mills, 2012f, para. 4). A male spectator at another game similarly expressed his desire to attend future games, and he elaborated:

I’m very surprised with the hard hits and how fast of a game it is. It caught me off guard. I expected more prancing around, a slower game, a little bit of a wrestling match. These girls [sic] are going all out. I’m very impressed. (Harder, 2012b, para. 8)

The focus of the game was on it as a “product” and as “entertainment”; while players were represented as proficient football players, media emphasis was often placed on the end consumers (predominantly males), rather than the (female) participants. If the
LFL is (sport) entertainment, then it makes sense to report about the audience and their reactions to it. This point is illustrated in a brief, 61-word article (below) that reported the details of an upcoming LFL game and referred to a past game with no mention of the score, only the number of spectators:

Lingerie football returns to the Abbotsford Entertainment and Sports Centre on Saturday night (Sept. 29), as the hometown Angels take on the Toronto Triumph. Kickoff for their second and final home game of the Lingerie Football League season is at 8 p.m. The Angels played the Regina Rage on Aug. 25, in an [sic] home opener that attracted an estimated 2,500 fans. (“Lingerie Football Returns,” 2012)

If the LFL is entertainment, then the previous game’s success as an entertainment attraction (attracting 2,500 spectators) is more important than the sport success of the home team. If the LFL is not considered to be, or taken seriously as, a sport, then there is no need to report sport-like features such as the score (the most basic game result).

In WWCFL coverage, the league was not portrayed as entertainment. The focus was on the teams and the players. Occasionally the number of spectators at a WWCFL game was mentioned and their support, like, “The crowd of about 120 . . . cheered them loudly” (Lambert, 2011b, para. 3). In one instance, a player’s partner was interviewed at a WWCFL game (Graham, 2011), but otherwise no spectators were ever interviewed.

**Necessary marketing strategy.** Mortaza never disputed the critiques of the league’s sexualization and objectification of its players and charges of using “sex” to sell football. He was consistently and unapologetically clear that the lingerie uniform was a marketing strategy:
The unique thing about the LFL is that we’re blantly honest - in fact, to a fault. You know, sex has been used for decades and eons as far as marketing individual athletes and a sport. Today you see David Beckham in his boxers in Times Square on a big billboard. This goes on, on both sides of the fence, and it’s gone on well before the LFL. We’re just more honest about it - that, hey, that’s part of our gimmick to initially bring fans in, bring in media attention. (Mills, 2012c, para. 28)

Mortaza admitted to using a “sex sells” strategy and attempted to deflect criticism by pointing to examples of objectified male athletes (see also Mills, 2012a). Some players also felt that the uniform was a necessary marketing strategy. In an interview with BC Angels player Jeanette Jackson, Kevin Mills (2012e) reported, “She said the lingerie aspect helps the league build the brand and fill the stadium” (para. 29). Fellow BC Angel, Ashley Petrie, agreed, “They need to find ways to draw in a crowd” (M. Stewart, 2012a, para. 10).

Come for the lingerie, stay for the football. Mortaza justified the uniforms and sexualized marketing strategy with the quality of the football product, his rationale seeming to be that because the players are actually playing a high-quality game of football, the objectification is excusable to draw viewers initially; that the end justifies the means. Mortaza and players consistently said to reserve judgment on the league until attending a game, after which they felt spectators would realize that the players were

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50 In defense of the LFL’s uniform, Mortaza also pointed to volleyball uniforms (presumably women’s beach volleyball uniforms) and said that LFL uniforms were no worse (e.g., Baker, 2012), which some players, coaches and proponents of the league echoed (e.g., Hutton, 2012b; Mills, 2012e; M. Stewart, 2012a). They also compared the LFL’s uniforms to those in other sports including swimming (Mackenzie, 2012), track and field (e.g., Mitchell, 2012a), triathlon (Trembath, 2012d), and roller derby (Nicholl, 2012), and non-sport contexts, like the beach (e.g., Luymes & Ip, 2012).
talented athletes who played football well. Mortaza insisted, “If LFL strictly relied on sex appeal, it would have no shelf life. . . . The sport continues to grow because of the intensity of the game and the level of football that these women play” (Baker, 2012, paras. 13-14). He argues that there has to be some level of talent, otherwise people would not continue to watch the games. BC Angel Ashley Petrie agreed, “Once you draw in a crowd [through the lingerie uniform], you have to keep that crowd” (M. Stewart, 2012a, para. 10) by playing football proficiently. Mortaza, players, and coaches were confident that spectators would enjoy LFL games for the lingerie and the sport. Megan Stewart (2012a) argued, “Make no mistake, the LFL uses sex to sell football. . . . But without football-fast, smart and tough tackle football-the league has no leg on which to strap its lacy garter belt” (para. 30).

Conclusion. The LFL was largely portrayed as a business, a pseudo sport, and as entertainment, or some combination of the three. The WWCFL, meanwhile, was not portrayed as a business or as entertainment, and its status as a sport was not questioned. The LFL’s uniform, which was the target of most criticism against the league, was defended by some league members and supporters as a necessary marketing strategy, justified by the high quality football “product” produced by the players.

Chapter Conclusion

Men’s football shaped interpretations and representations of both leagues. Since the WWCFL played football following the same rules as men, the league was portrayed as a historic movement in a male-dominated sport, whereas men do not play football in lingerie like in the LFL. The league’s uniform was criticized for sexually objectifying women, and the LFL was not represented as historically significant. Additionally, the
LFL was portrayed as a “sport” entertainment business, which was not seen in representations of the WWCFL.

In the next chapter, I discuss all three sub-questions as they relate to the main research question.
CHAPTER 7

Discussion

Using duality of structure as a framework for analysis illuminates the socially constructed nature of structures and the people who create them. Agents actively create, reproduce and, sometimes, transform structures, including the WWCFL and LFL Canada, while their actions are concurrently shaped by previous structures. Through Messner’s (2002) tri-level framework, I was able to examine women’s football structures, the agents who create them, the culture (media) in which they exist, how they interact to shape women’s experiences playing football, and how they are shaped by the players. Furthermore, studying both leagues together provided more and different insights than if they were analyzed alone. For instance, I found that players from both leagues dedicated a large amount of time volunteering for their leagues, yet they experienced the time commitment differently because of the leagues’ differing orientations towards earning profit (see “League Structures (Resources) Shaping Players’ Experiences” section for further details).

In this chapter, I discuss the factors that have shaped the two football leagues’ structures (rules and resources) and consequently shape players’ experiences. I also consider how players are shaping league structures (rules and resources). Additionally, I look at how league structures and players are shaping media representations. Finally, I discuss the possibilities that the two leagues present for structural reproduction and transformation.

Factors Shaping League Structures

The divergent purposes of the leagues greatly shaped their structures. Hegemonic understandings of football and gender also contributed to the leagues’ structures. The
WWCFL is a non-profit, participant-centred amateur football league, while the LFL is a for-profit sport entertainment league with spectators’ entertainment being its prime focus (in order to make money).

The distribution of power in the WWCFL is decentralized and democratic. It is modeled like a typical amateur sport league with autonomous teams that have one representative each to comprise the Board in addition to elected Executive Members. The WWCFL’s decentralized structure facilitates the need for clearly laid out rules, including small details such as the times when games can be played, because each team is responsible for running their home games as per the schedule set by the league’s Commissioner.

The LFL has a highly centralized and autocratic structure, with the majority of power concentrated at the top and almost none at the bottom, in line with the hierarchical structure of the power and performance model of sport (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). The LFL is a business and the Commissioner is its owner and Chief Executive Officer, making decisions to ensure the business is profitable. All of the LFL teams are created (and disbanded) by Mortaza, and he makes coach hiring (and firing) decisions. He, along with the other (small number of) league administrators, arrange contracts with stadiums, set the game schedule, assemble the necessary game-day staff, including referees and medical staff, and stage the games.

The WWCFL’s purpose is to provide women with opportunities to play the sport of football as it is currently understood. Consequently, the WWCFL is affiliated with Football Canada and closely follows their Rule Book, which governs the way amateur football is played in Canada. In order to provide women with football opportunities, the WWCFL heavily relies on males to coach and officiate, and male teams for resources like
equipment. Their dependence on men reproduces the gender order, with men in dominant positions of power and women being subordinate to them. Further, to ensure that the league receives support from males and male-dominated football organizations, the WWCFL does not compete with them for resources. Instead, the WWCFL’s season is scheduled around pre-established leagues to ensure that the women have access to resources like equipment, coaches, and fields. Since WWCFL participants do not present a challenge to existing male programs for resources, they have been accommodated in football’s male-dominated structure and thus they are able to fulfill the league’s purpose of providing women with opportunities to play football. By scheduling the WWCFL’s season around men’s football, they reproduce the hegemonic gender order with men and the things that they do (e.g., play football) receiving top priority.

The LFL is not affiliated with any other football organizations; it exists as its own brand of football. The LFL’s intent to provide an entertaining sport product means that games take place indoors in hockey arenas (in North America) for an up close spectator experience not available with outdoor football fields, where spectators are more removed from the on-field action. (Outdoor football fields might be more expensive to rent as well, which would be a business consideration for the league.) The rules of the LFL’s game have some similarities with the AFL, which is a marginal version of men’s football, but the LFL focuses on making comparisons between itself and the NFL, the hegemonic form of football in the United States. Contact is largely understood to be an entertaining (and integral) aspect of football, and thus it remains in the game. The LFL most noticeably diverges from any form of football by having players wear bikini uniforms and minimal equipment to display their bodies to attract media attention and entice spectators to either pay to attend games or watch them on television, aired by networks that pay for broadcast
rights. The LFL’s strategy to attract attention is shaped by dominant understandings of what attracts media attention and what (heterosexual male) spectators find “entertaining”: the sexualization and objectification of women (Robinson, 2002). Devaluing women by reducing them to sexualized objects minimizes their ability to challenge the current gender order when they are enacting characteristics of hegemonic masculinity while playing football, like aggressive physicality.

It is important in the WWCFL, as a participant-centred league, to ensure player safety, as much as possible when playing football. The Rule Book emphasizes safety throughout with rules about mandatory protective equipment and rules punishing dangerous play. The WWCFL has its own safety-related rules, including a mandate that all coaches have to have coaching certification. No WWCFL players mentioned issues with poor officiating, like Wedgwood’s (2005) participants in the Australian rules football Women’s League.

Since spectators’ entertainment is of prime importance in the LFL, player safety is less important, as is the enforcement of football rules, which contributes to unsafe playing conditions for players. The LFL uses minimal uniforms and protective equipment in order to attract spectators, and this attire causes safety issues. Women’s sports are often ghettoized (Messner, 2002) through the use of additional equipment and modified contact rules relative to men’s sports, but the LFL is ghettoized by having less equipment while maintaining the same contact rules as men’s football in order to make it “entertaining.” Moreover, keeping the game fast-paced, rather than bogged down with constant calls by officials, makes it entertaining, as do “highlight reel” hits. Some LFL players were concerned with the referees’ lack of rule enforcement, like Wedgwood’s (2005)
Australian rules football Women’s League participants, because they felt that their safety was compromised.

The WWCFL is a non-profit organization and, like most amateur sport organizations, heavily relies on volunteer labour. As a result, everyone in the league is a volunteer, and being involved is a time-consuming commitment, as seen in roller derby leagues as well (Beaver, 2012). While the LFL is a for-profit business, the fewer expenses Mortaza has to pay, like player salaries, the more profit he gets to keep. (Other profit-making “amateur” sports, like NCAA men’s football and basketball, do not provide their players with salaries either.) The LFL further saves money by relying on players, rather than paid administrators, to market their teams and sell tickets. The amount of unpaid labour fulfilled by LFL players, both on and off the field, reduces costs for the league. Thus, the WWCFL and LFL are similar in the large amount of time players have to commit to be involved with the leagues.

League Structures (Rules) Shaping Players’ Experiences

Women’s contact sports are often ghettoized (Messner, 2002) through rules that limit contact relative to men’s versions of the sports, like hockey (Poniatowski, 2011). Neither league, however, modified the level of contact involved in their games. Both the WWCFL and LFL adopted football rules that provided participants with an opportunity to play a version of football that involved tackling. A number of participants had previously played non-tackle versions of football, but none, with the exception of one participant, had ever played with tackling before. The physicality of the sport was the most common reason why players in both leagues were attracted to and enjoyed participating in football, which was also found in previous research about women’s football (Carter, 2012; Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009) and other contact sports (e.g., Chase,
opportunities for them to previously experience the kind of physicality involved in football were limited, which was the same for Knapp’s (2011) and Migliaccio and Berg’s (2007) football players. Many participants noted that sport provided them with an outlet for their aggression and everyday frustrations. Football and contact sport participants in previous literature felt the same way about their sports (Chase, 2006; Cotterill, 2010; Knapp, 2011). The players interviewed were thus able to enact characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that were previously unavailable to many of them, or that had been previously sanctioned as inappropriate when enacted in other sports. Their experiences aligned with the rugby players in Chase’s (2006) study, who mentioned having been penalized in other sports for being “too physical” (p. 237). Additionally, the contact involved in football led some participants’ family members and friends to be concerned about their safety, as other female contact sport participants have experienced (Baird, 2010; Carle & Nauright, 1999; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007).

The WWCFL followed Football Canada’s Rule Book, which meant that participants played the hegemonic, culturally valued version of the sport played by males. Female football players gained a sense of legitimacy by doing so. The WWCFL’s alignment with men’s football framed their interpretations of their experiences; WWCFL participants compared themselves and their sport to men, including how men’s football is played and structured (e.g., professional male football players get paid). Men’s sport as the standard was reproduced (Bruce, 1998), which was also seen in other women’s football research; Packard’s (2009) players felt sense of pride because they could hit as hard as men, and the most dominant theme in Knapp (2014) was that players were
encouraged by their coach and teammates to “play the right way” to demonstrate that women can play “real” football, which is the way that men do.

**League Structures (Resources) Shaping Players’ Experiences**

The leagues’ resources (financial, human, and material) shaped the players’ experiences in various ways.

**Financial resources.** The WWCFL is a non-profit sport organization, and players had to pay a fee to play. They also had to participate in fundraisers to raise money for their teams. LFL players did not have to pay to participate in their league, and the league covered players’ expenses related to travel, meals, and accommodations for away games. The LFL’s financial resources, earned primarily through the football product created by its players, were otherwise not shared with them. As a result, WWCFL and LFL players experienced a similar time-consuming commitment tied to volunteer activities in their leagues in different ways. WWCFL players, as members of a non-profit organization, were generally happy to volunteer their time to organize, promote, and fundraise for their teams. Meanwhile, some LFL players felt exploited as unpaid workers, or unappreciated by league officials in relation to the amount of time that they dedicated towards the league, which involved not only training and competing but also promoting and selling tickets to their games. Skaters in the original roller derby league similarly felt exploited for their labour on and off the track by the non-skater owners (Beaver, 2012). The skaters ultimately left to create their own league, which LFL Canada players who leave the league would not even have to do if they live in or near a city with a WWCFL team. Players in Ontario and BC, though, would have to be like the roller derby skaters and create their own football opportunities within their provinces.
Human resources. The WWCFL’s human resources contributed to players’ safety while participating in football. All WWCFL coaches had to have coaching certification to ensure that players learned proper skills and safe techniques. Some WWCFL teams had equipment managers who attended practices and games to help make sure that players’ equipment fit and protected them properly. Most teams had trainers, and medical personnel were present at games to help diagnose and treat injuries. Additionally, players gained a sense of legitimacy by receiving administrative and coaching support from individuals involved in elite men’s football programs as well as their PSO. Men’s support of the WWCFL differed from the conflicts and hostility that participants in Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League experienced with members of established men’s leagues and the sport governing body. The Women’s League was established more than twenty years prior to the WWCFL; perhaps the support that the WWCFL has received from males indicates progress in gender relations, with women gaining access to traditionally male-dominated structures with less resistance now than occurred with participants in Australian rules football in the 1980s.

Due to the LFL administrators’ primary focus on entertaining spectators to earn money, they did not stringently focus on ensuring the safety of their participants. While medical personnel were present at every LFL game, most players felt that improperly trained officials, who did not seem to be familiar with LFL rules or tackle football rules, refereed their games. One player said that Mortaza told referees to not make very many calls, and most players commented that referees did not enforce a lot of rules. The consequence was that potentially unsafe play on the field resulted. Participants in Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League also identified issues with umpires provided by their sport governing body; they felt that the umpires did not
take the women’s sport seriously so they did not strictly enforce rules, which created unsafe playing conditions. One LFL player suggested that referees might not have taken their jobs refereeing lingerie football seriously. Another LFL player felt the lack of rule enforcement was because the resultant “highlight reel” hits were, from the perspective of league administrators, entertaining for spectators.

The distribution of power in the LFL, which afforded almost none to players, affected how the non-returning LFL players viewed their teammates. Due to the antagonistic relationship between players and league officials that resulted from the power imbalance, the players viewed their teammates as comrades-in-arms against league officials. Such antagonistic relations within leagues were not described in my literature review of (predominately amateur) women’s sport, except for the original roller derby league where tensions existed between the skaters and the non-skater owners who were trying to make a profit (Beaver, 2012). Perhaps leagues with profit motives have more power imbalances that can lead to oppositional relations between players and management; players may come to view their teammates as a united group against management. Additionally, the LFL’s lingerie uniform and related marketing strategy generated negative reactions towards the league so, like Packard’s (2009) female football players, the LFL players felt that their teammates provided a necessary support group while they engaged in a stigmatized activity. (Returning LFL players did not express these sentiments with regards to the importance of their teammates.)

Material resources. By playing football according to Football Canada’s Rule Book, WWCFL participants played on regulation Canadian football fields and they wore the same uniforms and equipment as males. In some cases, they literally wore the same equipment and uniforms as males because some teams borrowed equipment and others
received equipment and uniforms secondhand from male programs. The players were thus able to align themselves and their sport with men, and differentiate themselves from the LFL on the basis of their uniforms and equipment. They would tell people who misinterpreted their football participation as LFL participation that they played with football equipment and clothing on, or in “the league with clothes,” as one participant put it. A football hierarchy seemed to emerge, with men’s football at the apex and women’s football played in the way men’s football is played above lingerie football. Evidentially, wearing adequate clothing and equipment is largely understood to be an important aspect of “sport.”

As previously mentioned, the LFL administrators’ focus on making money by entertaining spectators shaped its ability, or willingness, to serve the interests of its players in terms of safety. The players’ uniforms and protective equipment, previously described as a way to draw spectators’ attention and thus to fulfill the league’s purpose, compounded by the indoor facilities, created safety concerns for most players. They felt that the equipment was inadequate to protect them from injury while playing football and in arenas with boards. Additionally, the skin exposure caused by the minimal uniform was problematic for playing on turf due to the turf burn that all the players “inevitab[ly]” sustained. The LFL’s uniforms and protective equipment shaped players’ “body management.” Like Carter’s (2012) football players, LFL players’ body management differed from male football players in terms of equipment selection, but unlike Carter’s participants, it differed because players did not get to select their equipment and had to wear league-supplied apparel. Their attire was an obstacle to their body management because the minimal uniform and equipment led to different injuries that they had to treat, like extensive turf burn all over their bodies.
Players Shaping League Structures (Rules)

WWCFL players had opportunities to perform administrative functions by running for Executive positions, and to influence the structure of their league by representing their teams on the Board, by exercising their right to vote for Executives and on other matters at AGMs, and by bringing issues to the Board’s attention. Each team had their own administrative structure as well, so players could also shape their teams. With the exception of one WWCFL player, all of my participants were involved administratively on their teams. The two administrators were players when they worked to establish their respective teams, and one player had been involved with the formation of her team. WWCFL players were helping to create opportunities for themselves and other women to play football, just like the pioneers of the Australian rules football Women’s League (Wedgwood, 2005) and roller derby (Beaver, 2012), and the members of the lesbian, feminist softball league who created an alternative to “malestream” sport that aligned with their feminist values (Lenskyj, 1994).

Opportunities for LFL players to fulfill administrative positions and shape their league were limited. Each team had at least one Marketing Manager, which was a volunteer administrative role but its sphere of influence was small. Every event and media appearance that the Marketing Managers organized still required approval at the league-level. LFL players had to fit within and follow the league’s rules or leave, which two of my participants (and many others, like the players on the first Toronto Triumph team) chose to do.

Players Shaping League Structures (Resources)

Players shape financial, human, and material resources in their respective leagues, as outlined below.
Financial resources. Running a football team is a costly endeavour, and WWCFL players performed an important role by bringing in financial resources for their teams. Not only did they pay an annual participation fee, but they also helped organize and run fundraisers and solicit sponsorships to raise thousands of dollars. Without the time and effort that players contributed towards these activities, their teams would not have the financial resources to operate. Beaver (2012) mentioned the time consuming labour provided by roller derby participants to sustain their leagues. LFL players also significantly contributed to the financial success of their league. In addition to creating the football product that was marketed and sold, the players were relied heavily upon for promoting and selling tickets for their home games. The work of the Marketing Managers on each team was especially important. They were players who were responsible for soliciting sponsorships for hundreds or thousands of dollars, and organizing promotional events where they, along with their teammates, could sell tickets to their games. The reliance on LFL players for labour off the field aligns with the first roller derby league; it was intended to be a for-profit venture with non-skater owners, but players still volunteered their time off the track to ensure the success of the league (Beaver, 2012).

Human resources. Players shaped each other; teammates greatly contributed to players’ enjoyment in their respective leagues. Players from both leagues referred to the “family” environment on their teams. LFL players cited their teammates as a large reason why players continued to participate in the league. Previous women’s football research indicated that players greatly enjoyed the community and sense of family on their team (Migliaccio & Berg, 2007), which was seen in other contact sports as well (e.g., Cotterill, 2010; Ezzell, 2009). Additionally, WWCFL players helped to shape human resources by
recruiting players, and potentially spectators, to their league by participating in recruitment and promotional events for their teams, which is a novel finding.

**Material resources.** In terms of equipment, one WWCFL team purchased female-specific “Zena” shoulder pads for their players, who may have been having difficulty fitting into shoulder pads designed for men. Proper fitting equipment positively contributes to players’ body management by protecting their bodies from injury (Carter, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, LFL players’ ability to shape the league was limited. Even though some players had safety concerns about wearing the lingerie uniform and minimal protective equipment while playing football indoors in arenas with boards and on turf, the only alternative to not wearing the uniform and equipment was to leave the league. One player said that she made a request to wear additional protection that Mortaza denied, and she did choose to leave the league after the first LFL Canada season (for a number of reasons, including safety concerns). The main way that LFL players could shape the league’s material resources was through reproduction. Since LFL players were willing to play in the minimal uniforms and equipment, the league was able to continue operating. If all players refused to participate in the LFL, then the league would not be able to exist in its current form.\(^{51}\) By wearing the LFL’s uniform to play football, the players helped reproduce the league and reinforce the ideals of hegemonic femininity upon which it was based.

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\(^{51}\) The cancellation of the 2013 LFL Canada season was caused, in part, by a group of LFL players refusing to participate in response to the league officials shortening the season (Mitchell, 2013).
League Structures Shaping Media Representations

The WWCFL largely aligns with men’s football, so newspaper articles focused on the novelty and historical significance of women playing football, a sport dominated by men. The WWCFL head coaches were all male, and they were often referenced in articles and portrayed as “experts” who helped the largely inexperienced football players learn the game and achieve success. This result supported Vande Berg and Projansky’s (2003) finding that in women’s basketball broadcast commentary, players’ success was often attributed to following the advice of their predominantly male coaches.

The LFL’s uniform greatly shaped media representations and interpretations of the league. The lingerie uniform and, to a lesser degree, the lack of protective equipment, both of which clearly deviated from men’s sport, promoted the ghettoization of women’s sport (Messner, 2002). The LFL was largely represented as a “pseudo sport,” more akin to entertainment than sport. Roller derby has also been portrayed as a “spectacle,” rather than a sport, in the media (Cotterill, 2010). Indeed, LFL articles focused on the entertainment aspects of games, like showboating and trash talking, and the audience and their apparent enjoyment of it. This predominant entertainment focus extends the findings of Knapp’s (2013) LFL US media analysis, as an entertainment focus was not reported in her study. A high volume of criticism was aimed at the LFL based on its uniform because people disagreed with the sexualization and objectification of women, which the league’s Commissioner defended as a necessary marketing strategy not unique to women’s sport. Additionally, the Commissioner largely spoke on behalf of the league, which extends Knapp’s (2013) theme of “men take care of business” in the LFL, because her results focused on the (male) coaches as the figures of authority in the league.
Players Shaping Media Representations

Participants in both leagues actively sought media coverage. Either my interview participants themselves sought coverage or they said that other members of their teams did so. All my participants, with the exception of one WWCFL player, had been interviewed by members of the media. In some cases, like the WWCFL administrators, they had extensive experience promoting their leagues in the media. LFL players especially expressed that they felt like they had the opportunity to shape others’ opinions about themselves and the league through interviews with the media.

My WWCFL interview participants and players who were represented in newspaper articles wanted to be portrayed as competent athletes playing the same game as men, though in various ways they assured others that they did not play it as well as men. Players featured in articles often expressed a longtime interest in the sport, but never having had a chance to play. The LFL players that I interviewed and those who were represented in newspaper articles wanted people to know that they took the sport seriously and played it well. They wanted to promote women’s sport, especially contact sports, and change perceptions of women’s athletic capabilities. Thus, players from both leagues wanted to be similarly represented as competent, serious athletes.

LFL players were limited, however, in their ability to speak with members of the media because of the control that the league administrators exercised over media appearances. As previously mentioned, all media appearances had to be cleared by league administrators, and they often selected the players who represented the league in interviews. Additionally, players had to be careful about what they said during interviews because they could get into trouble with league officials if they said anything that
portrayed the league negatively. WWCFL participants did not describe such an oversight with regards to media interviews.

**Structural Reproduction and Transformation**

WWCFL participants are reproducing current, hegemonic understandings of football while transforming understandings of who plays it. The WWCFL’s purpose is to provide opportunities for women to play football, as that sport is currently understood. The WWCFL is aligned with existing (male) football organizations. The league is affiliated with Football Canada, and closely follows Football Canada’s *Rule Book* used by amateur football leagues across the country, thus avoiding ghettoization (Messner, 2002). WWCFL participants are not trying to transform the sport of football. They do not want to change any rules of the game or adopt a different governance structure. They are not set on ensuring that the league is largely run by its participants, like roller derby leagues affiliated with WFTDA that must have a certain number of skaters as administrators and owners (WFTDA, n.d.a). Current and former WWCFL players do largely fulfill administrative roles but that is based on necessity as a nascent non-profit organization with limited resources rather than a valued aspect of the league’s culture, as seen in roller derby with leagues’ “skater owned and operated” philosophy and DIY ethic (Beaver, 2012). In fact, one administrator hopes that the Executive will be run by outside members when the league becomes more established in the future. Democratic processes though, like in roller derby (Beaver, 2012), are an important part of the WWCFL. Inaugural administrators structured the league in a way that they felt was fair by giving every team an equal vote on the Board. They also hold AGMs to democratically vote on changes to the league’s By-laws and to elect the Executive.
Furthermore, WWCFL participants are not trying to create a feminist alternative to the sport, as seen in Lenskyj’s (1994) account of the lesbian, feminist softball league. Like the participants in Wedgwood’s (2005) Australian rules football Women’s League, WWCFL participants want inclusion into a structure from which they were previously excluded. They are accordingly reproducing the hegemonic understanding of (Canadian) football as full contact, 12-a-side, 3-down football played on a 110-yard field for 60 minutes by men in elite leagues like the CFL, CJFL, and CIS and based on the power and performance model of sport (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

The one way that the WWCFL differs from current understandings of football is that the league is for women, whereas football has historically been understood to be a man’s game. The WWCFL’s slogan, “Breaking stereotypes, one yard, one tackle, one touchdown at a time,” acknowledges that the league is changing (“breaking”) football in some way, which was reinforced by newspaper coverage that constructed the league, teams, and women playing football as historic. WWCFL participants are transforming understandings of who plays football. Football is no longer solely the domain of men; women play it too. A new understanding of who plays football is only being developed to a limited degree, because many people that the WWCFL participants encountered did not know that women’s football existed. Additionally, some people rejected the notion of women playing football, as evidenced by sexist reactions that players encountered. Some people essentially said, “Women can’t (or shouldn’t) play football,” as was noted in Migliaccio and Berg (2007).

Moreover, understandings of who plays football better are reproduced. WWCFL participants made comments that indicated they considered men’s football to be “real” and superior, especially devaluing the speed of female players and the women’s game.
Newspaper articles focused on players’ lack of experience in the sport, not only indicating the novelty of women playing football but also subtly indicating their lower level of play relative to men. There were also direct comparisons to men’s sport and male athletes, which are common in women’s sport coverage (e.g., Poniatowski, 2011; Vande Berg & Projansky, 2003) and reproduces men as the standard (Bruce, 1998; Kian et al., 2008).

Finally, WWCFL participants have the opportunity to be transformative economically. Through the league’s existence, participants are creating a market for football equipment for females. Women’s football participation has already spurred the development of “Zena” shoulder pads for women. Buying these shoulder pads, which one WWCFL team did, demonstrates that there is a demand for female-specific football equipment, and may shape the development of more women’s football equipment in the future.

The LFL is structured in ways that reproduce the gender order. Players contribute to this reproduction through their participation in the league. The LFL promotes the ghettoization of women’s sport (Messner, 2002) through its rules related to the uniform and protective equipment. Women’s athleticism is devalued through the league’s sexualized uniform and minimal protective equipment, which contributes to displaying the players’ bodies. Mortaza candidly admits that the league’s apparel is a “gimmick” to attract spectators and media attention, suggesting that women’s athletic abilities alone are not sufficient to attract an audience; in addition to women’s athletic talent, their sexualized bodies must be on display to make watching women’s sport entertaining.

The amount of media coverage that the LFL received reinforced the idea that sexualizing and objectifying women successfully attracts attention and supports Messner and Cooky’s (2003) finding that women’s sport coverage contains “pseudosport[s]” that
are “visually entertaining” (p. 41). Newspaper representations suggested that the LFL was not a sport, and the LFL, with its bikini-clad players, received more coverage than the WWCFL and its fully clothed and equipped players. In my media sample, the number of newspaper articles about LFL Canada (n=152) from an eleven-month time period was almost double in comparison to the number of WWCFL-related articles (n=78) that were published since the first Western Canadian team was established in 2003. WWCFL participants confirmed that there had been a lot of media coverage for the LFL, and said that they were often mistaken for LFL players because people did not know that women’s football existed in a non-lingerie format.

The LFL also reproduces, and enforces, hegemonic cultural understandings of feminine beauty. Players wear makeup while competing, and league officials emphasize the importance of having a tanned body (presumably for players with white skin). The uniform comes in one size that all players are expected to fit into, which indicates that there is only one acceptable body size for LFL players. League officials enforce appropriate body size through “body checks” prior to each game. Players who do not fulfill the ideal standard receive threats of being pulled from the game. Though LFL players embody characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity while playing football, their ability to be transformative is constrained by the preoccupation with, and supremacy of, their appearances over their athletic talent, which is facilitated through the league’s lingerie uniform.

**Connections to Literature**

My findings about league structures, players’ experiences, and media representations support, extend, and challenge current literature in numerous ways.
Support. My results about the league structures of the WWCFL and LFL align with Beaver’s (2012) roller derby research. The WWCFL is similar to contemporary roller derby leagues with a democratic structure and administrative roles primarily fulfilled by its participants. The LFL is like the original roller derby league in which non-skater owners autocratically made decisions and intended to profit from the league, even though skaters volunteered their time to both participate in the sport and perform tasks off the track. Thus involvement in all the leagues required similar time-consuming, volunteer commitments from participants, but they perceived the time commitment differently depending on their level of control over decisions and their league’s profit orientation. Players in the non-profit, democratically controlled leagues viewed their contributions as necessary volunteer work in order to further the development of a valued organization, whereas some athletes in the for-profit, autocratically controlled leagues felt exploited for their unpaid labour. In the latter leagues, antagonistic relations between participants and owners resulted in a number of athletes leaving the leagues.

Roller derby differs from football in that it is a relatively novel sport created and played predominately by women, whereas football is a previously existing, male-dominated sport, like Australian rules football. Women in both the WWCFL and the Australian rules football Women’s League examined by Wedgood (2005) wanted inclusion into these male-dominated structures and desired to play the sport in the same way as men including contact-related rules.

The physicality of football, especially hitting, was the main reason why my participants were attracted to and enjoyed playing the sport. It provided players with an outlet for aggression that many felt had not been available to them in other sports. Players’ enjoyment of contact and related findings on physicality supports existing
research about females’ football and contact sport participation (Carter, 2012; Chase, 2006; Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009; Theberge, 2003; Wedgwood, 2004).

Additionally, my results supported previous literature that identified a sense of community as a valued aspect of women’s contact sport participation (Beaver, 2012; Cotterill, 2010; Ezzell, 2009; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007); all of the players felt that their teammates positively contributed to their football participation experiences. Non-returning LFL players expressed that their teammates were an important source of support given their antagonistic relationship with league officials and the stigma associated with the league because of the sexualization of its athletes. Packard (2009) also found that teams served as a support group for female football players as they faced stigmatization for engaging in a male-dominated activity.

In terms of Robinson’s (2002) contention that increased sport opportunities for women can be both empowering and exploitative, the results of my study suggest a couple of potentially empowering aspects of football participation. Opportunities to engage in the level of physicality required in football are not widely available for females, and female football players are empowered to use their bodies in new ways that emphasize, and necessitate, physical strength. Further, football provides opportunities for female participants to connect with and develop relationships with other women. They must work collectively both on and off the field to achieve common goals, from winning their games to promoting and sustaining their leagues, which is potentially empowering.

As Bruce (1998) asserted, men’s sport as the standard frames interpretations of women’s sports, which was the case for my participants’ thoughts about their own involvement and in media coverage, thus supporting media research which indicates that
comparisons between male and female athletes are common (Kian et al., 2008; Poniatowski, 2011; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

**Extend.** Both the participants in the Australian rules football Women’s League (Wedgwood, 2005) and LFL players had issues with referees who they perceived did not strictly enforce rules on the field. Consequently, some players felt that their safety was compromised. In the case of Wedgwood (2005), participants thought that umpires did not take their jobs of referring women seriously, and one LFL player suggested that might have been the case in the LFL. Another player, however, suggested that the lack of calls was intentional in order to allow big hits and make the game entertaining for spectators.

Media research has noted that female athletes are often overrepresented in female “appropriate” sports (e.g., individual, aesthetic) and underrepresented in female “inappropriate” sports (e.g., team, contact) (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2010). While football would normally be considered an inappropriate sport for females, my results indicate that women playing football in feminine attire (i.e., bikinis) are overrepresented, in women’s football media coverage at least. In my sample, the LFL received almost double the amount of media coverage relative to the WWCFL in a much shorter time period (in approximately one year for the LFL as compared to 10 years for the WWCFL).

The results of my media analysis extend Knapp’s (2013) analysis of LFL US media coverage in two ways. First, her theme “men take care of business” was also present in my study. She, however, was primarily referring to the league’s (male) coaches, whereas my findings indicated that the (male) Commissioner was the predominant voice of authority in the league. I also found that the league was largely constructed as entertainment in the media, which was not noted by Knapp.
**Challenge.** Messner (2002) described the ghettoization model of women’s sport whereby female-specific rules are adopted that differ from the men’s version of the sport. The WWCFL followed the same Rule Book used by amateur football leagues in Canada and thus avoided ghettoization as described by Messner. The LFL’s rules differed in many ways from the hegemonic version of men’s football in the United States, but the league provides a unique example of ghettoization. Unlike women’s hockey, with its reduced conduct rules and increased protective equipment (Poniatowski, 2011), the LFL maintained contact-related football rules but players wore less equipment than men, which potentially made playing more unsafe rather than safer for its female participants. In terms of potentially exploitative aspects of women’s football participation (Robinson, 2002), the LFL uses minimal equipment, which some players felt compromised their safety, and a sexualized uniform to market the league. As previously mentioned, the LFL also benefits from unpaid labour performed by players.

As mentioned earlier, participants in the Australian rules football Women’s League studied by Wedgwood (2005) had issues with umpires, as did LFL players. WWCFL participants, however, did not mention any concerns about referees. Additionally, the hostility that Wedgwood’s participants experienced from male members of existing Australian rules football clubs differed from the support that the WWCFL received from men and male football programs, including coaching and administration support.

My research findings thus support previous literature in a number of ways while also offering new insights that extend and challenge it.
CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I summarize my results and conclusions and provide theoretical and practical recommendations.

Summary

In this study I explored how Canadian female football players are shaping and being shaped by their participation in the sport using a duality of structure (Giddens, 1984) framework, which posits that individuals are constantly shaping and being shaped by the social world around them. I focused on two Canadian women’s football leagues, the WWCFL, which plays Canadian football, and LFL Canada, which plays a form of American arena football and involves players wearing lingerie uniforms and minimal protective equipment. I looked at the leagues’ structures, players’ experiences playing football and participating in their respective leagues, and media representations of the leagues and players.

I interviewed two administrators and four players from the WWCFL and four players from the LFL Canada, and examined league documents to triangulate the data gleaned from my interviews. I conducted a media analysis of newspaper articles about both leagues, with 78 WWCFL articles and 152 LFL articles. Using NVivo, data were coded and analyzed to address each sub-question.

Results indicated that the leagues’ divergent purposes as a non-profit versus for-profit business as well as hegemonic understandings of men’s football and gender greatly shaped the leagues’ structures and consequently players’ experiences, including their ability to shape their leagues, as well as media representations. The WWCFL’s close alignment with men’s football and the LFL’s divergence, especially in terms of its
uniform, contributed to these differences. The players’ experiences, however, were similar in some ways, including the extensive time they committed to playing the sport and supporting their leagues off-the-field through their volunteer activities, close ties to their teammates, and love of physicality while playing. Additionally, playing the male-dominated sport of football provided players with opportunities to challenge the gender order, but they were constrained in different ways.

The WWCFL is a non-profit amateur sport organization designed to provide women with opportunities to play football. As a participant-centred organization, the league is democratically structured with each team equally represented on the Board and an elected Executive. The league follows many safety-related rules, including rules related to equipment, unsafe play on the field, and coaching certification. As a non-profit organization, the WWCFL heavily relies on the volunteer labour of everyone involved in the league, including players. They dedicate large amounts of their time organizing and executing their games as well as for events related to promotion, recruitment, and fundraising, which is especially important to sustain the league. Players are enthusiastic about promoting opportunities for women to play football and are willing to volunteer their time with their teams to do so. Players largely filled administrative roles in the league, including Board positions, and given the league’s democratic structure, WWCFL players were further able to shape their league by participating in AGMs and voting for the Executive and on By-law changes.

The LFL is a for-profit business designed to make money by entertaining spectators through women’s football and thus the LFL is spectator-centred. In order to ensure that the league is profitable, the Commissioner autocratically controls the league and structures it in ways that he believes are entertaining for spectators. Players wear
bikini uniforms and minimal protective equipment, which allows their bodies to be displayed, and one player felt that referees were instructed by the Commissioner to not make very many calls so that there would be big, entertaining hits on the field. Some players felt that their apparel and the poor officiating compromised their safety. Rather than paying administrators, players were responsible for promoting and selling tickets to their games. Since the LFL profited from the football games produced by the players and the work they did to sell tickets to the games, some of the athletes felt exploited for their unpaid labour. Opportunities for LFL players to fulfill administrative positions and shape their league, given its autocratic structure, were extremely limited. They largely had to either fit within the league’s structure or leave, which some players did choose to do.

The comparison between the structures of the WWCFL and LFL neatly aligns with Beaver’s (2012) findings about roller derby. The WWCFL is like contemporary roller derby leagues with its democratic structure and participants who fulfill administrative roles, though player control is more of a necessity in the WWCFL than it is an important value like in roller derby leagues. The original roller derby league was like the LFL with non-skater owners who wanted to control and profit from the unpaid skaters’ work. Many skaters chose to leave the league and formed their own league. Involvement in both the WWCFL and LFL as well as in the original and contemporary roller derby leagues was a time-consuming commitment for players, but they experienced it differently, either as necessary volunteer work or as exploitive unpaid labour, based on the leagues’ profit motives and participants’ control over decisions.

The leagues facilitated close friendships between participants. Players from both leagues noted that their teammates positively contributed to their football participation experiences. A sense of community and relationships with teammates have previously
been identified as important to female contact sport participants (Beaver, 2012; Cotterill, 2010; Ezzell, 2009; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007). The non-returning LFL players suggested that their teammates were especially important as a source of support, given the antagonistic relationship between players and league officials caused by the LFL’s autocratic structure, and the stigma associated with the league due to its sexualized uniform and marketing.

In terms of hegemonic understandings of football, the WWCFL plays the dominant version of football in Canada, following Football Canada’s *Canadian Amateur Rule Book for Tackle Football* and thus does not fit with previous research describing the ghettoization of women’s sports by making females follow different, “lesser” rules than the men (Messner, 2002). The league closely aligns itself with and receives support from existing (male) football organizations. Players felt a sense of legitimacy because they played football in the same way as men and received support from males, as had female football players in previous football research (Knapp, 2014; Packard, 2009). The media described women playing this male-dominated sport as novel and historic.

The LFL tries to align with existing American football rules as much as possible while taking place indoors on a small field, and while maintaining its lingerie uniform and its minimal protective equipment, which includes a hockey helmet with a half visor, modified shoulder pads, and elbow pads and kneepads. The LFL’s modified rules, especially in terms of its uniforms, promote its ghettoization as a sport (Messner, 2002). The league was largely constructed as entertainment rather as sport in the media, and the league was accordingly criticized because “men don’t play football in lingerie.”

One place where LFL rules are not modified from those of men’s football relates to its contact-related rules. Contact is understood to be an integral (and entertaining)
aspect of football, and thus it remains in the game. All players from both leagues greatly enjoyed the physicality involved in the sport, especially the hitting, which supports previous literature about females’ contact sport participation (Carter, 2012; Chase, 2006; Knapp, 2011; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Packard, 2009; Theberge, 2003; Wedgwood, 2004). Contact was a large reason why players were attracted to and enjoyed playing football. They viewed it as an outlet for their aggression that was not previously available to them and that was sanctioned in other sports.

Hegemonic understandings of gender shaped interpretations of women’s football participation. Although WWCFL participants, as women playing a male-dominated sport, were challenging understandings of who plays football, they reproduced ideas of who plays football better. Their own interpretations of their participation indicated that men were the standard. Participants compared how their leagues were structured relative to men’s football and other sports leagues. In speaking about their playing style, they made comparisons to men’s football and male athletes that suggested that women’s football and female athletes were inferior, which was also reinforced in media representations and supported in previous media literature (Bruce, 1998; Kian et al., 2008; Poniatowski, 2011; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). In the media, players were also portrayed as reliant on their (male) coaches’ expertise, given their own lack of experience in the sport. Women’s inferiority to men was thus confirmed, despite their enactment of hegemonically masculine characteristics while playing football, thereby reproducing the dominant gender order in society.

The structure of the LFL reproduced the current gender order differently, through its links to dominant understandings of feminine beauty. The league’s uniform was a “gimmick” used to attract spectators and media attention, which devalues women’s
athleticism by suggesting their sport performance alone is not entertaining or worthy of attention. The amount of media coverage that the LFL received, especially compared to the WWCFL, further supported this suggestion. LFL officials enforced feminine beauty standards through the league’s “one size fits all” uniform and conducting “body checks” to ensure that players were “fit,” well groomed, and tanned. The display of players’ bodies and the prioritizing of their appearances over their athletic talent in the LFL reinforce hegemonic femininity and thus reduce their ability to challenge the current gender order. Overall, players in both leagues embodied characteristics of hegemonic masculinity while playing football, and were differently constrained in terms of their ability to challenge hegemonic understandings of gender.

Recommendations

I provide theoretical recommendations for future research directions and practical recommendations for improving women’s experiences playing football.

Theoretical recommendations. I would like to increase the sample size of my study to see if the same themes would emerge or if others would develop with additional participants. Such a study could be enhanced by interviewing WWCFL players who did not return to the league to see if their reasons for discontinuing their participation are similar to the two non-returning LFL players in my study (e.g., safety concerns, time-consuming commitment). Additionally, building on Pringle’s (2008) study, which involved interviews with male rugby players to learn about their interpretations of women’s rugby participation, it would be worthwhile to interview male football players with regards to women’s football participation to further explore the extent that women playing football is transformative in terms of hegemonic understandings of football, masculinity, and femininity from their perspectives. Similarly, sports journalists could be
interviewed to see if their perceptions of football, masculinity, and femininity are transforming given women’s involvement in the sport.

**Practical recommendations.** WWCFL participants were largely satisfied with their experiences in the league. One thing that all that players mentioned is that they wanted to play more games. They felt that a four-game regular season was quite short for the amount of time and effort they dedicated to practicing and preparing for games. One administrator explained that the Executive did not want to extend their season and overlap with male football programs, because WWCFL teams relied on male programs for resources. As WWCFL teams become established, they could decrease their reliance on male programs by purchasing their own equipment and developing former players into coaches on their teams after their playing careers end. Additionally, former players could be encouraged to become trained as officials so that they can referee WWCFL games, as referees are a human resource that is necessary for the league to function. Even after executing these strategies, the league might still have difficulty accessing fields over male programs, since male programs would be seen as more established and “legitimate.”

LFL players expressed a long list of ways that the LFL could be changed to improve their experiences. The league, however, exists to serve its primary consumer, spectators, rather than its athletes. Regardless, some suggestions, without even touching on the uniforms and equipment (which some interviewees felt could be improved to enhance safety), include financially compensating players, and ensuring that referees are properly trained in the LFL’s rules. Minor modifications to players’ attire without altering the current uniforms include allowing players to wear arm sleeves to protect their arms from turf burn and using hockey helmets with full face shields, rather than half visors, which one LFL Canada player was allowed to do to protect her broken nose (Castagna,
2012). There was a LFL US player who became involved in the league as an administrator (Wallin, 2011c; Yosufzai, 2013); perhaps if more players become involved in the league’s administration, they can advocate for changes that will strike a balance between serving the players’ needs and the spectators’ interests.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A  History and Development of Football for Females in Canada

2002

• Montreal Blitz established as the sole Canadian team in Independent Women’s Football League (IWFL) (Phillips, 2002).

2003

• Calgary Rockies established (Hurlburt, 2003).

2004

• Mighty Peace Girls [sic] Football League established for high schools in Peace Country, Alberta with teams from two schools (Vanderveen, 2010).

• New Brunswick Women’s Football League (NBWFL) established with two teams from Fredericton and Saint John (MWFL, 2004).

• Edmonton Storm established; play three games against the Calgary Rockies and the two teams play during a Canadian [Men’s] Football League’s playoff game in Edmonton (MacGillivray, 2005).

2005

• Team from Moncton joins the NBWFL (MWFL, 2005).

• Montreal Blitz drop temporarily to “exhibition status” in the IWFL due to an ownership change (MacGillivray, 2005, para. 20).

2006

• NBWFL becomes the Maritime Women’s Football League (MWFL) with the addition of a team from Halifax (MWFL, 2006).

• Calgary Rockies fold (Hu, 2007).
2007

- Calgary Rockies re-establish; play two games against the Edmonton Storm (Buston & Sylvestor, 2007).
- Manitoba Fearless (Winnipeg, MB) established (Manitoba Fearless, n.d.).

2008

- Montreal Blitz wins IWFL Tier II Championship against the Clarksville Fox (Montreal Blitz, n.d.).
- Inaugural Canadian Women’s Tackle Football Championship hosted in Edmonton; Calgary Rockies, Edmonton Storm, and Manitoba Fearless participate (Prest, 2008).
- Two girls’ six-a-side leagues in New Brunswick established within the Fundy and Capital Area Minor Football Associations for girls aged 14 to 17 (Anonymous, 2010a; White, 2008).

2009

- Calgary Rockies disband; Calgary Rage established.
- Manitoba Fearless participate in IWFL Challenge game against Minnesota Vixen in Duluth, MN (Prest, 2009); Minnesota wins 46-6 (Besson, 2010c).
- Montreal Blitz earn silver in IWFL Tier II Championship against the Wisconsin Warriors (Montreal Blitz, n.d.).
- Moncton Football Association begins six-a-side girls’ league for girls aged 15 to 18 (Tingley, 2009).
• Tryouts occur in Eastern and Western Canada for national team to compete at the International Federation of American Football’s (IFAF) inaugural Women’s World Championship (WWC) in 2010 (MacNeill, 2009; Wolfe, 2010).

2010

• Montreal Blitz complete a perfect 8-0 regular season and win IWFL Tier II Championship against the Bay Area Bandits (Montreal Blitz, n.d.).

• Alberta Female Football League (AFFL) established with three teams: Calgary Rage, Edmonton Storm and Lethbridge Steel (Price, 2010); Edmonton Storm beats Lethbridge Steel 36-8 in the championship game (O’Leary, 2010); Calgary also hosts a pre-season jamboree with the three Alberta teams and the Manitoba Fearless.

• Manitoba Fearless plays first women’s football game in province of Manitoba in exhibition game against Edmonton Storm; Edmonton wins 26-8 (Besson, 2010b).

• Manitoba Fearless host game against Iowa Crush in second annual IWFL Challenge game; Iowa wins 20-14 (Besson, 2010c).

• Team Canada places second amongst six teams at the IFAF inaugural WWC in Stockholm, Sweden with 66-0 loss against the United States (Noronen, 2013).

• New Brunswick Junior Girls [sic] Football League six-aside established to bring together the teams for high school-aged girls from the Capital Area, Fundy and Moncton football associations (Anonymous, 2010b).

• Western Women’s Canadian Football League (WWCFL) established (Wolfe, 2010).

2011

• Inaugural season of the WWCFL with three AFFL teams plus Manitoba Fearless, Regina Riot, Saskatoon Valkyries and Winnipeg Nomads Wolf Pack (Woodard,
2011; Saskatoon Valkyries win Championship with perfect record (Rice, 2013a); the establishment of the Winnipeg Nomads Wolf Pack makes Winnipeg the only city in Canada with two women’s football teams.


- Montreal Blitz complete another perfect 8-0 regular season, but lose in the playoffs to the Carolina Phoenix (Montreal Blitz, n.d.).

- Toronto Triumph, sole Canadian franchise in the Lingerie Football League (LFL), established (Wallin, 2011a); Triumph finish season with 0-4 record (Wallin, 2012a).

2012

- Saskatoon Valkyries maintain perfect franchise record and win WWCFL Championship 64-21 against Lethbridge Steel, who had a perfect regular season record (Rice, 2013a).

- Montreal Blitz complete third consecutive 8-0 regular season (Boroyan, 2013) and win IWFL Tier I Championship against the Sacramento Sirens (Falloon, 2012).

- Inaugural bi-annual Women’s National Challenge Cup hosted in Laval, Quebec with five teams from: Alberta, Atlantic Canada, Manitoba, Quebec, and Saskatchewan; Team Quebec finishes with a perfect 4-0 record (Football Canada, n.d.).

- LFL Canada established with the Toronto Triumph joined by the BC Angels (Abbotsford, BC), Regina Rage, and Saskatoon Sirens (Wallin, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d); BC wins championship game 25-12 against Saskatoon (de la Fuente, 2012).

2013

- MWFL celebrates tenth anniversary season (Staffieri, 2013b).

- Two new teams from Alberta, Northern Anarchy (from Grande Prairie) and Okotoks Lady Outlawz, compete in their first WWCFL season (Harder, 2013); Saskatoon Valkyries’ perfect franchise record and 14-game winning streak interrupted by loss to Regina Riot in one regular season game (Rice, 2013a); Valkyries ultimately win WWCFL Championship 27-13 against Lethbridge Steel, who had a perfect regular season record for a second consecutive season (Rice, 2013a, 2013b).

- Montreal Blitz win gold in IWFL Tier II Championship against the Sacramento Sirens (Montreal Blitz, n.d.).


- Team Canada earns silver among six teams at the second IFAF WWC in Vantaa, Finland with 64-0 loss against United States (Noronen, 2013).

## Appendix B  Lingerie and Bikini Sports Leagues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>League</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Year Established</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Gender of Founder(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Bikini Sports League (Hunsberger, 2010)</td>
<td>Flag football</td>
<td>~2009</td>
<td>Snohomish, WA</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar N Spice Football League</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>~2011</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Female (Commissioner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies Football League Australia (Estwick, 2011)</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bikini Basketball Entertainment (Pecoskie, 2011)</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Greater Toronto Area, Canada</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingerie Basketball League (Lingerie Basketball League, 2012)</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick’s Basketball Association (Rick’s Cabaret, 2011)</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>New York City, NY</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies Gridiron League (LFL Further, 2012)</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Sydney, Australia</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liga Iberoamericana de Bikini Football (Ayala, 2013)</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bikini Hockey League (Eskridge, 2012)</td>
<td>Inline hockey</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Tulsa, OK</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bikini Basketball Association (Gorten, 2013)</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liga Mexicana Football de Lingerie (Ayala, 2013)</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Guadalajara, Mexico</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Arena Football League (Staffieri, 2013c)</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Southern United States</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful Ballers League (Chandler, 2013)</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>~2013</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2 males, 1 female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C  Interview Guide, League Administrators

Background

• Tell me about your background in sport.
  o What sports did you play?
    ▪ At what level?
    ▪ How did you become involved?
  o Did you have any administrative roles for any of these sports?

• Describe your background in football.
  o When did you first become involved in the league?
  o How did you become involved in the league?
  o What is your current role in the league?

League Structures

• What would you say is the purpose of the league?

• Describe how the league administration is structured. (e.g., structure and composition of the Executive and Board, responsibilities for each role)
  o Who is eligible to be on the league Executive?
    ▪ How are they selected?
  o What factors shaped the decision to structure the administration in this way?

• Describe a typical season in the league, including practices, games, and training off the field.
  o Number of tryouts, and what occurs at tryouts
  o Number of practices, and what occurs
  o Number of games, and what occurs
• Amount of off-field training, and what it involves

• What factors shaped decisions about the design of the season?  
  (e.g., field availability, players’ schedules, modeled after a different league)

• What football rulebook does the league use?  
  o How do the football rules in the league vary from other football leagues?  
  o What factors shaped the decision to use these rules for the league?

• What regulations are in place to ensure player safety?  
  o What factors shaped the decision to put these regulations in place?  
  o What process is in place to ensure that these regulations are followed?  
  o What consequences are in place if these regulations are not followed?

• What eligibility rules are currently in place in the league?  
  o What is the rationale for these rules?

• Describe any contracts or codes of conduct that the players in the league must follow.  
  o What factors shaped the decision to put these rules in place?  
  o What process is in place to ensure that these contracts/codes of conduct are followed?  
  o What consequences are in place if these contracts/codes of conduct are not followed?

• How would you describe the ideal football player for your league?  
  o What strategies are used to recruit the ideal players you described?  
  o What strategies are used to retain players?
Perceptions and Relations with the Other League

• Are you familiar with the Lingerie Football League (which is now called the Legends Football League)/Western Women’s Canadian Football League?

• How would you describe the other league (WWCFL/LFL)?
  - League purpose
  - League structure
  - Football
  - Administrators
  - Players

• How would you describe the relationship between your league and the WWCFL/LFL?
  - Do you have any interactions with anyone involved in the league?
    (e.g., administrators, coaches, players)

Perceptions of Media Coverage and Media Relations

• How would you describe the league’s relationship with the media?
  - How have you been involved with interacting with members of the media?
    (e.g., contacting members of the media, being interviewed)

• How would you describe the media coverage for the league?
  (e.g., positive/negative, (in)sufficient, (in)accurate)
  - Do you feel that the information you have provided in interviews have been accurately conveyed in the resulting media pieces?

• How would you describe the media depictions of players in the league?
  (e.g., positive/negative, (in)accurate, one-/multi-dimensional)
League Promotion and Image

• What strategies are used to promote the league?
  o Outside of games?
  o During games? (e.g., half-time activities, giveaways)

• How would you describe the image that you want others to have of the league?
  o What structures are currently in place to support that image?

Future

• What are your goals for the league?
  o How are you currently working towards achieving those goals?

Closing

Those are all the questions I have prepared to ask you. Is there anything else that you would like to add or clarify from your responses, or any last comments that you would like to make?
Appendix D  Interview Guide, Players

Background

- Tell me about your sport experience prior to playing in your league.
  - What sports did you play?
    - At what level?
    - How did you become involved?
- Are you currently playing any other sports?
- When did you become involved in the league?
- How did you become involved in the league?
- Why did you become involved in the league?
- What position do you play?
- Do you intend to play in your league next season?

Football & League Experiences

- Describe a typical season on your team.
  - Practices
  - Games
  - Off-the-field training
- Can you describe the off-the-field, non-football activities that are involved with being in your league?
  - Describe your involvement, if any, on the team beyond playing.
    (e.g., administrative role)
• What do you enjoy about playing:
  o Football?
  o In your league?

• What would you say is the purpose of your league?

• What characteristics make a good football player in your league?
  o How do you see yourself fitting with those characteristics?

• How would you describe the football played in your league?

• If you were put in control of your league, what changes, if any, would you make?
  o Rules of the game (e.g., length of the game)
  o Rules of the league (e.g., contracts/codes of conduct, uniform, equipment, eligibility)
  o Structure of the season (tryouts, practices, other forms of training, games)
  o Recruitment and retention strategies

• Describe any issues, if any, that you have had related to the uniform and protective equipment you wear in your league.

Perceptions of Other League

• Are you familiar with the Legends Football League (formerly the Lingerie Football League)/Western Women’s Canadian Football League?

• How do the ways that you described your sport earlier apply to the other league (LFL/WWCFL)?

• How do the characteristics of a good player that you described apply to the other league (LFL/WWCFL)?
• Have you participated in the other league (LFL/WWCFL)?
  o Would you ever consider trying out for the other league (LFL/WWCFL)?
  o Why (not)?

Perceptions of Media Coverage

• What media do you see related to your league? (e.g., newspaper articles, YouTube videos, blogs, tweets)

• How would you describe the media coverage for your league? (e.g., positive/negative, (in)sufficient, (in)accurate)

• How would you describe the media depictions of players in your league? (e.g., positive/negative, (in)accurate, one-/multi-dimensional)

• Describe any experiences you have had interacting with members of the media.
  o What did that/those interaction(s) involve?
  o Would you consider that/those interaction(s) positive or negative?
  o Do you feel that the information you provided was accurately conveyed in the resulting media piece(s)?

Others’ Perceptions

• What do your family members think about your participation in football?

• What do your friends think about your participation in football?

• What kinds of reactions do you get when other people (e.g., co-workers, acquaintances, strangers) find out that you play football?

Future

• What are your predictions for the future of your league?
Closing

Those are all the questions I have prepared to ask you. Is there anything else that you would like to clarify or add to your responses, or any last comments that you would like to make?
Appendix E  Sample Recruitment Message, Administrators

Hello,

My name is Katrina Krawec and I am a graduate student in the Sport Management program at the University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. I am conducting a research project on women’s tackle football in Canada and would really like your help.

The purpose of my study is to learn more about women’s tackle football leagues in Canada and women’s experiences participating in them. I would like to set up an interview with you to discuss the Legends Football League Canada. The interview will take place over the telephone and will last for approximately one hour. Your responses will remain confidential.

I also would like to interview players from your league. Again, I am hoping that you can help facilitate the player interviews by forwarding a recruitment e-mail, which I will provide you with, to the players on your teams.

The results from my study will be used to prepare my master’s thesis. The results may also be used in other academic journals and presentations. Study participants can request to receive a summary of the results by e-mail.

This study has received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor. If you would like further information please contact me (XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca) or my advisor for this project, Dr. Victoria Paraschak (XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca).

Please let me know if you can help with my study. I think you will find this project valuable for your league.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Katrina Krawec
Appendix F  Recruitment Message, Players

Hello,

My name is Katrina Krawec and I am a graduate student in the Sport Management program at the University of Windsor in Windsor, Ontario. I am conducting a research project on women’s tackle football in Canada and would really like your help.

The purpose of my study is to learn more about women’s tackle football leagues in Canada and women’s experiences participating in them. I would like to set up an interview with you to discuss your experience playing in the Western Women’s Canadian Football League/Legends Football League Canada. The interview will take place in person or over the telephone and will last for approximately one hour. Your responses will remain confidential.

To be eligible to participate in an interview, you must be at least eighteen years of age, have played in at least one game on a Saskatchewan team in 2012 season/have played on a LFL Canada team, and never played in a tackle football league outside of Canada.

The results from my study will be used to prepare my master’s thesis. The results may also be used in other academic journals and presentations. Study participants can request to receive a summary of the results by e-mail.

This study has received clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor. If you would like further information please contact me (XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca) or my advisor for this project, Dr. Vicky Paraschak (XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca).

Please let me know if you can help out with my study by Day of the week, Month, 2013. I think you will find this project valuable for raising awareness about your league, and women’s tackle football in Canada.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Katrina Krawec
Appendix G  Recruitment Message, LFL Players (from Colleagues)

Hi NAME,

One of my friends from the University of Windsor is doing research about women’s tackle football in Canada, and she is interested in interviewing you to discuss your experience playing in the Legends Football League.

I have attached a Letter of Information about her study so that you can learn more about the project.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please e-mail Katrina at XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca.

Thanks!
LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Social Construction of Women’s Tackle Football in Canada

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Katrina Krawec and Dr. Victoria Paraschak, from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor. This research will contribute to partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Human Kinetics degree. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Katrina Krawec at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or Dr. Victoria Paraschak at XXX-XXX-XXXX xXXX.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore women’s tackle football leagues in Canada and women’s experiences participating in them.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, either over the telephone or in person at a mutually-agreed upon location. The interview will be audio recorded with your consent, and will last approximately one hour.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk and discomfort associated with this study. You should not experience risk any greater than the risks you encounter in your everyday interactions with others.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

During your interview, you will have a chance to reflect on your involvement in a women’s tackle football league in Canada.

This research will contribute to the limited previous women’s tackle football research, all of which focused on the experiences of American athletes, and present a Canadian perspective on women’s experiences in tackle football.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your

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52 The title of my thesis has changed since I submitted my Research Ethics Board application.
permission. Due to the nature of interviews, anonymity cannot be assured. Limited personal data about participants will be collected. When results are reported, a pseudonym will be used for each participant and potentially identifying information such as age or occupation will not be reported with pseudonyms; demographic information will be reported as an aggregate.

All written records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Human Kinetics Building at the University of Windsor to which only the researcher and her advisor will have access. All electronic records will be password protected and only the researcher will have access to them. Audio recordings will be deleted from the recording device as soon as the files are transferred to a password-protected computer file. Participants will be permitted to review their audio recording upon request. All written records will be retained for six months, after which they will be shredded. All electronic records will be retained for three years, after which they will be deleted.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can withdraw from the study at any time before the researcher completes her thesis. There will be no consequences for withdrawing from the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the results will be e-mailed to participants upon their request.

Date when results are available: August 31, 2013

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, ext. XXX; e-mail: XXXXXXX@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____________________________________   ___________ _________
Signature of Investigator      Date
Katrina Krawec
XXXXXXXX@uwindsor.ca
Appendix I  Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: The Social Construction of Women’s Tackle Football in Canada

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Katrina Krawec and Dr. Victoria Paraschak, from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Windsor. This research will contribute in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Human Kinetics degree. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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The purpose of this study is to explore women’s tackle football leagues in Canada and women’s experiences participating in them.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, either over the telephone or in person at a mutually-agreed upon location. The interview will be audio recorded with your consent, and will last approximately one hour.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk and discomfort associated with this study. You should not experience risk any greater than the risks you encounter in your everyday interactions with others.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

During your interview, you will have a chance to reflect on your involvement in a women’s tackle football league in Canada.

This research will contribute to the limited previous women’s tackle football research, all of which focused on the experiences of American athletes, and present a Canadian perspective on women’s experiences in tackle football.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive compensation for participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Due to the nature of interviews, anonymity cannot be assured. Limited personal data about participants will be collected. When results are reported, a pseudonym will be used for each participant and potentially identifying information such as age or occupation will not be reported with pseudonyms; demographic information will be reported as an aggregate.

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You can withdraw from the study at any time before the researcher completes her thesis. There will be no consequences for withdrawing from the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

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RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, ext. XXX; e-mail: XXXXXXX@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study The Social Construction of Women’s Tackle Football in Canada as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Name of Participant

____________________________________   __________ _________
Signature of Participant       Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

____________________________________   __________
Signature of Investigator       Date

Katrina Krawec
XXXXXX@uwindsor.ca
Appendix J  Consent Form for Audio Recording

CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING

Title of Study: The Social Construction of Women’s Tackle Football in Canada

I consent to the audio recording of my interview.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping is stopped. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping will be kept confidential. Recordings will be transferred to a computer and only accessible by the researcher.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and that the audio recording will be for professional use only.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant       Date
Appendix K  Conceptual Baggage

“Conceptual baggage” is a term coined by Dr. Judith Golec and defined as “information about the researcher that places her/him in relation to the research question and research process in an immediate and central way” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 21). Kirby and McKenna (1989) encouraged researchers to record their experiences and reflections related to their research topic at the beginning and throughout the research process, because “all research is done by someone, [so] it is essential that that ‘someone’ is identified in some way and accounted for in the research” (p. 49).

In this appendix, I endeavour, in keeping with a duality of structure framework, to illuminate my history and the social determinants that have helped shape my social world and my current research project.

First, to outline my social determinants: I am female, and I am privileged as white, heterosexual, and presently able-bodied. I grew up in a middle-class, two-parent household in Canada. Both of my parents attained post-secondary education, and I am university-educated.

I became involved in organized sport at a young age, starting when my parents signed me up for t-ball at age five, and it has been an important component of my life since then. I did all of the sports offered in elementary school—volleyball, basketball, soccer, cross country, and track and field—and continued to play those sports in high school. Over the years, I also tried baseball, curling, gymnastics, ballet, and swimming.

One sport that never once crossed my mind to participate in when I was growing up was football. Even when my younger brother played youth football for a season and I attended one of his games, I never conceived that I too could play football. I assume that my parents felt the same way because they signed my brother up for football, but not me!
I do not recall there being any females playing on my brother’s youth team, but I know there was one girl who played on my high school football team for at least one season. I am embarrassed to admit that at the time I thought it was weird that she wanted to play football because I thought football was a sport that was exclusively for males, and I personally did not have a desire to play.

My feelings changed in university when I was introduced to the game by playing on an intramural-level female flag football team. I loved learning a new sport, and I excelled in my position on defense. Playing flag football also fulfilled my need to play on a team, which I had been doing since I was young. I played for four years, and in my second year, my coaches put together a team to play in Wilfrid Laurier University’s annual “Powderpuff” football tournament in Waterloo, Ontario, which brings together female flag football teams from across Ontario. The style of football played at Laurier’s tournament was different from what my team was used to in our games. Though it was still flag football, there was considerably more contact involved because the rules allowed for an offensive and defensive line that was not present in our games. As a defensive back, I was also allowed to “hit” my opponents on offense by delivering a quick push around the upper chest and shoulders to temporarily impede their forward motion within five yards of the line of scrimmage. This experience of intentional contact was new for me, and for most of my teammates. I found not only the legality but also the necessity of contact in this game exciting, and I began to wonder what it would be like to fully tackle someone to the ground (which was completely illegal in the form of football that I was playing).

It was not until my last semester of undergraduate study in 2009 that I began to investigate the existence of women’s tackle football for a paper I was writing for one of
my classes. I was surprised to learn that there were a few women’s football leagues operating in the United States, which included one Canadian team from Montreal, plus a league in the Maritimes and a handful of teams in Western Canada. I interviewed Canadian administrators, coaches, and a player to find out more than the one website and scant number of newspaper articles available told me about women’s football in Canada. Through my research I also learned about the somewhat annual Lingerie Bowl, plus the Lingerie Football League that was just beginning in the United States. I asked my interview participants about their opinions on lingerie football. Most had never heard of this novel American league and reactions were mostly negative.

Though at the time I did not know terms like hegemonic masculinity and practical consciousness, I was intrigued about women’s entry into this male-dominated sport and the successes and challenges they faced in doing so. My interest in the topic remained when I began my Master’s degree nearly two years later in 2011, especially when I realized that the teams from Western Canada that I wrote about in my undergraduate paper were part of the inaugural Western Women’s Canadian Football League. I was also interested to learn that the Lingerie Football League had just established a team in Toronto (which became part of the Canadian expansion league the following year). Upon further research, I discovered that the idea of “lingerie” sports had seemingly spread, with a number of women’s lingerie/bikini sports leagues emerging in the United States and other countries around the world. Since women’s sports are already commonly marginalized and trivialized (including by sexualizing female athletes), I was curious to observe how these sports leagues that are blatantly structured in a manner that focuses attention on athletes’ physical attractiveness attempt to avoid marginalization and
trivialization, and how people, including those who play non-sexualized versions of the
sports, react to such leagues.

I have been closely following women’s football in North America as well as
lingerie sport leagues globally in the media since 2012. I receive Google Alerts for news
articles about the following leagues: Beautiful Ballers League, Bikini Basketball
Association, Bikini Basketball Entertainment, Bikini Hockey League, Independent
Women’s Football League, Ladies Football League, Ladies Gridiron League, Legends
Football League, Lingerie Basketball League, Maritime Women’s Football League,
Western Women’s Canadian Football League, Women’s Arena Football League,
Women’s Football Alliance, Women’s Indoor Football League, and Women’s Spring
Football League. I also regularly check the LFL’s news website, LFL360, and I
occasionally check the WWCFL and MWFL websites and each individual team’s website
(they are not updated as frequently as LFL360). I am subscribed to the LFL’s mailing list
and YouTube channel, and I have watched a large number of the videos published on
their channel, including all LFL Canada games (in addition to attending one game).
Although an outsider, I thus feel that I am well versed in women’s football and lingerie
sport leagues.
### Appendix L  Rule Comparison of the WWCFL, LFL, and AFL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playing field dimensions</strong></td>
<td>110 yards x 65 yards</td>
<td>50 yards x 30 yards</td>
<td>85 x 50 yards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End zone size</strong></td>
<td>20 yards</td>
<td>8 yards</td>
<td>8 yards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Touchdown value</strong></td>
<td>6 points</td>
<td>6 points</td>
<td>6 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field goal value</strong></td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Placement: 3 points Drop kick: 4 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversion values</strong></td>
<td>Kicked: 1 point Pass or run: 2 points</td>
<td>1-yard line: 1 point 3-yard line: 2 points</td>
<td>Place kick: 1 point Drop kick: 2 points Pass or run: 2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety value</strong></td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of downs</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Game length</strong></td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>32 minutes</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time of play</strong></td>
<td>Four 15-minute quarters</td>
<td>Four 8-minute quarters</td>
<td>Four 15-minute quarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Halftime length</strong></td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overtime procedure</strong></td>
<td>Extra periods with each team receiving an equal number of opportunities to begin on offense starting on defensive team’s 35-yard line</td>
<td>8-minute sudden death</td>
<td>15-minute overtime, each team gets one possession to score. If teams are still tied after their one possession, sudden death results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Play clock</strong></td>
<td>0:20</td>
<td>0:35</td>
<td>0:25/0:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of players on the field</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offensive positions</strong></td>
<td>1 quarterback; 2 running backs; 5 linewomen; 2 wide receivers; 2 slot backs</td>
<td>1 quarterback; 2 running backs; 1 linewoman; 3 wide receivers</td>
<td>8 players, including: 1 quarterback 4 linemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defensive positions</strong></td>
<td>4 linewomen; 3 linebackers; 2 cornerbacks; 1 safety; 2 halfbacks</td>
<td>2 linewomen; 1 linebacker 2 cornerbacks 2 safeties</td>
<td>8 players, including: 3 linemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team roster</strong></td>
<td>Minimum of 24 players</td>
<td>14 active players 6 inactive players</td>
<td>21 active players 3 inactive players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other rules</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No punting</td>
<td>No punting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Katrina Krawec

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1987

PLACE OF BIRTH: Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

EDUCATION: University of Windsor
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2011-2014, M.H.K.

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