

“WOMEN’S RUGBY IS NOT JUST A SPORT IT IS TACKLING LIFE”:
NAVIGATING GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY FORMATION OF UGANDAN
WOMEN

by

EMMA SANDE ARIYO

(Under the Direction of Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson)

ABSTRACT

African women’s place in sport and society is constantly debated. Sport provides a platform and the space to disrupt dominant binaries associated with gender ideologies in the sporting environment and social landscape. With the increase in women and girls’ participation in sport, there is a need to explore and document the lived experiences of female athletes who deviate from actualizing social norms while crossing the boundaries of dominant femininity and challenging African women’s role in the community. There is a paucity of literature based on African women in power sports. The intent of this study was to examine the experiences of Uganda women’s rugby players for the purposes of understanding how they reconstructed their identity within social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Thus, this study aimed to understand the socio-cultural construction of gender in post-colonial Uganda using the lived experiences and personal stories of women rugby players and how they navigate their multiplicity of identities. The African feminist and identity theoretical frameworks guided this dissertation study. The study participants were seventeen women rugby players aged 18 and 45 who were involved in

various sports clubs, schools, and educational institutions in Uganda. Data collection involved the utilization of in-depth interviews and data analysis was conducted thematically. The findings of this study: a) dominant social practices, b) social networking, c) gender identity formation, and d) women's rugby resilience; revealed how Ugandan women rugby players disrupt contemporary gender norms. The significance of this study lies in adding a new dimension to how gender norms can be redefined in the deeply patriarchal society of Uganda. The significance of this study also lies in helping inform educators, activists, policymakers, and sport administrators' decisions about developing sport opportunities for women in Uganda while remaining cognizant of the multiple identities [intersects] and abilities of female athletes in the country. Implications of the study included the view that sport can provide women with ways to re-imagine gender roles, responsibilities, and identities while providing invaluable life skills. In addition, the study provides a platform for African women's acceptance in power sports.

INDEX WORDS: Ugandan women, identity, gender, culture, social roles, feminism, socialization

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father - Cornelius B. Bagira (RIP) and my mother - Spera N. Bagira, who were passionate educators and unconditionally supported me to achieve my dreams.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....	1
Rationale of the Study.....	1
Significance of the Study.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Research Questions.....	11
Researcher Assumptions.....	12
Definitions of Terminology.....	14
List of Abbreviations.....	16
2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	18
Women in Sport in Global Context.....	18
African Women in Sport and Physical Activity.....	27
Research studies on the status of African Women in Sport.....	39
Women in Uganda Sport.....	54
Sport Governance and Legislative structures in Uganda.....	60
Women’s Rugby in Global Context.....	66
Women’s challenges in Rugby in Context of Gender Roles.....	71

	Theoretical Framework.....	78
	Summary.....	90
3	METHODS.....	93
	Design of the Study.....	93
	Epistemological Context of the Study.....	94
	Narrative Inquiry Approach.....	97
	Population and Sampling.....	101
	Methods of Data Collection.....	105
	Data Analysis.....	106
	Trustworthiness of the study.....	111
	Subjectivity statement.....	113
4	FINDINGS.....	117
	Dominant social practices.....	120
	Social networking.....	136
	Gender identity formation.....	155
	Women’s rugby resilience.....	173
5	DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	199
	Discussion.....	199
	Conclusion.....	222
	Contribution and Implication.....	223
	Suggestions for future research.....	225

REFERENCES	226
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APPENDICES

A PARTICIPATION PROFILE FORM.....	261
B INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	262
C INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY	265
D INFORMED CONSENT	
LETTER 266.....	E
UNCST IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....	269
F UGA IRB APPROVAL LETTER	270

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4. 1: Participants Demographic Information.....	118
Table 4. 2: Participants Background Information.....	119
Table 4. 3: Overview of Categories and Themes.....	120

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: The organizational structure of the Ministry of Education and Sports65

CHAPTER 1

“WOMEN’S RUGBY IS NOT JUST A SPORT IT IS TACKLING LIFE”: NAVIGATING GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY FORMATION UGANDAN WOMEN

Introduction and Background to the Study

Sport plays a significant role in cultural practices in the construction of gender (Theberge, 1993; Lindner, 2012), and serves as a site for celebrating masculine skills and values (Birrell, 2000). It is also used as a platform to challenge gendered ideologies and as a space for disruption of binaries associated with masculinity and femininity in society (Engh, 2011). Ideologies of physical and biological differences between men and women (Birrell, 2000; Pelak, 2005; Dworkin, Swarr & Cooky, 2013; Darnell, 2014) continue to play significant roles in determining women’s ability to participate in physical activities and sport. For instance, female athletes are expected to enact socially ascribed feminine characteristics while trying to fulfill both the masculine and feminine gender roles in sport (Fallon & Jome, 2007). Engh (2011) argues that women’s sport and participation are considered ‘other’ because men’s sport is considered the standard for sport participation, where social norms equated athleticism associated with masculinity. Sport spaces privilege men allowing normalization of masculinity and athleticism. In contemporary times, sport provides opportunities for men to celebrate physical masculinity and sportsmanship while women are excluded because their achievements and levels of skill execution tend to be measured against the abilities of men, indicating

marginalization of women and girls' participation in sport (Birrell & Cole, 1990; Birrell, 2000).

Within African contemporary societies, identities of women and men tend to be circumscribed around 'being', a state that places women in a binary opposition (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Ukpokolo, 2016), characterizing post-colonial Africa as opposed to pre-colonial existence. The incursion of the colonial legacy created structural and cultural imbalances in African communities that undercut women's space, visibility, (Ukpokolo, 2016), and power to negotiate. Skies and Bale (2014) point out that "Africa's formidable and successful female athletes complicates the image of the African woman" (p. 451), as a woman's portrayal in society is representative of national views on gender, power, race, religion, political and socio-economic structures (Adichie, 2014) that represent post-independent African conditions. A woman's place in society across cultures and historical eras is constantly debated, but sport has the power to challenge western imposed patriarchal structures that dominate social cultural spaces characteristic of post-colonial Africa, helping create an equal playing field for all (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Hayhurst, 2014; Skies & Bale, 2014). African women in sport receive limited support despite their tremendous effort at the global level (Saavedra, 2003; Pelak, 2010; Ogunniyi, 2014; Skies & Jarvie, 2014; Fraser, 2014, Mansfield, 2014; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). However, at present, scholars write about African women's participation in male-dominated sports: football (Saavedra, 2003; Pelak, 2010; Ogunniyi, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Johnson, 2016), cricket (Fraser, 2014), boxing, (Meier & Saavedra, 2009;

Tjønndal, 2016), rugby (Allen, 2014), track and field (Skies & Jarvie, 2014; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Meier and Saavedra, 2009).

An emerging non-conventional sport for women is rugby, a sport rooted in hegemonic practices and masculinity (Broad, 2001; Chase, 2006; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Murray & Howat 2009) of western societies. In this sport, men and women play by the same rules making it a site to examine how gender norms and roles inform women's experiences in sport (Howe, 2001; Chu et al., 2003; Gill, 2007; Adjepong, 2017; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). Globally, women's participation in the sport of rugby has increased (Birch, 2016; Hunt, 2016; World Rugby, 2016; Anderson, 2017), with 25 percent of the total population playing rugby globally being female in 2015 (World Rugby, 2016). Gradually the culture of rugby has changed with the male dominance being challenged by the increasing numbers of women involved in the sport, which has helped dismantle the male preserve of the sport and end gender boundaries (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Broad 2001; Chase, 2006; Hardy, 2015; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). Recently added to the Olympic Games, and a growing global sport, Rugby has become a popular sport for African women. In the continent of Africa, women's rugby participation rates are growing, with South Africa leading the way with the highest number of female rugby players numbering approximately 7,000 women, who have participated in 15 provincial rugby programs (NewAfrican news, 2017), followed by Swaziland that has the fastest growing number of women and girls' involvement in the sport, and next are the countries of Botswana, Tunisia, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Senegal and Nigeria respectively (Birch, 2014).

Women's rugby is new to African countries (CNN World, 2015), therefore, to raise awareness and engage more women and girls in the sport, Rugby Africa dedicated the month of May to the development of women's game on the continent (Rugby Africa, 2018). Additionally, Rugby Africa Regional Development set forth strategies with African Rugby Unions to develop and enhance the visibility of the African female rugby players as set out in the Africa Rugby 2018-2025 plan (NewAfrican news, 2017). Involving women in a predominantly male sport requires a lot of work and acceptance. African women face formidable barriers in participation in sport (Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Pelak, 2010; Skies & Bale, 2014), with rugby being no exception as women and girls must constantly negotiate gender roles, cultural practices, religion, and patriarchal structures that dominate the African continent during the post-independent era. Despite the barriers to women's participation in sport, African women have embraced masculine sports (Coterrell, 2016) with the popularity of women's rugby in Africa on the rise as the number of African girls is steadily increasing with a participation rate of 46% and approximately 412,841 members in 2017 (Rugby Africa, 2018). For instance, rugby women in Uganda have approximately 2000 young girls registered to play (Maxwell, 2017), the women's national team *Lady Cranes*, progressively bolstering its presence and dominance within the African continent.

As a sporting nation, Ugandan women have been successful in track and field events, rugby, basketball, and Netball, participating in mega-sporting events such as IAAF world championships and Marathons, Commonwealth Games, All Africa Games, Netball and Rugby world championships. Ugandan women and girls' participation in sport has experienced a steady increase in numbers since the government revised the

national constitution in 1995, which mandated the need to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination, as well as making provisions for women and youth to engage in all social and economic spheres (Constitution of Republic of Uganda, 1995). Kateshumbwa's (2011) study on gender disparity in Uganda sports identified the growth of women's involvement in sport at the national level over a period of 12 years, with an approximately 20% participation increase from 1997 to 2009. The progress of women's involvement in physical activity and sport is curtailed due to constrained gender equity sport policies (Kateshumbwa, 2011), cultural stereotypes (Lindrio, 2018; Nsubuga, 2019), limited administration and leadership roles (Kyeyune, 2016), absence of safe spaces, inadequate funding, and marginal media coverage (Komugisha, 2019; Ssemugabi, 2019), leading to low numbers of participation despite constitutional policies set to advance women's sport. The 2012 Tag Rugby Trust Uganda report showed that only 24.8 percent of girls participate in extracurricular activities that involve sport (Tag Rugby Trust, 2019).

Besides, women's sport is not a significant topic of discussion in Uganda (NTV news, 2019) thus creating a vacuum in which female athletes must operate. The invisibility of female athletes as well as the limited opportunity accorded to them impedes the progress of women's sport in Uganda (Johnson, 2016; Mitchell, 2019). However, in a push to guarantee that women and girls' sporting conversation is present, the Uganda Olympic Committee (UOC) set up the Women in Sport Commission to support equality and equity for women's participation in sport and leadership (Aliguma, 2016), guiding a new era of women's sport in the country. Against the backdrop, there are socio-economic barriers and a lack of attention paid to Ugandan women, but these

have not crippled the women's sports movement in the country. The female athletes continue to strive for excellence at all levels of competition with the Netball national team leading the way, who were the 2017 Africa Nations Cup champion and who made back-to-back appearances at the Women Netball World Cup in 2015 and 2019, with Halimah Nakaayi winning Uganda's first gold medal at 2019 IAAF World championship helping to highlight achievements of women in sport.

Rugby has been part of Uganda's sports social fabric dating back to the colonial period, but women's involvement in the sport is a relatively new occurrence with the first women's national team game held in 2003 (Mwelu, 2019). Notwithstanding their limited numbers and resources, the *Lady Cranes* women's team managed to reach the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2009 (CNN, 2018), making it one of the biggest sporting achievements of the country. Since its inception, women's rugby in Uganda is on the rise and has shifted from its base in the central region of the country to Eastern and Northern Uganda (NTV News, 2019), which has players hungry and excited to play the game. Uganda women's Rugby has made steady progress with major achievements including winning the 2007 Rugby Africa Cup, participating in the 2009 Women's Sevens World Cup, and the 2019 World Rugby Women's Sevens Series. With the increasing number of girls playing rugby across the country, the standard of women's rugby has improved, and in the next 10 years, Uganda will be a force to reckon with internationally (CNN World, 2015). As a patriarchal sport, the increasing numbers and presence of women in rugby is a socio-cultural phenomenon thus necessitating an understanding of lived experiences of these athletes. Hence the focus of this study is on Ugandan female rugby players.

The theoretical perspective used to guide this study is African feminist theory and identity theory. African feminist theory plays a central role in rewriting African women's identities as active agents of social, economic, and political change (Atanga, 2013) while protecting the legacy of African culture, diversity, and norms (Amadiume, 1987; Mama, 1995; Mikell 1997; Oyěwùmí 2003 & 2005; Nnaemeka, 2005; Nkealah, 2006). In the context of this study, African feminist theory helps to explain conditions where power is “negotiable and negotiated... as power [is not considered] absolute but [understood] in relative terms – in terms of power sharing and power ebb and flow” (Nnaemeka, 2005 p. 33). African feminist scholars point out the importance of understanding the historical roles of men and women in conventional African societies to fully understand contemporary gender relations (Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyěwùmí, 2008; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Adichie, 2014). African feminist theory operates within a framework that sees tradition as inherently part of the present-day dynamics and anchored on African realities (Ukpokolo, 2016). As a way of explaining the current position of women in Africa, this theory is used not only to understand notions of colonialism, race, class, and gender (Oyěwùmí, 1997 & 2005; Nnaemeka, 2005) but also to rewrite the identities of African women. Uganda female rugby players occupy various roles and identities formed within the social networks they live which influence the reproduction of the desired identity. Mikell (1997) further explains that African feminism is grounded in the legacy of African culture and its resistance to western notions of hegemony and capitalism. African feminist theory was used to locate the rugby women's social identities as active agents of socioeconomic change within Uganda.

Social roles and identities contribute to locating the African female athlete in society. This study used identity theory to elaborate on how societies and institutions define identities that influence social interaction. Identity theory is the “categorization of the self as an occupant of a role and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance” (Stets & Burke, 2000 p. 225). In this context, identity theory was used for establishing patterns of social interactions that Uganda rugby women players use to forge relationships and construct their identities (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 2002 & 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Hogg et al. 1995). Identity theory focuses on role identities that relate social structures to individual actions, which would provide a basis for predicting social behavior (Hogg et al. 1995), as “identity self reflects society” (Stryker, 2007, p. 1089). Social identity plays a key role in developing a sense of self-definition as behavior and character development are linked to a community. Understanding one’s individuality and in the context of others, plays an essential role in defining the identities of Ugandan women rugby players and understanding how they navigate societal structures and boundaries. Ugandan female athletes are constantly challenged to navigate social, cultural, and religious boundaries within the contemporary African community and imposed post-colonial conditions.

African women are often “confronted with the reality of hegemony instituted by colonialism and globalization, which further entrench gender inequality, oppression and subjugation of women in the larger society” (Ipadeola, 2016, p. 15). In this context, patriarchal structures dominate the lives of individuals, governance, and political systems in Africa (Nzomo, 2015; Tripp, 2015; Thomson, 2016), influencing how African women have access and opportunity to engage in socio-economic activities (Goslin & Kluka,

2014). Gendered division of marginalization and discrimination within African society against women combine to create formidable barriers for participation and decision-making policies in sport (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Goslin & Kluka, 2014; Nauright, 2014; Ogunniyi, 2014; Pelak, 2005; Saavedra, 2003). Literature on competitive sport in Uganda is principally focused on male sports particularly football, rugby, and athletics (Chappell, 2008).

In reference to the present proposed dissertation study, literature based on Ugandan women in competitive sport is scarce (Johnson 2016), except for Kateshumbwa (2011) women in competitive sport and Johnson (2016) study on women's football participation; Musoke (2007) gender equality in physical education; Hayhurst (2014)-martial arts and Johnson & Whitely (2016) – girls' participation in community sports. However, there is paucity on literature that addresses the (re) construction of the Ugandan female athlete identity within the dynamic shifts of social, political, economic and cultural spheres in the country. With the increase of women and girls' participation in sport, there is need to explore and document the lived experiences of female athletes who deviate from social norms while crossing the boundaries of customary femininity and African woman's role in community. To situate Ugandan female rugby women in sporting landscape it is vital to understand the multiple constructs and intersects that define Ugandan women in sport.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in contributing to the body of literature on women rugby players' use of sport to navigate socio-cultural structures in society, in providing an in-depth understanding of how female participation in sport impacts

multiple identities [relations] and relationships [social positioning] in reference to young women and their families and communities. This study also adds a new dimension on how gender norms can be redefined in a deeply patriarchal society of Uganda. Finally, this study helps inform educators, activists, policy makers and sport administrators' decisions about developing sport opportunities for women in Uganda while remaining cognizant of the multiple identities [intersects] and abilities of female athletes in the country.

Statement of the Problem

The sport of rugby is ingrained within the social fabric of communities in Uganda, forming national identity and underscoring national consciousness. Although rugby is considered a male sport with strong historical links to masculinity (Murray & Howat, 2009), Ugandan women are embracing (Birch, 2014) and challenging the sport along with its hegemonic structures. Despite the national women's team success, the Lady Cranes are barely recognized in contemporary Uganda largely due to the patriarchal structures imported into the country. Given masculine associations with sport and athleticism, reexamination of gender norms in sport (Chu et al., 2003; Gill, 2007; Adjepong, 2017; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017), especially rugby in Uganda is warranted.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is two-fold: (a) to understand the socio-cultural construction of gender in post-colonial Uganda using lived experiences and personal stories of women rugby players, and (b) to comprehend how women rugby players navigate their everyday lives using roles and multiplicity of identities from grassroots to national team level participation in sport to inform socio-cultural change in

Ugandan sport communities. Specifically, the intentions of the research study are to document and understand players' lived experiences and stories that inform of masculinity-femininity constructs on and off the field, as well as negotiation of boundaries of existence structurally and culturally. The study is guided by the following research questions:

Research questions

Previous scholars' research studies on African women in sports inform the development of research questions used in this dissertation study. Such studies include Saavedra's (2003) study on football development in Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa, Toriola's (2003) study on leadership in Botswana, Chepyator-Thomson's (2005) study on women in athletics, Meier and Saavedra's (2009) study on African female role models in sport, Pelak's (2010) study on gender and football in South Africa, Clark's (2011) study on challenging hegemony in South African football, Goslin and Klula's (2014) study on sport business leadership in Malawi, Hayhurst's (2014) study on martial arts and social entrepreneurship in Uganda, Ogunniyi (2014) African women's football championships, M'mbaha and Chepyator-Thomson's (2016) study on Kenyan women in sport leadership and Goslin's (2016) study on African women making a difference through physical education and sport. The following research questions guided this study.

1. How do female rugby players perform gender on and off the field?
2. In what ways do female rugby players engage in the existing power relations and hierarchies in Uganda?

Researcher Assumptions

As an insider to women's sport participation in Uganda, it is my own experiences that drive me to write about Ugandan women's participation in sport from within. I am not simply studying women that play rugby, but I am also trying to deconstruct the concept of what it means to be an everyday female athlete participating in a predominantly male sport while challenging daily social and cultural barriers that exclude women. As an insider, I gained access to spaces that would otherwise be inaccessible to others particularly non-rugby players or women not involved in sport. I captured the meanings of rugby women's individual experiences and articulated these experiences accurately and in a detailed manner. Based on my experiences as a former athlete [Uganda and United States], I have made various assumptions about what sporting culture for women in Uganda should be. Given the fact that the sport industry in Uganda is at its infant stages, different women's sports are not given the right recognition and opportunities to excel. Another assumption is that female rugby players encounter challenges and barriers because the sport of rugby is predominantly male and the fact that Uganda is a patriarchal society.

Delimitations of the study

- Due to the homophobic climate in Uganda, participants will not be asked to discuss sexuality or sexual orientation given the contentious nature of these social structures in Uganda and the need to protect their identities.
- All the players contacted for this study were above the age of 18, attached to the women rugby club, and have participated in the women's national rugby league for how a minimum of two years.

Limitations of the study

- I had insider-outsider status in terms of being away from this sporting community for so more than 10 years, but I, however, maintained insider status as I was born and raised in Uganda and understand the cultural/social dynamics that influence women's participation in sport.
- The biggest population of female rugby players in Uganda is in secondary school and thus below the age of 18, thus missing out on their perspectives on the future of the women's game in Uganda and Africa and are therefore did not involve them in this study.
- Participants' expectations in terms of quick benefits of being part of the study and change in attitude towards the women's game in Uganda.
- Wearing multiple identities to fit within the women's rugby community, as a former Ugandan athlete, a sports scholar, and an advocate for African women in sport.
- Accessing the participants via internet platforms was a challenge. Poor network connections and different time zones between participants and researchers. Having a consistent conversation with some participants was difficult because of the unstable network service.

Definition of terms

- **African feminism:** “Theory and praxis for liberation of African women from gender-based discrimination compounded by racism, the legacy of colonialism, and the injustices of international injustices” (Steady, 2005, p. 325).
- **Colonialism:** “a cultural conquest of the native whereby the native’s forms of knowledge, art, cultural practices and religious beliefs were studied, classified, policed, judged and altered by the European” (Nayar, 2010, p. 2). Uganda was under British rule from 1894 – 1962, where they had political control, occupied with settlers and exploited the country economically.
- **Culture:** “The shared ways of life and shared understandings that people develop as they live together” (Coakley, 2017, p. 5).
- **Ethnicity:** “A particular cultural heritage that identifies a population committed to particular way of life” (Coakley, 2017, p. 226).
- **Feminism:** “Social movements founded to struggle for female equality” (Oyèwùmí, 2003, p.1).
- **Lady Cranes:** Nickname for Uganda Women National Senior Rugby Team
- **Gender:** “The social attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men” (the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues, 2007, p. 6).
- **Geographic location:** For this study, geographic location will represent different regions of Uganda.

- **Hegemony:** Process of maintaining leadership and control by gaining the consent and approval of other groups, including those who are being led or controlled” (Coakley, 2017, p. 75).
- **Imperialism:** “A set of hierarchical relationships between and among nations, peoples, cultures, and regions” (Oyèwùmí, 2003, p. 3).
- **Identity:** “A merged sense of who we are and how we are identified in a social world consumption/commercial ideology” (Coakley, 2017, p. 548).
- **Minority:** “A socially identified population that suffers disadvantages due systematic discrimination and has a strong sense of social togetherness based on shared experiences of past and current discrimination” (Coakley, 2017, p. 226).
- **Post-colonial feminist theory:** “An exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, race, sexualities in different contexts of women’s lives” (Rajan & Park, 2004, p. 1).
- **Patriarchy:** For the purposes of this study, I define patriarchy as a system of favoritism that gives preference and privilege to men, often at the expense of women.
- **Rugby:** The game is played with two teams, with each team carrying, passing and kicking the ball to the end zone to score.
- **She Cranes:** Nickname for Uganda Women National Netball Team
- **Socialization:** “A process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become familiar with social worlds (Coakley, 2017, p. 52).
- **Sport Federation/Union:** Organizations governing different sports in Uganda

- **Social structures:** “Established patterns of relationship and social arrangements that take shape as people live, work, and play with each other” (Coakley, 2017, p.

List of Abbreviations

IRU: International Rugby Union

IOC: International Olympic committee

MoES: Ministry of Education and Sports

NCS: Uganda National Council of Sports

PES: Department of Physical Education and Sports

URU: Uganda Rugby Union

UWRA: Uganda Women Rugby Association

UOC: National Olympic Committee representing Uganda.

AU: African Union

FIFA: Federation of International Football Association

INF: International Netball federation

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

IAPESGW: International Association of Physical Education & Sport for Girls and Women

UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

MDG: Millennium Development Goals

CHAPTER 2

“WOMEN’S RUGBY IS NOT JUST A SPORT IT IS TACKLING LIFE”: NAVIGATING GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITY FORMATION OF UGANDAN WOMEN

This chapter focuses on a review of the literature concerning women’s involvement in sport in global and African contexts, including women’s movements and feminist scholarship that play an important role in advocating for an increased number of women and girls’ participation in physical activities and sports. The chapter provides insights into ways women attempt to navigate socio-cultural structures and spaces to advance within the sporting arena and to display their athletic prowess and leadership skills. Further, the chapter provides a review of how gender equity in sport is implicated in leadership in international movements and sports organizations, as well as in the country-level sports federations. In addition, the chapter documents legislative and policy developments that influence women and girls’ presence in sport. The order of chapter presentation center on: sport in varying contexts, African women in Sport and physical activity, research studies on the current status of African women in sport, women in Uganda sport, women’s rugby in the global context, women’s challenges in rugby in context of gender roles, theoretical frameworks, and finally, the summary of the chapter.

Women in Sport in Global Context

Sport and Culture in Society

Sport occupies a prominent place in many societies. Theberge (1985) indicates sport to be a gendered cultural form dominated by men and masculinity privileging males in society. Historically in western institutions, women have been systematically excluded

from many social institutions including sports, particularly contact sport, and are channeled to other sports that conform to societal norms of femininity and heterosexuality (Hargreaves, 1994; Carle & Nauright, 1999; Birrell & Cole, 1994; Howe, 2001). Most physical contact sports, such as boxing, wrestling, football, rugby and basketball are often considered male or masculine sports and thus encourage, and reward behaviors and bodily forms typically associated with masculinity such as physical power, strength, violence, aggression and masculinity. Women in sport tend to be considered as the other or outsiders if they get involved in men's sports (Engh, 2011; Pfister, 2010) or subscribe to norms equated with athleticism of masculinity. Sports associated with women and femininity promote acceptable appearances and behaviors in western societies (Lindner, 2012; Hardy, 2015). However, over the last three decades women are increasingly taking part in sports that were off-limits. For example, the sports of biathlon, water polo, cycling, marathons, and iron man and combative sports were also off limit for women, with bodybuilding, ice hockey, boxing, sumo wrestling, skating and ski jumping representing this category (Pfister, 2010).

Despite the inclusion of women in endurance and combative sports, Pfister (2010) argues that gender differences and comparisons still exist. Athletes are represented as woman or man in sporting categories, cementing sport as an ideal ground for the reconstruction of identities as well as contesting gender binaries. Birrell (2000) accentuates sport as “an activity that not only welcomes boys and men more enthusiastically than girls and women but that also serves as a site for celebrating skills and values clearly marked as ‘*masculine*’” (p. 61), creating hegemonic masculinity. *Hegemony*, is defined as “the process through which certain powerful men create and reproduce relationships that

reinforce their position of power both over women and over other men” (Clark, 2011, p. 836), influencing roles that different people occupy in a community. Clark (2011) further asserts that “sport is based on hegemonic ideology” (p. 835) which in part “involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear “‘*natural*,’ ‘*ordinary*,’ ‘*normal*” (Donaldson, 1993 p. 3). In reference to *hegemonic masculinity*, Cornell (2005) describes *it* as “configuration of gender practice which embodies ... the legitimacy of patriarchy, [helping] guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women” (p. 77).

Sport participation has been dominated by males in all aspects including administration, coaching, and participation (Hardy, 2015). Also, sports participation provides a platform for social construction, helping define and reproduce hegemonic masculinity, while suppressing all other forms of social constructs as well as suppressing women’s advancement (Burton, 2013). Sport and masculinity define boundaries for women and men’s participation in physical activities, thus increasing “its capacity to give meaning and realization to patriarchal forms of power and domination” (Theberge, 1985, p. 197). Social establishments such as schools, governments, community groups, sport institutions and families are entrenched in the sustenance of hegemonic masculinity in sport practices that portray women’s experiences as a conflict between feminine and athletic roles. Burton (2015) indicates that it is important to position “gender as a fundamental aspect of organizational and social processes” (p.156) because the presence of women in any sporting category either as an athlete, coach, manager, or leader will always come under constant scrutiny. For example, in Norman’s (2010) study, female

coaches and administrators were undervalued because they did not fit the societal notion of being the ideal coach, that is a male figure.

Ideologies of physical and biological differences between men and women continue to play significant roles in determining women's ability to engage in physical activities and sport. Egalitarian sport feminists are mainly concerned with achieving equal opportunities and equal access to all sports at different levels for women, thereby increasing the numbers and the fields in which women participate (Hargreaves, 1994; Pfister, 2010; Martín, 2011). Sport as a platform to challenge gendered ideologies is an "important arena for the disruption of the binary oppositions of masculinity/ femininity" (Engh, 2011, p. 137). Women in sport space underscore the importance of examining a gendered body as contested and transformed within this environment (Butler, 1998). This space offers women the opportunity to enhance the transformation of gender norms while redefining the male perception of women's roles, particularly given that boys and men witness the strengths and competencies of women and girls on and off the field. Through participation in games and activities, women are de-establishing notions of gender roles embedded within patriarchal societies, challenging the definitions of masculinity and femininity that surround athleticism and masculine ideologies.

As a vehicle for social change around the world, sport has the power to remove barriers, create communities, empower people, and unite nations. Sport has the power to diffuse problems that occur within multiple cultures and spaces without challenging or disrupting the cultural, religious, and political norms that hold a community or nation together. It also has the power to challenge patriarchal structures that dominate social cultural spaces via creation of an equal playing field and in providing accessibility to

sport participation for everyone. Using sport as a tool, feminist activists, leaders, and athletes call for women to contribute to gender equality and socio-economic development, as well as look for ways to access social services and education. Feminist scholar, Woolf (2015), emphasizes the issues surrounding the absence of women in the workforce and advocates for empowering to create new forms of identity. Women and girls in the sport arena are still looking for that space to be availed to them especially at the grassroots levels so that their contributions to the community and their athletic prowess can be recognized.

Legislation and Policies for Women Involvement in Sport

Global policies, laws, and declarations on women in sport recognize physical activity and community engagement as an instrument of social change because they play an important role in the push for gender equity within the sporting arena. Some of the policies and laws include UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, physical activity for all human beings, the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) founded 1949, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Charter of Physical Education and Sport of 1978. These laws and policies encourage professional development and further the interests of women in physical education and sport while promoting the idea that the practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all.

In the United States, the Federal Law, *Title IX* of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex [girls and women] in all educational institutions. The International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport developed an international treaty, *The Brighton Declaration* of 1994, a Bill of Rights for girls and

women to enable participation at all levels, mainly targeting governments, civil society, businesses, academia, research institutions and sports organizations, which serve as advocates for gender parity across the globe.

The *Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration of 2014* advances changes in the sporting landscape that include major developments in international policy and an equitable system targeting sport and physical activity. These policies and declarations play a pivotal role in increasing the awareness of the need for gender equity across and within governments and international sport organizations. Leading the way are the International Olympic Movement (IOC), International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), International Basketball Federation (FIBA), The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) which have had an extensive outreach involvement around the world.

United Nations and Women in Sport

United Nations (UN) leads the way in creating policies and advocating for an increase in women participation in sporting and community activities. Sport programs play a vital role in positive youth and women development by incorporating various objectives and learning tools such as encouraging bonding, teach competence, build identity, rewarding positive behavior, and providing opportunities for community involvement (Coalter, 2010; Kidd, 2008). The United Nations policies such as UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Charter of Physical Education and Sport of 1978 entail fundamental rights for all; whereas the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace Report of 2002 and the UN action plan on Sport for

Development and Peace declaration of 2006, use sport as a tool for outreach; UN Women and FIFA Memorandum of Understanding of 2019, disseminates sports to promote gender equality. Hayhurst (2013) further clarifies that the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) objectives empower women and girls while fostering gender equality under the notions of sport in a global context.

The UN Women and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at the 63rd UN session of the Commission on the Status of Women hosted the Women and Sport Awards to recognize remarkable contributions (UN Women, 2019). The UN Women Executive member Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka recognizes benefits accruing from sport involvement on and off the field and calls for increased visibility of female athletes in the media. Mlambo-Ngcuka further points out that girls who are afforded the chance to engage in physical activities and sport can stand up to the world because they boast of high levels of self-esteem, better psychological well-being, and positive body image. Through sport organizations, physical activities and sport can be used to achieve gender equality and gender-neutral values and to seek individuals who are marginalized and underserved through outreach campaigns. Sport can also be used to advocate for equality and diversity and inclusion regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, origin, sexual orientation, religion, or economic status. The United Nations (2017) used sport to effectively tackle inequality in hard-to-reach areas while empowering individuals and communities, noting that it is a cost-effective and flexible tool to promote peace and development objectives. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Director at UN Women Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, argues for the potential of sport to enhance social change, and expressed that:

The potential for sport to contribute to the social, economic, and political empowerment of women and girls is clear and has been recognized by governments, the United Nations system, civil society, the sport movement and other actors. Now is the time to act on this recognition and bring the benefits of sport to women and girls. (United Nations Women, 2012, p. 1)

Empowering women and girls through sport allows for a network of leaders in different spheres such as government, private sector, sport and education to connect as well as help create global diplomacy that supports the girl child (MacDonald, 2015). Women activists champion the use of informal education—the sport for development and social change programs— to reach women and girls around the world. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton (2012) encourages women to play sport albeit facing formidable barriers. She explains that:

Girls and women around the world have a burning desire to participate in sports. They have the talent, the drive, the sheer love of the game. What they don't have is the chance to play, the chance to compete, the chance to prove themselves. So we want to support opening up more doors for girls and women in sports...so we want to find ways to get more women and girls on the field, the court, the track, in the pool, the mat, wherever their interests and talents take them, so that they can discover their strengths, develop their skills, experience that special satisfaction that sports can bring, win or lose. And we believe in the positive effects that can flow out of that experience for girls and women across their lifetimes and, by extension, for their families and communities. (p. 1)

To pave way for future success through increased self-esteem, educational and employment opportunities, sport provides space and leadership platform for young women (McDonald, 2015). United States female soccer player, Abby Wambach testifies that “when you give a woman a position of power, the trickle-down effect is real” (Women in the World, 2019 p. 1). Equipping and providing women with leadership opportunities, roles, and positions, within sport organizations challenge notions and societal norms that oppress and alienate women. However, there is evidence that indicates sport organizations could implement gender equity policies just to keep within legislation and to secure the needed funding, leaving gendered inequalities untouched (Goslin, 2016). Organizational culture is often taken for granted however it impacts women’s experiences in sport because “cultures of similarity that marginalize women are institutionalized within sport organizations” (Burton, 2013, p. 159). As one of the great drivers of gender equality, engagement in sport and physical activities has the power to provide women and girls with the values of teamwork, resilience, social connectivity, and voice within their communities.

International Olympic Committee

The IOC, one of the first international organizations to sign the *1994 Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport*, advocates for an increase in women and girls’ participation in sport. In addition, the IOC established Women and Sport conference in 1996, with a goal to promote gender equity in sport, with the conference subsequently held for several years— 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2014 in Helsinki, Finland. Following the 2014 conference developments, the IOC implemented ‘*Women in Sport Policy*’ legislation with the intention to increase the number of women participating in sport. The

result was a significant increase, from 23 percent of the athletes at the 1984 Los Angeles Games to a record 45.2 percent at Rio Games 2016 (IOC, 2019). In the most recent 2018 conference in Gaborone, Botswana, participants focused on a “sustainable sporting culture based on gender equality” to ensure opportunities for all (EUSA, 2018, p. 1). The IOC president Thomas Bach has called for structural change in leadership within sport organizations to uplift women. In his speech at the 2014 6th World conference on women and sport he explained:

Women’s participation in sport and sports administration is a key priority for the IOC. A great deal has been achieved on and off the field of play in recent years – all sports at the Olympic Games are now open to women, for example, and every National Olympic Committee has now sent female athletes to the Games – but we all know that change in this area does not come easily. (IOC, 2014, p.1).

Currently every new sport at the Olympic Games must include both men and women’s events with Rugby being the most recent addition (IOC, 2014). The IOC mandated its affiliates –National Olympic Committees and International Sport Federations–to increase the number of women in leadership positions and executive boards, specifying at least 20% (International Olympic Committee, 2015). Presently the IOC has 42.7 percent of women occupying leadership positions across IOC commissions, and 30.8 percent of IOC executive board members being women (IOC, 2019). Through leadership in sport, women find safe places to gather and build new interpersonal networks, develop a sense of identity, achievement, and pursue new opportunities. The Olympic agenda for the 2020 Games in Tokyo in Japan have a roadmap reaffirming the Olympic Movement’s

commitment to gender balance and equity across its various stakeholders and affiliates (IOC, 2019).

Based on the history of women involvement in sport, positive strides have been made to increase the number of women and girls participating at different levels across the globe. International legislature such as *Title IX, IOC-Women in Sport Policy* and *Brighton Declaration* continue to play an important function in redefining the spaces for inclusion of women and girls at all levels of sport. International bodies such as UN, IAAF, NCAA, IOC, and FIFA lead the way in pushing the agenda and availing the platform for inclusion of women and girls in all sport spheres. This section further described how women leaders and activists are using a collective voice to advocate for increased presence of women and girls across the world while working together to achieve a common goal.

African Women in Sport and Physical Activity

“African woman without activity cannot be said to exist ... to exist, however is to exert active influence on one’s society and environment” (Ipadeola, 2016, p. 23).

Women’s involvement in Physical Activity and Sport

Navigation of societal structures

Pre-colonial period. Sport and physical activities in Africa have had their place within the cultural fabric of African communities, where both men and women participated and thrived before colonization (Goslin, 2016). Physical activities and engagements were integrated into Africans’ way of life, happening through dances, initiations, and rituals that served as formal processes of imparting physical skills and knowledge, which occurred long before integration of European models of education and

governance. In precolonial African societies, women occupied positions of power in terms of social, economic and leadership, having an influence within their communities, albeit shared equally with the men (Amadiume, 2015). For example, in *Igbo* traditions, women engaged in farming and “trading was exclusively done by women in some parts of Igboland” (Adichie, 2017, p. 9), similarly among the *Suku* of Democratic Republic of Congo (southwestern region), according to Kopytoff (2005), the “division of labor followed gender very closely” (p. 128) where Agriculture was done by women whereas the men hunted and did all the *Suku* craftwork. Describing the Oyo - Yoruba traditions as free of gender-based categories, where “seniority, not gender, was the language of status” (Oyèwùmí, 2005 p. 170), women and men had equal and different responsibilities in the conservation of community customs and values.

Gender roles figured into the lives of the peoples, with females and males being accorded equal value to participating in various sporting activities, games, and social activities (Chepyator-Thomson, 2014). Indigenous games and recreational activities served as entities of integration, played an important role in promoting community development and social cohesion among diverse populace. Indigenous games of Africa emphasized fundamental movement skills that range from manipulative board games such as *omweso* (Uganda) or *kiela* (Angola) to less than physical games like jump rope and dancing, particularly enjoyed by the young women, to high impact physical games such as wrestling and hunting (Lyoka, 2007). These games “were played not only for fun, but also to improve body physique and acquire skills for other activities, such as warfare and hunting” (Thomas & Dyal, 1999, p. 120).

In precolonial Africa societies practical skills imparted to the youth served community interests. The young people of varying ages–acquired the skills in a variety of social settings such as home, communal gatherings, grazing fields and community playgrounds (Amedzro, 2005; Amusa & Toriola, 2008; Ndee, 2010; Chepyator-Thomson, 2014). A focal point at cultural ceremonies–births, harvest, coronation, conquests, deaths, marriages, initiation, socialization, and battles– served as a platform to educate, impart life skills, and knowledge to the community, across different generations, forming a conventional education system. Furthermore, Recreational activities in indigenous African communities improved the quality of life of the peoples as equal participation in events was promoted for everyone, becoming a part of the cultural fabric of the community (Gunani, Makaza, Amusa, Mugandani, Kanji & Tapera, 2008). Blacking (1987) argued that these rituals, dances, customs, division of labor, and games practiced for generations promoted status acquisition, identity formation, gender roles, and maintenance of power.

Colonial period. During the colonial period there was the introduction of western forms of education and Eurocentric ways of life, which penetrated and eroded the indigenous forms of education and physical culture (Sifuna & Otiende, 1992; Amusa & Toriola, 2010; Byron & Chepyator-Thomson, 2015). Europeans accomplished through the establishment of missionary schools and the introduction of colonial systems of governance. Physical education and sport were introduced to African countries through colonization, with sport being used as an instrument for ethical training and social interaction (Ndee 2010; Amusa & Toriola, 2010; Chepyator-Thomson, 2013). Physical drills, militarization, marching and gymnastics stunts were the focus of colonial models

of physical education (Mazrui, 1986; Goslin, 2016). The subject of physical education became an important aspect of the school curriculum and was considered critical to physical and intellectual development of pupils (Ndee, 2000).

Egbo (2000) asserted that colonial administrators and missionaries considered the western type of education and civilization to be essential in fulfilling religious agendas and sustaining control of African colonies. Unfortunately, the educational and social systems introduced by the colonialists tended to accentuate various forms of gender related discrimination and were modeled on the male only institutions of learning that had developed in old-fashioned patriarchal European system of governance (Ipadeola, 2016; Amadiume, 2015; Amusa & Toriola, 2010; Oyěwùmí, 2005; Musisi 2001). The declining of long-established African forms of education and the favoring of western education bred European perceptions of gender roles that Egbo (2000) pointed out were disadvantageous to African women, hence limited access to important aspects of education. But the involvement of women in communal events, labor, production of food and services ensured that their rights and value were maintained in all spheres of society (Kyazike, 2016). The exclusionary social and economic practices used against women active in all public domains of society were rooted in Eurocentric ideologies (Amadiume, 2015). African men in the colonial period were privileged giving them socio-economic opportunities that were not availed to women (Musisi, 2005), leaving women alienated and marginalized (Ipadeola, 2016). African women had no access to political and economic decision-making policies (Bastian, 2001), as they were often left in the villages and farms to defend their families (Kyazike, 2016). Men on the contrary had jobs that gave them monetary and social status wealth within colonial governments. These

practices did not only leave women without the western style education and belonging but also excluded them from space “outside the domestic sphere” (Das, 2016, p. 229). Such practices were transferred to other societal settings such as participation in sport and physical education, where women were pushed to minimal engagement in physical activities or engage in a more feminine specific sport like netball (Mansfield, 2014). Sports such as football, cricket, rugby, boxing accommodated young men only whereas athletics and netball became the only two sport available for women (Amusa & Toriola, 2010). Through the process of socialization women in Africa started to embrace and participate in various sport that were introduced during colonial times

Post-colonial period. Systems of governance in post-colonial period continue to remain discriminatory towards women, with African women having limited allocation of resources, have low social status and limited opportunity to engage in social events such as local and international sports (Saavedra, 2003). Hancock, Lyras, & Ha (2013) indicate that inability to participate in sport and physical activity inhibit development and contribute to a weaker position of women and girls in social, political, economic, legal, educational, and physical spheres. African athletes defy multiple intersects influenced by indigenous traditions, European colonialism, and the spread of Islam that Mazrui (1986) described as the ‘*The African Triple Heritage*’ that impacted development of sport in Africa. Majority of Africans practice Christianity, Islam in combinations with cultural beliefs, as Goslin (2016) points out to be “a major influence on gender equality and [on] how physical education, sport and physical activity for women and girls are valued and practiced within individual African countries” (p. 18). Mazrui further argues that the marginalization of women in sport was aggravated by multiple intersectional ways of life

that African woman had to embrace. The challenges engulfed within the “triple heritage continue to play havoc with both aesthetic standards and athletic measurements” (Mazrui, 1986, p.128) leaving fewer opportunities to participate in physical activities.

Despite marginalization and barriers that influenced access to social and economic opportunities, African female athletes have continued to make great strides producing inspirational leaders, while maintaining their role and significance within the African cultural setting. Activism, guiding policies and treaties at the continental and global level focusing on women and girls in physical education and sport have provided African women with opportunities to engage in sport. For example, the continental governing body, the African Union (AU) recognizes that “gender is a fundamental human right and integral part” of socio-economic development of people in the continent, thus creating a policy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) that ensures inclusion of women and girls at all steps of Africa’s development (African Union, 2019, p. 1). Additionally, the AU declared “2015 as the year of ‘Women’s Empowerment’ in Africa and gender equity in all spheres of society, including sport” (Goslin, 2016, p. 21), representing a push to make all African societies more inclusive than ever before. To support the agenda of women and girls’ participation in sport, African heads of state, the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa, the African Women in Sport Association (AWISA), and national African sport organizations are all signatories of the *Brighton Declaration* (Goslin, 2016).

On the backdrop of the legislature and policy support for the acceptance of African women and girls in sport has happened at a slower pace during the post-colonial period. Issues that include socio-economic and cultural facades of sexuality, community

resistance, religion, low participation rates, and accessibility taking center stage influence extent of women's involvement in sport. Regardless of the limitations and repercussions that African female athletes face, Africa has produced successful sportswomen who are known worldwide (Skies & Bale, 2014), with young women navigating and breaking through the multiple boundaries that limit their accomplishments at all levels of sport. This section has provided an insight of the continuous pursuit of inclusion and acceptance for African women in sport and physical activities. It also highlights the account of women engagement in all spheres of society and how different historical periods like colonialism impacted the lived experiences of African female athletes. The section also provides how scholarship has developed with specific foci being intersectional, complex, and historical processes that characterize the African women's engagement in sport and production of excellent performances at the world stage as athletes, activists, scholars and leaders.

African Female Athleticism and Appropriateness

Women in sport are increasingly a topic of discussion particularly in Africa, where women have achieved success in competitive athletics (Nauright, 2014). Among the prominent athletes are Maria Lourdes Mutola (Mozambique), Caster Semenya (South Africa), Catherine Ndereba (Kenya), Tirunesh Dibaba (Ethiopia), Derartu Tulu (Ethiopia), Françoise Mbango (Cameroon), Isabelle Sambou (Senegal), Tegla Loroupe (Kenya), and Nawal El Moutawakel (Morocco) (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Sikes & Bale, 2014; Goslin, 2016). These women track and field stars have inspired many upcoming runners and have helped showcase their skills at the global sports stage. African women have also found their place in top administrative sport

positions, with Lydia Nsekera-Burundi, serving as the IOC and FIFA executive committee member (BBC Sport, 2013), Fatuma Samoura-Senegal, serving as FIFA general secretary (FIFA, 2016), Penninah Kabenge- Uganda, serving as general secretary of Federation of Africa University Sports (FASU), executive board member of International university sports and the president of National University Sports Federation of Uganda (Nantaba, 2018), and Nomsa Mahlangu-South Africa, serving as the President of the Federation of Africa University Sports (FASU, 2019; Mokwena, 2019). These African women in sport “have rearticulated the family roles and reshaped its functions to include women’s roles in participation in sports” (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005, p. 251) and leadership, paving way for future generations. As role models, these successful women are not only representing Africa at international sporting level, but also inspiring young African women and girls who are the future of sport in Africa.

African sports female role models play a significant part in mobilizing and encouraging girls to be involved in sport (Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Sikes & Bale, 2014) because their success on and off the field is admirable to young girls, who struggle for social inclusion in physical activities and sporting events in various societies. Non-sport related programs with multiple and wide range of global initiatives tend to promote women’s social and economic development, addressing and preventing gender-based violence, and ensuring full participation for women working in civil and political organizations (Brady 2005; Hayhurst, 2013; Macdonald, 2015). Sporting activities, along with a holistic community-based approach, serve as a mechanism for creating group identity, helping draw girls into a network of other institutions, programs, and mentors, whom they would likely never have had access to in their places of residence.

Spaces that are gender neutral do not put women at any risk of physical or emotional harm, as they receive a degree of privacy and confidentiality. Brady (2005) points out that safe spaces inclusive of sport sites provide women and girls a sanctuary, where they are treated with respect, dignity, develop new skills, create social networks, enjoy freedom of expression, and have availed of learning and educational opportunities.

African women and girls that engage in physical activities and sports are constantly challenged with the notions of female appropriateness, female athleticism, and sex roles due to sport being deemed a masculine activity in contemporary times. Successful female athletes are challenging that stereotype narrative, “given Africa’s strong commitment to family, women’s critical role in maintaining cultural and social structures intact, African women in sports have forced society to change” (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005, p. 246).

Navigating socio-cultural boundaries

Through participation in games and activities women are challenging notions of gender roles within western influenced patriarchal societies, questioning the definitions of masculinity and femininity that surround athleticism in African contexts. Participation in sport allows girls and women to have to have bodily ownership, to have a sense of self-worth and belonging within one’s community (Hayhurst, 2013). Sport currently is embedded in male characteristics that are “linked to the patriarchal ideology which divides the social world into dualistic gendered spaces, positions, traits and dispositions that are presumably clear and natural” (Shehu, 2010, p. ix). To change or challenge African male hegemony in sport organizations, it is important to attend to the influence of institutional practices, policies, structures and systems on the experiences of African women (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Goslin & Klula, 2014). Sport cuts across the globe,

however men and women from different classes and cultures experience its norms and practices in diverse ways. Africans continue to struggle to make the best of the intersections of long-established cultures and systems of thought, and remnants of Western worldview brought about during colonialism (Egbo, 2000). African women have rejected the post-colonial structures by expanding family and community roles to be more inclusive of women and girls' participation within the sports arena (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005).

A woman's portrayal in society is implicated in national views on gender, power, race, religion, and in political and socio-economic structures (Adichie, 2014). In different countries and communities, public space is not legally defined, where citizens can go for recreation, education, entertainment, and participation in socio-political life. However, in African societies, recognition of public spaces does not define who can occupy these sporting spaces because these sites are broken down along gender lines in decision making processes, administration, leadership, and media coverage (Clark, 2011). Women have much less access to playgrounds and sports stadia and are additionally excluded from valuable societal and economic opportunities in form of sports (Saavedra, 2003). A woman's involvement in community-based activities such as sport does not only empower her, but also gives her the independence to get involved with socioeconomic and political activism, that will advance her family and community. In Hayhurst's (2013) study on martial arts sport development program in Uganda, the women and girls acquired skills of self-defense and sense of self-worth, with the graduates earning a living through coaching and serving as trainers in schools, community centers, and sports clubs.

The existence of the social development programs provides public and health related services to the community through sport and make available gender-neutral sporting fields to the women and girls within that locale. The spirit of female independence and empowerment challenges the image of women domesticity and exclusion from public spaces. Within the African context, sport developmental projects should adopt a holistic and integrated approach to understand and respond to local and diverse community needs. The goal of these sport developmental and social change programs is to reach as many people as possible. The use of non-formal education is useful to women and girls for it incorporates literacy program, skills-building activities, and reproductive health awareness via the medium of sport. Mazrui (1986) alerts scholars as to “rude shock [that] has occurred all over the continent and beyond [when] the shock [reached the populace] that the village is not the world [but] on the contrary, the world is a village” (p. 295). He describes the multiple facets that impact Africans, and how women are caught in the web of finding their identity through the structured patriarchal western influenced African society. Therefore, it is important for scholarship on African women in sports to make explicit reference to culture as indicative of the hegemonic nature of western values and scholarship structures. Shehu (2010) argues that:

Despite the pressures created by feminists and other social movements to open up the sport arena to women and other previously excluded groups, the age-old patriarchal principles embedded in sport, reinforced at every turn by the mass media and gendered socialization, remain a major obstacle to personal fulfillment and advancement in sport for many African women...[African] women, perceived as a threat to the male system of power relations in sport, become targets of toxic

myths, stigmas, and harassment in sport spaces to perpetuate the domination of these spaces by heterosexual, masculine males (p. x).

In the African landscape, social issues have been marked by cultural eclecticism since colonial rule, with Africans continuing to struggle to make the best of the intersections of their cultures and systems of thought (Saavedra, 2003; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Sikes & Bale, 2014). Mazrui (1986) described Africa's post-colonial era using the term: *'The Africans Triple Heritage'* pointing out that it made content with the populace embracing a combination of heritages: indigenous, European, and Islam. African feminist scholars argue that gender role responsibilities were equally distributed in indigenous African societies with women, men and children accorded duties. It should also be noted that *traces* of female subordination were evident in pre-colonial African societies and they became more pronounced and embedded into cultures during the periods of Islamic expansion and European colonialism, as well as during post-colonial periods (Amadiume, 2005; Oyěwùmí, 2005; Kyazike, 2016). Consequently, control over African woman's role, her belonging and how she experiences life was and is still interwoven within the social-cultural structures of society.

The question of women's place in society remains a subject of debate across societies, cultures and historical periods (Sikes & Jarvie, 2014). Decision making in the private and public sector domains is still skewed in favor of one gender and power consequently resides with those who hold it given penetration of western ideology into households of African people. Scholarship needs to understand the status and experiences of African women in sport, the active athletes, and those who occupy leadership and management roles in national and international sport organizations, as they have greater

agency and impact on day-to-day lived experiences of African women. Ukpokolo (2016) contends that scholarship on women and gender issues in Africa is transitioning from notes to exploring gender as a variable area of research. Skies and Bale (2014) indicate that literature on sport in Africa is “marked by the relative invisibility of women” (p. 449), with scholarship on women being in its early stages of growth. However, multiple scholars and practitioners could provide fresh perspectives on the ever-changing field of study and insights into the current state of African women in sport.

Research studies on status of African Women in Sport

Breaking Structural and Social Barriers

Women’s relationship with their bodies has been a long-standing topic of interest to feminist scholars (Salvatore & Marecek, 2010). It is important to note that sport and physical activities play a central role in re-defining body image appropriations. Gender is considered a set of expectations demanded of any individual and reinforced in society by the dominant discourse of masculine demands, a platform where women and girls articulate their negotiations of constraint within established social boundaries (Birrell, 2000; Pelak, 2005; Dworkin, Swarr & Cooky, 2013). Gender constructs in society perpetuate the limited attention given to women because scholars and news outlets focused on the dominant sex- the men and their success while ignoring the contributions of women (Saavedra, 2003). Scholarship on African women in sport calls for attention to how “gendered experiences /inequalities intersect” (Pelak, 2005, p. 55) impact sport participation. Organized sport in Africa is deeply gendered, with the legacies of colonialism playing a vital role in determining who has access to participation and resources (Engh, 2011). The generalization of women as an oppressed and homogenized

group across the globe has only made it more difficult for successful African sports women to stand out and challenge the unequal power relations between men and women on the African continent. Skies and Bale (2014) outline sport as a “social institution in which gender plays a fundamental organizing role” (p. 459), thus situating the African woman in her position as an athlete, a mother, a role model, a symbol of female success, and a leader in different aspects of community in Africa is a challenge. They further argue that: “Africa’s formidable and successful female athletes complicates the image of the African woman” (p. 451).

Lack of access to resources and economic stratification during a post-colonial era in African communities has become an impediment to women’s advancement in society (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Engh, 2011; Pela, 2010; Saavedra, 2003; Egbo, 2000). Essentially, imported laws and customs impact the priority of access and equity as women and girls are not afforded the opportunity to engage in physical activities (Meir, 2017; Nauright, 2014; Saavedra, 2003). Access to space and control over designating and scheduling sports space is a crucial factor in girls and women being able to participate in sports. Saavedra (2003) examined the situation for women participation in sport in Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa, finding that the boundaries of who can play and who cannot, rested on relations of power far more than it does on contemporary culture. For example, in Senegal, women’s basketball is among the most popular sports – third only to men’s soccer and African wrestling.

Williams and Chawansky (2014) study emphasize “the lack of sports infrastructure and social programmes other than those aimed at identifying potential professional players is part of a long legacy of relative difficulties” (p. 553) planted by

Europeans patriarchal system. In a case study on South African women soccer players, Pelak (2010) points to non-material resources such as media coverage, public support, advertising, institutional barriers, and invisibility of women's effort as outstanding obstacles for development of the women's game. Despite the increase in football and basketball academies across African continent, young men are the beneficiaries of these services because the profitable markets for female athletes in Europe and United States are not established (Saavedra, 2003; Engh, 2011; Williams & Chawansky, 2014).

As a social institution, sport plays a fundamental role in positioning the African woman by giving her a platform to address issues of inequality, social, educational, economic, and physical matters. Physical education and sport enable inclusiveness of girls and women thus availing them of the ability to control their lives and transfer sport skills into real life experiences. Women in Africa have gained access to sporting activities through community programs that aim to empower them socially and economically (Johnson & Whitely, 2016; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst 2014; Mansfield, 2014; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005). Krane, Waldron, Michalenok and Stile-Shipely (2001) argue that "sport and exercise can be a very empowering means by which women challenge themselves, gain a sense of identity, and learn their physical capabilities" (p. 20).

Through sport development programs, socio-economic and structural issues that are important to a community outside the political sphere are addressed. Practitioners and scholars use sport to "help in the building of physical, social and community infrastructure, which is regarded by many as essential factors for development to succeed" (Levermore, 2008, p. 186). Community and development sport programs act as

an entry point (Coalter, 2008) for African women to participate in communal based sporting activities. These engagements influence and impact their livelihoods thus moving towards achieving gender equality and inclusion in some societies. These programs find ways to “build understanding and to promote tolerance and social integration” (Hancock et al., 2013, p. 11) among community members, leaders, policy makers and athletes, while maintaining the cultural aspects of a given community. Such programs act as interventions in community health issues, helping curb violence against women and girls because they learn to defend themselves through engaging in the various sports and projects implemented by community (Kidd, 2008; Hayhurst, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014). Hayhurst’s (2014) study showed that young women who engaged in sporting activities such as martial arts, were able to “locate employment opportunities, ‘stay out of trouble’ and ‘be self-responsible’” (p. 304). Encouraging girls to better control their own lives while transferring life skills from field to real life (Meier, 2015) plays an important role in defining their identity formation and wellbeing.

In reference to the sport of netball, a predominantly a common female sport in Commonwealth countries, it is a popular sport for girls and women with its foundations in schools in Africa. According to Netball Africa, three countries are ranked in the top ten of International Netball Federation rankings for the year 2019, and successful athletes have inspired women and girls to engage in sport helping change the African continent through the lenses of sport. In Mansfield’s (2014) study, Netball has been used effectively in fostering women and girls’ engagement at grassroots level sport in Malawi. Meier and Saavedra’s (2009) study found netball to be the most popular sport among girls in Malawi, with the national team—the *Malawi Queens*—ranked number seven in the world,

serving as an instrument of inspiration for the female population in the country. Additionally, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) collaborate with the Netball Association of Malawi and the national team to promote campaigns of girl child education and to reduce violence against women and girls (Goslin, 2016). Despite the challenges faced by community-based sport programs that target women empowerment and social inclusion in various societies, the sport has given rise to star athletes who have propelled the country to international scene and helped create an opportunity for countries like Uganda, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe to increase girls' participation in the game.

African Female Sport Role Models

Sports role models play a significant part in mobilizing and encouraging girls to be involved in sport due to their success on and off the field (Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Goslin, 2016). Their athletic triumphs are admirable to young girls that struggle for social inclusion in physical activities and sporting events in various societies. For example, Malawi's Mwai Kumwenda, who was crowned 2016 Athlete of the Year by the International World Games Association (The World Games, 2016), works with schools and community centers to encourage young girls and boys to stay in school and to keep working hard (Richardson, 2016). Uganda's National team captain and International Netball Federation Global Ambassador, Peace Proscovia uses her journey to the top to inspire youth, while channeling the sport to promote sustainable development at the individual and community levels (Mitchell, 2019). Bongwiwe Msomi, a South African, uses sport workshops to create an equal playing field for women (Super Sport, 2019). Chepyator-Thomson (2005) elucidates the critical role African female athletes play in

altering the perceptions of women and girls' cultural and societal responsibilities [through participation in] sports at all levels of competition. Gradually female athletes' success and voice have "forced society to change" (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005, p. 246) making it more accepting of women in sport landscape. Family and social responsibilities given to girls often prevent them from engaging in community activities such as sport. However successful athletes have inspired young women to participate in sport.

Meier and Saavedra's (2009) study revealed how Esther Phiri, a Zambian single mother, defended the Women's International Boxing Federation Intercontinental Junior Lightweight title in 2007 by defeating Monika Petrova of Bulgaria, making her achieve stardom and fame in Zambia. As a female icon of sport, Phiri's success story has been used as a sport and development tool, helping alter gender expectations and responsibilities associated with culture and economy in Zambian society. The impact of successful African female athletes is enormous because their voices and activism continuously push for gender equality in Africa amongst policy makers. In North Africa, Morocco's Nawal El Moutawakel, the first African, Arab and Muslim woman to win an Olympic gold medal at 1984 Olympic Games opened doors for women not only from North Africa but also across the continent (Goslin, 2016). In honor of her performance at the 1984 Olympics, the King of Morocco decreed that all girls born that day should be named after her (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005). Her work ethic as an athlete, community leader, and women representative at the International Olympic Committee, represent "a symbol of women's liberation" (Goslin, 2016, p. 120), who inspires young African and Arab women to strive for success on and off the field, as well as challenge cultural and

structural barriers that hinder women from participating in sport activities across Middle East and Africa.

African star female athletes are highly respected in the sporting arena because of their accomplishments and the ability to evoke national pride while promoting girls' participation in physical activity. Representing one's country is an honor for every athlete, as one's achievements, struggles and failures are embraced by the nation (Meier, 2015). In the case of South Africa's Olympic Gold-medalist Caster Semenya, she has unified her country, the African continent and promoted human rights groups in her fight against gender verification and discrimination from IAAF and IOC. She is "the first Black South African to win a gold medal at an IAAF World Championship, a major hallmark in a country that has used sport for post-apartheid nation building" (Garcia, 2019, p. 1). However, her extraordinary performances on the track at World championships and Olympics have left her competitors disgruntled and calling her a man leading to one-year suspension from IAAF competitions as they verify her gender and testosterone levels (Wells & Darnell, 2014). Against this backdrop, Caster continues to compete and win her races as her legal team fights for inclusion and acceptance in the Sports Court of Arbitration.

The South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee have remained great supporters of the athlete, stating that "Caster remains the great carrier of the Team South Africa flag, a symbol of national pride and we applaud her for her excellence" (Zraick, 2019, p. 1). As an African female athlete, Caster Semenya has managed to trespass the oppressive, socio-cultural and political boundaries as her performances have triggered South African patriotism and tackled masculine connotations that are embedded

in African woman portrayal against sporting culture evident in postcolonial era.

Gendering in sport spaces is one of the main factors that hinders African women participation in sport and physical activities (Goslin, 2016; Nauright, 2013), therefore the presence and success of these African global ambassadors plays a key role in defying gender-based prejudice (Meier, 2015). African female athletes constantly seek their identity through multiple roles as a mother, role model, leader, and symbol of family and cultural attachment in deeply rooted patriarchal post-colonial conditions.

Sport for Social Change and Development

The international movement around sport and development builds upon efforts that use sport purposely to promote community development (Kidd, 2008). Sport for Development (SFD) organizations are utilized as powerful tools to reach marginalized people in communities (Mansfield, 2014). The use of sport as a tool for development programs foster social cohesion and is inclusive of different groups of people regardless of race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status (Coalter, 2010; Lyras & Peachy, 2011; Hayhurst, 2013; Mansfield, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014). Sport for development programs facilitate human development, foster social responsibility, enhance self-concept, promotes respect and social cohesion beyond the sports field. Sport for development helps raise awareness of issues that are important to a community outside the political sphere, evidence in practitioners and scholars' use of sport to build "physical, social and community infrastructure, which is regarded by many as essential factors for development to succeed" (Levermore, 2008, p. 186). Multiple organizations are using SFD and social change programs to effect transformation in underserved communities around the world. These include multilateral institutions like United Nations

(UN), international non-government organizations like CARE International and Right to Play; governmental bodies like UK Sport and Australian Sports Commission; International corporations like Nike and Pepsi; and local/grassroots organizations: The Kids League in Uganda, Go Sisters in Zambia, and Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya.

Lyras and Peachey (2011) argue that sport “can become a powerful tool for achieving educational objectives and promoting moral and proactive citizens...[and] can resist and overcome the limitations of the culture of segregation by developing value-oriented sport interventions” (p. 317). Adolf Ogi, Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace highlighted importance of sport in communities. He emphasized that: “education plays a vital role in a young person’s life” [it is] “the best school of life,” [for it teaches] basic values and life skills important for the holistic and well-balanced development of younger generations (di Cola, 2006, p. v). On the backdrop of gender and sport development programs, scholars and practitioners are increasingly using sport specific projects to engage women and girls within their communities. The 2008 Nike Foundation global movement ‘*Girl Effect*’ campaign targets young women in underserved parts of the world by involving them in programs that focused on social entrepreneurship, health, microfinance, education, and sport (Nike Foundation, 2012). Hayhurst (2013) contends the ‘*Girl Effect*’ campaign equips young women with skills that enable them fit in society as well as contribute to the socio-economic landscape in their community. Delivering social and health related programs to the community, sport for development programs create a platform and promote awareness for women and girls to be involved in sport.

When sports programs are combined with other cultural and community activities, they change individuals and communities (Coalter, 2008; Hayhurst 2013; Mansfield, 2014). Coalter (2008) further explains that sport provides an entry point for different groups of people, with sport for development programs allowing for implementing of specific activities that reinforce acceptable societal practices. As an entry point for African women to participate in community-based sporting activities, sport for development programs “promote tolerance and social integration” (Hancock, et al., 2013, p.1) among diverse peoples, while maintaining the cultural dynamics of a given community. These programs also provide features and structures that can be utilized in different cultural settings to effect social change, without causing any imbalances in a community. Furthermore, they provide a framework for performing “sport interventions that effectively promote social change, peace, and development” (Lyras & Peachey, 2011, p. 323), among African women who have limited opportunity to engage in sport because of social, political, economic, educational, cultural, and religious structure.

In a study of Namibia’s women football development, the ‘*Brave Gladiators*’ Williams and Chawansky (2014) argue that gendering in sport spaces is a main factor that hinders African women’s participation in sport and physical activities. Mansfield (2014) further points out that one of the biggest challenges faced by sport for development programs in various parts of Africa is the fact that communities do not fully engage in programs that foster girls’ empowerment. He singles out economic and socio-cultural dynamics in communities that do not recognize sport as a gender-neutral site, for all to participate. However, as much as sport for development programs initiate active participation in sport, empower girls and women, and create gender neutral sporting

fields, these programs have limited access to the community at large. The inadequate long-term structures of these programs, community acceptance and policies that support women in sport hinder progress of women's sport (Hayhurst, 2013; Williams & Chawansky, 2014). To achieve effectiveness of these social programs, it is imperative to critically analyze social, religious, political, and sport related policies in different societies that encompass women and girls' participation in a community.

African Women in Sport Leadership

African women's involvement in leadership spheres has increased with multiple countries adopting progressive constitutional policies and quotas on gender equality. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2019), the former president of Liberia describes "Africa of 2063 [to be] a continent where gender equality is embedded in all spheres of life" (p.1). Based on 2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), 41 countries have embraced the gender equality policy, with Rwanda leading the way with more than 50% female members of Parliament (United Nations Rwanda 2014-2019), followed by Madagascar, Seychelles, Uganda, South Africa and Algeria. However, this shift of acceptance of women into leadership roles in public spheres should be reflected in sport administration. Zambian Vice-President Inonge Mutukwa Wina described at the 2016 African Women in Sport leadership forum the challenges that African women experience, ranging from culture, tradition, economy, patriarchy, to religion. She singled out that "African women remain under-represented in key decision-making positions, which is unacceptable in the 21st century" (IOC News, 2016, p.1). The expanding socio-political movements of women in Africa are pushing for an increased role of women at all levels of leadership, policy making and implementation. Patriarchal ideologies in postcolonial Africa (Toriola,

2003; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Mwisukha & Rintaugu, 2013; Goslin & Kluka, 2014) are implicated in sport leadership.

Sport is a gendered institution that operates within a hegemonic masculine norm that limits opportunities for women to be involved in leadership positions. Shaw and Frisby (2006) described how sport organizations have institutionalized masculinity and have privileged male activities, actions thus promoting masculine leadership qualities in sport industry. In a study conducted by M'mbaha and Chepyator-Thomson (2016), they discuss the status of women in leadership in sport and emphasize the need to contextualize “historical, political, and socio-economic factors that influenced, and continue to have profound effect on African women in society” (p. 23). Gender relations and roles are reinforced by dominant ideologies that determine social norms and behaviors, and how individual groups are expected to conform (Lindner, 2012). A norm is “a shared expectation that people use to identify what is acceptable and unacceptable in a social world” (Coakley, 2017 p.104). Dominant gender norms serve the interests of people with power and influence based on what they think gender ideology, identity, and roles should be within society. Coakley (2017), further describes dominant gender norms as male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered, thus limiting possibilities for females. Male hegemony practices determine what roles different people are given within sport. Norman’s (2010) study revealed female coaches and administrators to be undervalued because they did not fit the societal notion of being the ideal coach, which means a male figure. To locate women in the sporting arena it is important to understand the post-colonial patriarchal structures, dominant beliefs, culture, and characteristics of African women’s lived experiences. In her study on the experiences of women in sport

leadership in Kenya, M'Mbaha (2012) points out women shy away from leadership and administrative roles due to socialization and stereotyping.

Gems and Pfister (2014) argue that “societies are organized via norms and rules, structures and institutions which define the spaces of and relations between individuals and groups” (p. 1910). Given the political, economic, and social environment, “many African women aspiring to leadership positions in sport are reluctant to distance themselves from tradition and culture out of fear of social exclusion” (Goslin & Kluka, 2014, p. 94). Despite African women’s advancement in different sectors of society and working as agents of social change they remain underrepresented (M'Mbaha & Chepyator, 2016). Goslin and Kluka (2014) study on women sport leadership in Malawi indicate how African society has been very slow to embrace women and girls’ participation in sport at all levels. Explaining the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership, Burton (2015) points to hegemonic masculinity in sport and the preserve of male dominance in society that suppresses all other forms of social constructs, including constraining advancement of women. Sociocultural responsibilities and practices disempower African women because they are not nurtured to take on leadership roles within their own society (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Mwisukha & Rintaugu, 2013; M'Mbaha & Chepyator, 2016).

Women and girls can acquire life skills such as leadership through participating in physical activities and sport. However, sport organization culture is constructed to favor men, making African women in sport industry secondary subordinates, and opportunities for leadership rare in prominent spheres. However, Goslin and Kluka’s (2014) study encourages women to get involved and participate as volunteers at sporting events such

as community games, national sports engagements, sport conferences, and school sports in order to familiarize with sport related responsibilities like overseeing sports events, and to get recognized for organizing successful events. Mwisukha and Rintaugu (2013) point to the lack of African female role models as a major contributing factor of low numbers of women and girls' participation in sporting activities and under-representation of women in sport leadership. Goslin and Kluka (2014) describe the importance of African women in leadership, as they are role models across the diverse African societies and can "represent the needs and interests of other women" (p. 96). To promote advancement of African women in sport leadership roles, it is important for sport organizations to encourage women empowerment and inclusion.

Lydia Nsekera, former president of Burundi Football Federation and the first female FIFA Executive Committee member affirms that sport remains a contested arena, where women constantly seek for equal representation in leadership (Obayiuwana, 2012). In her congratulatory speech after the FIFA general assembly in 2013 she said, "I will inspire women to believe they can lead and I will support women in member associations" (BBC sport, 2013 p. 1). This plays an important function in recognizing African female role models whose legacy inspires women to take up sport administration duties as well as leadership roles in different sectors. Echoing similar message is IOC honorary member Patrick S. Chamunda, who, at the 2016 African Women in Sport Leadership Forum in Zambia explained that:

Allowing women to take up leadership positions in sport is not just a luxury! It is not [something] nice to have! Indeed, smart leaders understand that gender

equality is not a problem to solve, but an opportunity to seize. It is a fact; having women on the board boosts the bottom-line! (IOC News 2016, p. 1).

The Sydney scoreboard global index for women in sport leadership shows that women chaired only 7% (5 of 70) of international sport federations and 19% in the role of chief executive position in 2016 (Adriaanse, 2016), an indication that women remain underrepresented in sport governance. The IOC mandates all its affiliates such as National Olympic Committees (N.O.C) and International Sport Federations (I.Fs) to increase the number of women in leadership positions and executive boards to at least 20% (International Olympic Committee, 2015), thus empowering women by giving them leadership and management opportunities. The IOC quota system has been efficient in empowering and giving women an opening in sport at all levels with an aim of closing the inequality gap in sport. Adriaanse (2016) emphasizes the value and critical role women play by increasing their representation in sport governance, because they offer different perspective.

Women sport leadership on African continent is relatively recent because information about gender relations, shattering cultural barriers and inclusion of women and girls in matters relating to advancement in sport is limited possibly due to scarce research focusing on African women in sport and society. The current IOC organizational structure has 105 members from different countries, Africa represented by 17 countries with 9 African women (more than 50%) representing their respective countries (IOC members, 2019). Policies implemented by international governing bodies such FIFA, IOC and UN, and regulations that include *The Brighton Declaration* and *Title IX*, play a significant role in addressing the gender gap at all levels of administration with the aim of

increasing the number of women and girls engaging in sport. Through sport, women have been provided with opportunities for leadership in their communities, resulting in positive, progressive and impactful social change. To promote gender equity and cultural change, it is important for scholars and activists to work within social contexts and complexities that define the livelihoods of African women and men.

Women in Uganda Sport

Sport is representative of an important form of leisure activity in society. In Uganda sport promotes national identity and it is ingrained within society and cultural fabric of local communities in the country. Women and girls in Uganda engage in sport at all levels, despite their invisibility they have managed to bring national and international glory to the country at international sporting stage, such as the IAAF World championships, Commonwealth Games, Africa Games, and the Netball and Rugby women's world cups. However, literature on Ugandan women in sport is scarce, with majority of literature on women and girls' participation focusing on sport development and social change, and on how sport can be used as a tool for empowerment (Hayhurst 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Hayhurst, MacNeill, Kidd, & Knoppers, 2014; Whitley & Johnson, 2015; Johnson & Whitley, 2016). Whereas Katshumbwa (2011) addresses the structure and administrative challenges faced by women in sport, Johnson's (2016) study examines the women's national football team and how its existence is key to addressing the gender gap in Uganda's sport landscape. Sport is associated with economic, political, and societal status as it is revered across different generations. The country takes pride in inspirational female athletes such as Margaret Bisereko, Susan Muwonge, Annet Negesa, Helen Buteme, Rebecca Kavulu, Mama Baker, Flavia Okecho, Violet Kalisa, Charlotte

Mudoola, Phiona Muteesi, Peace Proscovia, Majida Nantanda, Dorcas Inzikuru, Peninah Kabenge, Catherine Wejuli, and Halimah Nakaayi who have helped shape the face of women's sport in Uganda.

In a push to make women and girls sporting conversation and achievements relevant in Uganda, a Women in Sport Commission under the Uganda Olympic Committee (UOC) was launched to support equality and equity for women both at participative and leadership levels (Aliguma, 2016). Peninnah Kabenge, chairperson of the University sports in Uganda, explains that the challenges can be attributed to cultural stereotypes and lack of space availed to young girls in sport (Ssemugabi, 2019).

Women's representation and leadership remains a challenge at local and national levels where affirmative action is largely absent and male privilege is strongest (Hassim, 2003). In a study on women's competitive sport in Uganda, Kateshumbwa (2011) asserts that women's limited involvement in sport leadership and engagement in Uganda is attributed to socio-cultural, political and contemporary underpinnings in societies that contribute to gender disparities denying opportunities for women to break through and make a difference. Out of the forty-eight national sport federations, only five, approximately 10%, are headed by women, and include sports like volleyball, gymnastics, university sports, netball, and handball (National Council of Sports, 2019). Resounding frustration at the sport leadership structure in Uganda, the chairperson of Uganda Women Football Association Margaret Kubingi explained that the sport of football "needs more female leaders if it's to go to the next level" (Lindrio, 2018 p. 1). With low numbers of women in leadership, administrative positions, and participation rates in physical activities, a sports conference to address the challenges faced by female athletes in Uganda was held

in February 2019, targeting women's achievements and increase of the number of women at all levels of sport engagement (Komugisha, 2019).

Describing the invisibility of Ugandan female athletes, Johnson's (2016) study on women's football in Uganda attributes socio-cultural structures to low numbers of women and girls' engagement in sport. Echoing a similar message, national netball team captain Peace Proscovia maintains that Ugandan women are gifted athletes, but they lack the visibility given to their male counterparts thus stunting the progress of women's sport in the country (Mitchell, 2019). The lack of existing gender equity policies in Uganda's sport structures (Kateshumbwa, 2011), limited resource allocation (Johnson, 2016), and minimal media coverage (Komugisha, 2019; Ssemugabi, 2019) play a key role in the actuality of women's sport. Building more capacity for women and girls in functional roles in sport creates an opportunity to redefine the status of women in sport in Uganda. It is vital to create awareness about the role of Ugandan women in sports and find ways to promote girls' and women's involvement in sports across the country.

Currently the flag bearer of women's sport in Uganda is the national netball team: the '*She Cranes*', which at present is ranked 6th in the current International Netball Federation World rankings (International Netball Federation, 2019). The team crowned the 2017 Africa Netball Champions (Isabirye, 2017; Namunyala, 2017). After an absence of 39 years from world competitions (Musinguzi, 2019), the She Cranes qualified for the 2015 and 2019 Netball World Cups, making them the only Ugandan team to consecutively qualify for such a mega-sporting event. The tremendous work of female athletes in Uganda has made the national netball team the pinnacle for women in sport, taking center stage in the country. Irene Eyaru, former team captain, the 2018 East

African Community Games (EACG) in Burundi, explained that netball gained popularity “because of its winning ways” (Nalujja, 2018, p.1). The netball team is rewriting women’s success journey in a country that is not culturally inclusive of women and girls sporting prowess (Ssemugabi, 2019; Lindrio, 2018). Despite the limited access to leadership roles and recognition in socio-economic spheres and having inadequate spaces to showcase their talents and services, Uganda has become home to influential and outstanding female athletes in the continent, raising the women’s flag high in society and paving the way for younger generation of girls who need access to sporting spaces to acquire athletic skills.

Leading the way is *Peninah Kabenge* a pioneer of women’s basketball in Uganda and head of sports and recreation department at Makerere University, who advocates for student-athletes rights and women’s participation in sporting activities at all levels of education. In recognition of her work in promoting and creating sporting spaces for women and girls in Africa, the IOC awarded her with 2012 medal of honor (FISU, 2014). Her courageous fight for women recognition in sport leadership spheres is manifested in her multiple roles as an administrator in Uganda Olympic Committee, Federation of Africa University Sports (FASU), board member of International University sports Federation (FISU), the president of National University Sports Federation of Uganda (NUSFU) and the vice-president of International Wood Ball Federation. *Majida Nantanda* a former football player and women’s football national team coach is responsible for the revival of the women’s game in Uganda. Through her mentorship programs at *Tackle Africa*, they teach young women how to use their athletic skills to achieve life goals. Football as a popular sport across Africa has the power to penetrate

families and communities in a bid to be more inclusive of girls' participation. She developed grassroots football program 'Growing the Game for Girls' used to empower girls as well as address community and developmental issues like health, self-belief, and education (Goslin, 2016). As one of the top qualified football coaches in Uganda (Mutebi, 2014), she hopes to use FIFA level II certification to build the women's football program in Uganda and Africa by training more young women in leadership and coaching roles.

Dorcas Inzikuru, the symbol of hope for Ugandan women in sport, who uses her name and success on the track as a reference point for young upcoming athletes. She is an active member of women in sport Uganda association and has taken on mentoring responsibilities in a bid to get more young women involved in physical activities, eventually win more championships for Uganda. The first Ugandan woman to win a world junior gold medal in 1999, she consequently ended Uganda's 33year athletics world title drought at 2005 World championships in Finland, and at 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games where she won the 3,000 m steeplechase Gold (New Vision, 2012). The Arua Gazelle is a "reference for sports commentators and created such an effervescent brand for Uganda" (Kigongo, 2012 p. 1). *Helen Buteme*, national team coach and coordinator at Rugby Tackling Life (RTL), a local organization that empowers youth in communities by integrating rugby with life skills, sexual reproductive health, and education. Building awareness about the game of rugby, she runs rugby skills programs for young girls and boys across the countryside in regions that have less exposure to organized sport (NTV news, 2019). A true trailblazer and former national team captain, she was the first Ugandan woman to engage in rugby and play professionally at the

Darlington Mowden Park Sharks club in England. She is the second female rugby head coach in Africa (Mwelu, 2019), and has a vision of seeing Uganda regularly featuring at the World stage for the Commonwealth Games, Women seven's series, World Cup, and the Olympics.

And lastly, *Peace Proscovia* the captain of the national netball team and Uganda's 2018 athlete of the year is an advocate for creating sport spaces and for communities to be more inclusive of young women to participate in physical activities across the country. Her athletic prowess has availed a platform to shine light on the low numbers of girls' participation rates in the country and the challenges that they face. Her extraordinary journey playing netball from a small town in Arua district, northern Uganda to capital city in Kampala, to professional teams in England and Australia, and eventually being Uganda's Flag bearer at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia, gives hope to young women across the country. A role model for many young women in Uganda who dare to dream, she says "many girls want to be like me" [professional athlete] ... [and parents see] "the value of sports in making the girls step up and have hope" (Pearce, 2019 p. 1). The netball *She Cranes* are this generation's flag bearers in the push for women and girl's empowerment in Uganda because families, communities, fans, and athletes are proud of what sport can do for girls and the entire nation. The rise and involvement of Ugandan female athletes at the global scene, acts as a gatekeeper for women and girls to engage in sport at all levels. Sports role models play a significant part in mobilizing and encouraging girls to be involved in sport because their success on and off the field is admirable to young girls that struggle for social inclusion in physical activities and sporting events in various societies.

Sport Governance and Legislative structures in Uganda

The state of sport participation and government involvement is the focus of this section, with explanations provided on policies and legislation and responsibilities of governing agencies in advancing women and girls sport across the country. Specifically, the section delves into sport legislative Acts and policies, the development of sport governing bodies, the government's administrative system for implementing national physical education and sport policy, and into the intersection of sport and public policies. Uganda's central government manages, administers and finances sport from local to national levels, happening through an administrative structure.

Government Legislation and development of sport. As a sporting nation, over the last fifty-seven years, Uganda's key sport legislature has evolved from the British colonial rule to post-independence with key changes to laws and policies that influence how sport and physical education is experienced. In Uganda, sport gained increasing visibility throughout the 1960s, and a greater government involvement in sporting activities was inevitable to project a nation's image and competitiveness, especially during the British Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games. Development of sport follows Uganda's political leadership; Milton Obote, Idi Amin, and Yoweri Museveni have had a significant impact on the development and promotion of sport. Obote used sport and education to build the country through secondary schools and colleges (Ingham, 1994), and Idi Amin Dada used sports as a symbol of modernization and unification across the country, investing in the construction of sports facilities to support the development of sport (Muggaga, 2002). On the other hand, Yoweri Museveni revised

sport policies and created a physical education department to match the demands and challenges of expanding sport industry (MoES, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), formed in 1964, acts as the governing body for education, recreational activities, and sport in the country. The newly formed government of Uganda seized the importance of sports as essential in building national unity and promoting education. The 1964 National Council of Sports (NCS) Act of Parliament was enacted, under the National Act, Cap 48 of the Laws of Uganda to stimulate the integration of sport within the education sector and to Africanize social-cultural institutions in the country (Uganda Legal Information Institute, 2015). The function of NCS was to “develop, promote and control all forms of amateur sports on a national basis in conjunction with voluntary amateur sports organizations [and to] “approve international and national sports competitions and festivals,” and “plan the general policy of sports promotion” (Uganda Legal Information Institute, 2015 p.1). As an administrative arm of the government, the NCS oversees all sports activities and acts as a liaison between the government and the National Sport Organizations (National Council of Sports-Uganda, 2019).

The Government of Uganda revised the 1964 National Sports Act in 2004 and developed a new sports policy, namely *the National Physical Education and Sports Policy (NPESP)*, whose purpose was to improve management, implementation, governance, and funding of sports activities at all levels in the country (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). The overall mission of the NPESP centered on the ‘creation of a healthy, united, democratic and productive nation through physical activity and excelling in sports’ (Right to Play, 2008. p. 168). Essentially the 2004 NPESP document

was operationalized through the following objectives: a) Improving the planning, management, and administration of physical education and sports; b) Increasing access to and improving the quality of physical education and sports, especially for girls and women and persons with disabilities; and c) Developing high-performing national athletics on a sustainable basis (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). NPESP advocates for the rehabilitation of existing sports infrastructures as well as the construction of a new National high-altitude training center (NHATC) in Kapchorwa district to provide athletes with a state-of-the-art sports facility (Ministerial Policy Statement, 2016). Further in 2014, The 1964 National Council of Sports Act was amended to regulate the fifty-year-old instrument of law to make a modern-day sports Act that could accommodate the expanding sports industry and governance structures aligned with the international governing bodies (Muziransa, 2016). The government's main objective is to provide school children and women with the opportunity to engage in recreational sport activities or to acquire sport specific skills for competition purposes, helping enhance the competitive capacity for the nation's sport power and equip the athletes and players with competitive balance (Chappell, 2008).

Projecting the country's image and productivity of Ugandans, the Education and sports sector plays a critical role in implementing government programs such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Post Primary Education and Training (UPPET) and physical education programs (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). The Ministry of Education and Sports coordinates all the sport activities in the country through discharging its duties to the Department of Physical Education and Sports (PES), National Council of Sports (NCS), and to the Uganda Olympic Committee (UOC). The

government of Uganda promotes development of the sport sector in the country through these sport organs via the creation of policies that govern sporting activities and operationalized through various national sport bodies. The different national sport organizations serve the purpose of organizing and managing different after-school sport programs from the grassroots to the national, and to international levels in accordance with international sport organizations. Cognizant of international sport frameworks, sports institutions follow required mandates in using regulatory framework regarding the development and promotion of sport at the national levels.

Department of Physical Education and Sport. The Department of Physical Education and Sports (PES) ensures implementation, development, supervision, and coordination of all physical education and sports activities in the country (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). The underlying goals of this department include: budget allocation, capacity building for PES teachers at all education levels and community, and accessibility and availability of resources to all educational institutions through ensuring quality education and sport for all. *The Uganda Olympic Committee (UOC)* operates as an independent sport organization and non-governmental organization that reports directly to the International Olympic Committee (Uganda Olympic Committee, 2019). The UOC coordinates all Olympic-related events, and it is also responsible for other international sporting events like the Commonwealth Games, All-Africa Games and World Championships. It is also responsible for providing workshops, expertise consultation, coach education, sport law policies, and facilitation to national sports federations. In a push for increase of women participation in sport, the UOC launched the Women in Sport Commission to support and encourage more girls and women to get

involved in sports leadership and administration roles (Kyeyune, 2016). *The 1995 Constitution of Uganda*, under the Social and economic objectives of State Policy XVII Section Recreation and Sports, states that the government “shall promote recreation and sport for citizens of Uganda” (Constitution of Uganda, 1995 p .24). The constitution further supports existing and new sport policies that emphasizes the role of government in providing support for the Sport for All program as well as the elite sports.

The constitution of Uganda and different by-laws drafted by the government indicate that there are numerous policies and acts in place to support the development of sport at the grassroots level through physical education in schools, as well as through supporting elite athletes. The role of sport policy and legislature is very important to the development, efficiency, competitiveness, and management of the expanding sport industry in Uganda. Sport is viewed as an important instrument in the promotion of health among citizens, education, inclusion, and community development, because it empowers the young generation and more importantly unifies the nation (National Development Plan II, 2015). Other acts and legislation that govern sport in the country either directly or indirectly include the National Women’s Council Act of 2010, which emphasizes women’s equal rights to participate in sport, and the National Curriculum Development Centre Act of 1973, which states that all primary and secondary school curriculum should have physical education.

Current Administrative Structure of Sports and Governance in Uganda

The key administrative structure (*see Figure 1*) of sports in Uganda was adopted from the United Kingdom’s structure of sports governance (Chappell, 2008). The MoES coordinates all the sports activities in the country by discharging its duties through the

Department of Physical Education and Sports (PES), National Council of Sports (NCS) and independent body Uganda Olympic Committee (UOC). National Sports Associations/Federations in Uganda are affiliated with International Sport Federations (ISFs) and share the same objective, which is to maintain and promote sports at all levels, support local clubs, promote community sports, schools/institution games, national competitions, as well as coordinate national teams. All (48) NSAs partner with individual district sports councils to ensure implementation of physical activities and sporting events at the district level.

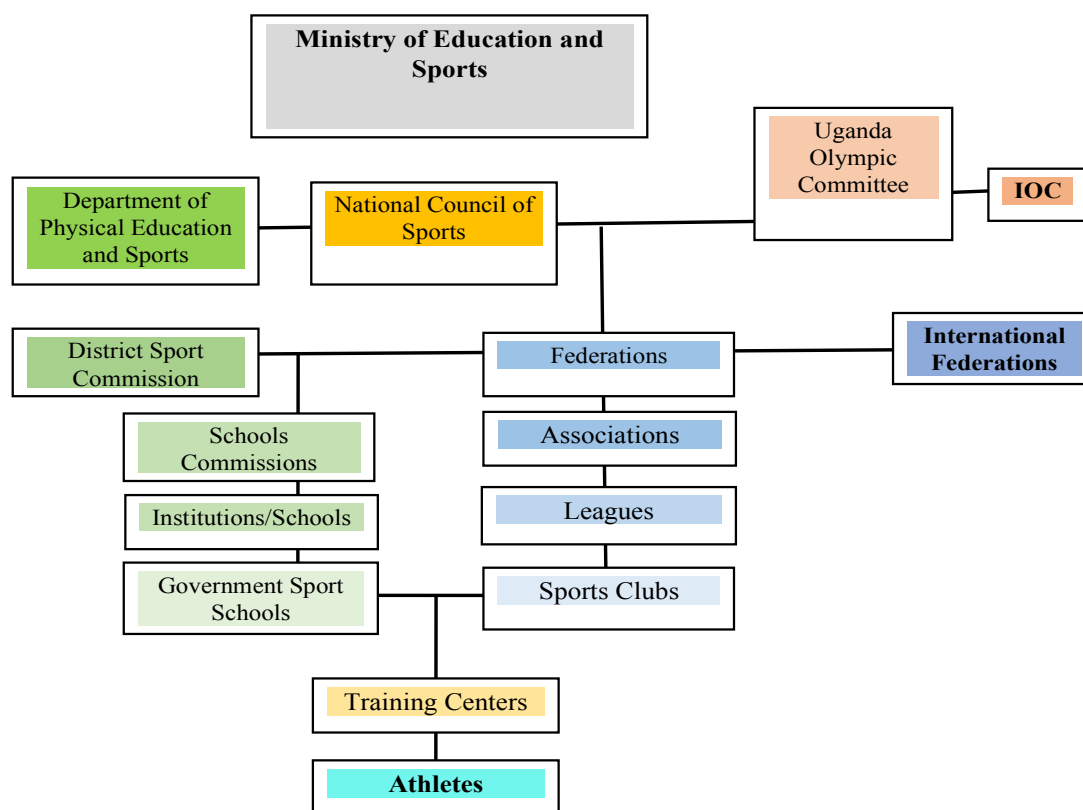


Figure 1: The organizational structure of the Ministry of Education and Sports.

Source: The Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports website, 2022.

Women's Rugby in Global Context

This section examines women's involvement in the sport of rugby, emphasizing the gradual acceptance of women in a male dominant sport and the challenges they face constantly in the African continent. This section will also examine the cultural and social significance of women's rugby at the global stage, the coping mechanisms female rugby players use to be accepted as great athletes. The section provides an insight into the current status of women's rugby in Uganda, the growth and achievements of the game, as well as impact of grassroots organization on girl's rugby. Finally, the section discusses research studies on lived experiences of female rugby players in Uganda.

Women's Rugby in Africa

Rugby has the fastest global growth in popularity and interest (World Rugby, 2019) in the continent. African women have embraced the sport and want to be part of this new global sporting phenomenon. According to Roberts (2018), "girls and women are now claiming the sport as their favourite" (p.1), with Africa leading the way with young girls' participation increasing by 46% over period of one year and approximately 412,841 girls registering in 2017 (Rugby Africa, 2018). However, on the African continent, the challenges faced by women rugby players are not unique, as they lack leadership, facilitation, infrastructure (Africa Rugby, 2018) and inclusion (Roberts, 2018) to support the growth of the game. Due to the fragmented leadership structures of women's rugby Africa, there was no representative from the African continent at the 2017 Women's Rugby World cup. In addressing the challenges of the women's game, the continental union restructured 2019 Rugby Africa Women's Cup tournament and created a new XV-a-side women's rugby competition structure (Rugby Africa, 2019) and

developed opportunities for young national teams to participate at the regional and continental level. Based on level and frequency of play four countries Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar and South Africa were selected to participate in August 2019 tournament, with the winner South Africa earning a spot for the 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup in New Zealand, and Kenya the runner-up will face the winner of the South American competition in 2020 for a place at world cup.

Women in Africa have limited role models in sport. Sikes and Bale (2014) point to the importance of role models in sport as they play a major function of shifting the perception about gender and athleticism within a community. Despite the challenges faced by African women in rugby, programs and workshops have been created to provide strategies on how to attract more girls to the game in sport, as well as create a more inclusive environment for the women's game on the continent. In 2018, Rugby Africa dedicated the month of May to women's rugby development, and further created '*The Get Into Rugby Program*,' a foundation for women's game promotion, and held a two-day leadership forum focused on women inclusion (Africa Rugby, 2018; World Rugby, 2018). This was done through partnering with the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) in Gaborone, Botswana. This enhanced the growth of the sport among young girls and women. In support of Africa women rugby, the director for women's rugby at World Rugby, Katie Sadleir said:

The increasing involvement of women in rugby presents the single greatest opportunity for our sport in the next decade. It is critical to World Rugby's vision of a 'sport for all, true to its values' and its mission to grow the global family... Women's rugby is experiencing unprecedented growth and participation

levels are at an all-time high. Women's rugby in Africa is leading the way in terms of numbers of female players registered globally (Rugby Africa, 2018, p. 1).

Rugby Africa and member unions called for the creation of an environment that allows the women's game to flourish and for utilization of best management practices in the continent. Rugby Africa is creating centers for instruction purposes, with the aim of growing the women's game and establishing model programs (Rugby Africa, 2018; Birch, 2018). The president of Rugby Africa Abdelaziz Bougja explains that the women's rugby needs federations and unions to work jointly to elevate the women's game (World Rugby, 2018). In preparation for the Women's Rugby sevens, the Rugby Africa President Khaled Babbou talked about the measures and effort that the union taken to improve the women's game on the continent:

Africa aims for high-level and international recognition, and I believe especially Women's Sevens Rugby has a great potential to promote and reveal our talents in Africa and to get more players on the continent into rugby. I am convinced the women's games will capture the public's imagination (Africanews, 2019 p.1)

With the Olympics and women's World Rugby Sevens series coming up in 2020, the African women teams have invested in teams in a bid to earn a spot at these mega-sporting events. An Olympics qualifier tournament, Rugby Africa Women's Sevens was hosted in October 2019 in Monastir, Tunisia, where twelve teams participated: Kenya, Uganda, Tunisia, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Botswana, Zambia, Morocco, Mauritius, South Africa, and Ghana. To make rugby a more inclusive sport and increase the base for players, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) launched a program to

bring awareness and support for women's rugby through youth training centers across the country (Donnelly, 2015). Despite all the effort for inclusiveness in the sport, Roberts (2018) claims that little support has been given to the women in rugby. However, the women's rugby in Africa continues to make steps to grow the game by targeting young girls in school and engaging sport administrators across different levels of sport governance. To support and grow the women's game, countries such as Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Senegal, and Ghana have set up long term strategies to boost the women's game. Roberts (2018) appeals to rugby administrators "to do much more for girls and women in rugby" (p.1) not just in South Africa but across the African continent to enable African countries to compete with top teams at the global stage.

Women's Rugby in Uganda

Women's rugby in Uganda is steadily rising and reaching out to all parts of the country as the game has shifted from the central part of the country – the capital city Kampala and to other regions in Eastern and Northern Uganda (Mwelu, 2019). The development of women's game is attributed to the determination and sacrifice of the players, coaches, and supporters. The national team coach Helen Buteme affirms that "the amount of talent out there is insane and once tapped, there will be no holding women rugby in Uganda back" (Mwelu, 2019, p. 1). Additionally, young girls across the country picked up interest due to the monumental achievement of the Lady Cranes playing at the 2009 Sevens World Cup and the 2019 Sevens World series in Dubai. Uganda did not win any match at the World Cup or Dubai Sevens series, but their appearance at the international sporting event increased the numbers of women participating in the sport. Despite limited numbers and resources, the women's national team has achieved a feat

that no men's teams in Uganda have pulled off, and that is reaching a World Cup (Els, 2015; Kanyike, 2016; CNN, 2017). The sport however still faces many hurdles such as breaking the social and cultural norms in a hegemonic society that stop women and girls from engaging in masculine sports such as rugby, football, and boxing, indicating a remnant of pre-existing dominant gender norms.

Gender disparities in sport culture are evident in Ugandan society. Former Lady Cranes and International Rugby referee Saudah Adhiru described the state of the women's game in saying that women are not expected to participate in sport "because they say it's rough, it's tough...but am sure that will change with time" (CNN World, April 10, 2017). Women are determined to engage in sport, as shown in over 2,000 pre-teen girls in based in Entebbe, Jinja, Kampala, Mbale, Kitgum, Gulu, Mukono, Soroti and Wakiso playing non-contact (tag) rugby, with close to 400 adult women playing contact rugby (Els, 2015). As of 2019 rugby season, six women's clubs in Uganda participate in the women's national rugby league, with players representing Uganda at international level. As the national team coach, Buteme organizes grassroots programs for girls across the country in a bid to engage more young women in the game, as well as build awareness of benefits of the game especially in the countryside. Despite the barriers placed before the women in sport and especially in rugby, the number of participants continues to grow and there is significant improvement in performances of the women's national team.

Women's challenges in Rugby in Context of Gender Roles

Social Construction of Women in Rugby

Rugby union has for a long been considered a male domain sport (Howe, 2001; Chu et al., 2003; Scrogum, 2005; Allen, 2014; Hardy, 2015; Roberts, 2018), but with the increasing numbers and unprecedented growth of women and girls' participation in the sport (Birch, 2016; Rugby Africa, 2018), the attitudes towards physicality and masculinity are changing (Howe, 2001; Scrogum, 2005). The inclusion of female rugby players disrupts the established underpinnings of the sport that utilizes aggression and violence as a form of masculinity. Scrogum (2005) indicates rugby to be used as a socialization tool and as a form of developing masculine identity, making the acceptance of women into sport, a threat to this ideology. "The social construction of sport has been a space where hegemonic masculinity is defined" (Hardy, 2015, p. 155) thus potentially challenging the masculinity of sporting terrain. Rugby represents acceptable norms that are embedded in societal institutions and culture that perpetuate notions surrounding multiple forms of masculinity and gender inequalities. Adjepong (2017) asserts that women's rugby has offered no significant changes and challenges to the structural terrain because the characteristics of game are still significantly a male domain.

Majority of the existing studies on women's rugby have extensively analyzed how women challenge hegemonic structures of the game (Carle & Nauright 1999; Howe, 2001; Sogrum, 2005; Adjepong, 2016), and how the sport acts as a form of empowerment (Wheatley, 1994; Nauright & Chandler, 1996; Chu et al., 2003). The unapologetic and outspoken behavior by female rugby players (Broad, 2001; Hardy, 2015) brings into question the notions of ideal feminine bodies (Chase, 2006; Martín, 2011) that women

are supposed to preserve. Nauright and Broomhall (1994) study on women's rugby in New Zealand claim that girls are encouraged at an early age to participate in sports like netball which portrays feminine societal ideals. But women rugby players are not afraid to engage in a sport that makes them muscular or have bruises on their bodies because they want to re-shape societal image of an athletic woman (Wheatley, 1994; Cleary, 2000; Howe, 2001; Hudson, 2010; Joncheray & Tlili, 2013) by creating a new form of athleticism. The image of sportswomen's heterosexual femininity sustains the ideas about hegemonic constructs that sexualize women. As a contact sport, Rugby promotes aspects of violence and aggressiveness (Gill, 2007; Hardy, 2015; Adjepong, 2016) that deviate from the broader social context of a women's image, which Fuchs and Le Hénaff (2014) describe as transgressions of the acceptable feminine norms. The reception of women in predominantly male sport (Carle & Nauright, 1999) disrupts the socially acceptable understandings of gender notions of sport, a platform where masculine identity is shaped (Scrogum, 2005; Joncheray, Level & Richard, 2014). Presence of female rugby players serves as a platform to challenge gender oppressions rooted in sport (Howe, 2001). The quest to challenge the predominant hegemonic structures of sport has led to an increase in women's participation in masculine domain sport such as boxing, rugby, motor sport, cricket, ice hockey, and martial arts (UFC), in a push to test their physical strength, social interaction, loyalty (Carle & Nauright, 1999) and acceptance.

The substantial use of bodily force in contact sport does not align with the conventional feminine patterns and expressions (Lindner, 2012). Despite the presence of women in rugby from early 1920s, Collins (2009) explains that the masculine nature of the game has not been challenged because women rugby players align themselves with

dominant characteristics of the sport such as excessive drinking and bawdy songs (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Adjepong, 2017), open about sexuality (Wheatley, 1994), and being unapologetic (Broad, 2001) to remain relevant. Women and men play by the same rules making it a site for examining the lived experiences of women and girls in the sport of rugby. Studies have echoed the existing ideologies surrounding hegemonic practices (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Howe, 2001; Chu et al., 2003; Allen, 2014; Hardy, 2015) and gender role conflicts (Wheatley, 1994; Broad, 2001; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Gill, 2007; Adjepong, 2016) embedded in rugby. These play a key role in redefining the gender structure of the sport and reconstructing ideologies surrounding the sport that exclude women participation. Carle & Nauright (1999) explain masculinity in rugby, as the ability for an athlete to show aggressiveness and toughness, sustain pain as well as violent bodily contact (Hardy, 2015). These studies illuminate how female rugby players are expanding and which bodies are allowed to embody masculine characteristics.

Masculine Identity in Rugby

Women have embraced rugby blatantly with the aim of playing the sport because of its masculine reputation (Howe, 2001; Scrogum, 2005; Collins, 2009; Adjepong, 2016). In his study, Howe (2001) contends that women engage/participate [in this sport] with the aim of de-construction of the dominant male subcultures that limit women's visibility. The sport offers women ways of resisting hegemonic structures embedded in rugby, giving them the ability to challenge gender order. As a test for physical strength and a genuine show for passion of the game, female rugby players were attracted to aspects of teamwork – the connections they make as women and loyalties that come with playing the game (Carle & Nauright 1999). Chu et al., (2003) stated that New Zealand

female Black Ferns participated in male domain sports because of the joy and thrill associated with physicality and speed of the game. Female rugby players use the sport to display their ability to perform in a predominantly masculine sport, giving them the right to control their bodies and make choices that are independent of social cultural expectations. In a study by Fields and Comstock (2008), women were attracted to sport based on social and communal aspects, and resultant formation of friendship bonds and development of a sense of belonging from team membership. Despite having the autonomy to participate in sports, women still “face the problem of constructing communities in sport that conform to overriding conventions dictated by wider societal constructs” (Carle & Nauright, 1999, p. 56).

Sexuality and Femininity Paradigms

Sport serves as a domain where masculine and feminine traits take shape. Wheatley (1994) indicated U. S. women rugby players to “denaturalize and disrupt heterosexist and misogynist discourses” (p.193) of men’s rugby subculture through actively engaging in songs that challenge heterosexist ideology and ideal feminine body. Howe’s (2001) study on rugby showed physicality and training regimes to take “the female rugby player’s body away from culturally inscribed norms” (p. 84). Women who actively participate in heavily contact sport such as boxing disrupt the notions of femininity because of the masculine characteristics –aggression, violence, strength, and power demonstrated in the game. In Hudson’s (2010) study, it was discovered that female rugby players challenge dominant notions surrounding femininity and sport, disrupting the conventional cultural codes that define womanhood. While these women do not necessarily object/reject the notion of femininity, they do modify the ideology embedded

in this concept. They want their friends, family, community, and fans to accept them as women who chose to display ‘toughness’, ‘hostility’, ‘aggression’, ‘bruised bodies’, ‘defiance’, ‘strength’, and show off ‘masculinity’ on and off the field.

In a study on Canadian women in rugby, it was discovered that they rejected the apologetic behavior that emphasized a female athlete’s femininity (Hardy, 2015). Despite the media playing an important role in promoting a form of feminine body image and behavior, rugby women engage actively in sport and public spheres to challenge this notion. However, it should be noted that successful female athletes “who wish to be marketed must still be feminine and pretty in the ‘out of sport’ context” (Hardy, 2015, p. 157). As a form of resistance to the sexualization of their bodies, the women in this study acknowledged that they did not fit within the margins of hegemonic femininity because rugby offers a platform/space that is safe (Hardy, 2015) and encourages them to be true to their identities. Pushing the boundaries of feminine athlete identity and place in society, Chase (2006) uses the Foucauldian concept of docile bodies to examine the complexity of a woman’s body. Chase further argues that women’s participation in rugby serves as resistance to ideal feminine body discourses. She claims that U. S. women rugby players are proud of their masculine bruised bodies because they represent structural resistance. Kanemasu and Molnar (2015) in a study of Fijian women rugby players state that their participation in the sport illustrates their resistance to hegemonic sporting practices. Hudson (2010) points out that playing rugby “reinforces what being a tough woman is all about” (p.251) and resists notions of ideal female bodies (Chase, 2006).

Resistance to Masculine Identity

Athleticism as well as the gendered order of rugby promotes aggressiveness and viciousness among the players counter to masculinity. Fuchs and Le Hénaff (2014) indicate male players view the sport as not suitable for girls and point out that those who play rugby “are no longer real women” (p. 369) within socially acceptable spaces. However, in Chase’s (2006) study, U. S. women rugby players acknowledged that playing the sport was an active outlet for their physicality, with actions within the game such as tackling making them feel powerful. She further explains that participation in sport provides players with a platform to maintain athletic discipline and to use their bodies to resist notions of passive feminine bodies. The sport of rugby reinforces the different discourses of the female sporting body and opens the conversation about the ideal feminine body, and what is socially acceptable. As a platform for women’s bodily identity, it is important for female rugby players to think about what their bodies represent as well as their experiences of their bodies. Women rugby players use their bodies to unapologetically demonstrate that their physicality is fine (Adjepong, 2016; Chase, 2006; Broad, 2001), and making bruises serve as “badges of honor” (Adjepong, 2016, p.1492). The women rugby players in Adjepong’s (2016) study do not cover their bodily bruises hence challenging the notions that women are physically incapable of absorbing the aggressiveness of the game and can’t control violence associated with playing.

This form of resistance challenges the image of femininity and heterosexuality affiliated by playing rugby, and it also dismantles hegemonic structures while re-shaping the ideal femininity. In support of this argument, Gill (2007) discusses British women’s use of the sport’s inherent violence to redefine gender identities. She states that “women

who behave in a violent or physically aggressive manner are among the most stigmatised groups in society” (p. 416), because they disrupt the existing social and gender structures. The role of violence in active sport is constantly negotiated within the acceptable feminine norms, and this creates a platform for women involved in high impact sports to resist identities that fit an ideal feminine body (Chase, 2006; Gill, 2007; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2015; Adjepong, 2016). Gill further emphasizes that the body is how athletes interrelate with the world and men use this platform to define masculinity, thus availing women of the opportunity to redefine “new version of femininity” (p. 418) within the same space. Women rugby players can transform the public assumptions of ideal femininity, as “gender identities are not defined by our physicality, but by the interpretations and expectations of our embodiment” (Gill, 2007, p.417).

These research studies have displayed heavy focus on overcoming male hegemonic structure in rugby and redefining the feminine stereotypes that are associated with playing the game. Women rugby players are constantly reminded to challenge the male gender order and heterosexual norms that are embedded in the sport, making this criterion of research narrative limiting. With exception of Allen (2014), and Kanemasu and Molnar’s (2015) studies, majority of women’s rugby research is mostly concentrated on elite players in the in Global North. Scholars need to go beyond social justice and institutional discrimination and need to be more inclusive of the lived experiences of everyday women rugby players, along with embracing sport has as instrument of individual development of women in the Global South. In this dissertation study, an exploration of the lived experiences of women rugby players in Uganda will be focused upon, along with understanding how the women rugby players navigate the social-

cultural and systems of prejudice that are not inclusive or accepting of women participation in *a masculine* sport. This study is guided by African feminist theory and identity theory which are used to locate the women rugby players in Uganda, and to discern how they construct their multiple identities, and finally how they challenge the hegemonic ideologies in their society and the sport of rugby.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework used to guide this study is African feminist theory. The focus of this section is to explain the assumptions and analytical lenses that feminist scholars use to situate women in spheres of existence and on deconstructing how the theories challenge patriarchal structures that limit for women and girls' involvement in social and sport activities like rugby. The section examines African feminist theory, how it captures African women's cultural patterns, truths, and intersections, and reveals how their lived realities are unique to the world. African feminist theory highlights the importance of using African feminisms to protect the culture and traditions of African communities, while giving agency to women. The section also provides a discussion on identity theory, how it captures multiple occupational roles and identities that women rugby players use within their communities.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a major branch of theory within the field of sociology. This theory shifts its analytic lens, assumptions, and topics away from the male viewpoint and experience. Feminist writers and activists, namely Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Julia Cooper, Bell Hooks, Virginia Woolf, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw, challenged patriarchal structures in society and were early advocates for the rights of

women. The writings of these women created the foundation for women to engage in the social, economic, and political discussions that promoted their psychological and physical growth and impacted their communities positively. Early feminist scholars of the 18th century that include Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the education of girls and women comparable to that of boys and men. Other scholars like Virginia Woolf's 1929: *'A Room of One's Own'* advocated for the woman's voice to be heard and not constrained by sex, situation, condition, structure, or even being (Woolf, 2015). Anna Julia Cooper in her 1892 book: *'A Voice from the South'* echoes a voice of a black woman who addressed a variety of issues that ranged from women's rights to racial segregation to challenges of illiteracy, arguing for inclusion of black women within different spheres especially education. Indications were that knowledge is vital for a woman's progress in life, enabling her to navigate the racial, class and sexist structures of society.

Feminist scholarship calls for women to be given equal opportunity to access social services and education. Woolf (2015) points out issues that surround the absence of women's work in the arts, and advocates for empowering and seeing a new form of woman that can be attained through education. One of the most significant contributions of feminism has been the development of a new perspective on social and political life, one in which unequal and gendered character is promoted. Describing the goal of feminist scholarship, Flax (1987) points to the importance of multiple gender dynamics, their importance and how each value is experienced. However, one of the most significant contributions of feminism has been the development of a new perspective on social and political life that shapes women's social and cultural experiences.

Feminist theory shines light on social problems, trends, and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the historically dominant male perspective. Key areas of focus within feminist theory include discrimination and exclusion based on sex and gender, objectification, structural and economic inequality, power and oppression, and gender roles and stereotypes (Crenshaw, 2008; Collins, 2000; Bordo, 1993; Harding, 1990; Flax, 1987). Bordo (1993) explains that through feminism, the gendered nature of history, culture, and society was revealed. It was a cultural moment of revelation and relief” (p. 137). Feminist theory reveals ways in which “systematic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices [...] situating the issues in a broader and shared cultural context” (Butler, 1988 p. 522). Through feminist theory indications show that the sphere of reproduction needs to be placed firmly within the planning process, not just to acknowledge women's invisible labors, but to identify social needs more generally within conditions of racialized and gendered social inequalities (Molyneux, 1998). Illuminating the relationships between women and men, feminist theory explains the fundamental assumption that women’s subordination is universal (Oyěwùmí, 2008), and how oppression of women has evolved overtime in its various forms. The push for women to be given equal opportunity and access to social services remains a contested area of society.

Using feminist theory as a point of reference for sport, feminist scholars have mostly assumed that female athletes belong to one homogenous category, sharing same ideals, identity, and experiencing gender discrimination in similar ways (Pelak, 2005). Birrell (2000) argues that sport sociologists and feminists increasingly move toward exploring social inclusion and prioritizing the various perceptions and needs of women

from multiple ethnic and social backgrounds, helping create opportunities for women and girls to participate in physical activities and sport in their communities. In the context of African women in sport, feminist theory cuts across multiple cultural differences while encompassing different perspectives such as womanism, African feminisms, and third world feminism (Pelak, 2005), which are specific to the African woman and her environment. Scholarship on African women in sport calls for attention to how “gendered experiences /inequalities intersect” (Pelak, 2005, p. 55) with daily lived experiences associated with oppressions, patriarchal society, colonial legacy, as well as religious practices. Although feminism has covered a great deal of ground since Mary Wollstonecraft first wrote in the 1700s, the desire for women to be treated as fully human and fully persons remain unchanged. Contemporary feminism is attuned to issues of exclusion and invisibility (Bordo, 1993). Using this theoretical lens, feminist scholars’ focus is to understand the various historical happenings that led to the way our modern world is shaped.

African Feminist Theory

African feminism is contextualized within a branch of feminism for it addresses issues that women in Africa face including oppression, discrimination, and agency. However, African feminism follows different trajectories from the dominant west and populist feminisms, as the views, cultural patterns, truths, and intersections of African women are unique to the world. Besides the western women movements, African feminist origins can be traced back to dynamism of Africa’s historical forces, socio-political factors, cultural imperatives, nationalist movements, as well as postcolonial eras (Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyěwùmí 2005; Atanga, 2013). African feminist scholar

such as Amadiume (1987), Mikell (1997), Amina(2001), Nnaemeka (2005), Oyěwùmí (2003, 2005), Steady (2005, 2011), Nkomo and Ngambi (2009), Msimang (2000, 2002, 2011), Atanga (2013), Adichie (2015) Nkealah (2006, 2016), and Ukpokolo (2016), discuss the unique characteristics of African feminisms that center on the lived experiences and activism of African women making it a contentious subject. African feminism is used to capture and engage the thousands of languages, realities and identities across the continent making it a site of resistance to western feminism discourse (Mikell, 1997; Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2005). The western form of feminism “does not ring the same urgency for most African women for whom other basic issues of everyday life are intersecting in the most oppressive ways” (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 32).

Western forms of feminism do not highlight African women’s struggle to overcome gender hierarchy and inequality within the legacy of African culture (Mikell, 1997). African feminism doesn’t seek to abandon tradition, as it protects culture and diversity that hold the legacy of African norms, knowledge, and spirituality (Nkealah, 2006; Amadiume, 1987; Nnaemeka, 2005; Oyěwùmí 2003; Mikell 1997) but seeks to develop “spaces for women to participate in the management of their societies” (Atanga, 2013, p. 302). African feminisms “ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies” (Nkealah, 2006, p. 139), with a goal of enabling tradition to adapt to changing times that can enrich diverse customs. African feminism considers African men and women to have mutually beneficial, transformative, and progressive relationships in the private and public spheres (Mama, 2001; Oyěwùmí 2005; Nnameka, 2005; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Atanga, 2013; Adichie, 2014), but does not focus on juxtaposing male dominance with female subordination (Oyěwùmí 2005). Rather,

African feminism challenges the status quo of patriarchies that constrain women (Mama, 2001), and prevent them from negotiating (Nnaemeka, 2005) and developing a positive identity” (Nkealah 2016, p. 135). African feminism also recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the bondages of colonial legacy and domination underscoring factors inscribed in African cultures where “each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole” (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 34).

Women in Africa are faced with challenge of overcoming the socioeconomic and political boundaries that have held them captive in their homes, cultures, and societies. The question of women’s place in society remains a subject of debate across societies, cultures and historical eras. Decision making in the private and public sector domains is still skewed in favor of one gender and power consequently resides with those who hold it. African feminism operates within a framework that sees tradition as inherently part of the present-day dynamics. Inclusiveness forms the foundation of African feminism where power is “negotiable and negotiated; it assesses power not in absolute but in relative terms – in terms of power sharing and power ebb and flow...while [some] western feminist discourse emphasizes the power grabbing that reinforces individualism” (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 33). African feminists point out the importance of understanding the historical roles of men and women in African societies, focusing on to full understanding of contemporary gender relations (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). African women are called to bear responsibility, to protect their histories, to connect histories and lived experiences to the conditions of the modern day as “African feminism is integrationist rather than separatist” (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 34).

Faniyi (2018) further explains that precolonial African societies were patriarchal but there were respected levels of partnerships between women and men that benefited the society. Western culture carried rigid gender ideologies, which aided and supported exclusionary social practices against women (Amadiume, 1987), consequently controlling over African woman's role while interwoven with the social structures of society. Faniyi (2018) clarifies that African women live within multiple constructs of their own situated knowledge, contemporary structures, neo-colonialism, colorism, underdevelopment, sexism, and patriarchy. African woman has unique characteristics with social and cultural differences familial obligations that may conflict with work obligations (Kargwell, 2008). Early socialization practices for girls is rooted in the cultural and social traditions that emphasize the primary role of women as mothers and wives and this may influence their future participation in labor, education, and career choices of the African woman. African feminist scholar Oyěwùmí (1997) examines the structures that dictate gender hierarchy in African societies:

If gender is a social construction then we must examine the various cultural / architectural sites where it was constructed, and we must acknowledge that variously located actors (aggregates, groups, interested parties) were part of the construction...thus gender being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon (p. 10).

Historical and social positioning of African women requires informed agency, an important aspect of their psychosocial advancement. An African woman without activity cannot be said to exist because one must exert active influence on society (Ukpokolo, 2016) to remain relevant. Mohanty (2003) argues that: "it is the girls and women around

the world, especially in the Third World, that bear the brunt of globalization” (p. 234). Explaining African women position Faniyi (2018) asserts that the “complex subjugation stems from the underprivileged tag associated with her in light of her position on racial, gendered and continental binaries” (p. 43). The general disconnection and lack of trust between rural/old-fashioned woman and the modern/educated woman remains a challenge for feminist scholars to bridge the gap that separates ideologies and ways of life that women in Africa experience (Mikell, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2005; Nkealah, 2006). As a foundation to understanding multiple experiences and intersects of women on the continent, Atanga (2013) emphasizes that African feminism “involves rewriting the identities of African women not only as passive victims of male dominance and patriarchy...but as active social, economic and political agents in the development of their countries” (p. 309).

Cooper (1988) argues that “the position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its generation and progress” (p. 21), maintaining the rhetoric of gender essentialism, that links woman to central role and her abilities to nature. With the availed education and unrestricted evolution of modern woman, Cooper further maintains that “such development, while it gives her to the world and to civilization, does not necessarily remove her from the home and fireside” (p. 73). Narayan (1997) emphasizes that the concept of nationhood cannot be ignored when addressing the women’s belonging and feminism because “many political projects that sought to redefine and empower marginalized groups constructed their own forms of exclusion and marginalization” (p. 37). African feminism and scholarship should make explicit reference to nationhood, culture, and traditions as they challenge structural barriers and

patriarchal systems that have held them down. It is important for scholars doing research on women and gender in Africa to avoid using Eurocentric (colonialism and imperialism) frameworks but rather study women from an African perspective (Steady, 2005). African women are encouraged to reject the status of victim and consider themselves as victors in charge of their own destiny (Ukpokolo, 2016) with the primary obligation of making progress in their cultural way of life through family values and commitment to community. Nnaemeka (2005) contends that the African woman does not need to reinvent the wheel but rather should take inspiration from those who are already shaping the narrative of African womanhood.

Challenging the status quo of African male hegemony in sport participation and administration is important because of its influence on institutional practices, policies, structures and systems on the experiences of African female leaders (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). It is vital to develop the idea of sharing knowledge, recognizing the role of scholarship and importance of inter-cultural interactions that allows for progressive and accepting ideas within society while facilitating the African feminist woman's voice within one's locale. It is important for feminist scholars, sport activists and sociologists to navigate each culture and group of people independently to understand societal norms and be able to get women and girls involved in sport, without breaking or destroying the pillars that hold a people and community together. Physical activities and community engagements are also viewed as entry points for civic engagement, fostering social integration, and generating social capital for women and youth. However, the degree to which sport can be used effectively as a mechanism to give women 'a safe space of their own' while at the same time bringing them safely and confidently into the public domain

has only begun to be tested. African woman's participation in physical activities and sport calls for what Mazrui (1986) describes as African renaissance revolution of skills, values and gender relations.

Using the African feminist lens, it is important for activists and scholars alike using sport for social change and development to understand what motivates women and to adapt to them, not expect women to adapt to sport especially within multiple Ugandan cultural heritage and intersects. In this study, post-colonial feminist theory, shall provide the perspective in which to examine the lived experiences of Ugandan women rugby players who engage in a colonial masculine sport, and who possess diverse cultural and multiple identities that define their existence and well-being. Specifically, African feminist theory makes explicit reference to culture and traditions, and to fundamental challenges to patriarchal customs of all kinds, while maintaining the legacy of African culture along gendered binaries. Addressing the gaps in literature the social-cultural reflections and lived experiences of women rugby players at grassroots level will be examined, to understand how these women navigate dominant boundaries and hegemonic constructs. The context of this study shall help inform comprehensively future research into women's rugby by first providing an understanding of the key aspects that dictate how the game is perceived and played in Uganda.

Identity Theory

Human beings form identities based on location, networks of social interaction, and societal structures. Identity theory (Stryker 1968, 1980, 1987, 2002, 2007; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009) has its origins in sociology and it is based on Herbert Mead's 1934 early work on

concepts of self, associated with how one shapes society and how society shapes self (Stryker, 2001; 2007). Identity theory focuses on role identities, social roles and social structures that help predict behaviors of individuals within society. Identity theory examines interpersonal relationships and role identities (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker, 2002 & 2007). Scholarship on identity formation and identity theory is explored using diverse perspectives of self as scholars indicate: Mead's (1956) self, identity and group relations; Burke and Reitzes' (1981) identity formation as a combination of personal perception and others' perceptions; Snyder's (1985) identity and one's multiple roles; Hogg, et al.'s (1995) structural positioning and labeling roles; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain's (1998) identity and agency; Stets and Burke's (2000) self-categorization and identification; and Holland and Lachicotte's (2007) studies of identity.

Derived from Stryker (1980; 2002) *symbolic interactionist frame*, identity theory bases its origin on the relationship between individuals and society. It is a link between social interactions and roles and identities, while elaborating how societies and institutions define role identities that impact social interaction (Stryker, 2007). Burke and Stets (2009) describe identity theory as a “set of ideas about the nature of the individual and the relationship between the individual and society” (p. 9) and “individuals' role-related behaviors” (Hogg et al., 1995, p.255). Identity as a theoretical construct defines “who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3) hence recognizing one as a distinct entity (Holland et al. 1998). Human action and interaction are shaped by meanings developed out of relations with others. Identity theorists seek to understand individual roles in identity construction (Stets and Burke,

2000) and refer to “multiple components of self as identities” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 256). Identity is an object and a subject that reflects behaviors as well as characteristics of a social group to which an individual belongs (Mead, 1956), thus identity construction occurs through interaction with others and locating oneself in society (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). The notion of identity plays a key role in developing a sense of self-definition because behavior and character development are linked to societal structure, hence acknowledging that “role expectations are defined by society and internalized by the individual” (Deaux & Martin 2003, p. 103). Individuals form identities based on perceptions of themselves or what others think of them in a specific role as their “identities relate to one another...influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions (Burke & Stets, 2009 p.3) tying them to societal underpinnings.

As a social construct Hogg et al., (1995) define identity as the “socially constructed self” (p. 262) where individuals have multiple identities resulting from their social networks and cultural constructs. Identity is the adaptation of one’s desired behaviors, characteristics and social role play as well as the desire of who we want to be. Based on Mead’s concept of identity, Holland and Lachicotte (2007) describe how “social positions and other roles crucial to the conduct of social activities and relationships” characterize self-meaning and behavior. One’s identity is an interplay of the continuous interactions with persons and societal discourse. Hogg et al. (1995) describe role identities as “self-concepts, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category” (p. 256). The multiple identities such as sister, mother, athlete, career women,

and student that women rugby players embrace are “self-cognitions tied to roles and, through roles, to positions in organized social relationships” (Stryker, 2007 p. 1092). As an occupant of a role within a society, one’s identity is categorized based on the societal expectations and meanings that guide behavior (Stets & Burke, 2000), making these self-meanings operate across multiple roles (Hogg et al., 1995)

The sport environment in Uganda exists as a social context in which female rugby players relate to their peers, family, and community, construct their identities, learn about gender binaries within the sport, and challenge socio-cultural norms as “selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves” (Mead, 1956, p. 227). Social cultural context and structures influence the rugby players while acting as agents that shape the landscape of the culture of rugby in Uganda. The physical space, the athletes, the sport culture, and the community at large exist in defining behavior and interactions of female rugby players. To understand patterns of social interactions and how individuals construct identity, Stryker (2007) argues that “social behavior can impact self, and society and self can impact society” (p. 1088). In the context of this study, identity theory provides the lens to further understand the diverse multiple identities of Ugandan female rugby players and ways in which they construct role behaviors and identities that are socially acceptable.

Summary of Chapter Two

The review of chapter two has provided information on the current state of women’s participation in sport, how historically women were excluded from social institutions such as sport, and how international governing bodies like the International Olympic Committee, Federation of International Football and the United Nations have

shaped values for gender equality and women empowerment on and off the field. A shift in policy and legislature at international governing bodies has played a key role in creating spaces for women's involvement in sport and physical activity, as women's movements and feminist scholarship continue to push for equal representation. Research studies indicate that the current increase in numbers of women and girls participating in sport is globally not reflective and proportionate to the women in sport leadership, hence limiting advocacy and policy implementation that support structures for women's participation in all spheres of sport. Literature also points to the hegemonic nature of sport, where men are naturally preferred, and to boundaries created that are defined by sex roles, leading to athletic women being scrutinized for failing to conform to ideal feminine types because society thrives on the binaries of masculinity and femininity. The literature review examines the historical and contemporary paradigms of African women's involvement in both the private and public spheres during indigenous Africa, the colonial period and post-colonial eras. African female athletes have pushed for inclusion and recognition in society, as contemporary and religious practices view women that engage in physical activity as breaking the dominant norms and failing to revere the cultural narrative that defines many African societies in post-colonial era.

In a bid to open up the continent to female athletes' acceptance, scholarship on successful female athletes as well as development projects that engage young women have taken shape in informing local leaders, policymakers, coaches, parents, women, and scholars about the importance of involving the girl-child in community activities such as education and sport. Further, the emergence of outstanding African female sports role models pushes for the recognition of female athletic skills while respecting the African

culture in its varied forms. As a popular leisure activity, rugby, the current state of women's sport in Uganda is examined in reference to women and girls' participation in the context of the patrilineal and patriarchal society. Rugby as a young sport for women in Africa is discussed with high participation rates, among young women to show that Rugby Africa is on a mission to improve the game for women so as to have African representatives compete at the global stage.

A social construct of women's rugby, resistance to masculinity and identity formation among female rugby players are featured in literature that show how women are taking ownership of the male nature of rugby. Lastly in this section, the theoretical frameworks used to guide this study are presented and discussed fully. As the base of all theories used, feminist theory provides a foundation and analytical lens for this study to understand female rugby players. African feminist theory offers insight on ways in which the African women protect her African cultures despite embracing Eurocentric mannerisms, such as engaging in sport-related masculine activities; and more importantly, describes the macro context wherein certain cultural patterns become dominant. Identity theory helps scholars to examine how female rugby players construct, sustain, and negotiate their identities as self, and as well as how a group operate within various roles and societal boundaries in a micro level context.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

This chapter provides specific methods that were used in the study, covering the research design, research site, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, researcher subjectivity, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter also covers specific data collection methods followed along with data collection strategies utilized, in which interviews and documents were reviewed. The purpose of this qualitative study was two-fold: (a) to understand the socio-cultural construction of gender in post-colonial Uganda using lived experiences and personal stories of women rugby players, and (b) to comprehend how women rugby players navigate their everyday lives using roles and multiplicity of identities from grassroots to national team level participation in sport. Specifically, the research study documented players' lived experiences and stories that inform masculinity-femininity constructs on and off the field, as well as their negotiation of boundaries of existence structurally and culturally. The research study questions encompass the following:

1. How do female rugby players perform gender on and off the field?
2. In what ways do female rugby players engage in the existing power relations and hierarchies in Uganda?

Design of the Study:

The design of the study follows a qualitative research method, with the utilization of a “multiparadigmatic approach,” which cuts across social interactions of participants in daily life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). The use of qualitative research is helpful because allowed for the empowerment of individuals/ groups/ communities by listening

to participants' voices and stories across various platforms (Kim, 2016; Riessman, 2008; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) hence the promotion of agency of marginalized groups [Ugandan sports women] (Kim, 2016; Riessman, 2008) while providing ways to understand meanings associated with lived experiences (Merriam, 2001). In qualitative research, the instrument of data collection is the researcher who engages in fieldwork and performs inductive analysis (Merriam, 2002) to understand human nature in its environment.

Through the lens of qualitative research, scholars aim to understand how people make sense of their lives. In the context of this study, the aim was to know how women rugby players made sense of their experiences, particularly how they navigated masculine sports ethos in Ugandan society, with the method of investigation being narrative inquiry. Through this method, the rugby players' life experiences, stories, and critical accounts of their lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were documented and understood. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) indicate stories to be an essential unit of human lived experience (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), as they play a key role in shaping individual identities, cultures, societies, and historical events. Stories are a common, habitual method that people use to communicate their ideas because they allow for making sense of place in the world happens through dialogue. As narrative researchers, our job is to interpret the stories people tell (Riessman 1993).

Epistemological Context of the Study

A constructivist epistemological framework was selected for this study because it allows each participant's /athlete's life events, culture, understanding, and personality to contribute to the co-construction of the meaning of the phenomenon under consideration.

According to Glesne (2006), epistemology determines what we can know, how we study it, and whether knowledge is authentic. Through constructivism studies, scholars come to know how people learn, interact, and gain knowledge while working together in their natural environment. The phenomenon under study concerns “the norm... a product of the culture, which causes most of its members [to] adopt the same worldview” (Mercadal, 2016, p. 1). Participants and researchers contribute to the co-creation of their reality based on the interpretation of their lived experiences (Riessman, 2008). Reality is constructed through a person’s active experience, observation, and giving meaning to what is observed (Barak, 2017). Meaning is constructed through the interaction of people with their world, with different people constructing different meanings even from the same event (Crotty, 1998). This study centers on human interactions and lived experiences, with the phenomena under study emphasizing the establishment of facts and realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researchers recognize the importance of constructing stories and lived experiences of phenomena without reducing people to fragments but preserving the completeness of the narratives (Lincoln, et al., 2011). Through a constructivist epistemology, we come to understand the world and ourselves in a subjective and socially constructed manner (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Constructivism comprises an individual’s worldview, shaping the ways people think, feel and construct realities (Crotty, 1998). Members of a society create meaning and cultural ways of knowing and in this way, it can be said that within Ugandan society the female rugby players live, and work in a socio-cultural environment that influences their meaning-making. Constructivism enables scholars to navigate different locales of African women based on their unique social,

cultural, religious, political, and economic status. A constructivist framework allowed the researcher to work together with the rugby players to understand their experiences and to know how they make meaning of them. In the context of Uganda, constructivism epistemology provides the researcher with a set of lenses that incorporates an awareness of her social, cultural, and economic context as well as how she perceives and experiences the women rugby players. Cultural perspectives, construction, and consumption of knowledge are “social and public” (Crotty, 1998, p. 53) based on one’s environment.

The researcher as the “knower and respondent co-create understandings” uses “a naturalistic set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13) in conducting this research study. The researcher shall bring her experiences and past learning into the dialogue with the female rugby players. The literature shows that Ugandan female athletes experience sport in multiple intersects such as religion, sexuality, class, culture, and educational background, and using constructivism will allow the researcher to investigate each woman’s meanings and truths (Crotty, 1998). Given that social constructivism allows for studying a subject in its natural form, it, therefore “provides ways to understand multiple perspectives of women in sport” (M’Mbaha, 2012 p. 78) about African societies. This study further considered the impact culture and society have on the construction of knowledge, particularly how Ugandan female athletes develop their own and, often unique, understandings of reality based on their own experiences and interactions (Lincoln et al., 2011). To understand the world in which we live, meanings of symbols, use of language, cultural traditions, and social situations need to be interpreted individually to capture the identity of the Ugandan female rugby players

in their natural setting. Reality is a product of our lived experiences and meanings being socially constructed and always changing (Merriam, 2001), therefore qualitative research emphasizes inquiry of social phenomenon with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Narrative Inquiry Approach

In this dissertation study, the narrative inquiry was used. Narrative inquiry can be defined in various forms. Riessman (2008) described the narrative inquiry as “international and cross-disciplinary, not fitting within the boundaries of any single scholarly field or nation” (p.17). This usage is mainly because storytelling is a universal human trait that goes beyond a single field (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives can take different forms either oral or written depending on the story, situation, or specific experience linked directly with the participant’s life (Clandinin, 2013). It is deeply rooted in inquiring into participants’ lives, and therefore the structure of the study revolves around research questions that focus on lived experiences, organizing data collection methods focusing on dialogue, epistemological stance, and utilization of ethical standards during fieldwork. The utilization of the narrative inquiry method provided the opportunity to go beyond the search for the one majestic narrative while examining the transformative process of storytelling in the field of Ugandan women in sport. Clandinin (2013) emphasizes that narrative inquiry respects all aspects of lived experience regardless of location or context. It further provides a framework for understanding past events and planning for future actions (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Narrative inquiry enables scholars to learn about different ways individuals, groups, and communities shape their identities through storytelling and lived experiences.

People's lived experiences are a collection of stories that are told in their social settings. For societies and groups of people that live on the margins of exclusion, narrative inquiry offers ways to investigate and tell truths of their lived experiences through storytelling and scholarship. African women have had a long history of being marginalized and oppressed by patriarchal structures of society (Ochieng, 2003), and thus, being excluded from sharing their lived experiences. Stories and storytelling allow marginalized individuals to communicate the realities of their oppressions and enable researchers to share in and better understand the life experiences of these individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research method provided an avenue for researchers and readers to understand individuals who are marginalized and who live on the fringes of our society (Riessman, 2008). Self-identity, awareness, confidence, and capability are aspects of humanity that directly affect the stories of a woman as she engages in her multi-purpose environment. The stories of women rugby athletes shall help uncover the realities of their oppression, emotional, relational, intersectional, and contextual aspects of their lives while honoring the multiple complexities of their lived experiences and promoting personal, social, and economic growth for Ugandan women and girls in sport. Women's stories become narratives that define and have implications for daily lives, sports clubs, and communities.

Through narrative inquiry, researchers strengthen their study through active interaction with their participants, making meaning out of the dialogues and sieving out critical ideas that help focus on a specific problem or explore a social phenomenon, while eliminating generalization (Fraser, 2004). Narrative inquiry involves the reconstruction of a person's experience in a social milieu and investigates people's lives through

“collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). The narrative inquiry method developed by Riessman (2008) accounts for the structure and approach of this research study. Stories told by participants and interpretation of stories by the researcher anchor the research study. Situating the social and cultural role of rugby women’s stories in sport organizations and grassroots movements, the use of narrative inquiry enables new viewpoints about and on activities/ initiatives within a community. Riessman (2008) asserts that this method elucidates the research process (step by step) and allows for transparency of the researcher, thus encouraging them to document their motivation, positionality, and continual presence in the study. Personal (researcher) narrative is included within the narrative inquiry process, as the researcher’s own story is an inextricable/inevitable part of the research during the fieldwork, as well as in the presentation of findings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Riessman (2008) describes three levels of narrative research inquiry and analysis: 1) stories told by research participants; 2) interpretive accounts by the investigator (narrative of narrative); 3) reader's reconstruction (narrative of the narrative). These stages represent/ correspond with three steps of doing research that is fieldwork, analysis, and write-up. Riessman (2008) further outlines seven steps or design options that narrative researchers should consider before they begin to plan a narrative inquiry:

- (a) Research puzzles, rather than research questions,
- (b) entering in the midst: moving into living alongside,
- (c) from field-to-field texts,
- (d) from field texts to interim research texts,

- (e) from interim research texts to research texts,
- (f) the importance of the relational throughout the inquiry
- (g) position of the narrative guard (pp. 42-52).

Narrative scholars Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest similar steps in narrative research design, providing what to include in the field and walking amidst stories, which are field to field texts – being in a place of stories, composing field texts, making meaning of experience from field texts to research texts, and composing research (p. 133). In narrative inquiry, scholars use research to give voice to those whose stories and experiences need to be told and documented, with feminist scholars leading in using the narrative approach to tell the stories of other women (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). This narrative research study utilized African feminist theory and identity theory lenses to inform the research as well as analyze the data. The theories will provide a basis for understanding the life stories and lived experiences of the participants within their respective environments. The theories were used to interpret the stories of women rugby players and provide new ways to understand how they navigate social and cultural boundaries and form relationships with family and community in their multi-purpose environment. In concert with other scholars of African descent, I drew inspiration from my African heritage and lived experiences in a sport that have played a key role in shaping my consumption of knowledge.

Research Context

The study was conducted virtually using different media platforms to access the participants. Uganda is comprised of diverse ethnic groups that spread out unevenly across the country, and are grouped into three linguistic groups—Bantu, Nilotic, and

Nilo-Hamitic (Okoth, Muranga, & Okello-Ogwang, 1995). The official language spoken is English, but different languages and dialects are spoken among diverse ethnic groups. The many ethnicities and linguistic differentiation define the cultural landscape and national unity of Uganda (Okoth et al., 1995), and these phenomena continue to shape the geopolitical reference of the country.

Population and Sampling

Seventeen women rugby players, ranging from age 18 to 45 years, who are current or former members (participants) of the Uganda Rugby Union (URU) served as the participants of the study. The participants of the study were recruited from the rugby sports clubs across different regions [Central, East, West, and North] of the country. There are potential differences in lived experiences of the participants as the country boasts of over one hundred districts, forty-five ethnic groups, and diverse cultures, hence widening the scope for my participant selection. Purposeful sampling was utilized to get the target population of 17 female participants, which enabled an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals that are knowledgeable about a phenomenon under study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and who can provide a wealth of information. This sampling approach provided information that answered the research questions (Maxwell, 2012, p. 97).

Each potential participant was contacted directly using social media outlets (Facebook and WhatsApp), email, phone calls, or word of mouth. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, why they were selected, and reminded that engaging in this research activity was voluntary. The criteria for participant selection involved the use of the following categories: the participant is a woman involved in the

sport of Rugby either as a former or current player and is over the age of 18 years. The researcher assured the participants that all information shared will be kept confidential. The study did not deal with issues of gatekeepers as the participants were all members of the Uganda Rugby Union and were over 18 years of age. The researcher had direct access to them given the researcher's familiarity with culture and society and knowledge about the sporting landscape in which the women find themselves. To avoid any potential ethical issues in the study, all participants were informed in writing that their names and identities will be kept confidential and that they are free to remove themselves from the study at any time. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants of the study to protect their identities, and other potentially traceable identifiers were removed from the transcripts.

For every potential participant whose contact information I received whether an email or text message was sent out (see Appendix C). In total, 28 potential participants were contacted, and 17 agreed to participate. As soon as the participant agreed to take part in the study, a demographic form (see Appendix A) was sent to her to complete and then asked to send back to the researcher. Then I sent a follow-up email/text message to set up a date and time that was convenient for the interviewee. The participant received two signed copies of informed consent from the researcher via email and WhatsApp platform, happening 24hrs before the agreed time and date. The message had guidelines for the participants to follow, such as reading through the informed consent form, asking questions about the study and interview session as well as communicating to the researcher in case they could no longer participate. Based on the time/date agreed upon, contact was made by the researcher to start the interview process. Participants read the

consent form, were given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, then asked to sign the consent form, and send it back to the researcher. Each participant was reminded that the interview session was being recorded and that participation was voluntary. Interviews lasted between 50 to 90 minutes. Finally, to get support from the participants and minimize other related issues that might arise during the study, I thoroughly explained to the participants the purpose of the study and why they were chosen to be a part of it. Written informed consent was collected from each participant. The study started after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Georgia and the Uganda Christian University Ethics Review Board.

Methods of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

This study employed in-depth interviews as the primary sources of data collection. Hollingsworth and Dybdhal (2007) advise narrative researchers to apply a constructivist stance to conduct semi-structured interviews in addition to conversations as data collection. Henderson (1991) used the term qualitative interviews as an umbrella term for those methods in which researchers learn from participants through long, focused conversations. Interviewing is the best method for pursuing a subject in-depth, operating in a discovery mode, and creating interactions with individuals. In the current study, the researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with each participant lasting approximately 50-90 minutes, using media outlets such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, and phone calls. Flick (2009) stated that semi-structured interviews are “linked to the expectation that the interviewed subjects' viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a

questionnaire” (p. 150). The individual interviews for this study are semi-structured and open-ended (Patton, 2015) because they allow the researchers to focus on the lived experiences of participants while building relationships.

This research focused on developing an understanding of how Ugandan women within rugby culture ascribe meaning to certain actions, occurrences, socialization, interactions, environments, and traditions. The feminist approach was important given the sensitive nature of the topic – African women in male-dominated sport and environments. While the researcher developed an interview guide, it was not necessarily used as a standard protocol due to each participant’s unique story. Semi-structured questions are usually open-ended, and after posing each question to the research participant, the interviewer followed up with probes seeking further detail and description of what has been said (Roulston, 2010). The researcher invited the participants to approach the interview like a conversation and encourage them to tell their stories (Smith, 2010), which allowed participants to lead the direction of the interview to balance the power dynamics (Riesmman, 2008).

Dialogues, in the form of interviews and conversations, are the most commonly utilized forms of data collection in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Interviews help to compose field texts with the clients, but conversations create an open space for the sharing of stories between participants and researchers (Clandinin, 2013). The interview guide questions focused on lived experiences of women rugby players, socialization within the sport and community, cultural and societal boundaries, responsibilities and identity formation in masculine sport, challenges encountered as female athletes; and strategies used to overcome prejudice in the sport,

and lastly consideration of the future of Ugandan women in sport specifically rugby. The questions helped develop rapport, as well as introduce the narrative interview structure to the participants (Riessman, 2008). Throughout the interviews, the researcher focused on being engaged and interactive, thereby shaping my probing questions, comments, and notes around the stories of the participants. The researcher personally conduct the interviews and reviewed all documents associated with this study.

Document Analysis

The second source of data was documents both printed and electronic material. Denzin et al. (2005) emphasized the use of “documents as a way of locating a group of subjects within a larger population” (p. 9) while providing background information, historical insight, and addition to the knowledge base of the phenomenon under study (Bowen, 2009). To establish the representation of the women’s rugby game in Uganda, the researcher considered document review a significant source of data collection, as well as a “medium through which to understand how our society has developed and how it continues to develop” (McCulloch (2004, p. 5). Merriam (1998) writes, “documents are a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 112). Documents take on a variety of forms such as advertisements, newspapers, press releases, agendas, brochures, journals, attendance registers, minutes of meetings, letters, radio and television program scripts, organizational reports, photo albums, and program proposals. Merriam (1988) argues that “documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118). Documents used to inform this study contained text (words), images, and videos that have been recorded without a researcher’s

involvement. This study used information from newspapers, radio and television scripts, multimedia clips, and social media sites that are relevant to women rugby players' experiences.

Data Analysis

Data on the lived experiences of the participants were analyzed using Riessman's (2008) three forms of narrative data analysis, which are thematic, structural (producing a story), and dialogic/performance analysis (a collaborative narrative that conveys a message). The thematic analysis allows the researcher to examine the content of a story; "what" was said, "what" was used, "for what purposes" (Riessman, 2008). Qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) ATLAS.ti (Version 8) was used to enhance the data analysis process.

Thematic Analysis

The primary method for data analysis in this study was thematic analysis. In the context of this narrative analysis, Riessman (2008) describes how the researcher identifies themes based on how the participants of the study told their stories. This study followed the six-phase steps of thematic analysis that Braun and Clark (2006) outline. The authors explain that thematic analysis "is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79) and helps in the interpretation of various aspects of research topics (Boyatzis, 1998). This type of analysis enabled the researcher to review the data with the intent of identifying themes that accurately represent the meanings of the data set as a whole. Using thematic analysis, the researcher made clear theoretical assumptions because a good thematic analysis will make the process transparent (Braun & Clark, 2006), with each process italicized below. The researcher

became familiar with the data by listening to each recorded interview and checking the transcript for any errors from transcription. The researcher re-read the transcripts so as to recognize potential patterns from the data. Then upload transcripts into ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software and began the coding process. The researcher read through the transcripts again and used data extracts, *to create initial codes* and to give a name for each code. After developing a code structure, the researcher then applied the different codes to the remaining data.

Open coding was used to develop codes that are based on data set and a codebook was used to keep a record of all emergent codes. Coding “leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). Saldaña (2013) suggests that simultaneous coding and sub-coding should be used during the analysis of each data set. Additionally, line-by-line initial coding is appropriate for field notes as well as interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2006), therefore enabling the researcher to have an abundance of codes that are reflective of the data. It is important to code and categorizes data by what participants talk about (Saldaña, 2013). In-vivo coding was used, as this study aimed to prioritize and honor participant voices (Uganda women rugby players). Saldaña (2013) explains that In-vivo coding “enhances and deepens” an understanding of “their cultures and worldviews” (p. 74). The second round of coding utilized in this study was the codifying system (categorizing). This system helped arrange the data into groups that showed patterns. Richards and Morse (2007) clarify that “categorizing is how we get ‘up’ from the diversity of data to the shapes of the data, the sorts of things represented. Concepts are how we get up to more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs” (p.157). Codifying also allowed for data to be "segregated,

grouped, regrouped and relinked to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2007 p. 21). The researcher followed an inductive approach as this ensures that the categories and themes that emerge are constructed from the data (Saldaña, 2013; Patton, 2015). This process allows "categories to emerge from the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 177). The coded data was rearranged into categories and sub-categories, and then into themes that eventually progressed toward conceptual and theoretical frameworks. After completing the initial coding process, the researcher *found themes within the codes*.

A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection (Saldaña, 2013). Once these themes have been created, *the researcher checked the initial themes against the entire data set* by reading through the selected data sets' extracts and then reading through the transcripts. According to Saldaña (2013), the researcher should find repetitive patterns consistent with participants' experiences as documented in the data. At this point, the researcher re-checked the *codes and themes within the codes and checked initial themes against the entire data set*. The researcher created 5 category themes and 17 sub-themes. Once the themes and subthemes created were in line with the entire data set, then the researcher *defined and named the final themes of data*. The themes created can work as a foundation for the "development of higher-level theoretical constructs when similar themes are clustered together" (p. 176). Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out that "our ability to show how these themes and concepts systematically interrelate lead toward the development of theory" (p. 55).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the theme names selected should be concise and immediately give the reader a sense of what it's about. Lastly, the themes and data extracts were used to *produce the final report* of the study. This analysis focused on how

female rugby players described themselves as presented categories, which showed overall themes indicating how the players described their lived experiences in the interviews. In this study, the researcher worked to develop an understanding of how the participants make meaning of their lived experiences as Ugandan female athletes in the context of a culture and sport that is predominantly male. Storytelling allows marginalized groups and individuals to communicate their lived experiences and realities of oppression, hence allowing researchers to document their stories (Riessman, 2008). A feminist approach was well-suited to the study, the researcher paid attention to gender and multiple intersects through which women experience reality. The researcher did not cause change or alter the participants' experiences but directed the writing to represent a way to influence change at multiple levels within Uganda sporting communities/structures, as the accounts of participants' lived experiences/ journeys will benefit not only female athletes in Uganda but other women in similar situations and context.

Atlas.ti (Version 8, Windows)

Data for this study were analyzed to allow for the description of the experiences and meanings of the women rugby players in Uganda. Qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) ATLAS.ti (Version 8) was used to boost the analysis process. The purpose of Atlas.ti is to help researchers uncover and systematically analyze complex phenomena hidden in unstructured data while providing tools that let the researcher locate, code, and reference findings among the data, as well as assess their significance (Konopásek, 2007). The process entails “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 147).

Each document was uploaded into the program as a PDF and a hermeneutic unit was created, which was then added to the document family. Each document was re-read and analyzed to create codes and code families. Researcher ran the data of each document and attached primary codes, then started to identify patterns with similar codes, and eventually redefined and merged codes to make sense of the data. The codes created in one document were sometimes repeated in another document because the questions asked from the interview guide were consistent for each participant but the lived experiences and stories differed. Multiple codes and code families were grouped together into categories and sub-categories which guided the researcher to create themes. Lastly, thinking about the data the researcher questioned herself about how the various codes, categories, and potential findings all fit together into a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the women rugby players. ATLAS.ti boosted the efficiency and in-depth analysis of the data, however, it was important to note that the program does not offer any guidance into the coding process but rather offers ways to manage data and analysis in an electronic environment. Atlas. ti enabled the researcher to keep track of quotations from each participant despite having a uniform code that was described under one theme.

This computer program (QDAS) ATLAS.ti (Version 8) “renders a code-and-retrieve function and provides support for theory building by facilitating connections between codes to develop higher-order classifications and categories, formulating propositions that imply a conceptual structure that fits the data” (Smit, 2002, p. 70). Data is analyzed systematically using Atlas.ti and it also serves an important purpose in organizing and preparing the data for analysis particularly “selecting, coding, annotating

and comparing noteworthy segments” (Smit, 2002, p. 70). Atlas.ti provides support to the thinking subject, as Friese (2014) explained the “software frees you from all those tasks that a machine can do much more effectively, like modifying code words and coded segments, retrieving data based on various criteria [...] offering overviews at various stages of a project (p. 1). The computer program is not capable of discerning the meaning of words or concepts of the data but rather assists in structuring and visualizing data analysis tasks.

Trustworthiness of the study

The quality of a qualitative study is directly connected to the credibility by which it will be perceived. Patton (2015) states that the theoretical framework and underlying philosophical underpinnings of the researcher create the criteria for judging the quality and credibility of a study. Recognizing and clarifying one’s own bias leads to increasing the credibility of the study. Having important conversations with Ugandan women actively involved in sport and learning how sports gives them agency and a platform within their community guided this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) assert that “research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (p. 5). As the primary instrument of research in this study, the researcher’s viewpoints and interpretations of participants’ stories (Merriam, 2009) directly impacted data collection and analysis of the data. Therefore, “the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and how the findings are presented” (Merriam, 1988, p. 165) plays a critical role in the trustworthiness of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Trustworthiness is a requirement for any qualitative research to be considered credible and useful, therefore the study must show transferability and confirmability as well as dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1988) explained that trustworthiness is regarded as the strength of qualitative research because it interprets participants' reality and defends the findings of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2007) viewed "validation as a distinct strength of qualitative research...extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study all add to the value...of a study" (p. 206). In addition, he considered "validation as an attempt to find the accuracy of the findings" (p. 207). The researcher validates the accuracy of the study by using procedures like member checks, triangulation of data sources, and using external auditors (Creswell, 2007). To ensure trustworthiness, (Merriam, 1988) recommends that the researcher use multiple sources of data to confirm the emerging findings.

Memos

The researcher wrote memos during the study for reflective and self-critique purposes. Maxwell (2013) explained that memos are important techniques to develop one's ideas and they take on different forms throughout the research. Additionally, he also explained that "not writing memos is the researcher's Alzheimer's disease; you may not remember important insights when you need them" (p .20). Memos keep the researcher embedded in the reality of the study and contribute to the trustworthiness of the research. Memos will capture the researcher's ideas, insights, and observations that will help in the understanding of the phenomenon under study in its settings.

Member checks

Member checks were used to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Each participant was provided with a copy of the interpretations of the study to verify if the results are plausible and accurate representations (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 2007) of what they said. Member checking is a way to “ensure study quality by checking to be sure the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ experiences is accurate” (Roulston, 2010, p. 87). The researcher shared fieldnotes, observation notes, and transcriptions with each participant to enhance truthfulness and control for bias. This allowed the participants to evaluate whether the transcripts were exactly what they intended to express in interviews. Using member checking assists with the analysis process (Riessman, 2008). No participant requested any changes to their transcripts.

Subjectivity statement

I was raised in a family that encouraged everyone regardless of age and sex to be active in community events and sports, thus influencing the way I learned from the world around me. Over the years, I have come to understand that my sporting experiences have shaped the way I consume knowledge and how culture and personal achievements contribute to my involvement in physical activities and sport. In the context of this study, I had some biases, perceptions, and predispositions about how Ugandan female athletes should be treated and recognized for their athletic talents. As a young girl in Uganda, I understood that my family and community/ environment enabled me to participate in sports, an opportunity that is not availed to every girl. Having participated in sport at all levels in Uganda, I understand that I had multiple privileges that enabled me to interact, engage as well as familiarize myself with different sports. As I have grown older and

continued in my studies, I have come to understand that dominant cultural norms and social structures in my country play a significant role in shaping one's identity. Women and girls' participation in sport is embraced only to a certain extent because cultural beliefs, social structures, and economic constraints situate women as secondary citizens in their communities in post-colonial Uganda.

Sport is used as a tool for development and social inclusion for all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. For me, this knowledge of the multi-benefit resulting from participating in sport fuels me to understand how young women in my country can use this tool to further develop their athletic and life skills. Sport has not only influenced my life but has changed my role in society because am an advocate for increasing women's involvement in community events and for continually looking for ways to use the acquired knowledge and sporting experiences to change the lives of young women. In teaching physical education (P.E) and sport management in higher education, I have spent much of my academic career developing confidence and acquiring the knowledge to create my worldview. Everyone has a set of beliefs, experiences, and situated knowledge that influence how we learn and perceive the world.

I have observed and experienced how Ugandan female athletes navigate post-colonial boundaries and sporting culture and noticed their continuous struggle for acceptance and inclusion in sport circles, as well as seeking ways to balance their everyday experiences with sport. Although I may have my preconceptions, I needed to set those aside to fully immerse and understand the phenomenon under study. I was cautious of my own biases throughout every step of the research process, as well as when

I wrote interpretations of the rugby players in this study. Despite familiarity with the culture of women's participation in sport in Uganda, their limitations, and their achievements in this industry, I am in no position to believe that I completely understand how they consume and develop women's sports in the country. My interactions with participants influenced the research process, interpretations, and outcomes of the study.

My desire to strive for an objective view of increasing the number of Ugandan women and girls participating in sport stems from scholarship concerning various feminist scholars, whose ideas stem from genuine acceptance and equality for all. Throughout the study, I continued to learn about my interests and motivations on scholarship about Ugandan women and girls' participation in sport, and continue to learn how women navigate invisible economic, cultural, and social boundaries in involvement in sport activities. Sport provides an equal playing field for all, therefore young women should use their participation in sport as a means and platform to create a dialogue/conversation about women's contribution to communities and the sport industry in Uganda. In my academic future, I would like to continue seeking knowledge and pursuing my interest in how Ugandan [African] female athletes' lived and learning experiences influence their decision-making, social positioning, and worldview.

Chapter Summary

This document outlined methods that were used in this narrative study, including the goals of the study and the research approach. The use of constructivist epistemology is explained with specific examples pertinent to the research investigation. Participants' involvement as players or former players who still have strong ties to the game is explained to serve as the primary focus of the study. Qualitative research method

processes and analysis techniques are explained fully. The theoretical perspectives that guided the study and the understanding of their experiences of the women rugby players are provided with details. Lastly, the researcher's biases, influences, and predispositions for the study are detailed in the subjectivity statement.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on the findings of the dissertation study, and it is divided into three sections. The first section provides demographic information of participants (Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the demographic characteristics). The second part of the chapter focuses on participants' stories and interviews, and they are divided into four sections: Dominant social practices, social networking, gender identity formation, and development of women's rugby resilience. A summary of emerging categories and themes is provided in Table 4.3. The third section centers on the implications and conclusions of the study.

The Participants

Seventeen women rugby players from various sports clubs, schools, and educational institutions in Uganda participated in this study. All the women came from diverse social backgrounds, with the majority living in the capital city Kampala, and a small number living in the countryside. The participants' ages ranged between 18 and 45 years old. Three participants had children, one participant was married, and eight participants still lived with their parents. As per education, all participants had completed their primary school education and two were pursuing further education at the graduate level. The majority of the participants had a minimum of seven years of experience playing rugby and had been on the national team at least once. A summary of the participant's demographic information is provided in tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age Range	Home Region	Live with parents	Number of Children	Previous sport
Ash	18 - 24	Central	Yes	1	None
Dija	25 - 31	East	Married	4	None
Chris	18 - 24	Central	Yes	0	Netball
Leila	18 -24	Central	Yes	0	None
Shilla	25 - 31	Central	Yes	0	Soccer / Athletics
Kara	25 - 31	Central	Independent	0	Athletics
Judy	18 - 24	Central	Yes	0	Athletics
Teri	25 - 31	North	Independent	1	Tennis / Cricket
Faith	18 - 24	East	Yes	0	Netball / Athletics
Julie	18 - 24	North	Independent	0	Athletics
Olive	25 - 31	North	Yes	0	Athletics/High jump
Carol	18 - 24	South West	Yes	0	Netball/Volleyball
Ann	25 - 31	East	Independent	0	Hockey/Volleyball
Katie	32 - 38	Central	Independent	0	Volleyball/Field Hockey
Dora	39 - 45	East	Independent	0	Netball/Field Hockey
Mia	32 - 38	East	Independent	0	Soccer
Samy	32 - 38	Central	Independent	0	Soccer / Volleyball

Table 4.2 Participants' Background: Education, Employment, and Active years in Rugby

Pseudonym	Education of Level	Profession	Participation in Rugby	National Team	Playing Status
Ash	Secondary School	Self-employed	2 - 5 years	No	Active
Dija	Primary School	Self-employed	2- 5 years	No	Active
Chris	Secondary School	Student	2 - 5 years	No	Active
Leila	Secondary school	Student	2 - 5 years	No	Active
Shilla	Degree	Administrator / sports coach	10 - 14 years	Yes	Active
Kara	Secondary School	S&C coach	6 - 9 years	No	Active
Judy	Secondary School	Student	6 – 9 years	Yes	Active
Teri	Primary School	Self-employed	10 - 14 years	Yes	Active
Faith	Degree	Student	6 – 9 years	Yes	Active
Julie	Diploma	Rugby coach / student	6 – 9 years	Yes	Active
Olive	Diploma	Business Administrator	10 - 14 years	Yes	Active
Carol	Secondary School	Rugby coach / student	6 – 9 years	Yes	Active
Ann	Diploma	Student / Business owner	10 –14 years	Yes	Active
Katie	Degree	International rugby referee	More than 15 years	Yes	Retired
Dora	Masters	Rugby coach / S&C coach	More than 15 years	Yes	Retired
Mia	Masters	Lawyer	More than 15 years	Yes	Active
Samy	Degree	Accountant	More than 15 years	Yes	Active

Table 4.3: Overview of Categories and Themes

Categories		Major themes
Dominant social practices		Disruption of cultural norms
		Women's space in rugby
		What makes rugby possible
Social networking		Creating opportunities through sport
		Female athlete role models and mentors
		Socio-economic mobility
		Future of women's rugby
Gender identity formation		Rugby socialization
		Re-imagining identity
		Rugby is empowering
Women's rugby resilience		Invisibility of women's rugby
		Access to resources
		The <i>Right</i> people in Leadership

Dominant Social Practices

Contemporary dominant practices evident in post-colonial Ugandan society position women and girls into specific gender roles as mothers, homemakers, and caregivers, thus limiting their ability to evolve into other roles such as sports leaders or coaches. The participants in this study talked about the socially constructed roles that exclude them from engaging in a predominantly male sport and involvement in their fight to disrupt socio-cultural structures that limit women's participation in sports at all levels. This section includes a story of a participant and themes such as disruption of cultural norms, women's space in rugby, and the support system.

Disruption of Cultural Norms.

These disruptions occurred varying among the participants. An example is the story of Julie. She was born in the Northeastern region of Uganda and is among the first members of her community to represent her country as an athlete and to travel abroad with the team on airplane. She started playing rugby at the age of 14, a period when her family was struggling to financially support her education. She says rugby helped her to navigate cultural norms that have plagued young women in the region. She said playing rugby enabled her to become independent, think beyond the boundaries of her community as well as to stay away from generalized norms of teenage marriages and pregnancy. Julie completed her secondary school and joined a vocational school where she learned the skills to help her earn an income. She said joining rugby, enabled her to see the value of sport, and she hopes to continue along this path so the sport can be used to uplift young women from the clutches of gender norms that disadvantage them. Julie's participation in rugby met with some resistance from her father, who was against her playing a violent game; but with the intervention of the coach and teacher, her parents granted her permission to engage in rugby. Having traveled to two countries outside of Uganda, the community members got interested in what she was doing and eventually encouraged their daughters to play rugby so that they would get the educational and social benefits that the sport was offering. She goes on to say that rugby has kept her busy, that she still needs more from rugby and that rugby still needs more from her.

The sport of rugby in Uganda is placed in a unique setting, where it serves as the site for reproducing hegemonic cultural norms and empowering women through sports participation. The rugby players interviewed for this study were aware of the power and

opportunity to change the sporting environment to be inclusive of women in the country. For example, Ash described how women are put in a 'domestic box' with no room for involvement in sport:

You see many people undermine ladies; they think ladies can't do anything, [and] they think that what ladies do is only housework. But they don't know that if you get a lady outside [of] the house, that if you bring her outside the house in a pitch, she can do anything more than a man.

Emphasizing the challenges that women and girls face in society, Shilla points out the cultural boundaries that keep women enclosed and away from the sport, saying:

The culture, the norms, like in Uganda particularly, especially in Buganda. There is this thing of girls are not supposed to run or my goodness how can they see you run, your breasts, like, how can they see you run, like it's not normal, yeah but I think the world is changing, people are becoming modern, like that is trying to change that is changing now unlike way back where women were not supposed to run, you are not supposed to be physical, you just have to be there humble you just have to be soft, I think now it is changing. I think people are [like] getting modern.

Collaborating with Shilla's views about engaging in rugby, Dora is determined to challenge the societal roles ascribed to women as well as confront the notion that all women fit into one kind of box that is socially acceptable. She described how physical activity is a basic human right and that playing rugby gave her happiness:

So, for me, playing rugby which is considered like a predominantly male sport, it's like ahh, I am doing it because I love it, if people happen to think am crazy

for doing it am like, yeah I don't try to fit within society roles; I will do what makes me happy and I will try and get other people to do what makes them happy.

Given the limited opportunities that women have to participate in sport, Dora believes that as a society in Uganda, cultural norms need to be revised to stop limitations put on what women can do and achieve within the context of sport. She calls for fair adjustments in societal norms when it comes to addressing the changes in gender differences:

I, for one, think that some of the traditional values need to evolve, and I think people are very selective about ahh the traditional values they want people to maintain. You know, ahh, there are some traditional values people are quite happy to do away with but when it comes to values which tend to suppress women, they want to maintain those values ... when it's a value which is not in favor of the men they are like we need to evolve from these traditional values but they don't do the same for women.

Adding to the need to deal with the selective established roles and duties assigned to women, Katie stated that there is an urgent need for gender roles within family and community to be addressed to break cultural norms that hold women back from fully participating in sport. She described a typical game-day routine for some young female players as compared to their male counterparts:

Saturdays when you have matches, girls will first need to wake up early cook, wash clothes, you know, make sure there is lunch, while boys just walk out of the house, you know. So that needs to change, why can't boys wash clothes, why can't they cook? We have had some very supportive families... there is an

instance, where two girls from the same family, had a rugby game [in Kampala] and their brother had a football game [in Jinja]. So, he was like but if you both go who is going to cook, and they were like, ah then he laughed, and he said it's okay I will cook because his game was [close to home] in Jinja.

Engaging family and community about the need to educate both boys and girls about domestic chores and responsibility play a key role in providing the opportunity for girls to engage in extracurricular activities, like their male counterparts. Families that are direct beneficiaries of their daughters' participation in rugby are grasping for the chance to teach both sons and daughters the value of sharing the domestic chores, to give their daughters a chance at getting educational opportunities and achieving athletic excellence. Dora further describes how engaging girls in sport is contributing to breaking cultural norms within some families, describing how:

The mothers are seeing rugby as an opportunity for their daughters. So rather than insisting the daughters have to stay home and cook or first wash clothes, they are getting the boys involved in doing household chores because some of these girls through rugby have educational bursaries which frees up the burden from the family of paying for school fees.

The involvement of girls in household chores is being addressed by some families that have found value in their daughter's participation in rugby. Carol and Olive say they can attend practices, tournaments, and travel with the team across the country because their mothers have recognized the need to divide household chores equally among the siblings. Carol explains:

Mum divides work then she is like for you, you will do this, once you tell her your timetable of sports, she will allow you to go and do your sport as long as you first do housework, like if she gives you your task to do and you complete then you are free to do whatever you can.

Samy, Katie, Dora, and Kara who have all been involved in women's rugby for over 15 years talked about the responsibilities of being a young woman as well as completing chores assigned within the household, and how they contribute to some women missing out on playing sport. They are not encouraging young girls to go against their family values, but rather encouraging families and the community to see the benefits of allowing young girls to break away from the cultural norms that keep them homebound, missing out on opportunities to progress. Samy calls for restructuring of roles saying:

So, what we are trying to do is not change the traditional [cultural] roles but just redefine roles to make them suitable for everybody to benefit instead of keeping people locked in one box. If you enjoy cooking, go ahead and cook. If you have to wash clothes, you must wash clothes, you know. If you enjoy wearing makeup, wear makeup, if you like wearing dresses and dressing up as a girl go ahead and do that. If you want to fix up your hair that's fine. You know. But don't lock yourself into this is what tradition says I must do and then you end up missing [out] on being a rugby player because that is also part of you.

In addition to restructuring the conventional roles assigned to women and girls, Mia believes that encouraging more women to participate in sports provides a new platform to engage in the changing societal perceptions:

Women playing rugby can change the perception of women's sport because currently, people believe that rugby is an aggressive sport and it's a game for men. Now imagine this group of women of all sizes coming and playing the same sport as the men and doing the same things. And then you find that some women train with the men then it changes what men think about women in general. It can earn you that respect, and the men can realize that women can do these [same] things, why should we undermine them, so in a way it can change?

By engaging the larger community, men are better informed about the abilities of women in sports and how ways of thinking about women need to be reviewed. For example, Ash described how some of her friends ridiculed her for participating in rugby, saying it was a male sport and females have no place in such a game, and that women are better positioned for gentle sports like dancing, netball, and gymnastics as compared to power – physical sports. She said that “I had a friend, she even never got interested in joining sports ... she used to ask me why are you playing rugby? Rugby is not meant for girls it's meant for boys”. Ash described how she was intrigued by the game and was not going to let her friend derail her from being a rugby player. Collaborating on Ash's encounter, Olive also faced numerous challenges and pushbacks from her friends about participating in the sport of rugby:

I have friends who tell me, a girl should not run. I am in sport and I run every time ... they tell me, you should not run as a girl you have to walk. Am like, in sport so how can I not run?

Given the numerous hurdles embedded in tackling socio-cultural norms and practices, the participants in the study defend their involvement in rugby. Dora is adamant about her

participation in rugby saying, “the weird thing is I know even participating in rugby is just to break the gender norms”. Similarly, Kara said; “there is no difference that rugby should be played by only men. All the sport in the world can be played by men and women as long as you commit yourself you will manage”.

Uganda’s patriarchal society combined with dominant gender roles often dictates women’s roles, that is homemaker and parenting, however, once women break these barriers and infiltrate male-dominated environments, they are met with resistance and ridicule. The female rugby players are pushing for acceptance in the sport by breaking the cultural norms associated with the masculine sport. Mia further explains that conventional gender binaries need to be revised because women rugby players were generally described as :

Tomboys or women who think they are men or lesbians. It was so hard to drive the game when there are all these negative connotations being attached to it and so we would lose players for reasons such as that. Yeah, so those are some of the things that made it really difficult.

Breaking cultural norms and the negative connotations around women’s rugby, and embracing it as a socially acceptable sport for women is a step in the right direction for women’s sport in Uganda. Dora further explained how the sport of rugby misses out on talented female athletes who might have joined the sport but feared the society backlash:

So, we lose very many female athletes still in their prime because they ahh quit sports to start a family. Some come back and are still able to excel but that’s if they have very supportive partners or husbands. Some try to come back but they fail. They just lack the support and others don’t come back at all because

basically, they have been told now, that their first job is as a wife and a mother.

Now forget about sports.

The importance of women rejoining sports after stepping away to start families should be prioritized because the majority of women start families during their prime years of athleticism. Therefore, the sports environment needs to be more inclusive regardless of the status of the woman.

Women's Space in Rugby.

Within the institution of sport, gender expectations and roles are constantly reinforced, therefore women need to empower themselves by making conscious choices about the sports they engage in, thereby pushing the boundaries of acceptance and inclusion within different sporting environments. Based on Shilla's sporting experiences, she believes the sporting environment and culture in Uganda are accepting of women, "I think they are welcoming. I think society is open now. They understand that a girl child can do anything". Engaging families and communities about the benefits of sports for girls is an uphill battle in many regions around the country. Kara points out the importance of engaging communities about women's sport and the benefits that come with it. She explained:

I think it goes back to ... sensitization. I think we just do not know ... people need to be encouraged like they need to be, we need to keep informing the people that yes there [are] women in sport, and they can do this and we keep encouraging them.

All participants in this study talked about increased awareness of the game among the female population, and how it plays a key role in getting more women engaged in rugby.

As a student, Leila believes that the sport should be introduced at the secondary school level; “the more awareness the more people know about it”. As senior players / long-term members of women’s rugby, Dora, Katie, Mia, and Samy have pushed for more women to get involved in rugby because they are witnesses to the potential and talent that Ugandan women possess. Dora goes on to say: “So, the more we get women into sports the more we will see the sport being taken more seriously in Uganda, and the natural talent [women athleticism] that we have will be fully exploited!”. Additionally, with the increasing number of women engaging in sport, the younger generation is subsequently pushed to pick interest in sport as compared to years ago when conversations about girls in various sports were unacceptable. The opportunity to play for a sports club, and represent one’s school and the country is slowly taking shape among the young female population thus increasing the participation rates of women in sport. Katie described how the platform is being built for the next generation of young women to fully engage in all sports:

So, the more they do it [sports activities], it encourages these young women players, the young generation so they are like ... if I do this then yeah, I do it for my country, I do it for my family, my future. So, the more these people [stakeholders] come in and appreciate the women’s sports, I think it creates a positive impact on the women’s team growth.

The push for women to be accepted and recognized at all levels of sport should not be the burden of the women’s rugby community alone. Judy, Katie, and Julie pointed out the role and significance of media houses in sensitizing people about women’s sports and

how the community can be supportive. Talking about engaging women's rugby on all fronts, Judy talked about the absence of media reporting on women's rugby. She stated:

I have never seen on TV or anywhere an advertisement about women's sports. In all the time I have been playing rugby, it is only the men's rugby that you find in the news or on the tv. I have never heard of a league or tournament organized for women's rugby.

With similar sentiments about the media's role in women's sports, Katie believes advertisements on different media platforms will generate more information and awareness of women's rugby within the sporting communities across the country. The media's role in promoting women's rugby contributes to the visibility of women in sports. Katie advised to "change a little in advertising so that people know that the [women's] game is going to be played in a particular place and so they come and watch. So that they too pick interest in the game".

Nationwide advertising via radio, television, or newspapers, people and communities are better informed about the benefits of sports and in particular the various sports that women and girls can engage in without being ridiculed or shamed. Once you inspire one or two girls from a school or region, the chances are that other young women will pick interest because of the success and opportunities that sport offers. For example, Julie's goal is to expand the game throughout her geographical region, so that young women can benefit and have more options in life. She talked about the reasons why she joined rugby and her ambitions for the sport:

I joined rugby so I don't want to be the only one playing rugby from northern Uganda, my goal is, I want also to build the young people, especially the girls, I

want to build them also they also reach the level I am in or if they can get higher that's it.

She wants to introduce young girls to rugby and other sport so that the families and community are more accepting of engaging girls at an early age in sport. Julie also focuses on coaching girls within her community because they are often excluded from extracurricular activities at school and overwhelmed with domestic chores at home. With increasing numbers of women engaged in sport and society, men become more accepting and inclusive of women's participation and abilities. The success of female athletes on and off the pitch plays a key role in accepting women in predominantly masculine sports. Mia believes that women's conquests on the field alter the way men view women's sport. She explained:

Women playing rugby has changed the way men look at women and think they can't do these hard sports; so, I think it has changed a lot and changed so many men's perspectives about women and what we can actually do in sport.

Therefore, it is important to open up the ways of thinking, by making them inclusive and less gender-biased. Engaging the support systems like family members, friends, teachers, and coaches can create a platform to challenge the barriers that impede the progress of young women across the country.

What Makes Rugby Possible.

By way of example, rugby is shown to be a phenomenal change agent. Faith, an avid music and dance lover, dreams of stirring the national team – Lady Cranes– to win continental and international victories. For her entire life, she has lived in the Eastern region of the country where she was introduced to rugby by a friend in 2014. She is

waiting to enroll in university where she has applied to three different universities with potential courses to study being statistics/education or business administration. She comes from a family that celebrates athletes, and when she confronted her dad and told him about her interest in playing rugby, he was supportive and told her that he could not stop her from exploring her athletic talent since her brothers and sisters are all engaged in different sports. She also mentioned how rugby had taught her the values of patience, hard work, and the ability to network. A sense of pride builds within her every time she walks onto a rugby field to play a match, and she, therefore, calls upon families to play a key role in encouraging their daughters to participate in sport.

Different support systems influence women's participation in sports and how cultural norms are addressed within the various aspects of society. All participants of the study mentioned family, friends, or the community as a factor in their pursuit to engage in sport and break free of barriers that limit women's participation in sport. Family support underlines the importance of young women engaging in sport, thus the need for the involvement of families in sports' programs and the provision of adequate information regarding the benefits for women who engage in sport. Dija who is married and has a family talked about joining rugby with her supportive husband:

I also asked my husband if he could allow me to go if there is a game [with my friends such as Leila]. I would like to go and play with them too; if I find that I can manage it [rugby] I will continue to play. So, he told me as long as you go and come back, I can't refuse what you want.

In the case of Shilla, Judy, Kara, Julie, Carol, and Dora, the positive support they received from their family enabled them to become better rugby players as well as recruit

other women to join them. Shilla described how her mum makes sure that she has eaten, has gone for her morning exercises, as well as helped her through injuries. She says despite being an adult, the family support propels her to succeed on and off the field: “Right now, am staying with my parents but I am an adult. My mum always makes that effort to ask; Have you eaten? you have you gone running? ... She is so supportive unlike other families”.

Having positive family support ensures that some of these participants could overcome the stigma surrounding women in sports. Similarly, Kara, described how she constantly confides in her family: “I always talk about my family because it’s always supportive.” In a hegemonic society, the presence of family support is a driving factor for women to freely express themselves in different spaces such as sports that are predominantly male preserve. Faith described how her father encouraged her to pursue her athletic dreams and aspirations after she confided in him about joining a sports club. She stated:

I told my dad am from [rugby] training, he was like if that’s what you have decided it’s okay. I can’t refuse you from playing rugby since I didn’t play it, I can’t deny you your talent because almost all my sisters and brothers are involved with rugby. So, he was like since that’s your talent you can go and play.

The strong presence of the family propelled the majority of the participants to embrace rugby. Ann’s mother was a former athlete, who introduced her to various sports but rugby. Similarly, when Ann discovered rugby in high school, she embraced it and so did her mother who keeps pushing her to become a better player. She also talked about how

her mother introduced her to sport at a very young age, therefore joining rugby was a welcome sight in the family:

The person who introduced me to sports was my mum. She knew I have the potential but for the first time when I went there, I twisted my leg, so she was like you know what, she did not discourage me. She was like, those things do happen in sports you just have to give it your best.

However, some participants in this study said that they received negative family support because rugby was not a feminine sport and that women should not participate in such a masculine sport. The cultural norms and gender boundaries continue to be a heavy presence in Ugandan society. Students Judy, Leila, and Julie were not about to be stopped from playing rugby because they loved the sport, more especially for what the sport offered them in return. In the case of Judy, she went against her family's wishes and participated secretly in rugby because she valued the friendships and support from the rugby community. She describes the wrath of her aunt, upon learning that she was heavily involved in the sport:

My aunt at that time refused me to continue with the game. She said rugby is a bad game and it is for men, it is all about hitting each other. She said I should never play that game ever ... I used to hide and play rugby, but my aunt said she would kick me out of her home. That is how I lost the first scholarship that I had in form three. But at the same time, she did not have money to pay for my school tuition.

Family members are protective of their daughters and how society perceives them.

Therefore, families do not encourage their daughters to play masculine sports for fear of

negative judgment and isolation from within the community. Parents play a significant role in guiding their daughters along the right path of society's acceptable cultural norms. Julie's dad was strongly against her participation in rugby until the headteacher at her school convinced the father and explained to the family, the benefits of playing rugby. Julie described the process it took to finally convince her father about sport. She said:

At first even my, my dad didn't want me to play rugby, so he told me am going to kill you before rugby kills you. So, after two weeks coach Dora sent a letter calling me for a curtain-raising game [under 19] national team; so, by then, he didn't want me to travel. But after when my headteacher talked to him that Julie is your daughter, you [my dad] were also once an athlete, and no one stopped you from playing. I also do not want you to stop Julie from playing. He then later accepted.

Families also associated the game with extreme roughness and hostility, and therefore saw the need to protect their daughters from internal and external harm. Leila's mum was worried about her daughter's ability to survive such a sport, hence stopped her from engaging any further:

By the time I joined rugby, my mum never wanted me to play rugby so she used to say that, [every time] I used to go I would come back with injuries, then she told me I don't want you to play that game.

The support structures present a myriad of complexity when it comes to engaging their daughters in sports, particularly a sport that is associated with masculinity in a society that values cultural traditions. However, most of the participants were able to overcome the family hurdles because of the benefits of sports participation provides.

Social Networking

Rugby provides a platform and opportunity for the participants to spend time with other women as well as engage in other activities that are not related to sport. It is an opportunity for participants to expand their social networks in the hopes of getting education opportunities, job connections, or even making local and international friends. The social connections made in the rugby community were important because these women became part of something larger than community within and outside sport context. The prospect of expanding one's social circle and network served as an attraction for women to participate in rugby. The following themes were derived from this category: a) Creating opportunities through sport, b) female athlete role models, and c) socio-economic mobility.

Creating Opportunities Through Sport.

Sport impacts women's views of themselves and society as demonstrated through the examples of Judy and Cindy. **Judy** was born in the central region of Uganda, Cindy was under the care of a family relative who had strong ties to rugby. At the age of 14, she was introduced to tag rugby in secondary school sports activities. Judy participated in track and field athletics at the inter-school and district/ national level. She, however, stopped all track and field activities because she didn't see any future in the sport, and opted for rugby which was a fast-growing sport for both men and women in the country. It was not smooth sailing for her rugby career as her caretaker prohibited her from playing rugby – saying it was a male sport and with a lot of injuries. At one point she had to quit playing sports and lost the academic scholarship that she had attained through sport. That is when the family realized the importance of sport as they [family] could not

financially support her through school. Her dreams of studying tourism and hotel management at university still live on because through rugby, she has been awarded academic sport scholarships from the age of 16 to complete school, and her talent as a rugby player has been recognized by clubs and the national team. Therefore, she hopes that universities will create space for women's rugby because it is through educational institutions that some women's sports have been given a platform and promoted. She emphasized that if it was not rugby, she would be somewhere, helpless. The sport has helped her remain focused on her ultimate goals of education and being one of the best players in the nation. She hopes, to get into university soon and continue to pursue her dreams.

The social and economic imbalance in Uganda often pushes children especially girls to drop out of school, because families generally cannot afford to pay for their education or school fees, therefore seven participants used education as an avenue for, and a driving factor to engage in rugby. The opportunity to get an education was welcomed by some participants whose education chances were uncertain because of constrained family financial challenges. Leila described how the club rugby manager paid part of her school fees, thus enabling her to stay in school:

I was in senior one ... my mum never had the money to pay the school fees so my manager contributed some money then she told me that you get this you go and pay the school fees and you bring the school report then I said it's ok. So those people [rugby community organization] ... started paying my school fees since that time up to today they are still paying my school fees.

The support from the coach was fundamental in securing sports scholarships for women rugby players. Without the support of a coach, Judy says her educational goals and career aspirations would diminish because she would be forced to return to the village. She described how her rugby coach helped keep her dreams alive:

This sport has allowed me to be in school ... [they] are sponsoring my education. I think they started when I was in form five because after form four, I was just at home then-coach Dora said: no, [if] you join senior five, we are going to give a hand by sponsoring. That is how I managed to be in school and finish senior six. if it were not for sports I would be somewhere in the village.

Providing sports scholarships, not only promotes the women's game within the community but also builds trust and a support network among the parents and the sporting community. Given the socio-economic constraints of some families across the country, Judy said her family was no stranger to financial challenges therefore she focused on building her athletic skills with the hope that she would get a sports scholarship and remain in school. She said;

[...]it was because my family couldn't afford to pay my school fees so I said if I play sport, I might get a bursary because for me when I started school it has always been a bursary, I played sports because my family couldn't afford to continue paying for my education. Love school even though I am not very intelligent.

Without the presence of sport, the lives of some participants would have turned out differently. Julie described the importance of sport in her life saying:

This rugby sport has helped me because it has helped me to get school fees in it. It has helped me reach my HSC [High School Certificate] and coach Dora has pushed me, at least somewhere that I didn't expect.

The ability to get financial assistance to continue their education was a turning point for players like Julie and Judy because their families had given up on their educational pursuits. Julie also mentioned that some parents have responded positively to girls' engagement in rugby, as they have seen the educational and social benefits. Similarly, Shilla, an administrator, and sports coach, claimed that part of the recruitment process to engage more women in rugby is to provide opportunities like education to the young women in school. She said:

Rugby scholarships in school will also help the girls to stay in school because right now the only way you can bribe a parent to give you their child is by just telling them, ok, I shall pay half the school fees or pay the full school fees ... at that point, the parent will let the daughter play rugby. They will just tell you, okay pay [school fees] for her, so it will just keep the girls in school.

Rugby is a means to accomplish educational and professional career goals. By keeping the girls in school, they are using this platform to attract young women to the sport, as well as educate parents about the benefits of educating their daughters. Besides getting an education, some participants mentioned career aspirations, as part of their socialization in rugby. The game of rugby continues to grow across Uganda with some players such as Ann enrolling in referee courses, to give her a fallback option once her playing career is done. Ann described how she enrolled in a referee course, to have something to fall back on once her playing days come to a stop:

I did the coaching and referee level one [course]. Anyway, it is not really in my mind to start a career in rugby, so it is just something am thinking about because it comes with commitment.

Within the different career aspirations that rugby offers, Katie – the first international female rugby referee from Uganda never envisioned herself traveling, meeting so many people as well as officiating rugby games in Uganda and Africa. She described her rugby career as being on track and looks forward to being a qualified professional referee at the global level. Katie who officiates games [men and women] across Uganda admitted that:

I did not know that one day [at some point] I would be out there doing a referee's course session because am now one of them, am a referee, am a coach so rugby has really done a lot, yeah, and it is still doing a lot.

Additionally, her commitment to rugby has rewarded her, as she is currently the manager of the Kampala association of rugby referees. Katie works with the Uganda Rugby Union (URU) and encourages more women to enroll in referee and coaching training/courses because it is an important aspect of the game, as it allows for career development: She described how URU administrators “have had many training sessions, yeah, level one. But ahh, most of these girls we recruit, we [Kampala Association of Rugby Referees] really want to take them into refereeing”. Additionally, Dora, Mia, Katie, Julie, and Carol described how rugby has given them so much and continues to provide opportunities for women and girls in sport. For example, Dora talked about her experiences playing rugby and how she transitioned to coaching:

I stopped playing for Uganda in 2014. Yes, that is when I retired from playing for Uganda and I started coaching ahh mmm I had been coaching since about 2005. I

have coached age grade boy's teams, I have coached age grade girl's teams, I have coached adult's men clubs I have coached senior women's clubs, but I started coaching Uganda in 2015, first as an assistant coach, then in 2016 I took over as the head coach

Sports participation should be open to everyone regardless of background, economic status, education, and gender because it allows for leveling of playing field and equal treatment. It creates a platform for personal development and life lessons because it enables one to interact with people from different social backgrounds and personalities. Dora further explained how sport provides valuable life lessons for young female rugby players:

It's just the same thing with sports and in life. You know, yeah and the same way am on the field, the way you are there for your teammates is the same way you should be there for your friends or your workmates in life as well because if you are not, then it's not pulling down your teammate or your workmate you are pulling down the entire team. So those are also valuable lessons learning to work together with other people whether you don't like them or not because everybody has something of value and that's another thing. There is nobody too small and there is nobody too big, everybody has a role to play to drive a team forward and that's the same thing in life.

The majority of the participants in this study stated that rugby has helped them in many ways from networking, meeting new people, and getting job opportunities to getting financial assistance for education. Mia explained that joining rugby is not all about ramming and falling unto each other, but rather opening doors for the players and

building a strong network within the community. She described women's rugby as follows:

[...] a path to change lives, I have seen it, ahh girls from orphanages getting confidence, getting healthier, ahh being able to travel the world because of rugby, I have seen girls from remote areas, from villages, being the first person in their village to step on a plane, being the first person from their district to represent Uganda.

The rugby fraternity, community organizations, and some students work together to support their educational and career aspirations. The women's rugby journeys are diverse with most of the participants describing how they stand to benefit from playing rugby because the community is involved, thus providing opportunities such as jobs, education, and a chance to build on one's network while building a professional career.

Female Athlete Role Models and Mentors.

Role modeling and mentoring are critical elements in athletes' lives. For example, Katie completed her studies at the university and is currently an international rugby referee. She said rugby was an easy decision for her because she comes from a family of athletes and had previously played volleyball and field hockey. She takes pride in rugby as it defined who she is today and uses every opportunity availed to her to give back to the community while promoting the women's game in Uganda and across Africa. Despite having a good relationship with her family regarding her engagement in rugby, it was not always smooth because she often returned home with injuries that upset some members of her family. She eventually retired from active play in 2012 and took on the role of a referee. She dedicated her time to getting all the needed certificates to become an

internationally recognized rugby referee. She has not looked back and uses her platform to encourage young women to play rugby but more specially to take on the referee and coaching roles as a way of expanding one's career in rugby. She is passionate about everything involved in rugby and is humbled by the respect she is accorded by the rugby community on and off the field. She believes that women's rugby has the opportunity to develop and provide needed support for young women rugby players across the country.

Given the growth and positive trajectory of women's rugby in Uganda, recruiting women into the sport, securing financial assistance, and building teams are mostly attributed to the presence of female leadership and sports role models who paved the way for more women to join the sport. The importance of female mentors and role models in the success of women's rugby relies on developing interconnectedness with key groups such as parents, teachers, athletes, and community organizations. The function of mentors and role models within the rugby community cannot be overlooked; Shilla gave an example about one of the most successful women rugby players in Uganda who inspired her. She explained:

A few senior players that I met on the team, let me say ... encouraged me. Let me say like Mia when I had just started playing rugby, I made one tackle, Mia came and told me, Shilla you are team material [skilled athlete] you will play [rugby].

Such encouragement was welcomed by Shilla, who mentioned that she was afraid of the attitude that the senior players would give to new players. Ash had a similar experience: she had the support and guidance from established women rugby players, pointing out that the welcoming environment built her confidence: "by that time, I joined panther she [Mia] encouraged me she said welcome to panther. You feel at ease, you play rugby."

Ash further described how the family-like atmosphere enabled her to adjust well to the sport of rugby.

Some of the participants mentioned how female role models/mentors have a positive influence on player attraction as well as retention, happening because the young women look up to them. Ann further described her admiration for the only female rugby referee in Uganda: her successful journey in rugby and the respect she gets on and off the pitch, which makes many young women look up to her, and possibly get encouraged to join the game/profession. She described how seeing this lady command respect in the men's game gave her so much pride and appreciation:

There is this lady that [I look up to], her name is Katie. So, when she is refereeing am like you know what! I too can make it to where she is and because she introduced me to refereeing and I was like, coach you know what, I also want to be like you so she was like yeah you can be me and you can be better than me.

The presence of role models within the rugby community has attracted and retained young women in the game because of the inspiration they receive from these ladies. For example, Dija proudly talked about the national netball team's achievements and how their success relates to women's rugby:

...when you sit and think and then you see in the news that the girls who play netball for Uganda have done this and that, they have come back and developed our country, you too are encouraged to play a particular sport.

Their resilience and push for women's sports inclusion are not ignored but rather admired by many. For the case of Julie, her inspiration came from former national team player and women's national team coach Dora who works relentlessly to teach rugby at the

grassroots level in different regions of the country and continues to inspire young girls to join rugby. She explained:

I started dreaming like the first time Dora went to Kitgum she played among men, so I told my coach I want to be like this lady and now I am ... it is coach Dora that has really pushed me hard up to where I am.

As a beneficiary of rugby, her ultimate goal was to engage as many young women as possible from the northern region of the country because she believed that they were missing out on all the opportunities that rugby offers. To attract young women into the sport and have access to their free time, Julie quickly developed relationships with parents and guardians of potential rugby players and took on a mentoring role with the community to gain the trust of the families. She explained:

So even like some girls might want to play but the problem might be from home, I go talk to the parents, I cite examples [about] me as a sports lady and [I am] Julie, and [I am] victorious ... so parents started believing in me, they started encouraging their girls to start the sport. [Parents would say] My daughter, you start the sport, you might be like Julie in the future.

Julie's success on and off the field played an important role in inspiring young women as well as convincing some families to give their daughters a chance to explore sport, continue in school and avoid teenage marriages. Participants Dora, Katie, Carol, Faith, Shilla, Ann, and Julie shared the same ideology about expanding the game by using the success of current women rugby players as a source of empowerment and motivation.

Julie's goal is to spread the game across the whole country:

I want women's rugby to be for the whole country not for the central part only, northern, eastern, western ... whole [part] of the country. So, there should not be tribalism in it for women's rugby to be a strong team.

However, absences of mentorship and guidance for Ugandan women in sport were mentioned by long-time rugby players, Dora and Katie. Young athletes look up to senior members of the rugby community, as well as those that have crafted their successful journeys on and off the field. Dora, a national team coach, and women's grassroots rugby activist addressed the role of mentors in the rugby community, explaining it as key to engaging more women in the sport. She pointed out that:

These players end up being role models within the community and what I love is [that] they are not just role models to girls; the funny thing is [that] they are role models to boys as well to their communities ... It does not become a gender thing it is about somebody from a certain community achieving and putting the community on the map, you know. And inspiring both boys and girls in that community. So, ahh, women's rugby is not just a sport, it is a life-changer.

Dora noted that there was a need for women role models and mentorship programs that would nurture, build, and take care of women in sport. These role models have the responsibility of developing and protecting female athletes in a bid to provide a better platform for the future of women's rugby.

Future of Women's Rugby.

The future of rugby lies on the hands of dedicated women to promote the sport. Dora is among the first women to play rugby in Uganda, and she dedicated her life to the development of the women's game across the country. She is from the Eastern region of

the country, completed her master's degree, and is currently a strength and conditioning coach. As a young adult, she was involved in field hockey but later switched to rugby because of family influence. She has traveled the world for school and rugby, played on professional women's rugby teams, eventually retired in 2014, and took on active coaching role at youth level and the women's national team. Katie said rugby is empowering, and the fact that women are involved in the sport is itself a testament to breaking dominant gender norms. She said sport enabled her to express herself, create friendships, and above all give her the platform to create opportunities for young women to excel on the field and in life generally. She is a strong advocate for young women's education and is heavily involved in grassroots rugby development across the country. She is partially responsible for the growth or spike in the number of young women involved in rugby because she passionately and personally travels to schools, communities, and families talking about the advantages of sport and why it is important for families to allow their daughters to play sport. Katie started playing rugby in 2002 and said she cannot imagine her life without rugby because the sport has been a key factor in her life, and it is a path to change livelihoods, and challenge gender norms across the country. She has dedicated her life to the development of the women's game and hopes to advance more female coaches in the sport to boost the participation rates of young women.

Forging the future of women's rugby is an ongoing campaign and a site of resilience for women engaged in the sport. All participants in the study envisioned the future of the women's game as well as seeing the national team, *Lady Cranes* reach a level where they would compete and be recognized as legitimate competitors on the

international scene. Kara, Dora, Julie, Samy, Carol, Mia, and Katie who have all regularly played on the national team, talked about the agency of grassroots rugby development and spreading the game across the country; to create more opportunities of attracting more players as well as building women's club teams. Multiple aspects surrounding the game were discussed as being critical for expanding the women's game; however, Dora discussed the availability of coaches as catalysts for the future of the women's game. She said the game is predominantly coached by men, and therefore convincing women is a big block to the growth of women's rugby. She explained:

You see when, throughout your sports career, you have been coached by men you don't believe that women are able to coach. So, when we see more women coaching, and when girls see more women coaching, then they will also start thinking, I can actually coach but as long as girls are coached primarily by men and all they see is men in coaching roles then we are still going to have that problem of few female coaches. So those are some of the challenges that ahh we are facing.

Women are introduced and taught about the game at a young age at the grassroots level. Therefore, it is vital to create a welcoming atmosphere as well as increase the presence of female coaches with whom athletes can identify. Kara talked about the need to have more female coaches who would easily connect with the young female population, thus attracting them to the game:

We, players, should engage more in coaching skills and training activities because we have fewer [female] coaches in Uganda ... if we have five coaches in Uganda, females only then the future is bright for rugby. I will just say coach Dora because

I always see her, she does some good stuff ... [we need coaches] in the east [and] in the west, [and] in the north. Because rugby is only here in the central and she is trying to push [develop] it.

Expanding the women's game provides a platform for the future of women's rugby, as Ann described the relentless work of coach Dora who is encouraging young women across the country to join rugby. She said:

I would say for coach Dora she is giving it all her best. She is creating teams in deeper areas, deeper sections [countryside] because she has one team in Palek [district] deep in there [villages]. There is one in Kitgum [district], she is creating all those teams so ... Dora has given it a good start. It is a good lookout for the women's team.

The creation of teams across the country provides a glimpse into the future of women's rugby. Engaging the girls in secondary school and at a young age is the foundation for club teams and national team development and sustainability. Katie shared similar views saying: "when these girls are handled well, they will become feeder teams to the various teams, yeah, various clubs and then eventually the national team. Yes, ahh it's, it's really bright [positive future] I should say it is."

The majority of the participants believed that women's rugby is headed in the right direction provided various stakeholders commit to their responsibilities. Mia and Dora confidently said that women in Uganda have natural talents and it is exciting to see them learn and grow in the game. Mia, a lawyer, founding member of women's rugby, and the national team captain explained:

When I think about it, it's just so exciting, there is so much we can achieve. I believe we are among one of the most naturally talented nations in the world, it's just that we lack resources, we lack exposure, and we lack experience, but our talent is way up there ... The talent we have is immense, the girls are so hard working. You know they come from different parts of Uganda, from northern Uganda, from eastern Uganda, they travel crazy distances across the country just to get to training and they don't ask for much, you know and they just tell me coach all I want to do is lay for Uganda, you know.

Similar thoughts were echoed by Dora, who works tirelessly to promote the women's game, especially at the grassroots level across the country. She said:

There is a need to recognize that when they [URU] invest in women's sport you will not get a return overnight it's a long-term investment, but it will reap dividends and benefits in the end... Women rugby has a very bright future. The future is there, but all we need is the support from the union and putting in the time coz the talent is there, not just in Central but there is a lot of talent in the East in the North in the West Nile.

The workload by some participants in the study and various stakeholders [schools, non-profit organizations, private sponsors, and the URU management] is gradually opening more avenues for women's rugby across the country. It is important to note that some girls are inspired by the successful feats of the women's national rugby team while others dream of playing for and representing their country.

Socio-economic Mobility.

The sport of rugby has played a key role in elevating women's social status through availability of educational opportunities. Judy, born in the central region of Uganda, Cindy was under the care of a family relative who had strong ties to rugby. At the age of 14, she was introduced to tag rugby in secondary school sports activities. Judy participated in track and field athletics at the inter-school and district/ national level. She, however, stopped all track and field activities because she didn't see any future in the sport, and opted for rugby which was a fast-growing sport for both men and women in the country. It was not smooth sailing for her rugby career as her caretaker prohibited her from playing rugby – saying it was a male sport and with a lot of injuries. At one point she had to quit playing sports and lost the academic scholarship that she had attained through sport. That is when the family realized the importance of sport as they [family] could not financially support her through school. Her dreams of studying tourism and hotel management at university still live on because through rugby, she has been awarded academic sport scholarships from the age of 16 to complete school, and her talent as a rugby player has been recognized by clubs and the national team. Therefore, she hopes that universities will create space for women's rugby because it is through educational institutions that some women's sports have been given a platform and promoted. She emphasized that if it was not rugby, she would be somewhere, helpless. The sport has helped her remain focused on her ultimate goals of education and being one of the best players in the nation. She hopes, to get into university soon and continue to pursue her dreams.

Participation in sports, particularly the case of women's rugby provided the participants in this study with social and economic mobility opportunities in form of education scholarships, jobs, a healthier lifestyle, expanding social network, avoiding early motherhood, personal growth, and representing Uganda on the *Lady Cranes* team. Engaging women in sports is a long-term approach to empowerment because it provides the space to dismantle existing barriers at multiple levels. Mia, the national team captain associated her involvement with rugby as a place for growth. She described the impact of rugby on her professional and private life:

Rugby has helped me, well basically, personally as a career person it has taught me so much, taught [me] to work hard, taught me a lot of discipline, a lot of balance ahh taught me a lot of integrity, there so many of those core values that you learn in rugby that you can carry towards your life as a career person.

The impact of rugby amongst most participants is evident in their stories of success and what they have been able to achieve. Kara and Shilla talked about job opportunities they got because of being part of the rugby community. Kara explained how a teammate helped her secure a job at a fitness center and also encouraged women to engage in sports because of the vast opportunities within the sports industry. She said:

Every girl should do sports and if you like it, go for it. if it wasn't for sports ... personally, I would not be where I am right now. Because even the job that I currently have, I got it through a friend of mine who played rugby.

The ability to build on the social network through sport has helped the majority of the participants to achieve social and economic accomplishment. The life lessons and discipline attained through rugby played a pivotal role in situating these athletes in

positions to excel. Dora described how some young women have traveled the world and achieved personal growth:

Rugby has helped so many girls get opportunities to go to school, get school fees, and some of them get jobs; so really rugby has been a strong foundation for these young women.

Echoing Dora's thoughts, Julie said rugby changed her life and the lives of many young women from her district. She never imagined that she would be talked about as a female athlete role model or even represent Uganda on the *Lady Cranes* rugby national team:

I experienced a lot of things because you know flying out of the country feeling the plane how it is because like all the way from Kitgum you only see the plane passing by so I [was on a plane] and I also interacted with various people from various countries.

She further talked about her goals in life, to make the best of the rugby experience to pursue her career aspirations using rugby as the foundation. Her career aspirations are beyond just playing rugby but pursuing all possible roles within the sport from coaching to administration. Having achieved her first goal in the sport, Julie talked about how she:

[...] wanted to join the national team after I become a coach and a referee so due to the hard work am doing, am seeing my dream come true and in the future, I want to be a referee, a coach because am now a national team material [player].

Similarly, her career trajectory and life experiences of Judy changed once she became part of the rugby community. She learned the importance of discipline, teamwork, personal growth and managed to redirect the path of her future using sport:

Currently, I see my career in rugby because if it were not rugby maybe I would now be a mother, or I do not even know what I would be doing. so, I see [that] I should play rugby because I see my future bright here in rugby.

Besides defining the career paths and providing opportunities for the participants in this study, Leila, a student, also confirmed the monetary ambitions and social status that young women hope to attain due to their engagement in rugby. She described how “some of them [players] are looking for money because they hear different people make money out of the game and [take home] medals for fame so that they can be looked at as celebrities.”

Ascending the social ladder in the community as well as showcasing her athletic skills, Dija hopes to play for the national team and fly to different countries. Additionally, some of the young players’ dream of representing the country and making professional careers out of rugby like their female counterparts around the world remains promising. Shilla is determined to earn from her athletic talent, she hopes to get the right exposure and representation to make financial gains like any other professional rugby player. She acknowledged that “it is fun, I want to, [it is] my goal for now, like I really, I really want to play professional rugby. That is my thing lately, I really want to earn from my energy, my talent, yeah”. Like so many athletes, the participants in this study hoped to make social and economic gains from their sweat and dedication to the sport. The women rugby players are hopeful and believed that the sport has the potential to grow and that the women stand a chance of benefiting, both socially and economically, just by engaging in a popular sport.

Gender Identity Formation

Sport plays an important role in re-negotiating gender roles and expectations. The identity of women in Uganda is expressed through multiple platforms such as politics, cultural traditions, religion, education, and the social phenomena of sport. Addressing the concerns surrounding gender equity and identity in sport goes beyond providing sporting equipment, seeing an increase in women's sports participation, and highlighting the achievements of successful female athletes. The ability to provide safe spaces and avenues for female athletes to redefine their identity through sport while re-negotiating dominant cultural values and norms is significantly vital for female participation and identity formation. Female rugby players must constantly renegotiate their identities to fit within the socially acceptable norms and cultural traditions that define the actions, roles, and behavior of women within a patriarchal society while embracing their new identity as an athlete. It is important to note that in a conventional society like Uganda, women are socialized to behave in strictly feminine ways that honor cultural norms regardless of their socio-economic status.

Rugby Socialization

Family members and friends help socialize women into the sport of rugby. The case of Dija epitomizes this. Dija was born in a neighboring country but moved back to Uganda and was raised by her grandmother. Despite heavy financial constraints, she completed primary school and runs her own business. She could not further her education, therefore stayed home to help her grandmother with daily chores and that is when she met her current husband. She has 4 children and has been married for 9 years. She heard about the sport of rugby through her extended family and friends, because they

often talked about practice sessions and games. She eventually picked up an interest in what her female friends were doing and wanted to learn more about the sport. She said as a married woman, Dija discussed it with her husband who was supportive of her decision to take on something new in her life, saying he could not stop her from exploring her athletic abilities. She quickly advanced in the game and at one point was training with the women's national team, a sign that her decision to try the sport was the right choice. She loves every moment because her friendship circle expanded, her family has been welcomed and above all, her ability to network and secure a job increased because the rugby community welcomes people from all walks of life. She is an advocate for young women to join rugby regardless of whether they are mothers or not because it enables them to stay relevant in the community. She also believes sport is a place that teaches young people values of respect and discipline, therefore making rugby an ideal platform for family and community engagement.

The rugby sport platform provides an outlet for all the participants of this study to redefine their identity on and off the field, as well as to contribute to personal growth because the sport allows them to discover themselves as they navigate boundaries surrounding a male-dominated sport. Dora who has been involved in a power / masculine sport for over 20 years, said that rugby contributed to her sense of identity and rediscovering who she was. She explained:

I would be lying if I didn't say sport defines me, it does. It defined me since I was a kid and even now. Without sports I wouldn't be [me], you know. I had been asked quite several times what would you do if you weren't playing sport? And

am like wow, I find it so hard to imagine a life without sports, and then since I took up rugby in 2002, I can't imagine a life without rugby.

A sense of belonging is what Dora described when she talked about playing sport.

Similarly, it has also given Judy, Faith, Carol, Olive, and Ann a great deal of competence and self-belief across different aspects of their lives. Judy talked about how rugby has kept her grounded and disciplined:

Sports have helped me a lot. One thing like, it is not that I am just there and idle, I always go to the field for rugby, sport has helped me to avoid peer groups and unnecessary outings. Rugby has helped me to be disciplined and avoid things like nightclubs. I usually leave the pitch after training, and I go home directly.

The demands of the sport, the push to excel, and the drive to showcase athletic abilities preoccupy these young women's minds, thus allowing them to engage in socially beneficial activities. Olive also talked about how rugby has helped her navigate some cultural norms that tend to hold back young women from advancing in education as well as exploring their athletic abilities. She described the situation of early motherhood / teenage pregnancies in her district, and how the socio-cultural demands push girls into marriages at a very young age. She stated:

Rugby helped me because I see there are many child mothers, especially in [my district]. So, rugby kept me busy until now so I still need more from Rugby and rugby still needs more from me ... it kept me busy up to this time because I see most of the girls are now mothers and am not a mother.

Teenage pregnancies and early marriages are prevalent across various communities around the country because families cannot afford to educate the girls, limited options for

work-related opportunities as well is a stigma surrounding the role of women in society. Questioning whether they were noteworthy to advance in education and career opportunities that are available to male counterparts. Four participants described how their families pressured them to get married and forget about education because the families were counting on financial and material benefits associated with marrying off their daughters.

Similarly, Faith talked about the pressures of being married off and being a mother at a young age because parents cannot afford to sustain families financially. She described how a friend got trapped in that cycle and lost her self-worth, pushing her to drop out of secondary school: “my closest friend, when she got pregnant huh everything was ruined because she ended up in senior four [junior high school]”. Carol was determined to challenge her family, and not fall victim to the cultural demands of marriage like some of her classmates. She also had the belief that if girls are involved in sport, it keeps them busy and cuts them off from other activities such as bad groups and becoming a mother so young. Uganda tends to have a high rate of teenage pregnancies and young mothers. Subsequently, some of the participants in this study talked about how rugby steered their lives from peer pressure, hanging out with the wrong crowds, and becoming mothers at an early age. Chris and Leila, both students in secondary school talked about their engagement with rugby and how it helped them avoid bad groups during after-school hours. Chris explained:

Sports, sports keep me from other things that can make my life in danger. Like if am in sports, I will never think of doing drugs, if am in sports I will never spend my time in these peer groups, I will always be there thinking of my sports, what

am I going to do today ... I should always get prepared for my training and I should be looking forward to excelling in my games which are coming.

The physical demands of the sport guide some participants to navigate life demands on and off the rugby field. Liberation of body and mind are some of the key benefits that participants talked about. Engagement in physical sport enabled some participants to feel both physically and psychologically empowered. For example, Faith was shy and had low self-esteem before she joined rugby. She said the game forces one to talk and to be intentional about actions and habits, thus prompting her to grow in self-confidence and belief: "It has made me confident when am talking to people, when am speaking to anyone, I speak with a lot of confidence, I tell them what I want, and I tell them what I don't want".

The sport offers multiple platforms for the participants to rediscover who they are as well as build confidence, personality, and strength throughout their daily activities on and off the rugby pitch. Sam who has played rugby for over 10 years credits the sport for boosting her confidence levels and social skills. She explained the benefits of rugby saying:

I will give credit to rugby for the social being it has made me, for the travel it has given me, and for the confidence. As well as the belief that you know, a rough game or a game believed to be rough is actually not a rough but a confidence-giving game to women.

Rugby is the main occupant of the participants' social time, Dija described how the time she spends training and playing rugby has helped her avoid bad groups:

It has helped me a lot now instead of having wasted your time you go and sit with people you might find that where you go and sit you might get problems ... when someone is going to play sports as I told you [it is] to avoid many problems, avoid bad groups, stress.

Likewise, Faith who is a student has benefited from rugby because she has managed to keep her focus on her studies and personal growth with fewer distractions and limited time to engage in socially unacceptable activities. Participating in a nationwide popular sport such as rugby is empowering, as some participants experienced social empowerment and confidence in everything that they did, on and off the field. Faith talked about representing *Lady Cranes* in Tunisia and how that experience changed her outlook on life and immediately decided that she wanted to achieve more with and from the sport. She described her journey of playing for Uganda saying:

I was selected to go to represent Uganda in Tunisia, I started feeling proud. So, when I went back home for my granny to pray [for] me, blessed me, I was very very proud because that was in my dream, I told them I also want to be watched on a tv like other girls, like other women who play and my dreams come true.

Whereas Carol's success on the field earned her respect from her family members and community after she was recognized nationally as one of the best female rugby players in the country. She won the award of national best female rugby player of the year, shedding light on her achievements through sport and indicating what other young women in her community could achieve if afforded the chance to engage in sport. She described the reactions of her family:

So, when they saw me on the national team, [...] sometimes they see me on the tv so they are so supportive and in 2016 when I won when I was the best woman player of the year in 2016 [and] I went for USPA awards [Uganda Sports Press Association Awards] they were so happy because they watched on UBC [Uganda Broadcasting Television]. So now they support me every time that I go out to play rugby.

The achievements of Carol on and off the field prompted a major shift in how some families think about their teenage daughters, especially those in the rural parts of the country. Despite encountering some resistance from family and society at large, the participants of this study (female rugby players) are determined to establish themselves as a socially acceptable group of women, as the sport of rugby continues to define who they are and change the narrative of women's sports in Uganda.

Re-imagining Identity.

The sport of rugby allowed women to form new identities. For example, Kara an avid athlete, found herself looking for a sport to join after she had completed her studies at the university. She was unemployed and needed something to preoccupy her time and feel good about herself at the end of the day. She thought of re-joining her childhood sport soccer, but she was not prepared to do so much running, and then she used Facebook to see which sports for women were active and likely to welcome her. She found the Uganda women's rugby page very active and immediately picked interest because she was confident that the sport welcomed athletes regardless of body shape and size, there was no room for body shaming in the sport of rugby. She further described how not participating in sports post-secondary school put her out of physical shape and

had become body cautious. However, despite her body image concerns she researched and saw that women's rugby welcomed all women as long as they were willing to learn the sport. She immediately contacted the national team coach who encouraged her to come out and try, as well as dismiss any thoughts of Kara being too old to learn a new sport. Since joining rugby in 2017, she has never looked back and further adds that rugby has built her confidence, she loves the noise before and after games, the friendships developed, and above all her goal is to become a professional rugby player.

During this study, the rugby players highlighted how participating in the sport while navigating social boundaries challenged them to constantly adjust to their changing identities and roles within their communities. Engaging in a masculine sport encompasses re-identifying oneself with a new identity internally as well as externally within the wider social context. Women rugby players need to understand who they are and what they stand for within their communities. During the interview with Shilla, she talked about self-acceptance and how the choices she has made in life have given her a strong foundation to engage in a sport like rugby. She talked about self-worth and "the most important thing that worked for me, you just have to make a choice. Accept who you are. You make a choice, you know what you want, you weigh options". Understanding one's motivations for participating in masculine sport plays an important role in self-discovery coupled with identity formation. Kara mentioned how the sport is pivotal to her identity formation and how she relates on and off the field because of the confidence she feels. Describing her feelings about the sport she said that "the identity it has given me is respect for people and also self-confidence, I believe that I can do something, if I can

play rugby that others find difficult, then I can handle a lot more”. Rugby has provided a platform for self-expression and self-discovery for so many young women.

Some of the participants talked about their struggles with self-identity while exploring new sets of values and beliefs due to their commitment to rugby. Despite struggling to fit in the cultural oriented society of Uganda, Samy talked about the importance of allowing girls to discover themselves and who they are particularly on the field. She said:

Sport helps bridge those gaps and you ensure that you are not falling off the track yeah. And then again for women, sport is empowering, you know, many people have told me you can't play rugby you are a woman and am like, but I am a woman and I am playing rugby.

Participating in a historically male-dominated sport pushes female rugby players to challenge the hegemonic structures of the sport and societal margins. Olive called for an end to the gender identity negotiations and belonging in Rugby. She proudly described how “rugby is not a man's sport”, and that women should be awarded equal opportunity to participate. She further called out all females regardless of age, size, and temperament, to engage in sport because it is a diverse platform that incorporates everyone. However, it should be noted that some participants in this study often associated rugby with masculinity, forcing some players to struggle to find their identity as women on and off the pitch.

Participants like Leila, Judy, Olive, Julie, Faith, and Carol struggled to overcome the masculine connotations associated with the game given that they were young women trying to find the right balance within a strong contemporary dominant gender norms

embedded in Ugandan communities. For example, Carol a recent high school graduate described how she had to block out community opinions about her and her choice of sport. She explained her predicament saying:

Instead of listening to the community and whatever they have to say about the game. I have shown them what I have benefited from the game to show them that this game can be played by everyone and not just men.

Navigating the stereotypes surrounding sports in Uganda has not only built resilience within these female rugby players but has also strengthened their belief in shattering the negative undertones of women engaging in sport. For example, coming from a small town in Northern Uganda, where the men have controlled and enjoyed the lion's share of co-curricular activities, Julie challenged her family and community members to accept young women's engagement in physical activities. She described her stance and discussions with some community members where she told them that "there is women's emancipation: what a man can do a woman can also do it. so, I believe that if a man can play rugby, I can also play rugby".

Using rugby to define her place in society and stand up for other young girls in the community highlighted the importance of sport and its contribution to formation of strong character and identity. Mia further talked about how the female players have been socialized to fit within socially acceptable boundaries. She explained:

The perception that rugby is not a sport for women and so ahhh u get men telling us that there is something wrong with us, that we are weird, that we want to be men, or they would say we are lesbians cause why would you want to play rugby you know.

The broader concept of women playing rugby is yet to be entirely embraced within the confines of Uganda's hegemonic society. Additionally, Teri who lives in the central region of Uganda echoed similar thoughts about gender formation and identity through the lens of sport, in saying that: "she can play rugby and still be a woman". Dora explained how the female players were viewed as outliers and rebellious for participating in a male-dominated sport thus denting the generalized identity of female rugby players. She described how some people in the community view rugby:

It's a game for tom-boys or women who think they are men or for lesbians. So, it was so hard to drive the game when there [have] all these negative connotations [of] being attached to it, and so we would lose players for reasons such as these.

Yeah, so those are some of the things that made it difficult.

The feminine identity of rugby players was constantly challenged because societal values and beliefs do not align with women's engagement in masculine sports. However, despite the mounting resistance from society and family members, players such as Ann, Dora, and Teri are determined to fight the stigma surrounding women's rugby in Uganda. For example, Ann talked about her attitude towards members of the community that viewed her participation in rugby as un-ladylike. She described her multiple roles on and off the pitch:

People do not have to look at it like, you know that it is a man's game, and it has to be done by man. Because sometimes when am moving out people are like she does a man's game and sometimes she is aggressive. I always tend to tell them when you approach me it depends on the way somebody approaches you. Am soft on the outside even on the inside but when am on the pitch there I mean business

so if you see me being aggressive on the pitch it means that am aiming for something and am aiming for a win.

She goes on to say that in the world today, women have gained more visibility and have proven to be capable of accomplishing multiple tasks. Therefore, if one decides to lean on populist opinions about identity and gender roles then one will never find success, as through African feminism, women are seen as active agents of social change. Despite experiencing biased community perceptions, the female players have embraced the sport and continue to show determination to break gender barriers both on and off the field.

Rugby is Empowering.

Sport empowers women and through the sport of rugby, this has been quite remarkable in generating feelings of hope and creation of a superb life trajectory. For example, Shilla having been an athlete in track and field, Shilla decided to try out a new sport that involved a group or team setting, she tried soccer but quit after about 1 year and then eventually found rugby in 2013 and fell in love with the sport. Shilla has also represented Uganda at Regional Youth Games where she medaled in short put. She got an academic scholarship at a university as a student-athlete. Shilla has always had the backing of her family when it came to sport activities, and she started her active journey in sports when she was nine years old. Currently, she is a sports coach and works with underprivileged children where she offers guidance and counseling. Her involvement in rugby has given her a revitalized path in life and motivated her to advance her education. Hence she hopes to return to school and advance her academic career. She hopes to acquire the knowledge and skills to better serve children with disabilities, and in underserved communities while fulfilling her dreams of using sports as a means to put

smiles on faces while bringing people together. Shilla attributes her successful journey in education and sport to her family, especially her mother who has been supportive and a pillar to lean on. She hopes to grow the women's game by coaching young girls and telling them about the sport – but first, she hopes to get Rugby coaching certificates to keep growing the game.

Participating in predominantly male sport is an opportunity for female rugby players in Uganda to forge their own ideal identities while challenging the cultural and hegemonic undertones around the sport. Participants in this study described how engaging in power sports such as rugby empowered them to navigate societal boundaries. Transformation of the mind and body through engaging in rugby (sport) has played a key role in their resilience to engage in the sport. Four participants have played rugby for more than 15 years and have described the journey as rough but their belief and determination to expand the game kept them fighting for the future of women's rugby in Uganda. Mia who is a pioneer of women's rugby in Uganda said the rejection they met during the introductory stages of the game to young women was enormous. However, she said persistence and hard work changed the minds of the predominantly male rugby community in Uganda. Acceptance into the rugby community enabled the participants to express themselves, learn how to interact with other people from different cultures and backgrounds, as well as apply the discipline one learns on the field to one's daily life.

All participants in this study described an increase in confidence from engaging in rugby both on and off the field. They all talked about the new feelings and changes in their lives outside of the rugby field due to the physical and sociological aspects of the

game. Sam who has played rugby for over 10 years described how valuable the sport is to her general well-being:

Am more fit, am more confident, I feel it is a sport that has given me confidence both physically and mentally because when or if you are to play rugby one of the things you need is your mental and physical confidence. So, I cannot complain also it has given us, me personally, a chance to travel to so many countries, see many cultures, meet so many people, [and] socially it is a game where I have met more people than any other game.

Learning new skills, acquiring new knowledge, and transforming her body changed her mindset of Ann. She described how playing rugby inspired her belief and gave her a feel-good factor: “way back I would just put my head down like do not indulge myself but right now I can speak with facts because I am confident because of rugby”. Discovering new skills empowered participants and provided a platform for participants to uplift themselves and find new purpose in life. For example, Faith described how her levels of self-belief have increased since embracing rugby:

So, rugby as a sport helped me to be a leader because at [earlier times]... I even feared talking before five people I cannot open my mouth and talk, but nowadays am strong, I can talk even when a thousand people are there [present], I can talk. So, it has helped me to be a good leader

Most of the young players shared similar views of low self-esteem and often lived in the shadows of friends and family. For example, Judy did not believe in herself and measured herself up to the people around her. However, after embracing the sport of rugby, her self-belief steadily developed and learned to make personal decisions that eventually

define her life today. She stated that “you learn how to personally decide for yourself or make personal decisions”. Playing rugby is a form of education for some participants because they get to learn about multiple aspects of life and ways to grow the sport among women whilst remaining disciplined. Kara attributes changes in her lifestyle to rugby. Before joining the sport, she felt like she did not belong, thus the courage to fight for what she believes was nonexistent. She explained that:

[...] for me sports, like from the time I started playing rugby, like my confidence and the way I look at things have changed from way back. Not long ago, I had low self-esteem generally simply because maybe, I am a girl or something, but ever since I started rugby, I know I can do anything and even my work.

Confidence and self-belief are key factors for young women to overcome socio-structural barriers that challenge their very existence within masculine sports. Addressing aspects of personal growth, some of the participants talked about transferring skills acquired in the field into real-life experiences. Julie talked about her burst of confidence and how community members in her hometown respect her for her involvement in a masculine sport. Coming from a small town in Northwest Uganda, opportunities for women and girls’ engagement in curricular activities such as sports are limited. She described how rugby changed the stance on young women’s involvement in sport within the town:

When I was training with the national team last year [and] they selected me to go to Botswana, most of the people in our community were like this game is helping ... if a girl like this one can also get out of the country, so we shouldn’t keep most of our girls at home.

Describing the changes within her community to accept more women to participate in sport, Julie felt the pride of representing as well as changing the life trajectory of girls. Rugby allowed the participants of this study to challenge the status quo of gender inequality in sport and provided a platform to explore life opportunities that were previously closed to them. As a coach for young boys and girls, Shilla explained how rugby has given her mental strength and pushed her to inspire secondary school students to embrace all different forms of sports. She further explained the importance of rugby to her well-being, indicating that:

I know I can do anything ... rugby, it has encouraged me to keep fighting in life like to keep fighting and hoping for the best every time. Like you have to, you need to have that positive mentality in everything that you do. It keeps me positive about everything.

In hindsight of encouraging women to join sporting activities, all participants agreed that rugby has not only empowered them but pushed them to question societal ideals. Veteran player Dora described her resilience to silence the critics of women's rugby saying not every woman has to fit within defined societal roles. She explained:

So, for me playing rugby which is considered like a predominantly male sport it's like ahhh I am doing it because I love it and if people happen to think am crazy for doing it am like yeah I don't try to fit within society's roles. I will do what makes me happy and I will try and get other people to do what makes them happy.

Embracing a masculine sport like rugby sends a message; it rejects the dominant cultural notions that women are weak, and that they cannot achieve the same success as men

within the same area of expertise. Rugby enabled the participants to move beyond societal gender boundaries and roles, hence creating their ideal description of a woman. For example, before joining the sport, Katie mentioned shying away from the public eye and not being able to exploit opportunities for herself. But once she found her footing in rugby, she never looked back. Katie described her journey from a player to an international rugby referee, saying the sport empowered her to be somebody she never dreamt she would be. As the first female referee of Uganda, she never expected to have a warm welcome in the male-dominated field. She said her presence among the men and the referee commission is a strong testament to the progress of women's rugby in Uganda. Katie talked about her interaction with male colleagues who had never worked with any woman on the referee committee:

I would say ahhh the respect I have gotten from the people is massive. People respect me. If I say something, they will listen [to me] right now am in our Kampala association of rugby referees and I am the referees' manager.

She has taken on mentorship roles to empower and encourage young women to join the profession. Over the years, she has trained young women to become referees that could work at all levels of the game within the country. She gave an example of a group of young women who became her responsibility until they achieved the referee badges. She explained: "I was entrusted with ... four referees that I pushed, and they completed their level 2 referee course successfully." She further explained that some women were more inclined to join the referees' profession as an alternative to playing. Ten out of the 17 participants said that the rugby community was welcoming and encouraged them to get involved in all aspects of the sport.

In the case of Kara, rugby opened career opportunities off the field and attributed her success as a strength and conditioning coach to principles learned on the rugby field. She said: “right now like I can do anything I know I have that mentality; I can do this ... if I put my mind to it, I can do it”. Some of the participants talked about how rugby provided the space to tackle beliefs about who they are and what they can achieve.

Further, the importance of uplifting girls to join curricular activities is critical to families and communities as Dora explained saying that “when we don’t involve women in sports, we are never going to go anywhere”. She said women are key players in nurturing, and that in reality, kids at a young age are shaped by their mother’s interests, experiences, and decision-making. It is important to note that rugby has psychologically empowered the participants and allowed them to experience the thrills surrounding the sport. The bodies and mindsets of participants undergo substantial transformation because of the strength and endurance workouts. All the participants in the study described how proud they were being part of a small minority of women who are willing to play rugby. Carol talked about her ability to stand up, and defend herself because of her association with a masculine sport:

When I joined rugby, [...] I started being confident in myself, I started trusting who I am. When someone comes to me, I don’t say a small no, a big no and I mean it. so, it has made most guys these days in the community fear me, and am proud of it when a man fears a lady like me. That’s the good thing.

Additionally, the physical demands of the sport pushed some of the participants to reject the position of being weak. Eight of the younger participants were excited about the boost of strength and feelings of being dominant because of the characterization of the sport.

Leila talked about the inner joy and gratification she gets from the game: “Happiness, strength? There is something you feel every time you dress up and go to the field there is something you feel and the mere fact that it is a man’s sport”. The physical strength that Judy has received through participating in rugby has uplifted her to reject her feminine body as weak. She further talked about how the game has guided her decision-making and boosted her confidence as well as ability to be who she wants to be. She said, “I feel fine, I feel strong, and I am respected. They say that girls do not play rugby, it is a male sport. She is strong-hearted to play such a game”. Through the development of physical strength associated with the game, Mia, Judy and Sam harness the mental strength that provides the confidence to pursue other positive experiences outside of the sport.

Women’s engagement in Uganda rugby signaled a shift within the cultural norms as Ugandan women were habitually not engaged in power sports.

Women’s Rugby Resilience

Leaders occupy a critical juncture in society and serve as instruments of change in social institutions such as sports organizations (Goslin and Kluka, 2014). Therefore, the leadership within Uganda Rugby Union (URU) is responsible for providing structure and support to women’s rugby in Uganda. It should be noted that sport is a gendered institution and that all aspects operate within a hegemonic masculine norm, thus creating less opportunity and imbalances for women within the sport. The participants in this study talked about how the organizational culture at URU is constructed to favor men and make women in the sport only secondary subordinates, making male activities central to the administration’s goals. Leadership structures and roles within sports institutions play a critical part in redefining women’s sports.

The Invisibility of Women's Rugby

Structures in society disfavor women's sport making rugby invisible, yet women have fought to change this narrative through superlative sport performances. Carol was born in a family of four children, Carol lives with her mum and she is originally from the Southwestern region of the country. Her athletic career started with her involvement in track and field at a young age, and she participated in other sports activities like netball, volleyball, and soccer because she had the aptitude for sport. Carol was introduced to rugby at her school when a group of rugby coaches visited and were on a mission to teach the sport to the young woman in the school. She immediately picked interest in the sport and went on to be a rising star of women's rugby in Uganda. She said her mum and family were always supportive of her decisions despite not clearly understanding what she did or the nature of the sport. Not until she won the best female player of the year award – she was featured on national television, and her family picked more interest in what she was doing and further encouraged her to keep playing the game, representing the family and the country in the best way possible. Carol said her achievement in the sport propelled her to stardom and eventually became a driving force for her friends and some young women in her community to join the sport despite the invisibility of women's sports regardless of achievements on the field. Carol is enrolled in university and hopes to complete her studies in accounting and business management.

African society has been slow to embrace women's and girls' participation in sports at all levels during the postcolonial era. Cultural norms, social responsibilities, and religious practices contribute to disempowering women and girls within this sector. Female rugby players were undervalued because they did not fit within the societally

acceptable norms that categorized rugby as a male sport. For the case of women's rugby in Uganda, Samy described the socio-cultural landscape of women's sport providing full recognition and participation are:

[...] still, pretty hard, this is basically hard because of the cultural dynamics in our country. You know, we are still in a cultural context that believes women should not be involved in sports, women should not be involved in rough games, and women should not be very active in anything. You know, women are supposed to be home and keeping their houses and probably their husbands or boyfriends. But honestly, the cultural background has a big role to play in this.

However, she goes on to say that women's involvement in rugby provides a platform for empowerment to overcome historical, socio-economic, and structural barriers. Rugby empowers women and gives them agency to challenge gender norms as well as social customs that define their daily lived experiences. Participants in this study are active agents negotiating power and gender relations in predominantly masculine sports culture. Optimistic about their journey with rugby, the women continue to show up for training sessions, learn and play rugby, occurring in a vastly gendered space. Additionally, the women constantly meet resistance from male rugby players, fans, family, and the community within these sports spaces. Senior members of the women rugby family Mia, Samy, Dora, and Katie talked about the struggles and challenges they have undergone in their push to make the women's game gain traction and visibility. To address women's ongoing struggles and invisibility, Samy suggested the creation of an all-women player's union that would advance women's rugby in Uganda.

I think to make changes, women should come together, form unions, you know women unions which support talent, of course, it should not be a feminine union but [a space] where women can have voices. You know, a union that will give clubs and women a stronger voice to advocate for their needs, their development, their accomplishments, and progress. So, I believe unions are the way to go. Unions will basically support women 's rugby talent in sports.

She was also optimistic about the gradual approach to the transformation of the male-dominant rugby culture. Having a strong administrative voice and presence gives women the agency to negotiate belonging and power relations. Samy's push to form a female players organization stems from the lack of support from the union and its leadership because the women's game and players are never at the forefront of the rugby union's plans. Therefore, creating a group that advocates for the women's game is critical to development and progress. Similarly, Dora justified the importance of providing opportunities for young women to advance in the sport. She suggested; "So, the more we get women into sports the more we will see the sport being taken more seriously in Uganda". She also talked about the need to allow women rugby players to lay a solid foundation at the grassroots level and within the Ugandan sports scene because "female rugby is new in Uganda but will eventually gain traction". The invisibility and limited opportunities given to women's rugby is an issue that all participants talked about.

It should be noted that despite the efforts and time devoted to the game, they were treated like they did not belong within the Uganda rugby community. Ann talked about her disappointment with leadership and the rugby community generally; She urged them to "always look on to both sides [women and men] and more especially let them give that

chance to the ladies”. Similarly, Chris talked about equality and called on the rugby union to rethink its policies toward women in the sport. She said:

I just think we are the same. We ladies and men are all the same ... I think they [URU] should also be looking at us as they look at men ... we ladies, can also raise the [Uganda] flag high and we can do it better than men.

Despite enduring negative responses from their communities, the rugby players get support from their teammates, friends, and coaches, who constantly push them to become ambassadors of the game both on and off the field. Addressing the determination of the women rugby players in Uganda, Dora, Mia, kara, Shilla, Katie, and Carol was very critical of the administration and its handling of the women’s game, the national team, and female player development. The administration has shown no interest in uplifting the women to national recognition, thus leading Carol to caution the rugby union:

They should not discriminate against us they should support us ... I know we the players are willing to play the game because of the love we have for it. They should support us [and] they should not let us down.

She further goes on to say that:

It is only about the effort they should put in for the women and also [since] we even play without their [URU] effort, and we bring good results. If they put in that effort, I think women’s sports will be brighter because I see women in other nations are recognized and successful.

Through the lens of the participants, there is no value attached to the women’s game despite the efforts of numerous female players that have given their sweat and blood to ensure the existence of women’s rugby in Uganda has a rock-solid foundation. Instead of

helping women's rugby gain visibility, the URU does not show any effort in trying to raise the women's game on and off the field. Speaking with disdain, Kara explained that the women are heavily involved in promoting themselves as well as looking for potential sponsors with or without the efforts of URU. She further explains that "we go out and speak [seek sponsors] for ourselves instead of them also helping us to do that". Carol also talked about the limited support from within the rugby community and how the national team is not appreciated or given any respect despite its success at the continental level. She explained:

I have realized that we play but people don't appreciate it. However much you give in 100% people do not appreciate ... giving an example we went to Botswana we played we reached the finals. Some of the people were happy but when we came back others were like it's because South Africa was not there that is why you were able to reach the finals but if South Africa was there [Uganda] would not reach the finals.

The quotation above was interpreted as an unwelcome gesture to the rugby scene of Uganda. For the women rugby players in Uganda, engaging in this sport is an act of defiance. Therefore, understanding agency and how they can use their voice to grow the game calls for activism and increased involvement in the sport at all levels; take on the responsibility of pursuing social change by becoming active agents of the rugby women's cause. Ann encouraged female rugby players to:

Stand up for themselves professionally; you know, they should stop lagging, you know, [in] the men's shadows. As I said earlier, I am happy about the strong women like Katie and Dora, who have gone into leadership positions because coaching

positions are not only for men but for women as well. I think professionally women should be more assertive for themselves, and they should stop letting each other down, you know; emotionally women should support themselves on and off the pitch.

The women rugby players coming together to support each other plays a critical role in the advancement of the game across the country. Engaging in sport for some young women goes beyond the boundaries of the sport because it empowers them to pursue educational, economic, and social goals that they wouldn't have had access to if it was not for the exposure they receive through rugby. Shilla and Dora talked about their projects that involved going to different parts of the country and teaching young women the sport while encouraging them to remain in school. For some upcountry regions, the stigma surrounding girls' engagement in sport was challenged and broken once the women showcased their abilities and talent on the field. Shilla described the role of rugby for many women by stating that:

Rugby is a tackling life, we are trying to bring up girls from upcountry [countryside], yeah, and am sure like before you know it there are a lot of women's teams in rugby, women's rugby teams in Uganda.

The key to fronting the women's game is constantly engaging rugby stakeholders in Uganda to give the women a much-needed platform. All the participants voiced their concern about negligence on the part of the rugby union when it came to women's game as compared to the incomparable attention given to their male counterparts. Olive talked about the enormous talent out there but limited opportunities are availed to them. She said:

I know women have talent but the one problem is the support. The support from people, however much the women may go out and do their best, right, coming back they won't be that recognized as the men ... They should support us like the way they support the men. Yeah, and I know we shall make it once the support is there for us we shall do whatever they [men] do but once it is not there they also let us down.

In addition to Olive's argument, Dora described how women are not given the space or opportunity to grow, they are devalued in daily activities within the rugby community:

Sometimes just like having pitch space to train on, we would sort of be pushed aside and so, or just have a small square so and then when it came to our matches, our matches would be like at twelve-thirty where it is really really hot and where nobody is watching and so we wouldn't really have that many fans and so it was a challenge, even trying to get the game visible to get publicity.

The presence of female rugby players disrupts the gendered identity culture of rugby in Uganda because it pushes for reform and recognition of women's agency at all levels of the sport. Ann also talked about the importance of the national team as a foundation for the grassroots development of the game. She said this about the national team: "the national team has an impact on people, young girls out there are like you know, one day I will also [proudly] play for my country". Dora further explains the importance of the national team and how developing players becomes a complex issue if they are never allowed to compete at the national and continental levels despite their success. With the potential to become one of Africa's leading women's teams, the women are not given the benefit of doubt or respected as equals within the rugby community. As a coach and

advocate for young girls in rugby, Dora described the hurdles that women's rugby needs to overcome from the grassroots level (acceptance) to the national team (recognition].

With limited opportunities and minimal priority given to women's game, organizing and getting competitive matches for *She Cranes* are not prioritized. She explained:

Getting national team games, [our women's team] to play in Uganda was a challenge. So, you don't develop as a player or as a team. Training and training without competitive games is demotivating because you want to test yourself against other people and teams.

Despite the push by women rugby players and their supporters, the level of disrespect is extremely high coming from some senior members of rugby management. Despite achieving success at the continental level, the women rugby players often talk about the lack of care and negligible attention they (women rugby) receive from the URU and the media. Mia explained the repercussions of denying women vast opportunities that could be availed to them in the sport, saying that:

It was hard to get people to believe that women actually played rugby in Uganda and it would even be difficult to convince sponsors that it's worth their while [time and money] to sponsor women's rugby.

Samy believes that women rugby players in Uganda are the future face of rugby because of their work ethic and untapped talent. With similar thoughts, Mia argued that women need to be given the platform to showcase their abilities and athleticism, particularly in a male-dominated sport. She described the untapped talent pool that is the future of sport in Uganda:

I think women can actually change the sport in a very big way, ahhh, because the talent is there, and we can compete, women are good competitors, and they can do so much for Uganda's sport. The Ugandan sports female people I believe are more talented and can take Uganda sports far compared to what the men actually do, or if both are supported equally then it will be good for Uganda sports.

The ongoing negotiations about the place of women's rugby challenge the power structures, the relationship between the female players and administration, and how URU redistributes resources. Participants strongly argued that they were far more talented than their male counterparts and therefore sounded off the need for URU to invest in women's rugby. Participants also pushed further for URU's objectives and plan to include a platform that is responsible for the development of the women's game.

Access to Resources.

The growth and development of a sporting entity can be linked to the financial backing of the team. The participants of this study discussed how the URU minimally provided some financial support to advance the women's game. Given the multiple challenges they face, the women rugby players felt undone by the limited financial support accorded to them. Women's sport in Uganda struggles to get enough financial support from government and corporations, in light of female athletic achievements at all levels of sporting competitions. The efforts of their male counterparts are applauded while the women continue to be ignored reflecting a patriarchal society. In the case of women's rugby, financial challenges constantly plague the women's league and the national team setting. Leila described the state of the women's financial support:

Like for us in rugby, if men, whenever men are having their trips like they are leaving the country, they are always supported; they have everything they need but if it is ladies' time, I always see them trying to look for the money, doing that other stuff, like fundraising, going washing people's cars, just to raise that money to be able to travel.

The lack of financial resources needed for women's rugby to prepare for regional and international competitions signals the following: structural barriers exist within the sport of rugby. Additionally, the limited financial support and nonexistence of attention given to women in sport weigh heavily on rugby because the institutionalized negligence places the women in vulnerable positions. Carol addressed the financial state of women's rugby in Uganda in saying that:

In other sports, I can see there is some managerial improvement, but in rugby, I don't see it. But we keep going back to play because of the love that you have for that sport. Because we young players of the national team [sometimes] do not focus on issues such as funding that may hold us back. If we know that there is a tournament or training camp, we shall participate regardless of the financial situation.

The above statement described the dedication of the female rugby players to the club and national team duties regardless of the financial support availed to them from the URU. Even with the women's rugby prowess, dedication, and achievements, they struggle to attract the attention of those in power – who maintain a biased gendered culture in the sport of rugby. Dora, who has worked effortlessly to develop the sport at the grassroots

level as well as advance the women's game has described how some members of the URU say that they have:

[...] acknowledged that they will go further with women's rugby and that we have achieved a lot despite having little support. So, they need to up their support so that we can now achieve more. And it's not fair to expect results from us and say we are supporting the men more because we get better results if they are not investing in us.

The unrealistic expectations to perform and bring great results were unfair to the women, given that the URU heavily invests in the men's game regardless of their performances. However, administration support for women is measured off their low-performance index thus limiting potential funding and support for the women's game. Dora called out the hypocrisy of the leadership at URU and hoped for change because female rugby players are relentless; they continue to work and improve their game. Expressing the same sentiments about gender-biased preferential treatment within the sport is Carol, who also talked about the funding that the men receive:

You know they [URU] can give them [men] much attention, they are given funds so they are much focused on the men than the women, yet if they focus on the women, I think women can do a great job.

Olive emphasized that it is the responsibility of URU leadership to solicit funding for women's development programs, national teams, and the national league, as well as to support the athletes. Noteworthy, the women are committed to the game regardless of the financial constraints. She said that "the women national team of Uganda, we the players, we are committed, we want the game, but the URU needs to improve on what they do".

Most of the participants called for the proactive actions of the rugby leadership to be visible and tangible towards women's rugby establishment.

Similarly, Mia addressed the need for URU to “invest more in women's rugby and pay women's rugby more attention”. She believed that the URU was missing out on tapping/developing the young and hungry talented female rugby players who have taken up an interest in the game:

If we can get what we need which is funding and attention, we are going to be world-beaters. Because when you consider ... a very small string budget, we are producing results with a very young group of girls, imagine what we can do with a bigger budget, and imagine what we can do when these young girls grow up; you know I have got eighteen-year-olds [females] on the team, [with] some debuting at seventeen years old so they have got at least ten to fifteen years of rugby life.

The participants were mostly disappointed with the limited financial support and sponsorships availed to the women despite the existing partnerships that the URU has with various corporate entities. It was visible to all the participants in the study that the women's game is ignored and financially crippled thus hindering the process of developing the game across the country. This general sentiment shared by most of the participants prompted Katie to acknowledge the biggest obstacle to the women's rugby game. She explained:

I would say the main challenge we have here is financial, yeah that is a very big break down so I would, I would encourage like aahh our local union to support us more financially. If they can't, at least find sponsors for the women's teams.

That way working with sponsors brings about like hmmm, how can I say, yeah.

That mileage yeah, because without finances nothing can go on, can happen.

Nothing can go forward.

Additionally, if women are not given the visibility or platform by the sport's governing body, then visibility to the outside world diminishes. Dora explained the importance of the URU fronting the women's game, providing a pathway to securing financial / sponsorships for the women. She said:

So, sponsors would tell us, we need mileage [visibility and number of games] and we are like that's difficult you know to get mileage; you know and they are like, we need to see results and we are like, but without sponsorship, we don't get mileage because journalists are not interested and then without sponsorship, we can't play games and get better. So, we can't produce results. It is like *a chicken and egg thing* and so we just kept going around and around in circles.

Dora's statement on the need to gain visibility and eventually financial backing from potential cooperate sponsors is based on the leverage the URU affords to the women.

Addressing the lack of sponsorship for women, Kara and Shilla mentioned that they had never seen a TV or heard a radio advert about women's rugby, even the mention of women league was left out of main sports news outlets that often talked about their male counterparts, thus contributing to the invisibility of the women's game as well as dampening their chances of getting potential sponsors. Shilla suggested to the URU that:

They should change a little in advertising so that people know that the game [women] is going to be played in a particular place and so they come and watch. So that they too pick interest in the women's games.

Ash also acknowledged that “another challenge is lack of sponsors in rugby. There are few sponsors in rugby” that are willing to invest in the women’s game because of the uncertainty surrounding the long-term rewards of their investment. Katie further explained this financial impediment that has slowly made its way into the mindsets of the community:

I think the challenge with all these organizations is, that women’s rugby is sort of seen as a burden, [sometimes] ridding off the men, and as much as it’s true that people don’t pay as much money to watch women’s sport, hmmm women sport hasn’t been marketed well.

Most players ridiculed the administration for ignoring the women’s game at all levels and only showing some interest in the national team setting, once the women have battled their way to continental and international tournaments. Their repeat behavior of only showing up when convenient has stunted the growth of the women’s game. Judy describes this as irresponsible. She expressed that:

The council [National Council of Sports], the union [URU], all that those guys [administrators] ... try to show support only when the women have qualified like for world cup. I think they should just follow up; they should follow up. It is their duty to follow up on the teams and ladies that have participated; investigate why they have not come back, and why they have not qualified this time around. I think they should just follow up [and] they should just learn to follow up on those teams that qualify.

However, given the limited financial support, the women remain resilient to the game but call out to those in power and leadership positions to revisit their policies when it comes

to advancing the women's game. Faith further urged the URU to embrace a more inclusive approach to women's sports in Uganda. She said:

They should not discriminate against us they should support us by giving us more funds, I know we the players are willing to play the game because of the love we have for it. They should support us; they should not let us down.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding financial backing for the women's game in Uganda, the participants of the study remained hopeful that change would happen at the top of URU leadership and that their momentum to grow the game will be matched with the union's acknowledgment, that the women's games are worth investing in them.

The Right People in Leadership.

To locate Ugandan women in the sporting arena it is important to understand the patriarchal structures, culture, and characteristics of their lived experiences. Their presence and status in sports reflect the greater practices of culture/society in Uganda. The sports leadership structure in Uganda is fragmented and heavily favors male sporting entities thus leaving the majority of women's sports with no support. Contemporary roles of African women are still weighed down by hegemonic customs that make women inferior to men, creating social and gender stratification. The presence of women in any sporting category either as an athlete, coach, manager, or leader will always be under constant scrutiny, in all social institutions

All the participants in this study were dissatisfied with the leadership structures within the Uganda Rugby Union (URU), citing the administration's failures in their duty to develop, support, and grow the women's game. Shilla expressed her disappointment with the current leadership when she said: "so, if we could get people who love the game,

and the right administrators,” then the women’s game can be recognized and legitimized within our society. The limited representation/support of women at the national governing body causes delays and drawbacks for the advancement of the game, as Shilla argued: “we just need the right people at the top [URU leadership]. Not everyone there in the rugby union is working to improve women’s rugby or the sport, some are just sited in offices doing nothing”.

Some of the participants stated that they had never interacted with any officials/administrators of the rugby union, making them feel underserving and underappreciated within the rugby community. Institutional leaders have a direct influence on resource allocation, identification, and branding of teams in the union because decision-making and implementation play important roles in the growth of the game. Ann called out the URU officials to acknowledge the existence of the women’s rugby saying; “I would request the union to just, at least, look on to the women’s rugby, and not only the women’s rugby but the women’s sports”. The feelings of neglect were echoed through Ann’s plea to the URU to engage with the women’s game. Similarly, Carol, a student, and rugby coach expressed her disappointment with URU at their limited involvement in indicating that:

What I can say is it’s only about the effort they should put in for the women, and also since we even play without their effort, and we bring out good results and [so] if they put in that effort, I think women’s sports will be brighter because I see other nations’ [their] women are recognized and considered [like] south Africa. Leaders of the game should make their presence and leadership skills recognized within the women’s game nationwide. The broken leadership culture at the top hinders the

growth and advancement of women's game because they cannot compete with their counterparts. Samy, who has been involved with women's rugby for over 15 years explained how individuals at the top of the leadership ladder within the URU have continuously failed the women's game:

For the future national team and the current national team's success; the leadership structure plays a key role. It needs to be flawless and perfect to make women get better. I mean Uganda is one of the countries which has gotten to the world cup but right now it is not even competitive at the continental level. But one of the main reasons why it is gone downhill is because of the awful leadership. So, the future of rugby is at the grassroots, we need to bring up the young talent and develop it. Two, we really need to look into the leadership and make sure it is much better, less biased, more flawless in what they do, it should be more tactical and technical and also clubs, all clubs, I wish clubs all around the country could encourage women's teams to be part of their clubs so that at least every club in the country has a women's team attached to it, and from there a wider selection or a bigger population to select for the national team can be made.

Aspects of bias and ignoring the women's sport were evident within the top leadership of URU, which indicates a heavy focus on the success of the men's teams. Julie cautioned the rugby union administrators to stay away from the biased and dishonest ways that only stand to benefit them and the men's national team, thus ignoring the development of the women's game; "First of all, they should reduce corruption", as the union often makes decisions that favor their male counterparts. She further explained the frustrations that women rugby must contend with as compared to their male counterparts: "But when you

come on the men's team, they give them everything. Whatever thing they ask, for them they are given in time but when you come to, we the ladies we are not given". Sport is a gendered establishment that operates within hegemonic masculine norms, thus creating less opportunity for women. Dora showed her disdain towards the unreliable leadership that supports the men while ignoring the women despite their successes on the field. She said:

I believe that there are a lot of talented women in sports ahhh but nothing much has changed. Because not many women's sports teams or players are actually supported. The support for women or female sportspeople is not there, the support is still focused on the males, it's still dominated by the men so, so many women, their talent goes to waste, and yet they can perform.

Despite the presence of talented female rugby athletes across the nation, all the participants regrettably acknowledged that they are subjected to a broken rugby union management that will not recognize them. With the rugby administration and sports community ignoring the women, Kara voiced her frustration towards the biased hegemonic structure across sport; "the government, the union itself, they care more about the gents than us," giving little support to women in sport.

The generalized attitude towards women's sport in Uganda is a stumbling block for women's rugby to progress. Kara, Mia, Dora, Samy, and Katie were critical of the general state of women's sport in the country, as it is reflected through women's rugby. Dora went on to describe how women's sport is an afterthought despite the remarkable accomplishments of Ugandan female athletes:

[...] the attitude of the government, the federations towards women's sports [we] still have a lot of work to be done. It is slightly better but it's still not good enough, we are still an afterthought. They always consider men's sport first even if the men's sport [is] not performing as well as we are, and then they consider women's sport afterward yet it's a lot easier to succeed as a country with women's sport than men's sport because the gap between like us and the top countries isn't so big whereas with male sport it's been there like for decades, centuries. And so, the gap between us and the top male teams in the world is way bigger.

Mia one of the founding members of women's rugby in Uganda described how the women's game has endured negligence from the union while it strongly supports men's rugby. Addressing the lapses in the URU leadership and its commitment to women's game she talked about the endless excuses from the union about financial shortages as well as limited exposure that the leadership directs towards the women:

If the union could actually... the time and effort they are putting in the men, if the union could equally do the same and stop giving excuses that there is no money! No Money! And then the next thing you know, they are spending so much money on the men, yet you can equally spend it on the women to produce results. I think if the union took the time to put in the time for women's rugby, we can actually take the world by storm, but at the moment without that support, then the future for women's rugby will go nowhere, and instead, it will go on a downward spiral, a continuous downward spiral. I am just hoping that the union

sees this [and] takes advantage of the talent that they have and tries to grow it and groom it from the grassroots.

The presence of dedicated leadership was seen as a key factor to engage more women in the sport. Against all odds, Dora described how the women had managed to forge a commanding presence within the rugby community nationally and internationally.

Despite the indifferent leadership and limited investment in women's rugby development, they have managed to create teams across the country, form a national league as well as compete at international sporting events. A pioneer of women's rugby, she is aware of the limited support for women:

They acknowledged that they would go further with women's rugby and that we have achieved a lot despite having little support. So, they need to up their support so that we can now achieve more. And it's not fair to expect results from us and say we are supporting the men more because we get better results if they are not actually investing in us.

Kara echoed similar thoughts, urging the union to do more for the women's game, "you know for them to step up". All participants of the study called for the union to change its ways of executing administrative duties, and to be more proactive towards women's rugby. Additionally, the fragmented leadership creates loopholes and negligence when it comes to serving the women's game thus leading up to inconsistency among the national team and its players. The success of the women's national team is an important tool for recruiting and attracting young women to the sport.

Judy, a talented young lady whose stardom has risen on the local scene and national team, talked about her frustration with the existing leadership at Uganda rugby.

She described how “there is no permanent national team player, it is from other clubs that they choose those who should play at the national team if they see that you are hardworking”, an aspect that is fundamental to the existence of women’s rugby. There is no continuity for the national team because of the inability of the rugby union to sustain an ongoing national team. Despite the presence of committed women to playing and representing the country, Carol talked about the invisible rugby union leadership when it comes to matters of women. She talked about players were dedicated to the team saying, “we the national team players of Uganda players, are committed, we want the game but the URU needs to improve on what they do”.

Despite the fragmented leadership, Dora remained optimistic about the prospects of the women’s game pointing to increasing female administrators and coaches, as key elements to change the trajectory of the game. Sport as an institution has few female coaches especially in the male-dominated sport thus indicating uncertainty for the future of women’s rugby. Another organizational practice that indicated uncertainty about the progress of the women’s game was the limited number of female coaches. While addressing the leadership gap and challenges within women’s rugby, eight of the seventeen participants talked about the importance of having female coaches. The link between coaches and administrative responsibilities within sports institutions is vital because coaches are responsible for teaching relevant skills, planning, and delivering programs that are mandated by the rugby union.

In the case of Uganda women’s rugby, there is an urgent need for more female coaches who can lead by example as well as be in a position to earn the trust of the young girls’ families, especially in the socio-cultural setting that considers women that play

rugby or male-dominated sport, as having a deviant behavior. Dora cited the limited number of female coaches as one of the biggest hurdles to grassroots development of the game along with sustaining women's teams across the country. She said finding female coaches is a "challenge because there are actually some girls' schools [that] want rugby introduced, they specifically want female coaches only. But they are very few female coaches so, in the end, they say then no rugby".

Like any other community, Dora, and Julie pointed out that schools and families are reluctant to entrust their daughters with male coaches given the evidence of sexual abuse and harassment from male coaches within sports institutions. The low number of female coaches to work within the grassroots programs/networks of women's rugby signals the failure of the rugby union to invest in the women's sport at all levels, especially equipping more women with coaching certifications. Samy also addressed the decline of national team performances because of limited top-quality female coaches. She stated expressed that:

The biggest issue we have in Uganda rugby is finding a suitable coach for women. I do not know why they say women's teams are the hardest teams to coach so, we still have problems with coaches who really can train and fully bring up women's teams.

The accountability and accomplishments of a sports team are measured based on performances and their ability to impact their societies. Julie was very passionate about the rugby union's push to engage, equip, and empower more women through coaching clinics/seminars. To resolve the shortage of female coaches around the country, rugby union was encouraged to engage more women in administrative roles and coaching.

Additionally, Kara urged female rugby players to take on coaching roles and get certification from the rugby union as a gateway to generating more female coaches across the country. She explained:

We, players should engage more in coaching skills and activities because we have fewer coaches in Uganda ... So, if we have at least five coaches in Uganda, females only, then the future is bright for women's rugby. Coach Dora, I will just say coach Dora because I always see her, she does some good stuff [grassroots rugby] in the east and north parts of the country ... Because rugby is only here in the central and she is trying to push it.

Most of the participants of this study talked about the importance of female coaches, their position as role models to female athletes, as well as their impact on shaping their female identity within the sport and community. The increased number of female voices as coaches and administrators within rugby union creates a platform for the agency, equity, sustainability, and development of the women's game across the country. The URU leadership is constantly questioned about the implementation, legitimacy, and commitment to the development of the women's game.

Summary

The study examined the experiences of women rugby players. The emerging themes from this dissertation study center on the following: dominant social practices, social networking, gender identity formation, and women's rugby resilience. The findings revealed that sport provides a platform for defining and reproducing hegemonic constructs that maintain male dominance in society. All participants had engaged in rugby-related activities for a minimum of two years and were familiar with the sport and

societal expectations. The lived experiences of the women rugby players were unique as each one of them had a different journey and socialization process into rugby. While three participants had no previous engagement in any sport, all other fourteen participants are multi-sport athletes. Schools, family, and friends were a point of entry into rugby and thus contributed to socialization in the sport of rugby.

Despite accomplishments on the global stage, the Lady Cranes players described their challenges to get recognized by the URU leadership that governs all rugby-related activities in the country. The role of the URU leadership in advancing women's games is rather critical as it defines the future of the game among women and girls in Uganda. The leadership disconnect from the women's game was among the focal points of this study. All participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the administrators and leadership structure of the Uganda Rugby Union because when it came to women, they were ignored and often given minimal recognition by the governing body. The inability of URU to be present in the development and sustainability of the women's game at all levels pushed the participants to ridicule the rugby administration for their failure to uplift women's rugby.

The rugby players emphasized the challenges they faced in their identity construction on and off the field. The female athletes were conscious of their identity and how it impacts their socialization within the families and community at large. These female rugby players showcased their ability to explore sport in a strongly gendered environment, by expressing their gender identity through disrupting the common social order that classifies women as inferior to men in physical and power sports. Involvement in rugby illustrates changing nature of sports culture that has often favored men. The

gender identity construction for these players was often questioned because of their diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Each woman sees rugby engagement as an opportunity to revolutionize sports spaces for women and girls that encounter barriers on and off the field.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

Research studies of African women's experiences in power sports are scarce. Current studies that offer insight into women's experiences in power sports are grounded in the global North contexts. According to Adjepong (2017), the majority of the research focuses on Global North and emphasizes whiteness, privilege, and heterosexuality. For example, Tjønndal's (2019) study on Norwegian female boxers addressed the exclusion of women within the sport of boxing at the Olympics; Hardy's (2015) study on Canadian women addressed how the rugby players were unapologetic for their athletic behavior within the rugby community and society at large; Adjepong (2017) study on women rugby club players in the Southwest United States addressed the White privilege structures that enable women to assert their domination and reproduce inequality. Despite breaking barriers in all aspects of the sport, gender disparities, inequalities, and invisibility remain at the forefront of women's reality in masculine/power sports. The ongoing inequitable treatment of women in sports (Hardy, 2015; Sikes & Jarvie, 2014; Allen, 2014; Joncheray & Tlili, 2013; Howe, 2001; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Chu et al., 2003) threatens women's rights to sport participation and agency. The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to understand the socio-cultural construction of gender in post-colonial Uganda using lived experiences and personal stories of women rugby players, and (b) to comprehend how women rugby players navigate their everyday lives using roles and multiplicity of identities from grassroots to national team level participation in sport. This section provides a discussion of the findings of the study in context of the

literature bearing on emerging themes: dominant social practices, social networking, gender identity formation, and women's rugby resilience. This section also provides implications and recommendations for future studies.

Changing Cultural Norms

In reference to disruption of cultural norms, the findings in this study mirrored (Hardy, 2015) a study on Canadian women rugby national team players and (Adjepong, 2016) women rugby players' experiences that revealed a gender-biased culture of rugby that celebrated male achievements and masculinity. Although the structures and culture in Uganda sports have habitually marginalized women, some participants were able to overcome the gender-based bias and pushed for the grassroots development of women's rugby. Previous studies (Hudson, 2010 & Howe, 2001) contend that participation in rugby challenges the notions surrounding femininity, as the female players push to deconstruct male culture that limits women's visibility. Given the limited opportunities availed for women to participate in sport, this study found that there is a need to revise contemporary norms that celebrate men in society while limiting the potential of women. Chu et al.'s (2003) study on New Zealand women rugby national team noted that they faced resistance to breaking down barriers concerning what women could do in a celebrated rugby country. The inclusion of women in rugby disrupts the underpinnings of the sport that Scrogum (2005) described as the space utilized to develop masculine identity and therefore the presence of women threatened that ideology, which resonates with previous research studies (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Howe, 2001; Chu et al., 2003; Allen, 2014; Hardy, 2015).

Several participants discussed the need to encourage more women to participate in rugby as their presence on the field would send a strong message of resistance to the existing hegemonic barriers that have kept women sidelined for years. Rugby provides an environment where women can experience their lives at multiple intersects that define the roles of women in society, and the sport also allows for women to have control of their sporting experiences. Chepyator-Thomson (2005) describes how African women have embraced multiple roles in society and that sport should no longer be seen as a male domain because African women athletes have proved to be successful on and off the field and are ambassadors of the African culture. Kanemasu and Molnar's (2015) study, the Fijian women rugby players used their participation to challenge hegemonic sporting practices. In this study, the women indicated that they were ridiculed for participating in a masculine sport and viewed as defying cultural norms that defined gender-appropriate practices. Gendering in sports spaces (Goslin, 2016; Nauright, 2013; Shehu, 2010), poses a big threat to the existence of African women and girls in sports activities. Previous research shows that it is important to address social and institutional practices that hinder African women's engagement in society (Shehu, 2010; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Goslin & Klula, 2014).

Creating a Space for Women in Sport

The dissertation study's findings on women's space in rugby are consistent with other studies (Sikes & Jarvie, 2014; Joncheray & Tlili, 2013; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Howe, 2001; Carle & Nauright, 1999) because the women in this study experienced moments of frustration and lack of acceptance in the rugby community. As a fast-growing sport in Uganda, the participants in this study revealed they were disappointed

that the game lacked the general structures to support the increasing number of women who showed interest in the sport, mainly due coaching and administrative support roles which male-focused and dominated. Consistent with studies (Howe, 2001; Chu et al., 2003; Scrogum, 2005; Allen, 2014; Hardy, 2015; Roberts, 2018), rugby unions have long been considered a male domain, predominantly serving male interests. The findings from this study indicate that Ugandan women had to overcome socially and culturally constructed ideologies that were designed to restrict their participation in contact sports in a push to preserve their femininity.

This dissertation study showed an increase in women who are working towards creating their definitions of femininity and know what it means to function in a society that prides itself in creating distinct boundaries that define socially acceptable masculine and feminine ideology. This is reflected in studies (Adjepong, 2016; Lindner, 2012; Broad, 2001; Krane, 2001) that identify women in masculine sports as intruders and had to navigate their feminine assigned roles to be socially recognized. Hardy's (2015) study on Canadian women's rugby argued that one's performance of femininity is often questioned if it is not within the socially acceptable boundaries. The study showed that involving women in power sports creates a platform for the athletes to develop physical, mental, and communicative strength that work simultaneously towards empowering women to challenge post-colonial gender-based ideologies and constructs. The strength, empowerment, and visibility the participants gain from being involved in rugby give them the confidence and willpower to challenge the discrimination they experience in wider society and enable them to reject the notion that women are weak (Chu et al. 2003).

Rugby in Uganda glorifies men because of the masculine and hegemonic ties to the sport. For example, the men's teams, tournaments, and national engagements at all levels of competition were prioritized over any women's engagements, a narrative that is echoed in several research studies (Hardy, 2015; Fuchs & Le Hénaff, 2014; Joncheray & Tlili, 2013; Gill, 2010; Chu et al., 2003). The acceptance of African women in the sports arena has happened at a slower pace during the post-colonial era (Goslin, 2016; Sikes & Jarvie, 2014; Hayhurst, 2013; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Saavedra, 2003) because women and girls were marginalized in all spheres of society. Similarly, in this study, the participants faced an uphill battle in finding their place within the rugby community with some teams having to practice along the edges of the rugby field because priority was given to the male teams. Saavedra's (2003) study confirms that women have limited access to playgrounds and opportunities to participate in sports. Additionally, the women's games or matches were intentionally held late morning or early afternoon when there were no fans and when the temperatures tend to be very high, whereas the majority of men's games were held late afternoon and evenings (floodlights) when the crowds had gathered to celebrate sport and enjoy the evening. So, the rugby community did not acknowledge the existence of women's rugby players or teams because they were never given a platform conducive to thrive.

Similar to other studies, (Joncheray & Tlili, 2013; Holt et al., 2009; Howe, 2003), it was found in this study that external barriers to participation obstructed the opportunities for women rugby players to engage and showcase their athletic skills and achievements in the sport. However, the fact that women are playing a male dominated sport is a clear indication that the establishment of rugby in Uganda is steadily changing

and being challenged by women, in what Chepyator-Thomson's (2005) study described as African women rejecting the post-colonial structures and sites that are broken down along gender lines (Clark, 2011) defining who can occupy these sporting spaces.

Impact of Support System on Women's Sport

The women rugby players found a support system critical to their involvement in the sport. Family and friends' support was predominantly the driving force in influencing women to take up the sport of rugby. This is corroborated in Chu et al.'s (2003) study on New Zealand women rugby players. In Scrogum's (2005) study on binaries and bridging of women's rugby participation, the women involved in contact sport were encouraged to join and were more likely to engage in contact sport through friends. Contrary to this study, friends and family members, who had ties to the sport of rugby, persuaded the Ugandan women rugby players to join the sport. Several participants of the study mentioned family members as key entry points into the sport of rugby and generally determined whether a girl engages in the sport or not. Some reasons that determined a family's willingness to accept their daughter's participation in rugby included a history of sport involvement, educational benefits through the sport, trust in the coaches, existing friendships among the girls, socio-economic mobility, good reputation of the sport and its members within the community. Among the factors considered to be critical to African women's engagement in any sport is the approval of the family. In Chepyator-Thomson's (2005) study, she explained Africa's strong attachment to family and the "women's critical role in maintaining cultural and social structures intact" (p. 251) were important. In this study, the majority of the women rugby players needed the consent of family

members to engage in rugby as it was deemed an inappropriate sport for women in society.

The path every girl takes is dependent on the decisions of the family, as one participant expressed that she had to convince her father to allow her to play rugby using the help of the physical education teacher and a female rugby coach, who both wrote recommendation letters and had face-to-face talks with the dad. The teacher and coach explained the benefits of playing rugby and detailed the tremendous talent of the daughter. This was an interesting route that the participant took, which was because socially, school and sports spaces tend to provide women and girls with a sanctuary where they would be respected and allowed to develop new skills, expand social networks, and enjoy the freedom of expression (Brady, 2005). The findings of this study show that the family plays an important role in the decision-making process when it comes to the participation of women and girls in community sports events. For some of the participants, the brothers, sisters, or parents seemed to guarantee access to the rugby events. Family members did not shy away from teaching her the basics of the game which eventually propelled her to legendary status in Uganda women's rugby. The findings echo a previous study (Ukpokolo, 2016) that encouraged African women to reject the status of the victim but rather take control of their destiny by making progress in their cultural way of life while maintaining family values.

Sport Provides Opportunities for Achievement of Player Objectives

In term of opportunity structure, sport provided a platform for the women rugby players to achieve new social and educational objectives. Indeed, sport provides a platform and works as a powerful tool for achieving social objectives such as educational

and career advancement in society (Goslin, 2016; Mutebi, 2014; Lyras and Peachey, 2011). Additionally, a combination of sporting activities within various communities served as an entry point for African women to participate in community and educational-based programs (Coalter, 2008; Hayhurst 2013; Mansfield, 2014). The findings of this study show that the presence of rugby camps in different communities and schools provided an opportunity for girls to join the sport. Trusted institutions such as schools and national governing sports organizations are respected among different groups of people when it came to delivering services like education through sport within the communities. The study confirms previous research findings that show that community sports programs provide a wide range of opportunities for women and girls (Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst 2013&2014a; Mansfield, 2014; Meier & Saavedra, 2009) who would otherwise have no access to sport-related activities. Given the educational and social capital that comes along with participating in rugby, families focused on the educational benefit for their daughters, hence motivating their girls to be interested in the sport.

Findings in this study showed that a strong education background played a key role for some participants who were able to pursue coaching and referee careers as an option for employment as well as a way to stay involved with the sport once their active playing career ended. Confirming Hayhurst's (2013) study, girls in the martial arts programs were able to transfer acquired skills of self-defense to a career in coaching and serving as trainers in schools and sports clubs. It is important to note that women's rugby in Uganda is at the amateur level where the participants cannot entirely depend on rugby to earn a living [economically] but also use the sport as a means to get [free] education.

This was critical for some participants who were faced with financial challenges that prevented them from getting their secondary education. Previous studies (Johnson & Whitely, 2016; MacDonald, 2015; Mansfield, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst 2013; Meier & Saavedra, 2009) showed that a combination of sports activities with cultural and community educational programs provides an entry point into society thus empowering women socially and economically.

Role models and mentors are critical to the promotion of women and girls in sport. Thus, African sportswomen play a significant role in mobilizing and encouraging girls to be involved in sport (Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Sikes & Bale, 2014) because their success on and off the field is admirable to young girls, who struggle for social inclusion and recognition in sporting events across various societies. The findings in this study show that women rugby players used rugby camps and tournaments to teach the game as well as serve as role models, hence resulting in women and girls having a positive sporting experience and enhancing their choice to engage further in the sport. The stories and experiences of current and former women rugby players inspire the next generation of rugby players to expand the game. In Meier and Saavedra's (2009) study, they found that female sports role models play a significant role in encouraging young women to get involved in sporting activities.

This study confirms the importance of providing young rugby players with female coaches and mentors who are socially and culturally accepted (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005) within the diverse communities of Uganda. For example, parents of many young girls are willing to work with a female coach who is reliable and trustworthy with the safety of the girls. The study revealed the need for an increase in female coaches and

administrators because they are the gatekeepers for young girls to engage in sports. Additionally, these coaches also act as role models within the community and can represent the interests of women in the sport (Goslin and Kluka, 2014).

The findings of this study corroborate studies (Mwisukha & Rintaugu, 2013; Meier & Saavedra, 2009) that point to the low numbers of women in sports participation and to their under-representation in sporting activities, which are directly linked to the lack of African female role models in sport. Young women look up to senior members of the rugby community who have been successful on and off the fields, hence the importance of having positive role models and mentorship programs within the sport. Previous research (Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Meier, 2015; Goslin, 2016) shows the critical roles that African women play in addressing the perceptions of cultural and social responsibilities of women (Adichie, 2014) through the lens of sport. The African female athlete role models take on the responsibility of nurturing and expanding the game while providing a platform for young athletes to develop (Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Goslin, 2016) within socially acceptable boundaries. The impact of successful African female athletes on sport is enormous because their voices and activism continuously push for gender-neutral spaces in sport.

Sport Promotes Success, Networking, and Identity Formation

Monetary ambitions and socio-economic status were repeated conversations throughout this study. The findings in this study showed that women rugby players emphasized the importance of attaining public and financial success using the rugby platform as means to achieve this. Their aspirations to achieve success on and off the field resonates with previous studies (Johnson & Whitely, 2016; Williams & Chawansky,

2014; Hayhurst 2014; Mansfield, 2014; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005), where athletes sought to use sport to breakthrough financial and social boundaries. One surprising finding in this study was the career aspirations of the participants that were beyond just playing rugby but pursuing all possible roles within rugby from coaching to administration. Having access to social capital required several participants to be part of a formal network of people [rugby], providing advantages to network and seek financial gains. Participants got jobs linked to the rugby community and their involvement in these jobs elevated their socio-economic status within the rugby community and the country at large.

In describing the concept of socialization, Holland and Lachicotte (2007) described how social positioning plays a critical role in self-characterization and general conduct within societal discourses. Some participants talked about their social status based on their expanded social network (Brady, 2005), that is the rugby community members. Research studies (Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014) show that young women who engaged in sports activities were able to locate employment, become self-reliant, and get equipped with skills that enabled them to fit into society while contributing to the socio-economic landscape.

Socialization provides a platform for women rugby players to interact and fit within the mechanisms of a group setting. Generally, the sports space is considered an excellent place for individual players to develop, nurture their skills, and excel in the sport. The findings of this study revealed that the women developed unique patterns of norms, socialization, and behavior through coming together as a small group to play rugby. Working together to build a solid foundation for women's rugby was a common

objective, thus providing a positive experience for the women on and off the field. Previous studies (Joncheray et al. 2014 and Mennesson, 2004) reveal that early socialization into any sport was a welcomed opportunity for women to challenge the conventional image and redefined their behavior on the field that did not align with what was expected of them in society. The findings of this study reveal the identity/socialization journey of most of the participants: they joined rugby at a young age, a sport that was not socially welcomed for women in society. The rugby players joined the sport because they either had a friend, family member or a teacher/coach who participated in it and eventually introduced them to the sport. Additionally, they also used this opportunity (individually and in a group) to redefine their identity, by challenging the dominant gender norms by playing a sport that was perceived as male domain. The rugby players chose identities that fit within socially acceptable norms while maintaining rugby attitude. By embracing multiple identities (Adjepong, 2017; Skies & Bale, 2014; Adichie, 2014), on and off the field, the participants revealed how engaging they were with their peers in safe sports spaces, which helped them integrate into the male rugby culture that was previously closed off to women.

Socialization as a process of identity formation (Joncheray et al. 2014) often integrates people into some form of social affiliations, where women are often socialized to act feminine (Krane, 2001). Surprisingly, though participants used rugby clubs for training and tournaments, which served as a baseline for socialization, the majority of them were not inclined to act/think about the socially accepted feminine practices in society, but rather focused on improving their athletic skills. This finding corresponds to Fields and Comstock's (2008) study, where rugby women attended the sport purely for

social, friendship, and for a sense of belonging reasons. Chu et al. (2003) study reveal that socialization through friends plays a key role in attracting and retaining new athletes to a sport. The thought of being together – their connectedness as women and as a team (Adjepong, 2016)– and of being part of a team reaffirmed their commitment to the sport (Chu et al. 2003). Friends and family are a “melting pot” (Joncheray et al. 2014 p. 4) for different forms of socialization, as actions and behavior characteristics are shaped by close associations. Through rugby activities, participants of this study were able to assimilate ways of thinking and actions that were common to their teammates and generally to women rugby players in the community.

Sport Allowed Women to Reimagine their Identities.

Women’s participation in a contact sport like rugby is an act of defiance, challenging the socio-cultural boundaries that have kept them out of the sport. It is a platform where women articulate their negotiations of constraint within established social boundaries (Birrell, 2000; Pelak, 2005; Dworkin, Swarr & Cooky, 2013). Adjepong (2016) described the bodies of female rugby players as a site to celebrate strong female athletes and reinforce what being a tough woman is about (Hudson, 2010). In this study, playing rugby and socializing with peers enabled the players to address the challenges of constructing “new” identities that fit across all spheres of society. The players were aware of their engagement in activities that are considered masculine and hence not suitable for any woman. This study confirms previous research studies that show gender identity negotiation (Wheatley, 1994; Broad, 2001; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Gill, 2007; Adjepong, 2016) embedded in rugby. Views on gender identity focus on societal expectations and

the reconstruction of ideologies that determine how women and men function within a social context.

For the participants of this study, living in a society that values cultural traditions, where gender roles and behavior are defined or structured, made it challenging for many young players to break away from societal expectations to redefine / re-imagine their identity through the lens of rugby. Joncheray et al. (2014) study on the identity socialization of the French national rugby union women's team described how the French women rugby players had to live in two worlds/cultures – one that celebrated sport as the inherently masculine and a wider social context where women were celebrated for their femininity. In this study, dual identities were developed and embraced by players to remain socially accepted by their family, friends, and society. For example, some participants described how playing rugby and representing the country did not push them to disrespect their families or even abandon household chores that they did, before joining rugby. Participants also described how rugby was often celebrated with alcohol consumption and late nights with teammates, however, they chose not to follow that route because the ideal representation of the sport was more important to them and their families. Another participant said that her engagement in rugby did not take away her motherly responsibilities but rather proved that she could play a masculine sport and be a mother concurrently. The need for the players to show their feminine side is described in Chase's (2006) and Krane's (2002) studies that demonstrated an act of reinforcing dominant sports discourses when it comes to their body image.

Women rugby players know that engaging in rugby is not feminine appropriate (Hargreaves, 1994), as playing rugby participation in rugby was considered un-lady like,

as it was meant to be played by men. This study found that the negative connotations attached to women rugby players create a hostile environment for players to self-identify with the sport. When some participants try to access or even reveal their participation in traditionally masculine sports, it still comes as a surprise, and it is met with resistance from family and community because it goes against feminine ideologies that depict women as vulnerable. Krane's (2002) study highlights how women in society are "expected to act traditionally, with hegemonic, feminine manners" (p. 117) and to be accepted within the social fold. In a study by Salvatore and Marecek (2010), they argue that the relationship between women and their bodies takes center stage when redefining socially acceptable norms and body image appropriations. The identities of the women rugby players are diverse as all participants of this study addressed the question of their identity and roles in society differently and all knew that they operated outside the socially accepted gender boundaries, thus 'distorting their identity.' (Joncheray et al. (2014) confirm the findings of this study, by indicating that female rugby players can engage in masculine sport and express their gender simultaneously without disrupting the social order of gendered identities. Additionally, the findings of this study confirm that sports spaces are a platform for gender negotiations and that the women rugby players are defining their unique image of how Ugandan women athletes should be represented by choosing their ideal feminine identity and versions of what feminine ideologies should be in post-colonial Uganda.

Sport Empowers Women

Sports provide a platform for athletes to develop skills that are transferable on and off the field, hence the sport of rugby empowered women. Rugby offers women

empowering and unique ways of experiencing their bodies and space by challenging themselves and gaining a sense of identity (Krane et al. 2001). Several reasons emerged that empowered women rugby players to take on the sport despite the masculine environment in which it operated. They include visibility, social networking, physical strength, confidence, mastery of athletic skills, respect, leadership, and identity. The study reveals that the participants of this study were using the platform of rugby to get a better understanding of the world in which they live through sport which resonates with previous research studies (Adjepong 2016; Chase, 2006; Gill, 2007; Chu et al., 2003 Broad, 2001). Participants attributed their new feelings of progression and change in their livelihoods outside of rugby to the physical and sociological aspects of the game, corroborating other studies. The findings show an increase in self-esteem and a sense of competence that was empowering to women (Adjepong, 2016; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst, 2013 & 2014a; Saavedra, 2003; Broad, 2001; Krane, 2001).

The findings of this study indicate that the women who chose to participate in sports felt empowered. Several studies (Chu et al., 2003; Theberge, 1993) have documented a sense of empowerment and self-confidence as key factors / or reasons that motivate women to participate in a sport considered masculine. Howe (2001) described how inherently rugby is a sport surrounded by misogyny, hence women that engage in the sport were often met with ridicule because of the masculine cultural beliefs attached to rugby. However, the women rugby players in this study took pride in their engagement with rugby despite the resistance they met from some family members and society at large.

Women's involvement in community-based activities such as sports empowers them and gives them the independence to engage in socio-economic spheres that advance their wellbeing (Hayhurst, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014; Meier & Saavedra, 2009; Kidd, 2008; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005), and act as an outlet for their physicality gained through tackling sport (Chase, 2006), an act that participants of this study acknowledged made them feel powerful. In Chase's (2006) study, U. S. women rugby players acknowledged that playing the sport provided an outlet for their physicality, with actions within the game such as tackling making them feel powerful.

The findings show that the women's involvement in contact sports emboldens them into having a positive body experience and working toward rejecting the idea that they are weak and less able. Participation in sport boosted players' strength and gave them feelings of dominance on and off the field, allowing them to have a positive body experience and rejecting the notions of the female body as weak. Previous studies (Hancock et al. 2013; Clark, 2011; Norman, 2010; Birrell, 2000) have positioned women as the weaker sex, the less capable of contributing to socio-economic, political, educational, and physical spheres. In Broad's (2001) study of USA women rugby clubs, they found that players were defiant and flaunted their rugby achievements regardless of the space accorded to them. This in turn gives the participants the confidence and independence to believe that they can gain physical strength but also able to transcend into every aspect of their everyday life and work. The spirit of female empowerment challenges the domestication and exclusion of women from public spaces, as Meier's (2015) study pointed out: sport encourages women to take control of their own lives and play an important role in defining their identity and wellbeing.

Women and Invisibility in Sport

Sport and sports organizations are viewed as platforms where gender binaries are preserved (Birrell, 2000; Pelak, 2005; Dworkin, Swarr & Cooky, 2013), thus ignoring the contributions of women (Saavedra, 2003). Organized sport in Africa operates within gendered boundaries that oppress and homogenize women into one group thus controlling/limiting their access (Engh, 2011) making it difficult for them to stand out and question prejudiced power relations. Given the limited visibility afforded to women rugby players in Uganda, the women's participation in the sport not only helps them negotiate for access and recognition but also equipped them with a voice to challenge the status quo of the male-dominated rugby culture. The findings in this study reveal that participants were active agents of negotiating issues surrounding representation, development of the women's game, restructuring policies of URU, and pushing for a positive presence in the communities across the country. Two participants described how the rugby scene does not give women the opportunity to grow, hence suppressing their advocacy.

A previous study by Williams and Chawansky (2014) on women's football in Namibia points out the heavily gendered environment that often overlooks the female experience and advocacy in favor of the male counterparts thus diminishing the women's voice in the sport. To gain recognition and acceptance in a sport is to allow athletes to have agency, to enable them to make decisions based on their lived experiences, and to modify sports policies that have been influenced by their own beliefs and social factors. Advocating for agency and representation, this study resonates with previous studies (Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Mansfield, 2014; Hayhurst, 2013 & 2014a). While some

female rugby players acknowledged the importance of male rugby players and their contribution to the growth of the game, they longed for the rugby community to recognize the efforts of the women without taking away men's achievements in rugby. Giving a platform for women to showcase their hard work as equitable contributors to the development and spread of rugby is a way to think about the future of rugby in Uganda.

In context of theoretical perspectives, the African feminist theory best explains how the women seek to create their visibility, as it plays a central role in re-writing the Ugandan women rugby players' identities as active agents of change (Atanga, 2013) while protecting the legacy of the African culture and norms (Amadiume, 1987; Mikell 1997; Oyěwùmí 2003; Nnaemeka, 2005; Nkealah, 2006). In this study, all participants talked about group identity and oppressions that they witness as women rugby players, as these oppressions tend to be invisible to the privileged group and that is men rugby players. Sports institutions play a fundamental role in re-positioning the African woman in society (M'Mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Sikes & Bale, 2014; Hayhurst, 2013; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005) by giving her a platform to address issues of inequality, social, educational, economic, and physical matters. Additionally, sport also gives agency to the rugby women to express their challenges, expectations, and achievements. The main concern in this study was the need for a platform that women could consistently use to meet with URU officials where the women could negotiate rugby space, express themselves, resolve grievances and find ways to forge forward. Sports practitioners should build up a culturally inclusive sports environment that is diverse and can adjust to sport-changing dynamics. This is consistent with what these scholars (Mansfield, 2014; Meir, 2017; Kateshumbwa, 2011; Clark, 2011) who called upon practitioners to focus on

the experiences of women from social, cultural, and historical perspectives, and to indicate how such aspects shape their daily lives as well as participation in sport.

Additionally, a woman's place in society remains a subject of debate across societies, cultures, and historical eras as Ukpokolo (2016) described: an African woman without activity cannot exist because one must exert an active influence on society to remain relevant.

Availability for Resources for Women in Sport

Accessibility to resources and economic stratification during a post-colonial era in African communities is detrimental to the development and advancement of women (Agergaard & Botelho, 2014; Engh, 2011; Egbo, 2000) in all spheres of society. Findings of this study show that limited access to resources crippled women's ability to engage in social activities (Hayhurst, 2013; Engh, 2011; Saavedra, 2003) outside of the home setting. Saavedra's (2003) study supports this finding, pointing out that lack of time and minimal resources is one of the major reasons that prohibit participation in rugby. Limited resources and inadequate funding for women's programs threaten the existence of women's and girls' engagement in sport. Previous studies (Johnson, 2016; Goslin & Kluka, 2014; Kateshumbwa, 2011; Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Saavedra, 2003) echo the findings of this study that reveal there is an urgent need for women's rugby to gain access to better facilities and funding to boost the development of the game among women and girls. It is important to note that African women have much less access than men and are sometimes completely excluded from public spaces (Nnaemeka, 2005). In African cultures, recognition of public spaces does not define who can occupy these spaces because these sites are broken down along gender lines. Generally, the women rugby

players experience institutional bias and low priority in terms of funding and resources, an argument that was a reoccurring theme in participant interviews.

Kateshumbwa's (2011) study cited several causes of gender disparity in competitive sports such as opportunities, support, and resource allocation, which are congruent with the experiences of the participants in the current study. This study reveals that women rugby players lacked the financial and human resources needed to be competitive at all levels of the sport. Previous studies (Johnson, 2016; M'Mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Fink, 2014; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Weaving, 2014; Mansfield, 2014; Saavedra, 2003), support the findings of this study. Even with the growing numbers of women participating in sport, gender bias has deep attachments to sports culture and is resistant to inclusive measures for women. In support of this argument, Weaving's (2014) study stated that sexism is prevalent and takes on many forms, especially for women in combat sports (Lindner, 2012).

The absence of genuine leadership at the helm of Uganda rugby emerged as a challenge to the development of women's rugby. A key finding of this study revealed the women rugby players' doubts surrounding the quality of leadership as well as questioning the dedication of the officials to the development of the women's game. Historically, sports organization culture has often favored men, hence pushing off marginalized groups [African women] to subordinate spaces (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Mwisukha & Rintaugu, 2013; M'Mbaha & Chepyator, 2016), where their grievances and opinions are often ignored. Previous research (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Goslin & Kluka, 2014; Nauright, 2014; Ogunniyi, 2014; Pelak, 2005; Toriola, 2003; Saavedra, 2003) shows gendered divisions of marginalization within

African societies combine to create barriers for women engaging in policy decision-making in sport.

In this study, the slow embrace and acceptance of women in sport at all levels was attributed to the decision-making processes and decisions made on behalf of women rugby players; that are gender stereotyped and did not, in any way, favor or fulfill the needs of Uganda women rugby. The majority of the participants asked the Union to stay away from their biased decision-making policies and dishonest ways that ignored the core needs of the women. Patriarchal structures dominate livelihoods, governance, socio-economic, and political systems in Africa (Nzomo, 2015; Tripp, 2015) generating discriminatory practices against women. Goslin and Klula's (2014) study on women and sports leadership in Malawi called for sports' governing bodies to expand from conventional male dominance to include women's perspectives. According to Clark (2011), decision-making processes, administration, leadership, and media coverage spaces in sports are broken down along gender lines. Additionally, at the 2016 African Women in Sports leadership forum Zambian Vice-President Inonge Mutukwa Wina challenged the under-representation of African women in key decision-making positions (IOC News, 2016); however, Adriaanse (2016) warned of the perils of 'token' representation: having one or two representatives does not guarantee a change in gender dynamics or the institutionalized masculine culture in sport (Burton (2015).

Out of fear of social exclusion, Goslin and Kluka's (2014) study described how aspiring women in sports leadership are hesitant to distance themselves from the cultures that dictate social status and belonging. Similarly in this study, there is a limited number of female coaches and sports administrators who play a key role in the development of

the game at all levels. Previous studies (M'Mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Mwisukha, & Rintaugu, 2013; Kateshumbwa, 2011; Steady, 2011; Toriola, 2003) showed that African women tend to shy away from leadership, coaching, and administrative roles due to stereotyping and masculine culture of the sport. The findings from this study show the urgent need for female coaches/administrators who could dedicate their time, skills, and identity to the development of women's rugby to step up and change the narrative. This study showed that women are undervalued needing change. The findings of this study echo Norman's (2010) research where women coaches and administrators were undervalued thus leading to the stigmatization of sports roles and responsibilities among women rugby players. Therefore, it is important to consider the call made by scholars (M'Mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016; Williams & Chawansky, 2014; Goslin & Kluka, 2014; Kateshumbwa, 2011; Meier & Saavedra, 2009) for policy makers and practitioners to do more than just increase the number of women and girls participating in sport; but rather push for the sports structures, policies, and the masculine model of sport to be challenged and dismantled to halt the male dominance in all spheres of sport in Africa

In summary, this dissertation study indicates that the overall rugby experience of the participants demonstrated that the gender divide in the sport is vital for situating the multiple social roles and experiences of Ugandan women rugby players. The findings in this study provide an overview of why African women have mostly stayed away from male-oriented colonial sports and why younger generations of women across the African continent are motivated to break these boundaries and embrace sport—as athletes, coaches, or administrators— at all levels. Rugby as a colonial sport plays an important role

in society's social and cultural fabric and the participants' stories and experiences show that they have traveled through the cycle of life with the general image of women's rugby slowly shifting to being more acceptable in the majority of communities across the country.

Conclusion

The experiences of the rugby women may not reflect those in a different sport or even rugby women in another geographical location. While there are many positive aspects that the findings have produced for women's involvement in rugby, those who chose to participate in rugby are scrutinized and questioned as to why they chose to engage in a predominantly male sport that could potentially skew their feminine identities within the socially acceptable norms of the community. One conclusion from this study is the lack of the right people in leadership roles within the Uganda Rugby Union and sports' governing bodies to spur change, thus impeding the progress, access to resources, and empowerment of Ugandan women in sport. For example, the socio-economic aspects on and off the field played a key role in attracting women to the sport, with the support from friends and family providing reassurances for the participants and indicating noticeably the possibility of feeling empowered both physically and socially, which was a major attraction for the women.

The study also showed that Uganda women's rugby players took pride in playing a sport that was seen as deviant (Broad, 2001), making it clear that the negative stereotypes associated with the sport did not define who they were but rather served as a reminder of the challenges that women face engaging in masculine sports. The identities of these players are diverse and have been confronted at one point with the question of

gender roles (Krane, 2001; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005) and acceptable feminine norms (Hudson, 2010; Chu et al. 2003) that are culturally accepted. However, most of the participants did not dwell on issues surrounding femininity or masculinity that tend to polarize communities but rather opted to focus on the benefits of the game, and how their engagement in the sport - reshaped their identities and how they socialize. Joncheray et al. (2014) wonder whether women pursuing careers in a sport like rugby, bodybuilding, and boxing are considered emancipatory and empowering for women who operate in dominant male spaces within the wider sports culture. Ugandan women in sports are pushed to conform to the shared expectations and dominant ideologies that are socially acceptable within the diverse cultural settings of the country. Notably, the women in this study function under dominant gender norms that are male-identified, male-dominated, and male-centered (Coakley, 2017). Every society has gender role expectations in terms of how one should appear or act, therefore, the female rugby players' experiences are not unique to other women in Uganda. This dissertation study revealed that Ugandan women rugby players are challenged daily at all fronts and struggle to compromise 'expected' gender roles as they constantly negotiate belonging and ways to navigate dominant gender ideologies that dictate a woman's place in society.

Contributions and Implications

There is a scarcity of research on African women in sports, needing more scholars to consider research studies on this population. There is a need to collectively address the structural challenges that dictate which groups of people have access to the given resources, as well as contextualize them within historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics. It is important for players, governing bodies, and feminist activists to work

together with women and girls in different communities to advance the needs of women in sport in the African landscape, particularly in Uganda. It is also important to note that Ugandan women engaging in rugby have changed and redefined their sporting experiences in a predominantly masculine sport while continuing to give new meanings to sports inclusion as well as resist the socio-cultural boundaries that define the sport. There are contributions and implications resulting from this dissertation study. A contribution from this dissertation study lies in the addition of new knowledge on African women to the extant literature and in the provision of invaluable insight into how and why women are interested in the sport of rugby. Another contribution from this dissertation lies in increasing visibility and advocacy for African female athletes helping to bring attention to gender-based biases within the sports structures that impede women and girls' participation in sport.

Research and advocacy could broaden our understanding of ways to improve the sporting experiences of women rugby players in Uganda. An implication of this dissertation lies in the view that sport can provide women with ways to re-imagine gender roles and responsibilities that currently define women in a post-colonial Uganda. Another implication is that sport can provide women with invaluable life skills—leadership, coaching, education, strategic planning, team building, social skills—which help the navigation of daily lives. Women can also utilize their presence in the sports arena and the platform availed to them to collectively mobilize resources and support from the community, sponsors, and policymakers in various government institutions that support women's engagement in the public spheres. Another implication is that with the increase in female athlete acceptance in power sports, there will be a positive effect on the

opportunities available for women and girls to participate at all levels of the sport. There is still a long way to go for the women rugby players to work towards changing societal perceptions about feminine role identity as well as convincing sports administrators to shift focus onto the potential growth of the women's game.

Suggestions for future research

1. The research focused on the experiences of women rugby players. Future research should consider focusing on the experiences and perspectives of female athletes engaged in pre-colonial and colonial sports.
2. Sports organizations and institutions play a critical role in the development of the sport. It would be important to analyze and examine the structures, policies, and leadership of sports organizations in Uganda, and how they influence sports participation for women at all levels.
3. The study focused on women in a male-dominated sport. Future research should examine the sports experiences of women participating in 'non-dominant' male sports.
4. Women's rugby is considered a fast-growing sport. Future research should focus on the experiences of African women across the continent and how the sport has been defined across transnational cultures and borders.
5. An ethnographic study is recommended to better understand how women perform gender in different contexts and how the sport defines the lived experiences of African female athletes in their natural setting.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Participant Demographic Form (Circle or List)

1. Age: 18 45
 - a. 18 – 24, b. 25 – 31, c. 32 – 38, d. 39 – 45.

2. Location / Region of Country:
 - a. Central, b. West, c. East, d. North,

3. Education Level:
 - a. Primary school certificate (PLE),
 - b. High school (*O level – UCE or *A - UACE),
 - c. Higher education (*Diploma, *Degree, *Masters, *PhD),
 - d. Other

4. Level of Play/involvement:
 - a. High school
 - b. University
 - c. Club team

5. National team engagement:
 - a. Yes / No
 - b. (if Yes, how many times have you represented Uganda)
 - i. None,
 - ii. 1 – 4,
 - iii. 5 - 10,
 - iv. More than 10

6. Length of participation in Rugby:
 - a. Less than 2 years,
 - b. 2 – 5 years
 - c. 6 – 9 years,
 - d. 10 – 14 years,
 - e. more than 15 years

7. Family and dependents:
 - a. Married Yes /No
 - b. Live with parents, Yes / No
 - c. Have children
 - i. None,
 - ii. 1,
 - iii. 2-4,
 - iv. More than 4

8. Profession / Employment:

Lawyer, student, accountant, sales, business owner, medical personnel, family business, sports coach, teacher, other

.....

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide Questions

Have a two-part interview

1. Please tell me some of your childhood memories. Can you share some stories about your growing up?
 - a. What sports did you engage during this stage of your life?
 - b. Who were supportive of your sport engagement?
 - c. What does this mean to you?

2. Why is sports important to you? Any special meaning it has for you?
 - a. In what ways has sports helped you?
 - b. In what ways has sport impact you and through you, those close to you?
 - c. What have you learnt from sport that has impacted all other aspects of your life?

3. Who introduced you to sports? How did it happen?
 - a. At the beginning, who were the most important people that impacted you while involved in sport (primary, secondary, higher institution, and club level)? and what communities impact you while involved in sport, such as the city, village, sports organization, religious groups, community groups?
 - b. How were you influenced by friends, family, or community? Was sport an escape from everyday life obligations or was it simply for fun?

4. As a female athlete/ sports woman, how would you describe or talk about sports for women in Uganda today?
 - a. Please talk about what you have seen in the past, experienced,
 - b. Please talk about changes that have occurred compared from your childhood to present time.
 - c. What most important changes have happened that concern women sport in Uganda?

5. How do people in leadership and sport organizations they govern in society influence how women in Uganda engage in sporting activities?
 - a. Is the general status or prominence of women in Uganda society reflective on the support given to women's sport and female athletes?
Do factors such as hierarchy in sport impact the growth of women's rugby? If so, please explain.

6. Sport is not a common feature in women and girls' livelihood in Uganda.
 - a. Have you tried to recruit other women / girls into the sport? What do you say about the game when trying to recruit other women and how do you get their attention to merge everyday life challenges and rugby?

7. In what ways have women used sports to change the way people think of female engagement in sport?
 - a. Does success on and off the field for female athletes challenge the pecking order that exist in sport environment, specifically rugby?
8. What ways of thinking about women in society/community influence women's participation in sport and are imbedded in practiced community and national culture in Uganda. Is there an image or reputation associated with women's rugby? If yes, please explain
 - a. How can we bring ways of behavior and cultural practices associated with man's sport into one while preserving image of a Ugandan woman, as well as promoting the multiple talents like sports that a woman possesses?
9. Rugby is a man's sport. What are your thoughts and feelings about participating in a sport strongly influenced and controlled by men?
 - a. Why do you (women) choose to play rugby and stay involved; what benefits are associated with engaging in the sport?
 - b. Is there a reputation associated with playing a man's sport?
 - c. How does rugby rank in terms of cultural and social importance in Uganda?
10. What come to mind about rugby on and off the field, things that they perform and that you enjoy?
 - a. Briefly describe what rugby possess in terms of core values for (women's) rugby, what it is to you and people outside rugby.
 - b. What thoughts do you have about what people in society say about female rugby players? Please tell me about yourself in relation to places (social) that you currently and previously lived.
 - i. Can you think of examples or stories where women (in Uganda) have changed something about rugby to make it fitting for their coaching style, selections, change songs, behavior in community, work ethics, academics/schooling, relating to friends, work skills, leadership roles.
11. When and why did you first start playing rugby? Talk about your first experience playing women's rugby.
 - a. What made you decide to go to for rugby practice for the first time?
 - i. What other reasons do you think women have for engaging in this sport?
 - ii. What aspects of the game attract women to play?
 - iii. What is favorite part of being part of rugby sport/community?
12. How does rugby influence your daily life?

- a. Have you changed your social behaviors (how you relate to others) due to participation in the sport?
 - b. Have you recreated yourself to look and feel different given the sport of rugby?
 - c. How do you view yourself outside of rugby?
 - d. How do you view yourself while playing rugby?
13. What comments and descriptions do friends and family use to talk about you as a rugby player/athlete?
 - a. What do you tell people who are surprised that you play? What are their reactions to women's rugby?
 - b. Does it mean something different being a female player? Can you explain.
 - c. Is masculinity associated with rugby a factor to consider? Please explain.
14. Given that our society has mostly men in power positions, tending to be in power and decision-making roles, what role does sport play in influencing/ changing the status quo of male dominance in decision making especially in sport organizations?
 - a. Has the success of female athletes challenged authority / power relations within sporting community? please explain.
 - b. How does the lady cranes team and individual female rugby players exist within a gender-biased rugby sporting community/leadership? And how do they make themselves strong to overcome this or to assert influence? Or use their position as talented rugby players to introduce needed change?
15. Have you played for the national team, the Lady Cranes? Please share your experiences with the national team.
 - a. In which ways could the governing bodies of sport in Uganda (URU, National council of sports, UOC, University councils and ministry of Education and Sports) promote and foster the growth women's rugby?
 - b. What is the future of women rugby in Uganda? What do you want for the future of the women's game in Uganda?
 - c. What role can organizations play to engage more women in sport governance in an effort to dismantle male hold of power in sport?
16. Looking to the future -- where do you see yourself heading after playing rugby is over and how are you going to make this happen?
 - a. Is there anything else you would like to share about your sport/rugby experiences? Or about the national team Lady cranes?
17. Do you have any questions for me about the study or your experiences?

APPENDIX C: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Introductory Email / Text Message

Dear

My name is Emma Ariyo. I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia, Department of Kinesiology, conducting a research study under the direction of Dr. Rose Chepyator-Thomson.

We are conducting a study focused on female rugby players who are between the age of 18 – 45 years, current or former members (participants) of the Uganda Rugby Union (URU) and Uganda Women Rugby Association (UWRA). The purpose of this study is to understand socio-cultural construction of gender on and off the field in Uganda using lived experiences and personal stories of women rugby players, and how players navigate their everyday lives using multiplicity of identities and gender roles from grassroots to national team level participation in sport. Your participation in this study will involve an interview, which will take about 45-60 minutes.

We will appreciate very much if you would consider participating in this study.

We do thank you in advance for your consideration and hope to include your unique perspective and experiences in this research study. Your perspective is invaluable toward our understanding of this phenomenon of Uganda female rugby players multiple roles and identities.

Should you have any questions regarding the research study please contact:

The principal investigator: Dr. Rose Chepyator-Thomson

Tel: +1 706-542-4434.

Email: jchepyat@uga.edu

Co- investigator:

Emma S. Ariyo

Tel: +1 203-545-7777.

Email: eariyo@uga.edu .

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Examination of Sociocultural Boundaries and Gender construction in Women's Rugby in Uganda

Researcher's Statement

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. This form is designed to give you information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent."

Principal Investigator:

Jepkorir-Rose Chepyator-Thomson
Professor
Department of Kinesiology
Email: jchepyat@uga.edu
Tel: 706-542-4434

Co-Investigator

Emma S. Ariyo
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Kinesiology
Email: eariyo@uga.edu
Tel: 203-545-7777

You are cordially invited to participate in this research project conducted by the doctoral candidate Emma S. Ariyo, working under the direction of Dr. Jepkorir-Rose Chepyator-Thomson, University of Georgia.

Purpose of this study:

The purpose of this study is to understand (a) how women rugby players perform gender using their lived experiences and personal stories and (b) how women rugby players use roles and multiple identities in playing rugby from grassroots to the national team level.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about women in sport in Uganda, experiences/ involvement in rugby, community and family perceptions of female rugby players, power relations in rugby and administration, gender relations, as well as governance in women's rugby.
- We will ask you to talk about your lived experiences with sport, focusing on rugby. It will take about 45 to 60 minutes.

- Interview results will be emailed to you to clarify or affirm them, with a follow up in two months via email or telephone.

Participation in this study is voluntary.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can ask to have all of the information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of this research

Risks and Discomforts:

There are minimal risks involved in participation in this study. You may experience some discomfort or stress during the interview because there could be some questions that may make you uncomfortable, so you can choose not to answer them.

Benefits:

There are no monetary benefits resulting from participating in this study. However, your responses may help us understand new dimensions of performing gender on and off the field, and inform educators, activists, policymakers and sports administrators' decisions about developing sports opportunities for women in Uganda while remaining cognizant of the multiple identities and abilities of female athletes in the country.

Privacy/Confidentiality:

We will take steps to protect your privacy. No individually identifiable information about you, or provided by you during the research, will be shared with others without your written permission, except if required by law.

To minimize any risk that could occur if accidental information connected to the research happens, you will be assigned an identifying pseudonym or fictitious name, and this pseudonym will be used on all of the data gathered and results. Hence know that all study records will be kept confidential. No identifiable information about you (e.g., name, e-mail address, cellphone number) or provided by you during the research will be shared with others without your permission.

You will be assigned a pseudonym at the start of the interview that will be used on all transcripts and results. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the persons conducting the study. Pseudonyms will be used for all names and proper nouns, therefore at no point will there be any direct identifiers linked to the participants. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study. This research involves the transmission of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed.

Electronic (non-paper) data will be stored on a password-protected computer and the paper data (e.g., consent forms, transcripts) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office (330 Ramsey Student Center, The University of Georgia). All documentation and recordings for this study will be kept for a period of three years, at which time they will all be destroyed.

Taking part is voluntary:

Your participation will involve a telephone, zoom or WhatsApp interview and should last about 45 – 60 minutes. The study will use audio/video recording devices to capture and document the participants' stories and lived experiences. Participation is voluntary. You

can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

Principal Investigator:

Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson, Professor
 Department of Kinesiology,
 University of Georgia
 Email: jchepyat@uga.edu
 Tel: 706-542-4434

Or

Co-Principal Investigator

Emma S. Ariyo
 346 Ramsey Student Center
 330 River Road, Athens, GA 30602
 Email: eariyo@uga.edu
 Tel: 203-545-7777

For questions or problems about your rights, please call or write:
 Chairperson, Institutional Review Board | University of Georgia | Athens, Georgia
 30602-7411
 Telephone: (706)-542-3199 | E-Mail: IRB@uga.edu

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or I had read to you this entire consent form, and answered all of your questions.

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX E: UGANDA NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IRB APPROVAL LETTER



UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

13/11/2020

To: Emma Ariyo

University of Georgia
+1 2035457777

Type: Initial Review

Re: UCUREC-2020-54: Examination of Sociocultural Boundaries and Gender construction in Women's Rugby in Uganda, PDF, 2020-11-06

I am pleased to inform you that at the 10 convened meeting on 12/11/2020, the Uganda Christian University REC, committee meeting, etc voted to approve the above referenced application.
Approval of the research is for the period of 13/11/2020 to 13/11/2021.


As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and addenda to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes.
3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or any new information which could change the risk benefit: ratio must be submitted to the REC.
4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by participants and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Continuing review application must be submitted to the REC **eight weeks** prior to the expiration date of **13/11/2021** in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. You are required to register the research protocol with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for final clearance to undertake the study in Uganda.

The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by Uganda Christian University REC:



APPENDIX F: UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA IRB APPROVAL LETTER

 <p>UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA</p>	<p>Tucker Hall, Room 212 310 E. Campus Rd. Athens, Georgia 30602 TEL: 706-542-3199 FAX: 706-542-5638 IRB@uga.edu http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/</p>	<p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Jennifer Freeman, IRB Analyst Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia</p>										
<p>Human Research Protection Program</p>												
<p>EXEMPT DETERMINATION</p>												
<p>August 3, 2020</p>												
<p>Dear Jepkorir Chepyator-Thomson:</p>												
<p>On 8/3/2020, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:</p>												
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Title of Study:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Examination of Socio-cultural Boundaries and Gender construction in Women's Rugby in Uganda</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Investigator:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Jepkorir Chepyator-Thomson</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Co-Investigator:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Emma Ariyo</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">IRB ID:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">PROJECT00002567</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Review Category:</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Exempt 2ii</td> </tr> </table>	Title of Study:	Examination of Socio-cultural Boundaries and Gender construction in Women's Rugby in Uganda	Investigator:	Jepkorir Chepyator-Thomson	Co-Investigator:	Emma Ariyo	IRB ID:	PROJECT00002567	Review Category:	Exempt 2ii		
Title of Study:	Examination of Socio-cultural Boundaries and Gender construction in Women's Rugby in Uganda											
Investigator:	Jepkorir Chepyator-Thomson											
Co-Investigator:	Emma Ariyo											
IRB ID:	PROJECT00002567											
Review Category:	Exempt 2ii											
<p>We have determined that the proposed research is Exempt. The research activities may begin 8/3/2020.</p>												
<p>Since this study was determined to be exempt, please be aware that not all future modifications will require review by the IRB. For more information please see Appendix C of the Exempt Research Policy (https://research.uga.edu/docs/policies/compliance/hso/IRB-Exempt-Review.pdf). As noted in Section C.2., you can simply notify us of modifications that will not require review via the "Add Public Comment" activity.</p>												
<p>A progress report will be requested prior to 8/3/2025. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.</p>												
<p>In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).</p>												
<p><small>Commit to Georgia give.uga.edu An Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, Veterans, Disability Institution</small></p>												

FIGURES

Figure 1: The organizational structure of the Ministry of Education and Sports.