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I, Jennifer A. Carter, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.

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"Let's Bang": Constructing, Reinforcing, and Embodying Orthodox Masculinity in Women's Full-Contact, Tackle Football

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"Let's Bang": Constructing, Reinforcing, and Embodying Orthodox Masculinity in Women's Full-Contact, Tackle Football

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in the Department of Sociology of the College of Arts and Sciences by
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Abstract

If asked to envision a football player in your head, a pretty standard image would likely emerge: a big, strong, muscular man. This image, and the discourse surrounding full-contact, American tackle football, focus on football as a "bastion of manhood;" a space where only the manliest of men will be successful. However, missing from this picture are the many women who participate in tackle football. In examining women's football, this study began by asking: what beliefs and practices constitute women's experiences of gender in tackle football? To answer this question, this project used several qualitative methodologies to examine the lived experiences of women playing football, including more than 300 hours of embodied participant observation, informal interviews, and autoethnography. This study finds that in aligning with expectations of football culture, women engage in a cyclical process in which they construct, reinforce, and embody football masculinity, an aggressive masculinity requiring physical sacrifice, and overt denigration of femininity. The construction of football masculinity requires women to overcome physical and ideological boundaries regarding women's bodies, engage in antifeminine behaviors, and suppress feminine performance throughout the season. This requires policing of masculinity and femininity constantly, a practice in which both coaches and players engage. Ultimately, this process illustrates the fluidity of masculinity and femininity, as it is apparent that women tackle football players engage in both at varying levels through their interactions. Thus, this study finds that masculinity and femininity cannot be seen as polar opposites, or as the ends of a singular continuum. Instead, women tackle football players illustrate that one can engage in femininity and masculinity simultaneously.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I knew it was coming. At some point during this game I was going to get hit. I had not been hit in practice the day before, so far my only day as a tackle football player. But it was coming. I was only playing on kickoffs, and had made it through the first kickoff of the game having barely been touched by a player from the other team. As time in the second quarter ran down, and the offense neared the goal line, I knew I would be heading onto the field at least once more before halftime. I wasn't nervous, but I stood there wondering what it was like to get hit. Hard. These women did not hold back. In fact, after a few players from the other team illegally hit our players without penalty, the coaches had ordered our defense to try to injure the other team's offensive players.

The offense had failed to reach the end zone, but the field goal team was headed onto the field to attempt to get us three points. I strapped on my helmet, expecting the kick to be good. A moment later the referee’s hands went up to signal a Cincinnati field goal. We were now winning 3-0. As I ran onto the field for my second kickoff, I could feel it. My participant observation, which had been taken to a new level when I strapped on football gear, was about to get a whole lot more painful. I was sure of it.

"Left side ready," the kicker yelled.

"Hell yeah," we responded.

"Right side ready," she yelled again.

"Hell yeah," they replied.

In unison we all began sprinting down the field. The ball was flying towards my side of the field, and was cleanly caught by the other team’s return specialist. Her job now was to get past me. My job was to “hit her in the mouth,” as one coach had explained it. Just when it
appeared I was going to get my first chance make a tackle, a teammate swooped in missing the ball carrier, and redirecting her course. In a flash, I found myself chasing the ball carrier, getting further behind with every step. After a 30 yard sprint down the sideline the tackle was finally made, and my time on the field was done again. Once more I left the field untouched.

It was nearly a half hour before I got the chance to head back on the field. Halftime had passed, as had much of the third quarter. Our offense had just scored, and I was an extra point kick away from my third kickoff. The extra point sailed wide right, leaving us with a nine point lead in the game. As I trotted onto the field Tiffany jogged past. “Just go down there and hit somebody, anybody. Don't forget to keep your head on a swivel,” she called. Kickoffs are known to be especially dangerous, because as you sprint down the field, the other team's goal is to block, or knock you down, so their ball carrier can run the ball down the field as far as possible. Hits on kickoffs are often extremely vicious. If you do not “keep your head on a swivel,” or stay aware of where the opposing players are, you could unknowingly get hit, or “blind-sided”. Keeping track of the opposing players, while trying to chase down a ball carrier, is no easy task. There are players from both teams running in every direction. You never truly know where people are, or when you are going to get hit.

I lined up with the team again, determined to “hit somebody” on this play. We again sprinted down the field. Through my facemask I did my best to look left and right, keeping the opposing players in sight. As during the previous kickoff, I quickly found the ball carrier running towards me. She and I were again running straight towards each other. I was finally going to “hit somebody.” But I had broken the cardinal rule. I had lost sight of a defender. And, before I knew it, I was on the ground. In a split second the play was over. I had been hit from the “blind
Figure 1.1: Jen (JC) Carter (9) is blocked by an opposing player during a kickoff in 2011.

side.” I had not seen the hit coming. As I fell, the player who hit me stepped on my hand before ending up on the ground next to me. The ball carrier and two of my teammates ended up in the pile as well. I hopped up and trotted to the sideline. It had hurt, but football culture says football players do not show pain; they sacrifice their body for the team. And these women followed that culture. “Felt good, didn't it?” Tahlia said as I made it to the sideline. “Yeah, sure,” I said with a smile.

The truth was, it did feel good; the quick action of the game, the collisions, the uncertainty of what would happen next, were all a rush. Yes, it definitely hurt. But, as I returned to my observations on the sideline, the pain went away, or at least was no longer on my mind for that moment. I would return to the field five more times on the kickoff team, and a few times on
defense during the game. I got hit twice more, and made a tackle during the final kickoff of the night. I had played in my first football game, but, as I would learn later, I wasn't a "true" football player just yet.

**Football and Masculinity**

If asked to envision a football player in your head, a pretty standard image would likely emerge: a big, strong, muscular man. Outside of the gendered markers, one might even envision the players in the opening vignette as men. Shown a picture of me, a woman, playing football, my students spend time analyzing the intent of "him" and "he" in the photo (see Figure 1). Even as I question their assumptions about what is happening in the photo, they never come to the conclusion that the contradiction is in their assumption that the athletes they are looking at are men. There is no question here. The picture is of people playing football; the people playing football must be men. When I tell the students that the photo they are looking at is of women, their reactions range from "I knew there was something weird about that picture" to "wow, I never would have even thought of that." When I reveal that the player in the foreground is me, most students offer disbelief. Eyebrows raise, mouths open, and laughter often ensues. While they do not question whether I am a woman while standing in front of them in the classroom, they continuously identify me as a man when I am clothed in a football uniform and engaged in an aggressive act. To believe that a 5'4", 150 lb woman plays football goes against everything our culture has told them about football players. Quarterbacks who are six feet tall are too short to play in the National Football League (NFL). Men who weigh 250 pounds are too undersized to play on the offensive line. Women and girls are too small and weak to play football at all. These are the stories we hear about football players.
The discourse surrounding full-contact, tackle football in the United States focuses on football as a "bastion of manhood;" a space where only the manliest of men will be successful. However, even if only some will succeed, all men still should aspire to become the revered "football player." Espoused as a “builder of men” (Fields 2005:35), and glorified for the connections made between father and son, football offers a space where boys are taught to become men. It has been argued that competitive sports were designed to address a contemporary crisis of masculinity, bolstering an ideology of "natural superiority" over women and subordinated groups of men (Crosset 1990; Kimmel 1990; Messner 1988). Young boys are socialized to participate in activities that increase their strength, aggression, and sports-related skills, such that the athlete identity becomes inextricably linked with masculinity. This identity is so significant that boys, as early as elementary school, understand that being athletic directly correlates with one's popularity in school (Messner 1991). Football has been at the forefront of this popularity in the United States. Youth football leagues begin engaging boys in tackle football as young as five, with the aspirations of many of these youth being a football career in high school, college, and the professional ranks. Although only .08 percent of those who play high school football will reach professional football (NCAA 2013), this stands as a dream for many boys. Even as football continues to be identified as a sport that ravages boys and men's bodies (Dworkin and Messner 1998; Sabo 2014), the positive benefits of the sport, like teamwork, strength, and increased manliness, are spotlighted as essential characteristics that outweigh any potential health consequences. Politician Robert F. Kennedy even exclaimed that "except for war, there is nothing in American life - nothing - which trains a boy better for life than football" (Clinch 1973 as quoted in Fields 2005:36). Ultimately, the institution of sport is
important in the construction of masculinity because it provides a structure in which men
"construct and reconstruct narrow definitions of masculinity" (Messner 2000:209).

In the past, masculinity had been directly tied to men, being defined as behaviors
associated with men, or more specifically, male bodies (Pascoe 2012). Dictionary definitions
largely still define masculinity in this way. Scholarly understandings of the concept of
masculinity have evolved over time, leading to the identification of various typologies of
masculinities. In general, "masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in
social action" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:836). Hegemonic masculinity is the form of
masculinity that is revered at any point in time (Connell 2005). This form of masculinity is
always changing and evolving, being defined differently across time, space, and culture. In
Western societies, one must possess certain ascribed characteristics, such as being a white,
straight, cisgender man, to even be "eligible" to reach this esteemed form of masculinity. Men
must also achieve certain characteristics. In the U.S. today, "athletic qualities such as aggression,
competitiveness, strength, speed, and power [are] viewed entirely as masculine" (Dowling
2000:201), requisites of hegemonic masculinity, or being a "real man. Contact sports
particularly have been connected to hegemonic notions of masculinity in American culture in
contemporary times (Dworkin and Messner 1998). It has been argued that male athletes,
especially those participating in contact sports, like football, "serve as public symbols of
exemplary masculinity with whom all men can identify as men, as separate and superior to
women" (Dworkin and Messner 1998:343). As the most revered form of masculinity, one of the
main characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is that it subordinates women, and those men who
are unable to meet its requisites (Connell 2005). Although few men will embody the hegemonic
form of masculinity, sociologist R.W. (Raewyn) Connell (2005) has argued that all men, and even women, are complicit in its continued dominance.

Sociologist Eric Anderson (2005) has posited that when men meet the *achieved* characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, but do not possess the *ascribed* requisites they have accomplished orthodox masculinity. So, for example, a gay man might be an extremely accomplished, strong, powerful athlete; while he may meet achieved characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, he does not meet the ascribed requisites based on his sexual identity. A black man would experience a similar paradox based on his race. Thus, Anderson (2005) argues these men are achieving orthodox masculinity. However, Anderson (2005) has not addressed whether women, who are clearly failing to meet the main ascribed requisite of hegemonic masculinity, being a man, can engage in orthodox masculinity. This begs the question, can women, like gay men, effectively engage in orthodox masculinity when embodying masculinity in a masculinized space?

**Masculinized Spaces**

A masculinized space is one that maintains an expectation that participants will enact masculine "configurations of practice" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:836). These practices involve many different realms of social life, offering expectations related to physical bodies, emotions, language, etiquette, hobbies, and other social actions. This also includes upholding masculine ideologies, such as those that espouse the muscular superiority of men. Masculinized industry has been described as that which is "historically male-dominated and higher risk, with an emphasis on authority and masculinity" (Collins 2013:245). This would include policing, corrections, firefighting, military positions, and building trades. A main emphasis in these positions is muscularity and physicality. It is these attributes that have been used to limit and
exclude women's participation. Similar arguments have been used to police women's participation in contact sports, such as tackle football, rugby, boxing, and hockey.

One of the most contested issues within these masculinized spaces revolves around biologically essentialist understandings of women's physical capabilities. A perceived lack of strength makes women a liability in "male-dominated" jobs, according to their co-workers (Balkin 1988). For example, policemen have identified a lack of strength and aggressiveness as reasons women should not participate in patrol work (Balkin 1988; Wells and Alt 2005). Concerns about women effectively “backing up” male corrections officers (Britton 2003), police officers (Balkin 1988; Corsianos 2009; Prokos and Padavic 2002; Scarborough and Collins 2002), and military personnel (Cohn 2000; Holm 1992) in a physical altercation have been well-documented as well. It is often acknowledged that these feelings are sexist, but then reinforced that they are still valid due expected physical limitations of the female body. "I don’t care who, how big the female officer is, I’m going to be able to take care of myself a lot better than they are. You know, that’s sexist, but it’s realistic," said one male correctional officer (Britton 2003:171).

While the “reality of police work” is that most of the daily tasks require little physicality (Prokos and Padavic 2002:442), male and female officers both regard muscle and strength as of utmost importance within policing (Wells and Alt 2005). Physicality is also revered in contact sports, with other skills and strategy being overshadowed by “big hits,” strength, and power (Theberge 1998, 2000, 2003). For example, "women’s hockey is portrayed as a game of speed, finesse, and play making in contrast to the more aggressive physicality of the men’s game, which favors force and intimidation" (Theberge 2003:500). The more valued and popular of these games is that which is played by men, the game featuring aggressive physicality. Research has
shows that women playing tackle football and rugby are attracted to the physicality and aggressiveness of the sports as a main draw (Chase 2006; Migliaccio and Berg 2007; Packard 2009). As Chase (2006:238) says "rugby provides a space for these women where they are expected to be physical and to tackle other players in ways that are not allowed in many other women's sports." Packard (2009) and Migliaccio and Berg (2007) found women football players desire physical contact. Many women love their specific football positions, because of the amount of contact required, and the ability to make big hits. For example, offensive and defensive linewomen often indicate their love of the consistent physical play on the line, which requires contact on every play. Overall, “These women are proud of their ability to 'hit as hard as any man' and feel empowered enough to encourage their own daughters and other girls in the community to play football" (Packard 2009:336).

Doing masculinity within masculinized spaces is not without its challenges for women. Women are generally expected to enact a "feminine presentation of self and a masculine performance of work," and "engag[e] in reflexive gender displays that emphasize the most advantageous identity for each situation," what has been called a "double bind" for women. (Denissen 2010:1052). While men in these spaces are expected to avoid the feminine, women must find a way to maintain the feminine while embracing the masculine. Women must either adopt male-defined requisites for success, and face the peril of being perceived as 'unfeminine,' or they may reject them, doing so at the cost of success as it has been organizationally defined (Britton 2003:18).

Thus, women in masculinized spaces engage in a hybrid gender performance that encompasses femininity and masculinity. This study finds that women are able to employ orthodox
masculinity on the football field, but gender performance in this space is also "inclusive" (Anderson 2009), encompassing attributes of other femininities and masculinities as well.

**Hybrid Masculinities and Female Bodies**

It has been acknowledged in recent research that there are inclusive and hybrid forms of masculinity that encompass elements of hegemonic, marginalized, and subordinated masculinities. In other words, masculinities now "allow a more varied selection of performances to 'count' as masculine" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). As Bridges and Pascoe (2014) explain, there are several different stances on the overall impact this fluidity has on the gender hierarchy. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinity is impacted very little by changes in the expression of masculinity. In contrast, Anderson (2009) finds that as masculinities become more "inclusive," they offer more equality and challenge the gender hierarchy. The final camp finds that hybrid masculinities "represent significant changes in the expression of systems of power and inequality, though fall short of challenging them" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014:247). In this way, the fluidity of masculinities "blur gender differences and boundaries," but fail to reduce the subordination of women and non-hegemonic men (Bridges and Pascoe 2014:247).

This study finds that hybrid masculinities allow women to engage in masculine and feminine performances on the football field, and offer the potential to challenge the gender hierarchy. While masculinity and femininity have often been considered relational and end points on a gender continuum, the fluidity of gender performance by women football players point to the limitations of viewing gender in this way. Instead, it seems more accurate to consider gender as separate continua that acknowledge one can enact masculinity and femininity at the same time.
At the beginning of this study each player had the opportunity to mark whether they identified as more masculine or more feminine by drawing a line on a continuum similar to that shown in Figure 1.2. As can be seen in the figure, two players identified the masculine end point, and four the feminine end point. The other 20 players who completed this survey question placed themselves elsewhere in the continuum. A total of 15 players placed themselves somewhere on the feminine side of the spectrum, while nine identified with the masculine side, and two right in the middle. Given the opportunity to self-identify, most players identified themselves as feminine, although to varying degrees. However, in practice, all players engaged in the process of presenting an orthodox form of football masculinity, displaying aggression, power, and physical force throughout the season. Ultimately, it seems unlikely that identifying oneself on a masculine-feminine continuum fully explains ones gender performance.

This study finds that women perform masculinity and femininity to varying degrees throughout the course of every practice, game, and social event. The social setting, participants, and general situation change the players' gender performance consistently. Social justice comedian, and self-professed sociologist, Sam Killermann (2013) suggests a two continua model, which I will further explore in this text. In this model, increasing one's masculinity does not necessarily decrease one's femininity, and vice versa. In other words, a player may be engaged in a hyper-masculine, orthodox performance of masculinity, and still display her femininity in some outward expression. For a woman, a hypermasculine performance with little
display of femininity might be categorized as "butch" (see Figure 1.3). Some sports scholars have argued that women athletes offer outward displays of femininity, such as bows in the hair, to "apologize" for their masculine behavior on the field (Davis-Delano, Pollock, and Vose 2009; Ezzell 2009; Felshin 1974; George 2005; Griffin 1998; Messner 1994). I will argue that while this behavior may be construed as "apologetic," it could also be explained as a more hybrid gender performance that encompasses aspects of femininity and masculinity.

**Why women's football?**

Masculinities are generally researched in male bodies. However, several scholars have examined masculinity outside of male bodies (Ainsworth, Batty, and Burchielli 2014; Halberstam 1998; Messerschmidt 2004; Pascoe 2012; Rifkin 2002; Wickman 2003). Judith (Jack) Halberstam's (1998:276) work on "female masculinity" was groundbreaking in its consideration of "the multiple ways in which women produce and name new masculinities." In this work, Halbertstam (1998:28) considers queer female masculinities as she argues that these are the "most threatening" to men. This includes masculinities enacted by lesbian women, specifically focusing on the stone butch, drag kings, and transgender people in the female-to-male (FTM) spectrum. Largely theoretical, Halberstam's work considers "female masculinity" through a pop culture analysis, but misses the opportunity to offer an empirical approach that considers the everyday lives of women. Additionally, her study fails to examine masculinity in heterosexual women, which she acknowledges (Halberstam 1998:28). Several scholars have followed her lead focusing studies of female masculinity on lesbian women and transgender men.
(Halberstam 1998; Rifkin 2002; Wickman 2003). Less work has considered masculinity in heterosexual and gender conforming women, an area this study will address.

Women's football offers an interesting space for the examination of masculinity in female bodies, as women in the sport fall across the race, class, and sexuality spectrums. The sport also features gender conforming and non-conforming women. Schwalbe et al. (2000:441) argue that we should "study the beliefs and practices that seem to constitute gender in a setting and then try to discern the consequences of these beliefs and practices." It has been established that masculinities "can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:836). Thus, this study examines gender within sports, more specifically focusing on women who play full-contact, tackle football. Beyond being understudied, the potential for women's participation in football to disrupt its claim as the "last bastion of manhood" makes this a rich area for sociological study. Effective participation in football also has the potential to challenge cultural expectations of sex-based physical abilities, which are used to subordinate female bodies, especially in the sporting realm.

Even as women's involvement in sport increased significantly after the 1970s, with women participating at higher numbers and in more sports (Fields 2005), football has been slow to become inclusive, existing as a sport largely for men since its inception. Inequality in football opportunities has remained at all levels of the sport, with girls continuing to be denied roster spots, and even tryouts, in youth and school leagues, and women struggling to maintain competitive semi-professional and professional leagues. Girls have been harassed by players, coaches, parents, and communities as a means of denying participation, while school districts continue to uphold rules denying girls' participation in contact sports, including football (Fields
Contrary to popular belief, Title IX\(^1\) does not include protections for girls seeking football opportunities, as contact sports are excluded from the legislation. Although the Equal Protection Clause has been helpful in gaining girls access, challenges to school districts and youth programs often end up in lengthy court battles. All of this has complicated, but not completely prevented, the participation of girls and women in football, which began as early as the late 19\(^{th}\) century. However, throughout this time, gender inequality within the sport has been reified in several ways. This has happened on multiple societal levels, as "gender involves cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior and organizational practices at the interactional level, and selves and identities at the individual level" (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:510-511).

Although sociological examinations of inequality often are the purview of macro-sociologists, this study follows an interactionist perspective, ultimately considering processes within women's football, and football culture more generally, that may reproduce inequality. As in other sports studies, I work to "link individual experience and meaning with the larger structural patterns in the society" (Washington and Karen 2001:188), considering the gender structure and the organization of the sporting institution. In examining women's football, this study began by asking: what beliefs and practices constitute women's experiences of gender in tackle football? To answer this question, I used participant observation to examine how masculinity and femininity are framed and enacted on the football field by women playing the sport.

\(^1\) See Fields (2005) for a full discussion of Title IX and other legislation that impacts women's participation in contact sports.
Research Methods

This project uses several qualitative methodologies to examine the lived experiences of women playing full-contact, tackle football, including more than 300 hours of embodied participant observation, informal interviews, and autoethnography. As its name suggests, within participant observation a researcher participates in the field of study, and observes the interactions, actions, conversations, and relationships of those persons within that setting. In embodied participant observation, the emphasis is on "replicating the bodily experiences of those studied" (Emerson 2001). This type of research is especially useful within the sporting arena, where the body is the main tool used by athletes. Previous embodied participant observations have examined boxing (Lawler, 2002; Wacquant 2004), martial arts (Loh Han Loong 2013; Spencer 2013); rugby (Gill 2007), and football (Migliaccio and Berg 2007; Packard 2009; Sands 1999).

In his ethnographic work, *Body & Soul: notebooks of an apprentice boxer*, Loïc Wacquant reflects,

It is the need to understand and fully master a transformative experience that I had neither desired nor anticipated, and that long remained confusing and obscure to me, that drove me to thematize the necessity of a sociology not only of the body, in the sense of object, but also from the body, that is, deploying the body as tool of inquiry and vector of knowledge (2004:viii).

By chance, Wacquant (2004:viii) ended up becoming an apprentice boxer while looking for a space to analyze "the everyday reality of the black American ghetto." In a similar way, I found myself lining up on the football field between the white lines, instead of standing on the sidelines, as had been the expectation. My intention was not to play for the team, but to work as
a sideline assistant, carrying balls, getting water, and fetching kicking tees. However, I was perceived as a potential player by those on the team, and eventually found that my ability to build rapport with many of the players was limited. After careful consideration, I made the decision to play for the team.

On the pro side of this decision, this offered me more access to the team, gave me a new connection to those players who were always on the playing field, and deepened my relationship with others. On the con side, this limited my abilities to make jottings, and may have caused me to be less attentive to conversations and happenings throughout practices and games. However, making the decision to play immediately allowed me more unfettered access to the team, allowing me to engage with the players on a more intimate level, and build more extensive bonds. My personal experiences of playing also offered a new dimension to my work much like that experienced by other researchers who have become full participants in their field site (see Lawler 2002; Sands 1999; Wacquant 2004). I was now fully immersed in the language of the game, actions required of different positions, the feelings of uncertainty of on-field responsibilities, and certainly the pain and exhaustion that come from playing a high contact, physically demanding sport. In autoethnography, the life of the researcher becomes a site of research (Emerson and Pollner 2001; Ellis 2004), thus my direct experience of playing for this football team is also recorded as “data” for analysis.

Additionally, I engaged in informal interviewing throughout the duration of my observation. Informal interviewing is a part of participant observation in which the researcher participates in ongoing conversations in the field. Instead of asking set questions of the participants as is typical of more formal, scripted interviewing, informal interviewing allows for
the interpretation of existing interactions and “everyday” conversations. Decades ago in his now-classic ethnography, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*, William Foote Whyte (1993:303) noted the importance of this technique. He says “As I sat and listened, I learned the answer to questions that I would not even have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interviewing basis.” More recently, sociologist Mary Pattillo (2007) moved into the neighborhood she was studying in Chicago in the interest of observing interactions between residents and outsiders. She found that her conversations with residents in community organizations and community councils helped her understand others' interactions more fully than scripted interviews. These interactions allow the researcher to “learn the language” of this social group, and more actively participate in the space (Whyte 1993:296), all while maintaining an insider status (Maxwell 2004). To reflect the "language" of this group, I have reproduced profanity, and other language that may be considered derogatory, throughout this dissertation. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995:119) indicate, ethnographers are "drawn to everyday, colloquial, and often evocative terms that may be graphic or earthy…." Removal or censorship of this language may change the meanings of the interactions of the participants in this space, hence its inclusion in this document.

Informal interviewing took place during games, practices, and at other team events. I also interacted with players on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. I spent more than 300 hours doing embodied participant observation throughout two football seasons, and the off seasons, beginning in April 2011 and ending in April 2013. I attended one game before becoming a player, and then subsequently played in 11 games with the team during the 2011 and 2012 seasons. I also attended one game during the 2013 season. During the season my research included attending practices, film sessions, and games, six at home and five away. Away games
were played in four different states: Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Michigan. I rode in the team’s chartered vans to all but one away game, and drove several teammates to my final away game in Radcliff, Kentucky. I also traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana, and Kalamazoo, Michigan for away games. During the 2011 and 2012 seasons, practices and home games were played at LaSalle High School in western Cincinnati (interestingly enough, an all-male parochial school). In 2013, the team began playing at Princeton High School in northern Cincinnati. Practices also took place at an indoor facility in Sharonville, a suburb in northern Cincinnati. Film sessions, during which we watched and examined video of upcoming opponents and previous games, were held in the Village of Lockland, another Cincinnati suburb. During the offseason, observations came from conditioning sessions, team meetings, photo shoots, banquets, and other social events.

Field notes were completed after each interaction with the team and/or players. Due to my full participation in the sport, I had to find creative ways to complete jottings while on the sidelines during practices and games. During practices I would often jot notes quickly during water breaks, and after practice on a small notepad I kept in my workout bag. I also occasionally made short notes using my mobile phone’s notepad feature. During games notes were a bit more difficult to record. Generally game jottings were completed at halftime and immediately following the game. Often in the car on the way home from events I would record voice notes on my phone detailing important happenings, and offering "thick description" (Geertz 1973) of settings and situations. These voice notes and jottings were then combined into detailed field notes each night. Field notes were much easier to document during team film sessions. In these sessions I would write notes on a notepad as they happened, easily gaining direct quotes and robust stories.
In addition to data gathered through observations, I also completed secondary data collection through various archival resources. I located more than 200 mass media articles discussing women's football from 1896 to 2014. These articles are important for understanding the culture and expectations of women football players through the years. Since an extensive collection of the history of women's football does not exist in one source, this dissertation includes a broad history as documented through these secondary data sources (see Chapter 2). Several local newspaper sources were also donated by the team statistician of the Cincinnati Sizzle from her personal collection.

**The Cincinnati Sizzle**

This research focused on the Cincinnati Sizzle of the Women's Football Alliance (WFA). I use the actual team name in this dissertation, with IRB approval. Players were notified of this fact during the consent process. Due to my participation as a player on the team, it seemed impossible to conceal the identity of the team as my name and photograph appeared in team rosters, marketing materials, and on the team website.

The WFA is the self-proclaimed “largest-ever women's football league in the world” featuring 63 teams and more than 2,000 players (Women's Football Alliance 2012). In addition to a team in Cincinnati, the WFA includes Ohio teams in Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, and Dayton (final season in 2011). The Sizzle became a franchise in 2003, played an exhibition season in 2004, and played their first full season in 2005. The team was originally a member of the now defunct National Women's Football Association (NWFA). The 2011 season was the first in the team's history where a record “above .500,” or a winning record, was achieved, as the team completed the season 4-3, having what would have been the eighth game of the season nullified due to inclement weather. In 2012, the team regressed, and we lost all eight games.
Generally the WFA season consists of an exhibition game or two in April, with the eight-game regular season spanning from April to June. Playoff games are then played in June and July, culminating in a national championship game in early August. The WFA consists of regional divisions, which allows teams, who pay for their own travel expenses, the ability to keep costs low. During my time with the Sizzle, our longest trip was to Kalamazoo, Michigan, a 600-mile, 10-hour, round-trip excursion. In the past the team has made trips to Washington D.C., Tennessee, St. Louis, and even Alabama for away games.

Head coach and CEO, Elbert “Ickey” Woods, a former Cincinnati Bengal, worked with a small volunteer coaching staff of two to three coaches to manage the Sizzle during the 2011 and 2012 seasons. Now known simply as Coach Woods, his football career ended after just four years in the National Football League (NFL), with knee injuries ending two of his seasons early. A sensation as a rookie in 1988, Woods is often known as the “father of the end zone dance” after his “Ickey Shuffle” routine, a short dance he offered after touchdowns, became controversial, and was almost banned by the NFL. His end zone dance was eventually allowed by the NFL, although the team was fined several times before. It was emphatically embraced by fans who dubbed Cincinnati as “Ickeyville” for some time. The dance also spawned many other routines by various players throughout the league. Ickey’s two serious knee injuries as a player have forced him into numerous surgeries since his retirement, including two knee replacements that left him hobbling down the sideline with a walker for several games during the 2011 season.

It is clear Woods is still a celebrity, as people often stop to talk to him during practices and games. At one practice two gentlemen came up and asked him to “give [them] an 'Ickey Shuffle' for old time's sake.” When he declined, one of the gentleman asked, “well, can I at least get a handshake then?” Coach Woods obliged, shaking both men's hands. More prominent was a
Table 1.1: Racial Identity of Sizzle Players (n = 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

request for the “Ickey Shuffle” made over the loud speaker by the announcer at an away game during the 2011 season. He declined this request for the “Shuffle” as well. Coach Woods is also occasionally stopped by autograph seekers after games and practices, and generally obliges these requests.

Access to the team was originally granted by Coach Woods. However, team members were offered the opportunity to participate in this study, or decline, signing consent forms to authorize their participation. Additionally, each consented participant was given the choice of using their real name or a pseudonym. Those using a pseudonym are noted with an asterisk on first mention in this dissertation. Coaches generally will not be identified by name, although the gender of the coach may be indicated when relevant to the analysis. The roster varied in size from season to season, and even week to week, with around 45 players on the official roster for the 2011 and 2012 seasons, and 35 players required by the league. A total of 37 players, coaches, and support staff were consented over the two-year study.

The Sizzle Players

Of those consented, 28 filled out an optional questionnaire requesting demographic information. Based on this questionnaire it is clear that the Sizzle players come from diverse backgrounds. All respondents identified their biological sex as female, however one player
Table 1.2: Income level of Sizzle Players (n = 27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $10,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $79,000</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 - $119,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$120,000 or over</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

identified her gender identity as transgender. Although all other players identified as women, based on the gender expression of some, it is unlikely that all of these women would be considered gender conforming. Outside of sex, the main requirement of every player is that they be at least 18 years old, with a rule stipulation to allow 17 year-olds the opportunity to play with parental permission. Ages on the 2011 and 2012 Cincinnati Sizzle teams ranged from 18 to 53.

Racially, Sizzle players mainly identified as white and black on the questionnaire, with one player each identifying as Hispanic, Native American, and White/Native American (Table 1.1). The players also spanned several classes from the unemployed to six-figure earners (see Table 1.2). Players were employed in varying jobs with nurses, high school administrators, construction workers, engineers, pharmaceutical representatives, factory line workers, personal trainers, cooks, social workers, military members, and high school and college students all sharing the same field. Education levels also varied, with most respondents completing at least some college (see Table 1.3). All respondents indicated that they had graduated from high school or received a GED.

Although in many studies the sexual identity, or self-identification of sexual orientation, of the participants might be irrelevant, in an examination of women in sports, especially contact

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2 Respondents were asked to identify their biological sex and gender identity on the questionnaire, leaving room for those whose biological sex and gender identity does not align to self-identify their gender.
Table 1.3: Education level of Sizzle Players (n = 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest education completed</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma/GED</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/professional degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

sports, sexual identity is of more interest. The sporting institution has been plagued by a homophobic culture (Anderson 2005; Griffin 1998), and although progress has been made in changing this culture (Anderson 2009), evidence still indicates that sports are a heteronormative space. Research has shown that women who participate in sports are often labeled as lesbians (Griffin 1998) and "mannish" (Cahn, 1994). Participation in contact sports, like rugby and football, often intensifies this stereotype (Gill 2007). The sexual identities of Sizzle players were varied, with 10 respondents identifying as heterosexual and 17 as a non-heterosexual identity (see Table 1.4). During my first season, I was informed by a veteran Sizzle player that the team used to be "almost all straight," but that had changed over the years.

The Cincinnati Sizzle and its league more generally are often described as “professional,” but players are not commonly paid to play. Sizzle players must cover their own expenses, paying a league registration fee and team travel fee each year, and a uniform fee as a rookie. Players incur additional expenses for equipment (e.g., helmets, shoulder pads, practice jerseys, etc.), and health care, including health insurance coverage, a requirement of the league. In my own experience, purchasing the needed equipment and paying team fees cost more than $500 in my first year of research. In total, I spent more than $2,000 on football-related expenses during
Table 1.4: Sexual Identity of Sizzle Players (n = 27)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Identity</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straight*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One player identified her sexual identity as straight, but indicated "bisexual when I feel like it" in a space for open-ended responses. This player has been categorized as straight here based on her checked response.

my two seasons, including travel expenses and medical needs. Unlike my teammates, I was able to cover some of my expenses through a research grant from the university Graduate Student Governance Association.

The WFA does have a few teams that pay players a small amount per game as a way to maintain the “professional” status of the league as a whole, but this title is largely symbolic. Flint and Eitzen (1987:17) argue “a professional team is composed of athletes who are profit-oriented laborers who have acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to sell their labor (or commodity) in a hypothetical open market as an occupation and livelihood.” Women in the WFA are not able to capitalize on their labor monetarily, so in this case I would argue that calling the league "professional" merely symbolically denotes this as the highest level of competition for women within tackle football.

The Sizzle is an interesting group for study due to its inclusion in the largest semi-professional women's tackle football league. Additionally, the team has a lengthy history, celebrating a decade of football in 2013, a milestone not reached by many women's teams. Like other women's teams, however, the Sizzle experiences many difficulties in gaining and retaining players. The time and monetary commitment required, in addition to the physical challenges,
make recruitment difficult. In this way, the Sizzle is a good representative of women's tackle football teams. It should be acknowledged that although the Sizzle is a good representative of women's football, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all women's football teams. However, the methods used in this study offer insight into the beliefs and practices of the women of the Cincinnati Sizzle.

**Chapter Summaries**

This research starts with an analysis of the lengthy history of women's football in the United States. This history extends to the late 1800s, not long after the creation of the sport. Chapter 2 exposes an important connection between women's participation in football and the social climate of the period. In other words, women were more likely to be included in football at socially liberal points in U.S. history, in contrast to socially conservative periods. The lack of historical documentation of women's football participation in historical and sociological texts makes this an important area for analysis.

Chapter 3, 4, and 5 explain how women construct, reinforce, and embody masculinity in line with the expectations of football culture. Chapter 3 discusses the construction of football masculinity by women on the football field, showing how they learn to overcome physical and ideological boundaries regarding women's bodies. This allows women to engage in the physical contact and aggression expected of football players, and trains them to subscribe to the "culture of sacrifice" that creates football "warriors." The construction of football masculinity is a continual process that must be managed and reinforced, as observed in Chapter 4. Reinforcing football masculinity requires denigrating femininity, engaging in antifeminine behavior, and suppressing feminine performance during the football season, especially on the field of play. Due to the relational nature of masculinity and femininity, the denigration and suppression of
femininity serves to reinforce masculinity. Ultimately, this means women must embody football masculinity, as is illustrated in Chapter 5. This embodiment includes managing the competing ideologies of muscularity that exist between male and female bodies. For women, this often means learning new weight-lifting techniques, and being comfortable with increasing musculature. Embodying football masculinity also forces women to deal with the challenges associated with protecting the body during play. Football equipment, such as shoulder pads, is designed with the male body in mind, complicating its use by female bodies. The timing of the women's football season also makes it difficult for women to procure equipment, taxing their ability to embody football masculinity.

The challenges faced by women in accessing resources necessary for successful participation in football are examples of the "boundary maintenance" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:430) that assists in protecting football as a space for men. Chapter 6 examines the many boundaries that women must cross in order to participate in the sport. The chapter also discusses how the invisibility of women's participation continues to lead people to believe that women do not play the game.

Finally, Chapter 7 posits that the popularity of football and its direct connection to ideologies about the superiority of male bodies make it an important space of resistance with the potential to alter the gender hierarchy. Successful participation of female bodies in this physically demanding sport may offer challenges to beliefs regarding the physical abilities of female bodies, a change that could also impact entrance into physically demanding professions, such as policing. This chapter will also consider several recommendations for future research engaging gender and sports scholars in the study of women's football.
Chapter 2: "A woman's place is in the huddle":

A Social History of Women in Tackle Football

I arrived at practice early as usual, and headed down to the field to finish getting dressed and start stretching. It seemed that a few more players than usual were already on the field, and that's when I noticed the camera. I had not seen cameras at practice since the end of the last season when ESPN filmed the team for a segment on our coach, "Ickey" Woods, a former NFL player. "Perhaps ESPN is back for another segment," I thought, although this film crew was much smaller than the last. "What's going on?" I asked a nearby teammate. "Some thing for Time Warner," she replied. The video would feature the team in a segment for a Time Warner cable access show called "Around Town," and would introduce viewers to women's football, and the Cincinnati Sizzle more specifically. I was told it would air in the Cincinnati area, although later I learned that it was airing throughout the state when my brother and his children viewed it nearly 200 miles away in northern Ohio.

Practice was business as usual; we completed our warm-ups, participated in offensive and defensive drills, and then ran laps to end the night. Following practice, players were asked to participate in a short interview for the television show, telling our profession and position on the football team. I got in line, and followed the script as requested. "By day I'm a PhD student at the University of Cincinnati, and by night I'm a cornerback for the Cincinnati Sizzle," I recited. After each player had completed their turn we grouped together for a team shot. We would yell, "a woman's place is in the huddle," and then we were free to go. Finished with media duties, I headed to the sideline to grab some water and my bag. Coach Woods was offering insights into the team and women's football more generally in an interview for the show. "Women's football started about maybe 20 years ago and it's just now coming into its own," he said, as I walked.
past. "That's weird," I thought to myself, "women's football has a much longer history."

However, current media reports about women's football teams would make one believe that women just recently began playing full-contact, tackle football. Much like Coach Woods' statement on the history of women's football, the co-owner and General Manager of the Atlanta Phoenix, a team in the Women's Football Alliance (WFA), stated in a 2013 interview with CNN that women's football had been around since at least 2000 (CNN 2013). However, to say that women's football has been around since 2000 fails to acknowledge a history that began more than 100 years earlier. An understanding of the history of women in football is important due to the contentious relationship that has existed between women and the sport throughout the years. Susan Cahn (1994) has argued that:

> the persistent but unsteady tension between female athleticism and male-defined sport forms a central thread in the history of women's sport, illuminating not only women's complicated standing in the athletic world but the vital interplay between sport and the surrounding culture (Cahn 1994: 6).

Today sports offer perhaps the only societal institution in which gender segregation is still accepted and aggressively defended. Even though women's participation in sports is higher than at any other time in history (Acosta and Carpenter 2014), women's sports are still considered a lesser version of the men's games. This is especially true of contact sports, such as hockey, boxing, and football. Contact sports offer an area of contested terrain, where women are still seen as “interlopers” (Migliaccio and Berg 2007:272). Women have seen progress in hockey and boxing, both of which now offer women's programs in the Olympic Games. But, women still struggle to gain acceptance in American tackle football, a sport that has been defined as a
“builder of men” (Fields 2005:35), “a game suited for aggressive ‘manliness’ and deemed a means of teaching young boys to become men” (Fields 2005:36).

Perhaps not surprising, women's increased participation in football has generally taken place during more socially liberal time periods within U.S. history, including the 1920s flapper era, the late sixties and early seventies, and the new millennium. This chapter examines the social context surrounding women's participation in tackle football during these eras, and considers the absence of women's tackle football outside of these time periods.

The Early Years of Women's Football

The earliest documented presence of U.S. women on the football field seems to be a game played in 1896 in Harlem. A news report from The Sun indicates that the game was to be entertainment during a masked ball in Harlem River Park. The game featured two teams of five women each. The women were simply volunteers from the crowd, cloaked in "short dresses," with the colors of Yale and Princeton pinned on their clothes to demarcate teams. The game itself lasted just a few plays as following a tackle in which all ten women "fell in a heap," the paper reports "there was a wild scramble, and the crowd of men looking on, excited by the struggle, closed in with a rush" (The Sun 1896). Police dispersed the crowd after gaining control, ending the game for fear that someone might get injured. This game seems to have solely been designed as a form of entertainment for men attending the masked ball.

While the game played in 1896 was meant to be a show, not an attempt to feature women's ability to play football, the following decades saw more concerted efforts to gain women entry into football. In 1916, the headline of a news report in Atlanta's newspaper, The Constitution, reads "Football for Girls; Well, Why Not? They Look Fine in Gridiron Togs" (The
The article, in a condescending fashion, discusses Ruth Lydy's attempts to put together a team for women. When asked why there should be a team for women, she states "Why not a football team of girls?" to which the reporter responds, "Because they'd stop to powder their noses when they should be running signals. Deny it if you dare." Lydy refutes this claim, and points out that women are doctors, lawyers, chauffeurs, baseball players, "and do everything else you can think of, so why not women football players?" (The Constitution 1916). The article goes on to describe Lydy as "dainty," speaks of her as "dolled up" when wearing her football uniform, and focuses on her ballet training. The article includes no information about where this team was to be located, or if it was to be affiliated with any college or school, and does not mention whether Lydy's attempts at forming a team were successful. However, there is evidence that women's teams existed at the high school and college levels during the 1920s.

Perhaps the creation of women's teams in the twenties should not be too surprising, due to societal changes taking place during this era. The 1920s were a time of unprecedented change in American society. The increased use of machines, and industrialization more generally, reduced work hours and work days, thus increasing the importance of leisure in American culture. This led to the commercialization of leisure activities, including sports, and the forming of a new sporting culture. Major League Baseball (MLB) was wildly popular, with players like Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Ty Cobb gaining spectacular celebrity. Although baseball led the way as the "national pastime" during the twenties, the creation of the National Football League (NFL) in 1920 (called the American Professional Football Association until 1922), and the geographical spread of the college game beyond the northeastern states where it had been concentrated, increased the overall popularity of football (Pro Football Hall of Fame 2005).
For women, especially those in the middle and upper classes, the twenties offered a cultural shift offering more freedom from restrictive Victorian values. This was "an age when commercial entertainment boomed, when female fashions allowed for freer movement and greater exposure, when dance styles as well as sports were becoming more physically demanding, and when the greater acceptance of female sexuality had broken men's exclusive hold on public physicality, leisure, and sport" (Cahn 1994:36).

Women's participation in sports increased in community recreational leagues, national competitions, and on the international stage. Tennis, golf, and swimming were considered the most appropriate sports for women, but women participated in many other sports as well. The more liberal flapper era even offered women the opportunity to take to the football field, with some colleges fielding women's football teams, although it is unclear how many teams existed.

Two women, Miss Kent McCord of Tampa, FL and Gladys Scherer of Upsala College (NY), each appear to have been at the forefront of the movement for women's football. Each was compared to Red Grange, a star player at Illinois at the time, certainly a sign of respect for their football skills and a huge honor. Not only was Grange the best college football player of his time, but in 2008, ESPN declared him the greatest player in college football history (ESPN 2008).

McCord played for a team in Tampa, Florida, which two news reports indicated was the only women's team in the south (The Coshocton Tribune 1924; The Olean Evening Herald 1924b). However, in another news report it is stated that the team had scheduled games against "other girls' teams in Florida" (The Olean Evening Herald 1924a). It was said that this team "promises to make the gridiron sport a popular one for high school girls along the Florida west coast" (The Indianapolis News 1924). Unfortunately, little other information exists about this
team, or any of the teams it may have played against. It is unclear whether McCord's team was affiliated with any school or college.

Scherer was one of at least 18 women on the Upsala College (NJ) women's football team. As with the Florida team, there is limited information on which teams Upsala played. Media reports offered positive coverage of this team, unlike that which had been offered Ruth Lydy nine years earlier. A 1925 article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* newspaper boasted:

"The girls of the women's football team at Upsala (sic) College, East Orange, N.J., have tackled football with the same enthusiasm that they formerly tackled dancing and other sports and they now rub their noses in the mud as frequently as they formerly rubbed them in the powder puff."

In another article a headline states "You should see [Scherer] hit that line" (*The Freeport Journal-Standard* 1925). In a more general article on Upsala, the author suggests that "maybe we shall hear of Illinois vs. Upsola (sic) in the future," alluding to Red Grange's team, which the
article says no men's team had been able to stop. In the three seasons Grange played with Illinois the team went 19-4, with one tie. These three articles indicate some acceptance of women as football players. Each of the articles is accompanied by a photograph of Sherer and/or the team in their football uniforms. These teams played in the same uniforms as men, including the leather helmets that created the nickname "leatherheads" for football players during this time. The teams also played by the same game rules as men, although it is indicated that one additional rule applied to the women, no hair pulling (The Olean Evening Herald 1924a). As one article terms it, "Of course hair pulling and eye scratching are not permitted during a game and are heavily penalized as 'roughing.' But then the girls seldom forget they are ladies" (The Hartford Courant 1924).

Little context is provided for how women playing football "seldom forget they are ladies," (The Hartford Courant 1924) but this alludes to the fact that not all media coverage of women's teams during the twenties was positive. In a 1925 article espousing the health risks of women playing "too strenuous sports," McCord is described as "militant organizer" of women's football. The article also indicates that Dr. Thomas D. Wood, the director of physical education, adviser in health education, and physician at Columbia University, is vehemently opposed to women playing many sports, especially football. The article states, "Football he condemned as a girl's game, despite the gridiron heroines of some of the leading institutions of learning." The article quotes Wood as saying, "Taking it all in all, men's games should not be played by girls as men play them and all athletic sports should be conducted carefully and under the coaching of medical experts." According to Wood, men play responsibly, while women need more supervision, as they fail to take care of their bodies when engaging in sport (The Times Recorder
Figure 2.2: The Frankford Yellow Jackets women's team that served as halftime entertainment for the Frankford Yellow Jackets versus Chicago Cardinals professional football game (Philadelphia Public Ledger 1926).

1925). Indicative of the time, Wood names issues with future reproduction as a main concern with women's participation in sport. The article says, "training is likely to weaken her and may some day(sic) interfere with the thing to which every normal girl looks toward as the high honor of woman's existence - motherhood!" (The Times Recorder 1925).

In 1926, women were used to offer entertainment on the football field, much like in 1896. In a game that was more spectacle than sport, eleven women suited up against two men to play football during pregame and halftime of an NFL game featuring the Frankford (Philadelphia) Yellow Jackets and the Chicago Cardinals. The women were described as the "prettiest football team Frankford has ever seen," and "female gridiron invaders" in a newspaper article the next day (Philadelphia Public Ledger 1926). The article also indicated that more than football took place on the field, saying leapfrog, imperial ballet, and the Charleston were all featured during the performance (Philadelphia Public Ledger 1926). There is no evidence that the "Female
Yellow Jackets” ever played another game. It is likely that the team's presence in this game was meant as a money-making, entertainment venture by the Frankford owners, not an endorsement of women playing football. By playing eleven women against just two men, this bout actually reinforced the dominance of men as football players. That it would take eleven women to compete against two men establishes that men are more equipped to play the game.

As the twenties came to an end, two women's tackle football teams from Toledo, Ohio embarked on a barnstorming tour of the Midwest, playing in 1930 and 1931, cloaked in old uniforms from a little league football team. The tour was a financial success in the beginning, but the teams met resistance from people who felt that women should not be playing tackle football. A game scheduled to be played at the University of Detroit was cancelled when university officials decided the game was inappropriate. The teams ultimately disbanded when First Lady Lou Henry Hoover accused the owners of exploiting womanhood (Rothman 1978).

The concerns of the First Lady echoed the sentiments of many others during this decade of transition. It was during this time that increased attention was paid to the "masculinization" of women athletes. Physical educators led a movement to create woman-friendly versions of men's sports. These educators were especially concerned about sports that "featured the 'masculine' qualities of strength, speed, and bodily display" (Cahn 1994: 58). Along with changes in women's basketball and track, stricter regulations on women's sports in colleges likely led to the elimination of women's college football teams and the overall invisibility of women's football in the thirties. Any gains women made on the football field during the twenties were erased as the new decade arrived. This decline in participation would continue throughout the forties as the social climate surrounding femininity and masculinity continued to evolve.
Figure 2.3: Women football players wore different styles of uniforms in different decades as illustrated by Miss Kent McCord in 1924 (left), Luverne Wise in 1939 (middle), and Agnes Risner in 1945 (right). McCord played for a women's team in the twenties, while Wise and Risner were the only women on their high school teams. *(LaCrosse Tribune and Leader-Press 1939; The Hartford Courant 1924; The Nassau Daily Review Star 1942)*

The Forties

Many women's sports thrived throughout the war years, but concerns about women in men's sports and factory jobs reflected societal anxiety regarding how masculine women might become. Softball had been considered a softer version of baseball, one suitable for women, after its inception in the 1900s. However, an influx of men into the sport, and its working-class image caused the sport to be redefined as masculine in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Cahn 1994). As such, talented women softball players began to be thought of as very masculine. As men headed to the military, leaving baseball behind, Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs baseball team, saw an opportunity to offer entertainment in the form of the All-American Girls Softball League, which became a baseball league after two years, the All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL). As is famously reflected in the popular film *A League of Their Own* (1992), due to concerns about how spectators would view "masculine" women playing baseball, the
league instituted the "femininity principle," which required the AAGBL women to attend charm school, play in short skirts, wear makeup, and maintain feminine appearances and actions at all times. Women who did not meet the beauty standards were not recruited for the league, regardless of their skill, and women who defied league rules were fined or released from their contracts (Cahn 1994:149).

Concerns over "masculine" women playing "masculine" sports likely negated many opportunities for women to find or create opportunities in organized football. However, there is evidence that some young women participated in high school football during this time, generally as kickers on "boy's teams". For example, Luverne "Toad" Wise kicked six extra points, and passed for one, during two football seasons (1939 and 1940) with the Escambia County (AL) High School team. A 1939 newspaper article described her as "17, pretty, blond and weighing 115 pounds." It went on to say "she attracts more spectators than any two teams the school has ever fielded" (LaCrosse Tribune and Leader-Press 1939).

In 1943, Agnes Risner attempted two extra point kicks for New Castle High School (IN), missing both. Much like women baseball players, women playing football during this era were expected to maintain the "femininity principle" (Cahn 1994:149). Both Wise and Risner kicked in short skirts that ended halfway down the upper thigh. Unlike the women's teams of the 1920s, these women were not photographed wearing helmets in news reports, and were adorned with jewelry and well groomed hair (LaCrosse Tribune and Leader-Press 1939; The Nassau Daily Review Star 1943). The article on Wise clearly focuses on her appearance, giving both a general description of her looks as "pretty," and a report specifically describing her size by sharing her weight. This serves to prove that she is meeting the body and beauty standards of women even though she is participating in a masculine sport. Her participation is less problematic, because
she is meeting the "femininity principle." Although there is evidence to indicate participation of a few girls in high school football, there is no evidence of women's teams or leagues during this period. The invisibility of women in football extended throughout the fifties, and most of the sixties. By the end of the sixties, women's football had reemerged with the creation of women's professional teams.

The Sixties and Seventies

In 1971, when Linda Rae Hodge's co-worker told her about a new women's football team she was playing for in Pittsburgh, Hodge decided she had to give it a try. She had never had the opportunity to play football before. In fact, she hadn't even been able to get into her high school band. "I wanted to play drums in the band and they said, 'Girls don't do that,'" Hodge told a reporter (O'Neil 2002). Playing football for her was a dream come true. Hodge, like many women who grew up in the fifties and sixties, had few opportunities to participate in sports and other activities considered "for boys." By the late sixties the women's movement had created some change, and opened up opportunities for women.

Overall, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of significant social change for women. Women's liberation was sought within employment, the education system, and the family. A socially progressive cultural revolution was also underway, one marked by a "sexual revolution" with "an emphasis on physical freedom, bodily pleasure, and leisure" for women (Cahn 1994:249). Legislation like the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, and the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, all contributed to this social change. As a part of this, "political reform, women's
activism, and cultural innovation fostered a renewed excitement about women's sports" (Cahn 1994:249). This included the reemergence of women's football.

The first attempt at creating a professional football league for women started in 1967. Sid Friedman (also spelled Syd Freedman), a theater talent agent in Cleveland, Ohio, signed 18 women to play exhibition games against semi-pro men's teams. Envisioning it like the Harlem Globetrotters, Friedman planned a barnstorming tour around the country. In their first year, the Cleveland USA Dare Devils played four games, three against men's teams and one against a "hastily organized team of women" in Detroit (Miller 1968). The Dare Devils won three of these games, and tied against a men's team consisting of media personalities in Erie, PA. Little was written about the actual outcome of these games, with news articles offering more general information on the team. It seems as if a football team of women beating men's teams would be newsworthy, but the focus was elsewhere. It is likely that reporters wanted to avoid any controversy over these outcomes, as a team of women beating a team of men would have been contentious. Friedman also had emphasized that the teams "won't worry about the score," so it is possible that detailed statistics and scores were not recorded (Cohen 1967).

To garner interest for women's football, Friedman's first move was to offer the women as entertainment at halftime of NFL games (Miller 1968; Ralbovsky 1969). Friedman said, "I think football fans are sick and tired of watching marching bands and it's time for something different in halftime shows. And what's better than watching some beautiful women playing football?" (Ralbovsky1969). There are varying reports regarding halftime shows scheduled with the NFL. A 1969 account indicated that games had been scheduled for the halftime shows of four NFL teams, the Pittsburgh Steelers, Philadelphia Eagles, Buffalo Bills, and Miami Dolphins, along with one Canadian team, the Toronto Argonauts (Ironwood Daily Globe 1969). Another report
stated that two teams had agreed to games, the New York Giants and Detroit Lions (Miller 1968). Ultimately, Friedman's goal of offering women's football as NFL halftime show entertainment never materialized as he wanted. He said,

> On two occasions, we were scheduled to play during halftime of NFL games that were televised nationally, but both times the plans fell through…. Can you imagine any guy leaving his TV set at halftime when he knows a bunch of pretty little things are coming out to knock heads? Another thing is the women who hate football because they can't pry their husbands away from the TV. Do you know how many of these same women would join their husbands at it? We'd probably draw a larger audience than the game itself.

> And TV football widows will be a thing of the past (Ralbovsky 1969).

Much as had been done in 1896 and 1926, Friedman's marketing of women's football during this time was largely as entertainment, not sport. As Friedman indicated, "basically it's going to be a show - a real show" (Cohen 1967). Friedman's background in theater may explain the focus on spectacle over sport. It may be that Friedman's ultimate interest was in the profitability of women's football, not the athletics. The focus of his discussion of women's football often was on the beauty of the players, as is seen in the above statements.

After the success of the initial barnstorming tour in 1967, Friedman began expanding his team ownership, which included four teams by 1969, the Dare Devils, Detroit Petticoats, Pittsburgh All-Stars, and Canadian Belles, located in Toronto (The Daily Reporter 1969; Ironwood Daily Globe 1969). His pursuits were successful for several years, with exhibition games between the teams drawing crowds of 6,000-7,000 spectators. In an interview in 1971 Friedman indicated that he planned to debut a league during the year that would consist of divisions in the east and west. The east division would include teams in Buffalo, Cleveland,
Toronto, and Pittsburgh, while the west division teams would be in Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (*The Ogden Standard-Examiner* 1971). Although Friedman never launched the planned league with a West Coast expansion, the Women's Professional Football League (WPFL) began play in 1971 with five teams, all owned by Friedman. The league ran as a "barnstorming league" as the teams traveled to various areas where "the games were always sponsored by a local booster club or charity. The games operated as a fundraiser for the organization sponsoring the game. Admission and vending sales were split 50/50 between the sponsor and Sid Friedman."

In addition to the WPFL team, two independent teams began play in 1971, the Pittsburgh Powderkegs and Detroit Fillies. It was with the Pittsburgh team that Linda Rae Hodge found her opportunity to live out her dreams of playing football. "I felt invincible. It was just a wonderful feeling -- to go all out, throwing yourself around," Hodge reflected. However, Hodge's career would be short lived. In fact, it only lasted three or four games. Financial issues quickly hampered the independent teams, as attendance was low, and the $1.50-2.50 received per ticket limited profits. Much of this money was needed to pay the $20 per game each player received (O'Neill 2002). WPFL teams were not faring better with their finances. By 1973 all but one of the teams had folded. One team from the WPFL survived, the Toledo Troopers. In essence the Troopers had been stolen from Friedman when the coach, Bill Stout, went behind Friedman's back and trademarked the team name and logo. Bad blood existed between the two men, with the Troopers moving to an upstart league, the National Women's Football League (NWFL), in 1974, its inaugural season.\(^3\)

\(^3\) Information gained email communication with Guy Stout, July 6, 2013. Guy Stout, the son of Bill Stout, is currently producing a film he helped write called "Perfect Season: The Untold Story of the Toledo Troopers."

\(^4\) Information gained through email communication with Guy Stout, July 6, 2013.
### Table 2.1: Disbanded Women's Tackle Football Leagues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>League</th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th>Disbanded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women's Professional Football League (WPFL)</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Women's Football League (NWFL)</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western States Women's Professional Football League (WWPFL) *Formed from the NWFL</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became the American Professional Football Association (APFA)</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Tackle Football Association (WTFA) *Formed from the NWFL</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Professional Football League (WPFL)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Women's Football League (NWFL)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became the National Women's Football Association (NWFA)</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's American Football League (WAFL)</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became the American Football Women's League (AFWL)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Affiliated Football Conference (WAFC) *Formed from the WAFL</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Football Association (WFA)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Football League (WFL)</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harris Jr. 1971; *Ironwood Daily Globe* 1969; Miller 1968; O'Neill 2002

Although Hodge argued that "It was way before its time. It was too soon to have women's football" (O'Neil 2002), not everyone was ready to give up. The new NWFL league sanctioned seven teams during the inaugural season, including teams in Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York, Dallas, and Toledo (Durslag 1974). The league experienced rapid expansion, and by 1976, the NWFL had expanded to 15 teams, in three divisions nationwide. The league's first championship game was played in 1976 between the Oklahoma City Dolls and the Toledo Troopers. The expansion of the league across the country offered women in many regions the opportunity to participate in football, one that previously had not existed. However,
it is likely the expansion actually killed the league. By the end of the 1970s the league was in financial trouble. The expansion was forcing teams to travel much farther to play games. What once had been a league concentrated in a small region, now forced teams to travel thousands of miles for games. Travel was becoming too costly for teams who had to trek all over the country to play games.

The teams from California that had been competing in the NWFL broke away in 1978 and formed the Western States Women's Professional Football League (WWPFL), adding two teams from Arizona. However, this league disbanded shortly thereafter. Financial issues caused the Southern Division of the NWFL to disband in 1980, as only two teams remained.

There was still optimism that women's football could survive, and several attempts at resurrection were made throughout the eighties. However, the more socially conservative eighties, and economic struggles for the teams, led to a decline in women's tackle football. The once promising leagues of the seventies, including the NWFL, struggled to survive. The winningest team during the seventies, the Toledo Troopers, folded in 1980 after several attempts to sell the team. When the Troopers disbanded, their record stood at 58 wins, 4 losses, and 1 tie, solidifying their position as the most dominant women's football team of the decade. But their record alone was not able to save them. By the mid-eighties the NWFL was down to just six teams, all in Ohio and Michigan. The Women's Tackle Football Association (WTFA) formed from several NWFL teams, and found limited success, but disbanded in 1987, effectively ending women's tackle football.

Girls had a bit of success breaking into high school football during the eighties. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) began tracking the participation of girls in high school football in 1983, with participation as low as just eight in 1984, and as

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5 Information gained through email communication with Guy Stout, July 6, 2013
high as 97 in 1988 (National Federation of State High School Associations 2013). Although this was a significant increase during the decade, it dwarfed in comparison to the nearly one million boys who were playing high school football. Girls would not see significant gains in high school participation until the early 2000s.

The New Millennium

The late nineties featured a significant change in the image of women as athletes. Heywood and Dworkin (2003) argue,

At least a century in the making, [the woman athlete is] the product of politics and cultural shifts: the growth of a consumer, information-based economy that meant more women in high-paying jobs, the expansion of the entertainment industry and therefore sports, a culture marked by progress, backlash, change (xvii).

Sparked by the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, the year had been framed as the “Year of the Women” in sports by Newsweek, while the Olympic Games were touted as the “Games of the Women” (Gremillion 1996). Along with Newsweek, The New York Times Magazine, People, Sports Illustrated, and TV Guide all featured women athletes on their covers. The Games were followed by the start of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the Women’s Pro Softball League (WPSL) the following year. Perhaps the most defining moment for women came in 1999 when the Women's World Cup took the U.S. by storm. With more than 90,000 in attendance at the Rose Bowl for the final, the U.S. beat China in a penalty shootout that skyrocketed the popularity of soccer and the celebrity of the women's national team athletes. Following the World Cup victory, the Women’s United Soccer Association (WUSA) brought women’s professional soccer to the U.S. in 2001.
Women's tackle football also reemerged during this time of change, with the creation of the Women's Professional Football League (WPFL) in 1999, both the new NWFL and the Independent Women's Football League (IWFL) in 2000, and the Women's American Football League (WAFL) in 2001. The WPFL started the resurgence of women's football in 1999 when they created two teams to play in an exhibition. The game was to be played to determine if there was interest in women's football that could lead to a successful league. The first game was played in the Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and featured the Lake Michigan Minx and Minnesota Vixen. A success, the game spawned a six game barnstorming tour that traveled around the United States promoting women's football. Armed with proof that women throughout the county were interested in playing tackle football, and fans were willing to watch, the WPFL scheduled a full slate of games in the fall of 2000, featuring 11 teams nationwide. But, bad investments led to financial woes, which ended the 2000 season early, and left players unpaid the $100 they had been promised for the season. As one media report indicated, "With snappy logos, modern Web sites, and smart, quotable jocks, the WPFL's got everything going for it—everything except the fan base, infrastructure, corporate sponsorship, financial stability, and broadcast deals that are usually de rigueur for successful sports leagues" (Cagan 2000).

Instability would continue for the WPFL the following season as the league moved to a spring season, and featured just four teams. One of the league’s creators left to create a new league, the WAFL, but it quickly failed too. After just one season, it broke into two leagues, the American Football Women's League (AFWL) and Women's Affiliated Football Conference (WAFC), with both of these leagues failing by 2003. Some of the teams from these leagues transferred to the three other surviving leagues, the WPFL, the new NWFL, and the IWFL.
The new NWFL debuted with two teams playing exhibitions in 2000, and an eight team slate in 2001. In 2002, the NFL requested that the NWFL change its name due to its similarity with the NFL name. The NFL did not want there to be confusion over whether the two leagues were affiliated. Additionally, the NFL asked for the logo and team uniform colors of two teams to be changed due to their similarity with those of NFL franchises. While the National Basketball Association (NBA) had been supportive of, and instrumental in the early success of the WNBA, the NFL did not have a similar reaction to women's football. Women's basketball had been successful at the college level for a couple of decades giving the NBA reason to believe it could be successful at the professional level as well. Without established women's football teams it is possible the NFL saw little potential for financial gain or competitive play for women's football. The NFL's interest in distancing itself from women's football also says much about their desire to maintain football as a domain for men. But proponents of women's football were not deterred. The NWFL returned for the 2003 season as the National Women's Football Association (NWFA). The NWFA was successful for several years, fielding between 35 and 40 teams from 2004-2008. The league planned to add three teams in 2009, but disbanded prior to the season. Most of the teams scheduled to play the 2009 season moved to the IWFL, and the newly forming WFA. The only league still remaining from the millennium explosion is the IWFL, which shares the current football landscape with four other major women's leagues.

Women's Tackle Football Today

Heading into the 2013 season, the IWFL was one of three main outdoor tackle football leagues for women. The longest tenured of any league, the IWFL fielded 32 teams with more than 1,200 athletes for the 2013 season. An international league, IWFL teams extend from coast
Table 2.2: Women's Tackle Football Leagues in 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>League</th>
<th>Founded</th>
<th># of teams</th>
<th>Approximate # of players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Women's Football League (IWFL)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Football Alliance (WFA)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Spring Football League (WSFL)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legends Football League (LFL)*</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Indoor Football League (WIFL)**</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4,275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indoor league
** Indoor league; WIFL teams will begin play in 2014

to coast, and from Montreal, Canada to Texas. Although inactive for the 2013 season, the Monterrey, Mexico Black Mambas have also called the IWFL home. Additional international ties were created when the IWFL sanctioned the Guam Women's Tackle Football League (GWTFL) as an affiliate league in 2012. During the inaugural 2012 season, the GWTFL included four teams which played "Sixxes," or six players on the field at one time, instead of the customary 11. Playing with fewer athletes on the field allows for smaller rosters, thus assisting regions where a full 11-woman roster might be difficult to fill (IWFL 2012). In 2013, the league expanded to eight teams, playing 8-woman football. There are plans for the GWTFL to field an All-Star team in the future that will play teams from other countries as well (Pinkston 2012).

The Women's Football Alliance (WFA) was formed in 2008, playing its first season in 2009 with 36 teams, many of which transferred from the NWFA when it disbanded. The WFA stands as the largest women's tackle football league, fielding 50 teams in 2013, a decrease from the 62 teams of the 2012 season. The league made history in 2012 when its championship game became the first to be held in an NFL stadium, as it was played in Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The game was also broadcast live on the ESPN3 online network.
The newest of the current outdoor leagues, the Women's Spring Football League (WSFL), was founded in 2009, and began full regular season play in 2011. The WSFL offers two separate divisions of play, an 11-woman division and an 8-woman division. For the 2013 season, the WSFL included 14 teams, seven in each division. Two additional women's leagues exist, both playing indoors. The Women's Indoor Football League (WIFL) formed in 2012, and will begin play with 15 teams in 2014. The Legends Football League (LFL), formerly known as the Lingerie Football League, is the most visible of all of the women's leagues. Although women in the LFL play full-contact, tackle football, the league is controversial due to the requirement that women play in a sports bra, panties, and a garter. Additionally, the shoulder pads are modified to stop just under the collarbone, exposing the breasts, and helmets contain a clear plastic shield, rather than a facemask, to allow women's faces to be seen. The toughness and athletic skill of these women athletes is questioned due to the spectacle made of their attire. Of the LFL, sports sociologist Mary Jo Kane said "I am not so naïve as to not believe that the LFL might attract male viewers, but it doesn’t have anything to do with sports. It has to do with soft pornography and selling sex to a market" (Shepherd 2010). LFL founder and chairman Mitch Mortaza does not deny this aspect of the league’s marketing campaign. According to Mortaza, players in the league are required to have three attributes: "Beauty, athleticism and confidence" (Shepherd 2010). At a tryout in Orlando, Florida in 2010, Mortaza sent home the players, because they were not "fit" enough. He said,

It doesn’t take a prick like me to tell you what’s happening. Why are you working six hours a day, under the sun, if you’re not committed to getting yourself in shape? We have national TV – are you fucking out of your minds? We’ve canceled games over this! (Shepherd 2010).
Mortaza argues that the uniforms are just the means to get fans in the door. "You may come in the door lured by the sex appeal, but you’ll leave blown away by the competition," he said (Shepherd 2010).

Mortaza's scantily clad athletes have stirred controversy consistently among players, fans, and feminists alike, but the league has found success, expanding from 8 to 12 teams in 2013. The league has also been able to maintain some form of media contract in each of its seasons, most notably with MTV2. LFL success has also led to the creation of LFL Canada and LFL Australia, each of which currently offers four franchises. One Sizzle player has gone on to have a successful career in the LFL, playing for teams in all three countries, and gaining significant popularity with the fans. In Mortaza's eyes, this is the only marketing model that works for women's football. He argues that there is a reason that few people have heard of other women's football leagues. "When it comes to football, there’s a ceiling for what women can do with it" he said (Shepherd 2010). However, proponents of the other leagues have argued that the LFL makes a mockery out of women's football, and say they offer a more authentic version of the sport for the athletes and fans.

Overall, these five leagues include around 125 teams throughout the country, offering approximately 5,000 women the opportunity to play. Regional leagues, like the Sugar N Spice Football League (SSFL) in Texas and Oklahoma, offer additional opportunities for women. Although women's football has been a constant throughout the new millennium, many franchises have changed leagues or disbanded throughout this period causing some instability. For example, the New York Sharks, originally a flag football team, became a full-contact barnstorming team in 1999, joined the WPFL in 2000, were an independent team in 2001, spent 2002-2010 in the IWFL, played 2011-2013 in the WFA, before rejoining the IWFL in 2014.
Disputes between teams and leagues, such as that between the Sharks and the WPFL in 2001, often lead teams to move leagues. Financial frustrations, maintaining regional rivalries, and changes in league structure and fees, also lead teams to change leagues. The disbanding of franchises and the transferring of leagues makes each offseason contentious for surviving franchises. In each of my seasons with the Cincinnati Sizzle, the team was in a division with different franchises. In 2011 the Sizzle played in a division with teams from Indianapolis and Louisville (KY), while the Sizzle shared a division with a new Kentucky team and Toledo (OH) in 2012. In the 2013 season the Sizzle moved into a division with teams from Cleveland, Columbus (OH), Pittsburgh, and Louisville. The changes during each offseason do not offer teams consistency from year-to-year in competition or travel, creating challenges in planning for upcoming seasons.

One trend has held steady throughout the turnover of franchises and leagues, no matter the decade – there are women who want to play tackle football, and will when given the opportunity. The failure of most franchises, and the leagues themselves, has largely been tied to financial difficulties of both the teams and the athletes. For franchises, limited profits challenge the ability to cover expenses for field rentals, equipment, and travel to away games. Fundraisers are often necessary to maintain a franchise. Many teams have difficulty gaining consistent fan support, leading to limited revenue from ticket sales. For the Sizzle, a crowd of about 100 for home games was standard. Other teams manage to bring in larger crowds, upwards of 5,000 fans. Overall, women's football continues to struggle to find relevance in a saturated sports market where consumers have an overabundance of sporting events offered as entertainment. Spring and summer schedules attempt to allow women to compete during the football "offseason," but women's teams still must compete with the myriad of men's semi-professional
teams playing during those periods. Playing during a spring season also means competing with all levels of baseball, from local leagues to the MLB. With only so much disposable income, fans seem reluctant to embrace women's football.

Limited revenue for franchises and leagues means players generally are not paid to play, and when players have been paid it generally is an insignificant amount. For women's "professional" football players, ideas of football as an occupation, or as a "profit-oriented" endeavor are largely a dream. For example, the LFL paid players at one time, but players are no longer paid. Founder Mitch Mortaza indicated in a recent interview that the LFL is an amateur league, and would pay its players when it could afford to, which it currently cannot (Inside Edition 2013). Not only are players not paid, but they actually pay to play.

 Often athletes are unable to continue playing due to the significant financial contribution that is needed for team fees, travel, and equipment. The Sizzle charge a $300 fee for rookies, and $150 fee for veterans who already have the team uniform. However, other teams require a bigger payout from players. For example, the California Quake (IWFL) charges a $700 fee, while the fee for the Atlanta Phoenix (WFA) is $1,000. In addition to team fees, players often must purchase their own equipment, pay for any medical treatment and equipment needed, and injuries often cost players hundreds or thousands of dollars. Many athletes suffer serious injuries that require surgery, with all costs being the responsibility of the player. For many players gaining sponsorships from family members and local businesses is the only way they can afford to pay the required fees. The Sizzle completed a raffle each season to help players raise money for their fees. While most teams offer some type of fundraising opportunity for their players, these events often seem less than helpful, as the players who already have the least resources
have the most difficulty gaining sponsorships. Fundraising requires a commitment of time beyond practices and games, a commodity that many players are lacking.

In addition to monetary challenges, the time commitment needed for fundraising, team events, practices, games, and general recovery from playing a contact sport, often conflicts with employment and family obligations. Since these athletes receive little to no compensation for playing football, most must maintain other employment. Work schedules often cause players to miss practices and games, which impacts team chemistry, skill levels, and overall preparation. I had to miss the first game of my second season due to a presentation at an academic conference. I felt horrible, as if I was letting the team down due to this missed game. I apologized to my teammates, and most were understanding, as it was not uncommon for a player to have to miss a game. As Megan said to me, "God knows we say it's pro, but we're not being paid."

Beyond employment responsibilities, family obligations also often created issues for players. Women playing for the Sizzle were still obligated to complete the "second shift", before, during, and after practices and games. The "second shift" refers to household and childcare labor that is completed outside of paid labor, an area still largely the purview of women even when engaged in the labor force (Hochschild 1989). Having children at practice was a typical event, as often players could not secure and/or afford babysitting services. Coaches seemed comfortable with children attending practice, as they often included the children in our drills, especially warm-up activities. Players had mixed reactions to the presence of children. For most it was a normal event, and was fully accepted. However, occasionally players issued concerns about children at practices and on the sidelines during games. Generally complaints focused on the safety of the children. For example, during an exhibition game in 2012 several children were on the sideline with the team. Eventually veteran players asked the children to
move to the stands after players being tackled were pushed into the sideline. In another situation Kathy, a veteran, indicated her displeasure on a day when four children were running around at practice. "I hate when practice turns into a babysitting service," she said. The need for children to be present at practice was the most salient example of the obligation women had to the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989) even while playing football. For some, family obligations became too much, leading to player retirement.

Women's football is still largely invisible to the general public, with limited media exposure and scarce marketing funds hampering visibility. Likewise, questions about the ability of women to competently play football at a high level often leave prospective fans skeptical. Much of this resistance stems from the ideological foundation of the sporting institution, one that defines male bodies (men) as superior to female bodies (women), reinforcing a hierarchical structure that subordinates women's sports. The next chapter will discuss these ideological foundations, which continue to mark sports, and football more specifically, as a masculine space.
Game day. The offseason was officially over. To the veterans this was just a scrimmage, a warm-up for the season. But, for the rookies, this was initiation. We had completed tackling drills, and hit one another in practices, but being hit and making a tackle against another team was different. Locker rooms at the field were not available, so we got prepared on the sidelines, dressing, stretching, and warming up. Since this was only a scrimmage, we would not play a complete game, and some rules would be modified. "We'll go on offense first with a set number of plays, then we'll be on defense, and then we'll work on special teams," Coach said as we prepared to start the game. Players stalked the sidelines, pacing as the five referees met with the coaches. "I'm nervous," Audrey, a rookie, stated. Several other rookies agreed. "I'm always nervous before games, even if it's a scrimmage," Megan, a veteran, chimed in. "Who's ready to hit somebody?" a player yelled. "Let's hit a bitch," Li countered. "Alright ladies, bring it up," Coach yelled. "Let's go to work."

The scrimmage started rough for us. The offense seemed out of sync, and the energy from the team seemed a little low. The offense lined up for another play. "Let's go ladies," a player yelled from the sideline. The play call was "pro right, 27 sweep reverse." The quarterback would hand the ball off to a running back, who would run horizontally across the field. A wide receiver running the opposite direction would then take a handoff from the running back, reversing the direction of the play. "Hike!" the quarterback yelled, turning and handing the ball to the running back. Audrey, a wide receiver, sprinted across the field, cleanly taking the handoff from the running back. Unfortunately, Indianapolis was prepared for the play. Right as Audrey looked up, an Indianapolis linebacker hit her squarely in the body, knocking her back a couple yards. The sound of the pads cracking together was audible to everyone in the stadium.

Audrey had indicated in practice that she was scared to take a hit. On one occasion we were participating in a drill called "the hamburger." Two players lined up five yards apart. When the whistle blew, both players would sprint forward, one player carrying the football, the other player tasked with tackling the ball carrier. Audrey stepped up to the line, preparing to be the tackler. Across from her was Stefanie, a player known for being a big hitter. "Oh, hell no," Audrey emphatically said, stepping back. "Uh-uh." Several players laughed. Although she would be allowed to step out of the drill on this occasion, letting another player take her place, veterans were quick to point out that she would have to take a big hit eventually. And, in the first scrimmage, she did. Surviving a hit such as this one was a confidence booster for most players. For women just beginning to play tackle football, the feeling of getting hit in this way was often a new one.

Although sporting opportunities for women have increased dramatically since the 1970s, contact sports are still largely the domain of boys and men. Lack of opportunities to participate in high-contact, physically demanding sports, along with gendered socialization that often fails to emphasize aggressive physicality for girls, forces many women stepping on the football field to hesitate when faced with hitting others and being hit. Women are expected to overcome this quickly, however, as aggression is required of the sport, and is clearly entrenched in its culture. This chapter examines how women of the Cincinnati Sizzle constructed appropriate football
masculinity, gaining the fortitude to engage in the physicality required of the sport, and harnessing aggression for use on the playing field.

"Quit hesitating, go up there and hit her": Overcoming the "Double Hesitation"

Throughout its history football has been established as a "mechanism of masculinity" (Adams et al. 2010:279). As "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:836), masculinities are inextricably tied to ways in which we "do gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987). "Doing gender" takes an ethnomethodological approach to the study of gender, examining the taken-for-granted expectations of gender in society. Instead of gender being something we are, it is something we do. This approach considers the ways in which gender is constructed and reconstructed through interaction. A main focus lies in accountability, which West and Zimmerman argue is important, as our gender performances are being assessed by others. Thus, "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (1987:136; emphasis in original).

Of interest to women's participation in football are the differing ways women are assessed on and off the football field. Expectations on the football field hold women accountable for a physical aggressiveness that would not be expected off the field. Women on the football field are then "undoing gender" or engaging in "social interactions that reduce gender difference" (Deutsch 2007:122). This is especially salient in considering the abilities of the female body.

The sporting institution is based on a sex/gender-segregated system in which all bodies must fit. Bodies are classified as male/man or female/woman based on perceived biological differences between these categories of people. This "oppositional binary" is considered to be
"natural" due to its biological basis, and immediately subordinates female bodies within sports (Kane 1995). This biologically deterministic structure contends that men, defined as those with male bodies, are bigger, faster, and stronger than women (those with female bodies), and thus are better athletes. The structure relies on "deeply ingrained beliefs in the muscular superiority of all men compared to all women" (Dworkin and Messner 1999:341). Yet while sports are used as definitive evidence of men's biological superiority, what truly exists is a "sport continuum in which many women routinely outperform many men" (Kane 1995:193). Using a marathon as an example, while just one race is run by all participants, the finishing times are divided into two categories, women and men. In the 2012 Boston Marathon, the top finisher for the women was the 52nd overall finisher. This structure illustrates that men are faster than women, confirming our dominant narrative. However, what this overshadows is that the top woman finisher completed the race faster than 12,570 men (Boston Athletic Association 2012). What marathon results can show us is that athletic ability is more complicated than the "oppositional binary" we employ (Kane 1995).

Girls and women are socialized in a manner that encourages a much more docile body than that of a boy or a man (Martin 1998). Young (2005) says this socialization process is what initiates the bodily restraint girls show in activities such as throwing a ball. She indicates that the phrase “throwing like a girl” alludes to this constraint, which several authors attribute largely to social, not biological forces (Dowling 2000; Kane 1995; Young 2005). Girls and young women are given limited opportunity to express their bodies in a physical manner, whereas boys and young men are encouraged and even expected to engage their bodies in physical and aggressive ways. Dowling (2000:56) finds that
"sports teach boys to use their bodies in skilled ways, and this gives them a good sense of their physical capacities and limits. They develop the capacity for forceful movement by learning coordination and follow-through, and how to use physical leverage. Girls’ movement patterns are often incomplete because they don’t learn to generate torque when executing a throw, a swing, or a tackle."

In this way, action is gendered.

Young (2005:34) argued that women are hampered by a "double hesitation," or "lack [of] confidence that we have the capacity to do what must be done" and a "fear of getting hurt."

Overcoming the “double hesitation” and other ingrained forms of bodily restraint is challenging. For some this task does not seem achievable, but not because their bodies are incapable of physical contact. Instead, the process requires the reversal of a bodily experience that has been constrained in various aspects of physicality over the course of one’s life. Mennesson (2000) found that women boxers went through a long process of learning how to use the body.

While socialization can certainly explain some of this bodily hesitation, societal structures reinforce a constrained body for girls and women. The sports institution offers an excellent example of structural constraint. Opportunities for girls and young women to play football and other contact sports are limited. Girls are still guided towards sports that are less physical in nature, many of which focus on artistic performance over physicality. It is still commonplace for girls to have to “fight the system” to gain access to opportunities within football (Fields 2005). Withholding opportunity for girls and young women reinforces football as a masculine game meant for boys and men, or more specifically, for male bodies. This also stunts girls’ acquisition of important football skills that boys often receive from the time they are
in elementary school. For adult women just beginning their careers, this often means learning to overcome the "double hesitation" for the first time.

I experienced this "double hesitation" firsthand. Especially in my first few games, I had little confidence in my ability to actually catch and tackle an opponent, even though I made tackles proving my ability. Other players indicated this lack of confidence as well, sometimes even when espousing they were confident. Often players would run toward the ball carrier, and then wait for the opponent to come to them. In a halftime speech Coach Woods addressed this saying "you can't play scared, you have to get in there and hit them." Audrey was explicitly open about her ineptitude at tackling, and even sought help from veterans after several failures. In experiencing the "double hesitation," she was also afraid to take a hit because she was concerned she would get hurt.

Openly admitting fear was not commonplace, but several times rookies asked about the experience of getting hit, especially if they had yet to play in a game. In one instance Li inquired about taking a hit, and Alex admitted that she was scared when she first started playing. This admission seemed to calm the Li's nerves. I became more comfortable with the process of hitting and taking hits during my second season. For others, this process seemed to take longer. I found that once I overcame the fear of getting hit, I had no trouble engaging in the physical aspects of the game. I gained confidence with each interaction after. Young (2005:34-35) indicates that this is the experience of other women. She says, "If we should finally release ourselves from this spiral and really give a physical task our best effort, we are greatly surprised indeed at what our bodies can accomplish." Learning to use the body in a new way was a challenge for most of the players I studied. However, overcoming this bodily constraint led to the creation of the aggressive physicality expected in football.
"Hit her in the fucking mouth": Aggression within the rules

Although some women had difficulty fully engaging their bodies upon taking the football field, most enjoyed the physicality of the sport. Other studies on women's football (Knapp 2011; Migliaccio and Berg 2007; Nett et al. 2010; Packard 2009), rugby (Broad 2001; Chase 2005; Fields and Comstock 2008; Lawler 2002), hockey (Theberge 1998, 2003), and boxing (Hargreaves 1997; Mennesson 2000) have found similar results. These "confrontational sports celebrate the force and power that is at the heart of the association of sport and masculinity" (Theberge 2003:499). Each of these sports requires a significant amount of physicality, although there are differences. Boxing, unlike the other sports mentioned, is an individual sport. The physical nature of this sport is induced through one-on-one contact. Women's hockey is a bit different than the other team sports, because the most aggressive form of physicality in the sport, body checking, has been legislated out of the game. Body checking, the act of hitting a player into the boards or ice, is a fixture of the men's game, but its removal from the women's game leads some to see the games as the "'same' but 'different'" (Theberge 1998). Rugby and football are the most alike in terms of the physicality required in competition. Neither sport has significant rules different than the men's equivalent. The physical expectations of these sports have been retained in the women's game. In each sport, a fundamental component of those expectations is aggression.

Football rules encourage and even require a certain amount of aggression. Some acts can be deemed to be too aggressive, thus crossing a line. However, there is often little difference between aggression that is deemed to be acceptable, or within the rules, and aggression that is unacceptable, or outside of the rules. "Big hits" are the most prominent and revered display of aggression within the rules of the sport. Big hits are characterized by a full speed hit, during
which the tackler drives her momentum *through* a ball carrier. These hits generally include a big impact, often audible even in the stands, with the tackler exploding through the opponent, who then slams to the ground. Big hits often cause the ball carrier to fumble, or lose control of the football, and are used as an intimidation technique as well. Delivering a big hit can make an opponent hesitate in future plays, making it easier to tackle. These hits also electrify the crowd, and are exalted as the epitome of what football is supposed to be about, physicality. Big hits generally look violent, and are known to cause injuries.

Displaying the physicality necessary to deliver a big hit can validate one's status on the football field. A big hitter tends to be thought of as stronger than others, is feared, and, most importantly, is respected. On the field big hits were rewarded with praise, slaps on the helmet, and cheering. For example, during a 2011 game Tiffany broke through the offensive line, hitting the opponents’ quarterback right as she turned to survey the field. Three Sizzle players greeted Tiffany in the backfield to celebrate the big hit. "That's the way you do it. Big hit, big hit," Coach yelled, chuckling a bit after. After several plays the defense forced a punt. Upon her return to the sideline Tiffany received high fives and praise for the big hit from other players.

Big hits were a quick way for a rookie to be accepted on the defense as well. In 2012, two rookies emerged as big hitters. Jess, playing on the defensive line, earned respect from veteran players when, during her first game, she hit a running back behind the line of scrimmage, knocking her two yards back. "Ohhhhhhh," erupted from the sideline. "What's her name again?" Coach asked right after the hit. "Jess," a player replied. "Big hit Jess, way to work," he yelled. "Damn," another player replied. A big hit such as this would often be "relived" on the sideline as players discussed how it happened, and even occasionally reenacted the hit. Brie, also a rookie, made several big hits from the outside linebacker position during the season. On one occasion
Brie made a hit that knocked both her and the opponent to the ground. As Brie fell back she slammed the back of her helmet on the ground. After a visit from the trainer, and a few minutes on the sidelines, Brie reentered the game. She would show signs of a concussion later in the week due to the force with which she landed on the ground after the hit. As TJ, a retired veteran once put it: "People think it's a joke, but it's no joke. That shit hurts. Women hit hard."

Although big hits were certainly rewarded on the field, they were embraced even more during film study. Many times a big hit would be rewound and played over and over during a film session for players to admire. "Hang on, let me rewind that. Let me show you how to make a tackle. This is how you put a big hit on someone," Coach said in one film session. "That's what I want to see every time, ladies; drive through the ball carrier." Big hits shown on film often gained oohs and aahs from player and coaches, as well as praise and excited laughter. Big hits displayed the aggressive physicality that is revered in a contact sport like football.

Aggression on the field was policed by both players and coaches, although coaches were much more forceful in their critique of aggression. During film study of a game in 2012 the lack of physicality during the game was the topic of direct attack. Coach stated, “This type of shit here makes me want to cry. No fuckin’ passion for football. I’m so fuckin’ disappointed in you. I expected big things. I’ve never seen so much blatant disrespect for football in my life.” Failing to meet the physical requirements of the game was equated with disrespect for the most fundamental part of the sport. For this reason, constructing, maintaining, and embodying aggressive physicality was a must in becoming a football player. Since this was the most important part of the sport, aggression was required whether it was "within the rules," i.e. legal, or "outside of the rules," and thus illegal.
"Don't get caught": Aggression outside of the rules

Often aggression displayed on the field was "outside of the rules," or illegal. These acts included physical altercations and the verbal promotion of violence, frequently after the whistle was blown, and the play had been completed. For example, on an interception Shannon went to make a tackle, and was hit in the back and knocked to the ground by an opponent. This is an illegal play in football, known as "blocking in the back." The infraction was obvious, and penalty flags were thrown by the referees to indicate the violation. Several players clapped on the sideline, realizing we would gain 15 additional yards for the penalty. "Way to take a penalty, Shannon," one player yelled. Shannon angrily got up as the play ended. "Where's the bitch?," she yelled, looking to the sideline for an answer. "We got you, we got you," a referee responded, indicating to Shannon that a flag had been thrown. "I know; you did your job, now I have to go do my job," she responded.

Incidents such as these were not uncommon. Often players would ask for an opponent's jersey number or player's position when an infraction was detected from the sideline, especially if a referee had called no penalty. In one instance Kourt妮e came back to the sidelines angered by the play. "That bitch threw me on my face, disrespectful. Who is number 10?" Seeking retribution was deemed acceptable by coaches and players, as long as one did not get caught and penalized. Sometimes veteran players would tell rookies how to "get away with" acts on the field. On one occasion, Audrey sought out advice.

Audrey: In basketball you can kind of get away with some things. Can you do that?
Shannon: You can get away with things. That’s one of the reasons I love being on the line, because I can push the limit and get away with some stuff. My favorite is to hit a girl up underneath the helmet. I can get away with that. I was doing that against Toledo
and one of the linemen complained to the referee, and I just said suck it up. The ref came and said “hey, Shannon, you gotta knock that off.” And, I said, "I told her that’s football." And he said I just needed to be more careful about it and he’d be watching. So you just have to figure out what you can and can’t get away with.

Again, the main focus in these instances was figuring out what you could do that wouldn't draw a penalty flag. Pushing the boundaries and retaliation were definitely acceptable.

Several instances of retribution happened while playing one specific team. Games against the team in the Louisville, Kentucky area were always aggressive beyond that allowed within the rules of the sport. This often would include late hits, the use of copious profanity, and physical violence, including punching, kicking, and hitting under the helmet facemask.

Following a 2012 game with Kentucky an argument between an opposing coach and several Sizzle players nearly erupted into a brawl between the teams. The relationship between the two teams was always contentious. In fact, as players we were always ordered to wear our helmets during the handshake line that is customary after each game with the expectation that things could get violent. I never received a specific explanation of why the relationship between the two teams was so contentious, other than that Kentucky "played dirty." Other teams in the league also complained about Kentucky's play. Since Kentucky was located in close proximity to Cincinnati, they were often placed in the same division as the Sizzle, likely adding to the difficulties between the two teams.

During a 2011 away game against Kentucky, aggression outside of the rules escalated so much that Sizzle coaches ordered players to "play dirty," something I had never heard requested before. Throughout the game both teams engaged in pushing "after the whistle," in other words, after a play was completed. Additionally, during play there were various acts that would be
deemed worthy of a penalty if seen by an official. For example, often players would push upwards on the facemask of an opponent, or put their hands inside the helmet of the opponent. These acts certainly were not only engaged in during play with this opponent, but they were more prevalent when compared to games against other teams.

I became involved in one of these altercations during a 2011 home game against Kentucky. After making a tackle on a kickoff, I became entangled with an opponent in the pile of bodies that formed on the field. Once a play has ended it often takes a few seconds to disentangle players. I often found myself trapped underneath another player. When this happens one must simply wait to get up. After this play I was unable to get up because another player was laying on me. An opponent happened to be trapped underneath me as well. "Fucking get off me," the player screamed just before kicking me with her free leg. After two more kicks, I kicked back. Several other players became involved in the altercation, pushing one another. Four officials arrived on the scene, and began physically removing players from the area. Eventually I was able to emerge from the pile. Beyond the initial interaction, much of the altercation is a blur. Expletives were flung by all of the parties involved. While the initial altercation was between just two players, me and an opponent, the overall incident ended with 14 players involved. After restraining Tahlia, Sydney came over and patted me on the helmet, pushing me towards the sideline as we jogged off the field. I received high fives from Kourtnie and Angela on the way, and several players greeted me with helmet smacks as I made it to the sideline. Although this physical altercation was clearly outside the bounds of the rules, no penalty flags were thrown, and no players were disciplined. In fact, I received nothing but positive feedback for my actions. These types of altercations were not normative, but on the occasion that they did occur, they were praised unless they drew a penalty. Actions drawing a
penalty flag "crossed the line" even if they were the same actions that were praised without a penalty. In other words, these actions were considered positive as long as one did not get "caught."

Getting penalized during an altercation changed the reaction of players and coaches from one of praise to one of frustration. In another incident with Kentucky, a punch thrown after a play ended led to an ejection of a Sizzle player. In this case physical and verbal exchanges during play led Jenn to punch a player after play ended. Although Jenn swore she did not punch the player, the referees determined she had, and ejected her from the game. I was standing on the sideline at the time, and did not see a punch thrown, although other players on the sideline said they saw the punch. Jenn had a bit of a temper, so this seemed plausible. Coaches were angry that she had "crossed a line" and gotten ejected from the game. "I didn't hit her," Jenn yelled at a coach. "Alright, the eye in the sky don't lie, so I guess we'll see," the coach replied. The "eye in the sky" referred to the camera that records each game for film study. The panoptic gaze of the "eye in the sky" served as a method for controlling players’ actions on the field. For example, after making a mistake on a play and allowing a ball carrier to run past me on defense, I continued to chase her down the field even though I knew I would never catch up. I knew that failing to continue the chase would be scrutinized on film as much as, if not more than, the mistake that allowed the ball carrier to escape. The phrase "the eye in the sky" was often used as a threat to get players to complete a desired task, or as a way to indicate that a sanction would be received if the film revealed a mistake.

Upon review of the game film during the following week it was determined that Jenn did punch the player in the facemask area. The film room erupted in chatter as the video was replayed several times. "The eye in the sky don't lie," Coach said chuckling. "You gotta keep
your head. You can't get thrown out of games. You may get suspended," Coach indicated, although he did not express anger over the situation or offer any additional discipline. Jenn never was suspended by the league, although based on the WFA "Code of Conduct" the event likely should have led to a suspension. My altercation in which kicks were exchanged also could have led to suspensions under this code. The document states: "There will be no fighting between players or any team personnel on the field or anywhere on the premises of the game venue. You will be ejected from the game, leave the premises, and be suspended from playing in the WFA" (Women's Football Alliance 2011). The "Code of Conduct" also outlaws profanity on the field, "dirty hits" or "cheap shots," "physical abuse," threats to officials, and drugs and alcohol during practice or games. Many of these were violated by Sizzle players at some point. Profanity was normative, with players who censored their language often being reminded that they need not do so. While physical altercations such as those discussed were not normative, they were not completely discouraged either. As has already been illustrated, much of this aggression was supported; players were encouraged by coaches, other players, and even fans to engage in this behavior "as long as you don't get caught."

Verbal aggression was also encouraged. After a big hit on an opponent during a kickoff, Jenn got up and yelled "and stay down" to the opponent. This verbal aggression was met with laughter and support from teammates. Teisha often encouraged players to "trash talk," which includes "verbal taunts that players direct at their opponents during contests; these oral insults are often accompanied by displays of physical intimidation" (Eveslage and Delaney 1998). During practices she would taunt any player she was competing with, whether she was playing on offense or defense. Coaches also often encouraged "trash talk." "Tell her what you're going to do to her while you're standing there on the line," a coach instructed during a practice.
Coaches encouraged this "trash talk" as a means of intimidation. During the last game of the 2012 season, the team tried a different means of intimidation, purchasing "warrior" masks to wear during warm-ups. Most players purchased a mask, with everyone wearing them when heading out to the field. The masks varied in color and style, with most including a lightning bolt pattern on the sides of the face, and a cross at the top of the head. My mask included this pattern with a base color of blue and accents of yellow. A men's semi-professional football team completed play just prior to our game, and the players loved the masks so much that they asked to take photos with many of the Sizzle players.

Putting on the game face was another means of intimidation. While talk of the "game face" at practices and games was generally abstract, during a photo shoot, discussion was much more specific. The photo shoot was for team promotional materials, with players also receiving copies of their shots. Upon arrival at the studio, I was ushered to a dressing room to change, and then headed in for pictures. The photographer had us place "eye black" on our faces, a black streak of grease that is typically placed under the eyes to reduce glare from stadium lights. Now eye black is used by players and even fans as a means of intimidation, with some players streaking the paint down their face to look more intimidating. Even though Sizzle players generally did not wear eye black, the photographer suggested its use. The photographer then sprayed each of us with a water mixture, likely water and glycerin, to make it appear that we were sweating. Each of us took individual photographs in various poses, some with pads, some without. Sometimes we used a prop, like our helmet or a ball. But what stood out was the request that we put on a "game face" in our photos. The photographer encouraged each player to "look mean." "C'mon, you can do better than that," he said to me. "Uh, I think this is my best game face," I responded. Other players had similar issues getting the "required" facial
expression. A look of intensity and determination that often includes a scowl, the "game face" was uncomfortable and difficult for several players. Kourtnie even said that she gave up because she couldn't stop smiling. Ultimately, having the right "look" was a part of embodying football masculinity.

“I'm fine, coach; I'll be fine”: Adopting a Culture of Sacrifice

Football maintains a “culture of sacrifice” that says that a “real man” is a “warrior” and fights through the pain for his team (Earp 2010; Migliaccio and Berg 2007). Calling it "the pain principle," Sabo (2014: 449) says "sport is just one of the many areas in our culture where pain is more important than pleasure. Boys are taught that to endure pain is courageous, to survive pain is manly." As a part of constructing and embodying football masculinity, Sizzle players abide by this as well. For instance, Dana, a veteran on the team, played multiple positions during the course of each game. Her heavily braced and bandaged knee hurt her significantly as games wore on. Although visibly in pain, and often limping, she always reentered the game. “I'm fine, coach; I'll be fine,” she said in the midst of one game. After a few minutes of stretching, she reentered the game when the offense headed back out. Many other players were in similar situations.

Shannon, a veteran with knee problems, missed some time early in the 2011 season after an injury in a game. However, she did not miss a game, only practices. A similar situation would play out during the 2012 season when she injured a calf. Mary, Sydney, Kourtnie, and several other players heavily braced their knees for each practice and game. While one wrong move could send them to the operating table, they continued playing regardless of the pain or possible consequences. Even after being knocked unconscious and suffering a concussion, Marley refused a trip to the hospital, joking to the coach that she was “ready to play, coach.” She was back on
the practice field two days later, and although she was not allowed to take hits, she ran through every play with the team. When Sydney suffered a golf ball sized knot in her calf during a conditioning session, she had another player rub the knot out, and returned to the field. Even after other players urged her to sit out, she continued to run sprints with the rest of the team. Megan hurt her arm just above her wrist, gaining a contusion the diameter of a baseball. Although she did not complete contact drills for about a week, she had the trainer tape her arm each practice, and participated in everything that did not require full contact.

Although most players subscribed to the "culture of sacrifice," there were times when a player's commitment to the team was questioned. When Stefanie stated she hurt her leg during sprints at a practice, and sat out the rest of the conditioning drills, players began to grumble about whether she was actually injured. When she reentered practice later during a scrimmage, the other players determined she was "faking it." Stefanie's commitment was questioned several other times throughout the two seasons. When she decided not to participate in certain drills, because she did not understand the reason for the drill, she was chastised by teammates. Twice she quit during the middle of a game, because she was unhappy with her playing time and role. Her commitment was also questioned when she chose to stop running "gassers" at the end of several practices. Gassers consist of sprints from sideline to sideline, with one gasser being two trips across the field. If a player failed to give "100 percent," the entire team would be forced to run extra. Several players caused the entire team to run extra laps during my career, "ruining it for everyone," as Kathy termed it.

Both players and coaches questioned the validity of injuries on occasion. There was an expectation that the extent of a player's pain could be judged by others. Some injuries were not deemed "painful enough" to warrant time off the field. When Alya and Mercedes sat out a
practice for shin splints and a quadriceps strain respectively, one veteran angrily declared that there were too many players sitting out for "insignificant pain." In another instance, during a film session, Jamie indicated that she had torn a muscle in her leg. "If you tore a muscle in your leg, wouldn't you not be able to walk on it?" questioned one player when Jamie got up and walked to the bathroom. Even my own level of pain was questioned when I suffered a hip pointer during a drill in practice. A hip pointer is when the bone and muscle on the iliac crest, or hip bone, are bruised. Generally this causes bleeding in the surrounding muscles, along with bruising and swelling. This injury occurs when the soft tissue and muscle on the hip bone are compressed into the bone. Hip pointers are common in football, due to the propensity for the hip to take direct hits during play (Moore, Dalley, and Agur 2010). My hip was hit during the hamburger drill, where a ball carrier and tackler sprint towards one another in a five yard span. I lined up against Mary, an offensive lineman with both a height and weight advantage. The whistle blew, and I ran the ball forward. Mary quickly met me in the middle, hitting me directly on my hip while making the tackle. I was able to twist away from her and stretch the ball a few yards, but as I got up it was clear that there was something wrong with my hip. I spent a few minutes stretching, wishing the pain away. But, I ended up with the trainer, and became a spectator on the sideline.

Although a minor hip pointer can take just a few days to heal, some force players onto crutches, and can take up to six weeks to heal. I missed five practices while recovering from my hip pointer, but it was clear that this was not acceptable to the coaches. A week after the injury a coach called out to me as I stood on the sideline during practice.

Coach: What's wrong with you?

Me: I'm still dealing with this hip pointer.
Coach: Aw man, c'mon.

Me: Coach, I'm doing what I can.

Coach: You've got to be back for that scrimmage on Saturday. Got to be!

His irritation with my inability to return to practice was clear. Katie, the athletic trainer, quickly defended me saying, "She did do all the warm-ups and everything at the beginning that she could." I had begun light jogging the week before, and was participating in non-contact drills, although not at full speed. But, this was the type of pain that was meant to be "sucked up," pushed aside, and ignored. In the eyes of the coach, I was not adhering to the "culture of sacrifice." I wondered what my teammates thought. Did they find my pain to be legitimate? Did they see that I was doing the best I could to return to the field as soon as possible? Or, did they think I should play through the pain? I never got the answer to those questions, though certainly when those questions were asked about other players, I was privy to the responses. For some their sacrifice was validated, while the commitment of others was questioned.

Beyond playing through pain, players were also expected to sacrifice their time for the team, and work hard in every practice and game. However, this was an area of significant contention for the Sizzle. Perhaps a complication of the sport as an unpaid, largely recreational endeavor, maintaining consistency in practice schedules, attendance, and work ethic was difficult. Many practices featured so few players that we were unable to complete "11 on 11" drills, scrimmage against one another, or focus on special teams. It was common to have somewhere between 15 and 20 players at practice with 40 on the roster. Due to injuries, sometimes we would have higher numbers at practice, but still not have enough people who could participate to do extensive drills.
Pleas for dedication and participation from coaches were common. "Tell people to get their asses to practice," Coach said at the end of one practice. Players also continuously requested that people begin attending practices, but with little success. Several practices were cancelled due to low attendance, although generally players would stay and do some form of practice even on these days. Attendance of coaches was also often suspect. Several players questioned the commitment from coaches and offered this as a reason for their lack of concern.

Sometimes what was deemed as a "lack of commitment" carried over to game day. This was often very apparent at home games during the "walkthrough." A walkthrough is a time before the game when the team "walks through" offensive, defensive, and special teams plays to prepare. This was a time to make sure players knew where they were playing, specific plays designed for attacking a specific team could be discussed, and players were able to begin focusing on the upcoming game. At one home game, Coach was lining up players on the kickoff team during the walkthrough, and there were several missing players. As he attempted to insert backups for people on the line more confusion ensued, largely brought on by the fact that some players had not arrived. Three players wandered in late and were told to leave their bags and personal items on the field and “come on.” Instances such as this happened on several occasions.

All of this translated into confusion on the field during games, and frustration, especially from those players that were consistently in attendance at practice. Team meetings, emails, text messages, and individual discussions addressed this issue over the course of the two seasons. Failing to show up to practice, not working hard while there, and lack of enthusiasm for the sport all were seen as breaches of the "culture of sacrifice." However, meeting the expectations of this culture was problematic for those who had conflicts with paid labor, transportation issues, and family concerns. The semi-professional nature of this sport certainly challenged the ability of
many players to fully commit to the team, impacting the ability to fully adhere to the "culture of sacrifice." This sacrifice was still expected and imperative as women constructed football masculinity. Continued adherence allowed women to reinforce, manage, and maintain this masculinity as will be discussed in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: "What is this girly shit?": Reinforcing Football Masculinity

It was a sunny day, but only about 45 degrees. If the wind had not been blowing it might have felt warm. But, most of the players were cold, dressed in sweats and winter hats. We had already completed some tackling drills, and now were lining up for a new training drill. Two cones were placed about five yards apart. The goal was to shuffle back and forth between the cones following the movement of a football, moved to the left or right by a coach. The coach emphasized that we should keep our bodies low, move left or right when he moved the ball left or right, and if he put the ball on the ground, we were to dive on the ground, roll, and jump back up. Four players had gone so far, and each had been scolded for their inability to get low enough in a squat, and for a slow response when dropping to the ground.

I stepped up to take my turn. We were completing the drill in pairs, so my partner slid in next to me. We moved back and forth, and back and forth, over, and over, and over. I felt as if the drill would never end. My partner was not low enough, was not shuffling fast enough, was slow to drop to the ground and roll, and the coach continued to yell at her. "Do it right and we'll stop," he yelled as he moved the ball back to the side again. "Stop, just stop. What have I been telling you? What is this girly shit?" The coach popped up on his tippy toes, shook his hips back and forth, walking with his hands near his chest, wrists falling limp. "None of this girly shit. This is football, and we're not doing this girly shit. Now get your ass down low, and when the ball goes down, get your ass on the ground." There was some snickering from the back of the line of players awaiting their turn, some eye rolls, and a few huffs from players, but nothing was directly said to the coach. Several players seemed offended. "What is he doing?" one player asked with an irritated look on her face. "That's some shit," another said quietly. Several players laughed, making remarks about how stupid the coach looked "prancing around."
This was certainly not the first time we were yelled at for being girly, or acting like a girl, but it was the first time that I had seen a coach "act like a girl" to make his point. In previous practices and games, Coaches made it clear that "tackling like a girl" and "girly shit" were not acceptable. Missing tackles because you failed to attack the ball carrier was considered "tackling like a girl." Failing to show physical aggression was often labeled as "girly." Labeling actions that did not meet the standards of football masculinity as "girly" was one way in which male coaches, and even players, denigrated femininity. Maintaining football masculinity required not only engaging in masculinity, but degrading and avoiding femininity. Women also participated in a "jock culture" that included raw sexual innuendo, especially in the locker room. Finally, women suppressed femininity throughout the season, waiting until the postseason to get their hair and nails done, and show off their feminine attire. All of these acts served to reinforce football masculinity, the physically aggressive orthodox form of masculinity required by football culture.

"Don't tackle like a damn girl": Denigrating Femininity

As the opening vignette suggests, acts that were not aggressive enough to constitute football masculinity were generally labeled as "girly." This point was made during practices, games, and while reviewing game film. We spent one Wednesday night watching film of the first two games we played in the 2012 season. Neither game went well for us, as we lost 68-14 and 52-8 to Toledo and West Michigan, respectively. "I'm trying to get through this first half without getting angry," Coach said of the first film. But, he was clearly angry and his frustration grew as we watched. As the first half came to a close he ejected the DVD. "Fucking shit," he said under his breath as he put in the second DVD. "We've got to fix this, ladies." A quarter had
gone by in the next game film and the frustration was building in the room for everyone. Most of the feedback had been on tackling, or the lack thereof. Player after player was yelled at for not "wrapping up," not "driving through the ball carrier," not "getting after her legs and bringing her down." I had missed a tackle on the opening kickoff when a teammate and I collided while going for the tackle allowing the ball carrier to escape, so I had not avoided the wrath. We had just made it into the third quarter of the game film when a West Michigan running back caught a screen pass in the backfield, broke six tackles, and ran past the entire defense for a 63 yard touchdown.

Quit tackling like a Goddamn girl. Wrap her up and hit her in the fuckin' mouth. You have got to get in there and hit 'em, ladies. Put your shoulder pads on them and drive through, grab their legs and get them on the ground. Do something. We have got to stop backing up and letting them run through us. Don't tackle like a damn girl.

It was expected that everyone in the room had a shared meaning of what it meant to tackle "like a girl."

Other behaviors were also indicated as being "girly" and unacceptable. Being in a bad mood was considered "girly," and sometimes would be attributed to "that time of the month." A bad mood could be dealt with if it didn’t impact play. In one instance, after incorrectly blocking on a play, and receiving feedback from coaches, Stefanie quipped, "I’m not in the mood.” Coach immediately fired back, “What does mood have to do with playing football? I’m not in the mood!” he yelled. A few plays later when another offensive play was run incorrectly, Coach stated angrily, “Well, she was supposed to block for you, but she’s not in the mood.”

Labeling certain acts as "girly," or to say someone is engaging in an act "like a girl," constitutes a form of "oppressive othering" (Schwalbe et al. 2000). The phrase "like a girl"
serves as an "identity code," that "makes[s] it impossible for members of a subjugated group to signify fully creditable selves" (Schwalbe et al. 2000: 424). Being told you do something "like a girl" is supposed to serve as the ultimate insult. In a well-known scene from the baseball movie *The Sandlot*, an argument between two boys in which they trade insults, comes to an abrupt end when one boy espouses "you play ball like a girl." Being called a "jerk" "idiot," "moron," "scab eater," "puss licker," and "fart smeller," were no match for the ultimate insult. In another mass media representation, the movie *Friday Night Lights* (2004), high school football player Ivory Christian offers a similar argument in a fiery halftime speech meant to inspire his team to come back from a deficit. Christian says, "what's wrong with ya'll, ya'll playin' like some little girls, like you never played football before…. I want you to hit everything that moves, if the ref gets in your way, you hit him too" (Berg 2004). Using the code phrase "like a girl" indicates failure in creating an authentic performance of masculinity. Masculinity must consistently be proven (Anderson 2009; Kimmel 1996), thus statements such as these were meant to police football masculinity, to indicate it was not being upheld. However, these statements serve another purpose, creating distance between what is considered feminine and that deemed masculine. The negativity in these interactions also serves to directly denigrate femininity, associating negative behaviors with the "other." Phrases such as "throwing like a girl" serve a similar purpose.

"That's not ladylike": Employing Antifemininity through Bodily Functions

Although there are many variations in what is considered masculine, one component that is widely accepted is antifemininity. Kimmel (2004:97) suggests that "while different groups of men may disagree about other traits and their significance in gender definitions, the antifemininity component of masculinity is perhaps the single dominant and universal
characteristic." Antifeminine behavior is that which directly goes against femininity, and is used to denigrate femininity. This ultimately reifies the power of masculinity.

Sizzle players defied femininity by engaging in antifeminine physical behaviors like burping and farting. Elias (1994) mentions these as "natural functions" that can be controlled by the "civilized body." Shilling (2003:131) says,

The civilized body also has the ability to rationalize and exert a high degree of control over its emotions, to monitor its own actions, and those of others, and to internalize a finely demarcated set of rules about what constitutes appropriate behaviour in various situations.

While we might consider burping and farting to be "uncivilized," the release of these functions is controlled by these women, who consciously make the decision to engage in this behavior in this specific situation. "Uncivilized bodies," generally associated with earlier eras through medieval times in Europe, were rarely constrained by norms, and engaged in behaviors without much restraint (Shilling 1993/2003:132). In this situation, burping and farting were normative behavior. In my study, Women had control over the public release of these functions, choosing to do so in direct opposition of what might be expected of women. Weinberg and Williams (2005:317) have argued that for men, especially heterosexual men, "bodily grossness may be valued for its opposition to the manners that femininity is thought to imply. The delight taken in physical behaviors like burping can indicate men’s disdain for what they perceive as feminine."

Sizzle players seemed to find similar value in these antifeminine behaviors.

Bodily functions, such as burping and farting, were often a source of admiration leading to praise, and even contests. During one practice Megan let out a huge burp as we lined up for warm-up exercises. "Oooo, that one sounded chunky," Shannon commented. "It had texture,"
Davida added. This elicited laughter from those standing nearby. Players were used to hearing other players burp, so this often became fodder for jokes and stories. Several players engaged in burping contests, sometimes continuing over a few practices and games. In these contests, the louder and longer, the better. In fact, releasing a quiet and/or short burp was considered a failure. For example, as Shannon walked across the field during a practice she let out a burp. "Sorry, that wasn't a good one," she apologized. In this case the failure was not in engaging in the antifeminine behavior, but in not making it antifeminine enough.

Perhaps just as common as burping was farting. During one practice a perfectly thrown pass was dropped by Angela. As she returned to the huddle she was laughing. "Sorry, you know I was farting, and that's why I dropped it," she said. Amid laughter, Sydney responded, "Wait, you dropped the ball because you farted? That's awesome." In another example, I was playing linebacker next to Angela. I heard a loud noise, but had no idea what it was, or where it came from. "JC\textsuperscript{6}, I thought you just let out the best fart ever," Angela said. Several players began laughing. "No, I wish though," I responded, laughing. In this case a loud fart would have offered me a certain desirable status among my teammates. Weinberg and Williams (2005) have found that although in many spaces an act such as this would be normalized, neutralized, or even ignored, in some spaces this is celebrated. They state, "attention to a breach of body boundaries often also is sought to embarrass the offender and provide amusement to others. Or it can signify solidarity" (Weinberg and Williams, 2005, 318-319). In the case of the Sizzle, physical acts like burping and farting signified solidarity, and were used as a source of entertainment.

Bodily functions such as these were only questioned when they were odorous. Odorous functions did not seem to be a source of embarrassment, but certainly were fodder for comedy. One such incident happened during a practice at our indoor facility. Through laughter,

\textsuperscript{6} Players called me JC, since there were several "Jen's" on the team.
Kourtnie apologized to the team after releasing a loud fart. She explained that she had eaten sushi before practice, so it would probably be a continuous issue. After a few seconds Tahlia realized that this particular fart was odorous. "Ah, c'mon, that's not ladylike," Tahlia said while walking away fanning the air. "So what?" Kourtnie replied with a laugh. "You can't do that in a building with no doors and windows," Tahlia stated as she called a timeout, and headed off the field. Usually an interruption in practice would have elicited a strong negative reaction from coaches, and perhaps other players. However, this incident instead incited laughter from players and coaches. In Weinberg and Williams' (2005) study, a man indicated that after an odorous fart, "guys would say it's raunchy and then say 'Nice one,' because if it's strong it's more manly." The respondent added, "You know, because women would not try to clear a room with a fart" (Weinberg and Williams 2005:325). As is illustrated here, farting is considered an antifeminine behavior. For heterosexual men, this act is a way to show their "power through indifference." For those men who are non-heterosexual, resisting these behaviors may show "greater respect for body boundaries," and fights against "masculinist hegemony" (Weinberg and Williams 2005:332). Inmates in prison have been shown to engage in what has been called "insubordinate farting" where they fart during times when silence is required. Terry (1997:32) states:

The resulting laughter obviously mocks the guard. It also, in a safe way, attacks the system…. It also allows the inmates to break the rules and reaffirm, at least for themselves, their own power.

For the Sizzle women, engaging in these behaviors was a form of resistance to femininity, and, as such, a way to reinforce their masculinity. Antifeminine behaviors gave women power over femininity.
"Now I Can be Feminine Again:" Suppressing Femininity on the Field

As discussed, in constructing and managing football masculinity women denigrate femininity is several ways. In addition to these more overt actions, women also suppress behaviors that are seen as feminine. Most poignantly, Sizzle women were quick to police emotions, generally their own. Emotions, especially crying, are often considered to be a feminine trait (Fisher et al. 2004; Lombardo, Cretser, and Roesch 2001; van Hemert, van de Vijver, and Vingerhoets 2011). Coaches often indicated that women players were more emotional than men. "There are a lot more emotional things to deal with because women are more sensitive than men. You've got to be a little more patient," Coach Woods said in a newspaper interview (Russell 2004). In other interviews Coach Woods also indicated that women get more offended by being yelled at (Russell 2004; Schapp 2011; Styles 2012). Another coach indicated, in what seemed to be a sarcastic response, that he felt there was more crying when he coached men, but there was more drama when coaching women (Styles 2012).

Players often talked of suppressing emotions while in the presence of the team, especially with regards to crying. After sustaining an injury that required a trip to the emergency room, Alex indicated that she was in so much pain she wanted to cry, saying to her family by phone on the way to the hospital: "I think it's broken. The trainer said that's what she thinks. If it's broken that's going to be the end of my career. I wanted to cry, but I didn't want my teammates to see, so I held back." Even though she was clearly in excruciating pain, Alex refused to cry, an act that certainly would be considered feminine. Several times players did cry when they were injured, but they often directly acknowledged this as unacceptable. During a game in Kentucky, Sydney was hit and driven into the ground by an opposing player while attempting to punt the ball. Kicking the ball, especially punting the ball, leaves a player very vulnerable. In this case,
she was unable to handle the snap, and kicked the ball late. Although she kicked the ball, an opposing player still slammed her to the ground. She writhed in pain on the field for several minutes before being helped off the field by the coaches. It was during this time that she began to cry. As she made it to the sideline many players gave her words of encouragement. "Way to take a big hit," I said. "Yeah, and then cry like a big baby," she responded angrily as she headed to the bench. Angela was injured during the same game, and in a similar situation, indicated her frustration with the fact that she cried, even though her injury was serious enough that it kept her from returning to the game. A former player reported that she always said to players, "You better not cry, or I'll give you something to cry about" (Haller 2006:194). Although I never saw a player berated by coaches or other players for crying, it was still clear that crying was not to be part of the game. However, not all emotions were held back, or thought of as off limits; anger and frustration were common emotions that were even encouraged in some cases.

As discussed in Chapter 3, players who expressed anger and frustration through aggression on the field were not admonished, unless they led to a breach of rules that gained a penalty flag. Coaches would tell players to "keep their head," while at the same time asking players to "get angry" and "hit somebody." Anger and frustration did lead to on-field incidents (see Chapter 3), but also incited confrontation between players and coaches. Several episodes in practice led to screaming matches between a player and coach. On one evening I was playing cornerback on the far side of the field. We were working through offensive and defensive plays in a full-contact game simulation. On the opposite side of the field Li was playing cornerback against a new player who did not yet have pads or a helmet. In general, as a cornerback, we were to hit the receiver as soon as she began running towards us to try and disrupt her ability to run her route and interrupt the timing between quarterback and receiver. Since the new player
was not wearing pads, Li was not hitting her as she ran her route. "Don't play her like a bitch" a coach said, inciting rage within Li. They both began screaming at one another, bringing practice to a halt. As Li walked off the field toward the sideline, another coach asked what happened. "I have no idea," the coach involved in the incident stated. When asked about it later, Li responded that she let her temper get the best of her, but told Lindsey "nobody calls me a bitch." A few practices prior to this incident, a heated argument between another player and coach left several players trying to mediate the situation. These expressions of emotion were never truly questioned. Acts of aggression, as in these situations, were generally accepted as an important part of the game.

Outside of emotions, Sizzle women suppressed femininity in several other ways. Rarely did players wear makeup, style their hair, or play in jewelry, acts that tend to be common in women's sports. Several researchers have found that women athletes engage in "apologetic behavior" (Davis-Delano, Pollock, and Vose 2009; Ezzell 2009; Felshin 1974; George 2005; Griffin 1998; Messner 1994), in which they "apologize" for their athletic ability by outwardly displaying femininity through makeup, jewelry, bows, and long hair. These acts feminize the players and the sport they are playing, seemingly making their participation more socially acceptable. Sizzle players did occasionally comment on how they wanted to get a manicure or pedicure but they were waiting until the season ended. The team previously had rules disallowing any fingernails longer than the fingertip (Russell 2004), and although I was never told of this rule while playing, most women seemed to adhere to this during the season anyway. Occasionally some players would paint their fingernails with team colors. Makeup was not generally worn by players during play, although Diana and Tammie each wore makeup during the 2012 season. Diana spent time in the training room trying to convince other players to wear
her purple and orange (team colors) eye shadow, but there were no takers. When Mercedes seemed to question her choice to wear makeup, Diana replied, "it makes me feel feminine." Tammie made a similar statement at the end of the 2012 season. Upon her arrival at a team social, Coach Woods quickly focused on Tammie's hair. "Tammie, look at your hair," he said with surprise as she walked up. "Now that the season's over I can be feminine again," she replied. While women in other sports find ways to feminize their appearance on the field, this was largely not a concern among Sizzle players. Football itself makes it difficult to engage in the apologetic behaviors used by other teams. The most common is the ponytail, with a bow in the hair (Mosbacher and Yacker 2009). A football helmet would cover any ponytail worn, and could also damage many hairstyles players might choose. Helmets also negate one's ability to see any makeup worn by players, which is why the LFL lingerie football league uses a helmet more like a hockey helmet that includes a clear shield in the front allowing the face to be viewed. Jewelry is generally thought to be dangerous on the football field, as players will use anything to take a player down. Thus, a necklace could be used to tackle a player. The equipment used in the sport negates some of the apologetic behaviors typically employed by women in other sports. But even if these women football players could display femininity more easily, it did not seem that many would do so. The Sizzle instead engage in what Broad (2001) has called "unapologetic behavior." The "unapologetic" includes "transgressing gender, the destabilizing of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, and 'in your face' confrontation of stigma" (Broad 2001:181). By engaging in unapologetic behavior, these players are more likely to be labeled as lesbian, an issue that other sports attempt to avoid.
"Some of these women forget they're women:" Queering Football

Ahmed (2006:25) argues that queering is “turning towards what disorients us in a way that does not insist on setting things straight, that does not insist on realigning the misalignments, but rather allows things to remain askew, strange, unhoused, and unfamiliar." As such, by engaging in unapologetic behavior, Sizzle players strive towards orthodox masculinity while on the football field, suppressing and even denigrating femininity as a part of that process. Engaging in apologetic behaviors would be an attempt to "realign misalignments," allowing women to feminize the game and reestablishing the expected gender regime. But, by engaging in aggressive, physical masculinity, without apologizing for that performance, women create a space that is non-normative according to the societal gender order. The expectation is for football to be infused with the most aggressive masculinity possible. But the expectation is not for women to engage in that process.

When women engage in unapologetic behaviors, and more generally, when they engage in masculinity, their gender expression is often equated with a non-heterosexual sexual orientation. In other words, engaging in behaviors that are expected of men (and identified as masculine), leads to an image of a "mannish" woman who must be a lesbian (Cahn 1994). It is this expectation of lesbianism that women players, teams, and leagues in many sports attempt to negate. Griffin (1998:66) explains the issue like this:

Women's sports advocates historically have taken a defensive position in response to the lesbian boogeywoman. Rather than questioning the value of societal expectations of compulsory femininity and heterosexuality or acknowledging and valuing the diversity of women in sport, many supporters of women's sport continue to rely on the same
defensive responses that have already proven to be ineffective in deflecting questions about the heterosexuality and femininity of women in sport.

As Griffin points out, women's sports offer a forum for questioning and considering societal gender norms and ideologies, yet the response is still to subordinate these sports and athletes by focusing on questions about athletes' femininity and sexuality.

By engaging in the unapologetic, the Sizzle step towards new conceptions of gender, masculinity, and femininity, while seemingly caring little about the specter of lesbianism. Unlike men's football, which has historically been very homophobic, the Sizzle were very accepting of various sexual identities. While veterans indicated that previous teams had been comprised of "mostly straight" women, this team was more split in the identities represented. Not long after I started to play for the Sizzle, one of the coaches went around asking about the players' sexual identities. I am not sure what inspired the questioning, but he seemed unfazed by the answers. Sexual identity was also openly discussed by players. My own sexuality was questioned by various players shortly after my entry into the field. I had open conversations about my sexuality with a few players, and my girlfriend participated in team events, a team 5K run, and attended various games. Identifying myself as lesbian may have helped in gaining rapport with some teammates, and in this space seemed to have no negative effects.

During a rain delay at an away game, players of various sexual identities engaged in a long discussion over how to label various non-heterosexual women on the team. The players considered who would fit into the "butch," "femme," "pancake," "stud," "soft stud," "soft butch," "out" Division I football player, Chip Sarafin of Arizona State University. Additionally, several coaches have been suspended, and players publicly admonished, for anti-gay epithets, while support for marriage equality and other LGBTQ issues has been espoused by athletes in each of the major men's sports.

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7 Although football and men's sports more generally have been known to be largely homophobic, there has been significant progress recently in altering attitudes within locker rooms and on fields of play (see Anderson 2009, 2014). Within the last two years we have witnessed the participation of the first openly gay athlete in any of the four major men's sports, Jason Collins with the NBA's Brooklyn Nets; the drafting to the NFL of an openly gay man, Michael Sam by the St. Louis Rams; and the acceptance of the first publicly 'out' Division I football player, Chip Sarafin of Arizona State University. Additionally, several coaches have been suspended, and players publicly admonished, for anti-gay epithets, while support for marriage equality and other LGBTQ issues has been espoused by athletes in each of the major men's sports.
"stemme," and other classifications, having differences of opinions about the definitions of each category, and who would ultimately fit each. The players also often engaged in sexual play showing comfort with "heteroflexibility," or the engagement in same-sex intimacy by heterosexual women, and "sexual fluidity," or the understanding that sexual desires, behaviors, and identities do not always align (Rupp 2012). This sexual play took place between players of varying races, sexual identities, and ages, and on-field, off-field, and in the locker room. Some of this sexual play was simply making sexual jokes, whereas at other times it involved various types of sexually suggestive touching.

Sometimes sexual joking revolved around everyday activities, like changing before or after practice. For example, jokes were often made when a player was bending over to get items from her bag. After a player mentioned she would be bending over, Marley responded "you can bend over in front of me anytime," before whistling. In a similar situation, Alya was standing behind a player on the sideline just as practice was ending, when a player yelled, "Hey, Alya, you gonna get up on that?" Often sexual joking revolved around sexualizing football plays, and the touching that takes place during football play. Kourtnie decided that she wanted to play quarterback, to which Shannon, the offensive center who would "hike" the ball to her, stated, "you just want to stick your hands up there." This turned into a stream of sexual jokes involving several players. On another occasion a coach was trying to explain a tackling drill that some players were having difficulty understanding. "Just pretend like you are suckling on a boob," a player explained. Sexual jokes occasionally revolved around the football as well. During a walkthrough in the rain a player picked up a football and exclaimed, "this ball is slippery; I hate slippery balls." At one practice we used a toy football instead of our regular regulation football. We were going to play "two-hand touch" instead of full contact. "Hey, we're going to use the

Sexual play also included sexually suggestive touching. Over a few practices several players participated in a "game" in which they would run by and grab another player's breast. Although some players did not seem to mind at all, others would run, and attempt to evade the game. On one occasion a player involved in the game said "I have to grab your boobs because we're teammates," implying that this was a sign of team camaraderie. After several days of this "game," a veteran player asked, "what is going on with this team; when did we become a team of boob grabbers?" Taken as rhetorical, no one answered these questions. However, the "game" ended shortly thereafter. Touching also sometimes involved play wrestling. For example, on two separate occasions players who generally expressed their gender in a masculine way even off the field were teased and harassed in the locker room when it was realized they were wearing women's underwear instead of boxer shorts. In both cases the player being teased attempted to hide their underwear, while other players attempted to confirm their suspicions.

This sexual play was engaged in by players of varying social statuses. In a homosocial space it is perhaps not surprising that there would be touching by persons of the same sex. However, others might immediately identify the situations explained above as clear homosexual behavior. For players this was not the case. The football field was a sexually fluid space where heteroflexibility allowed heterosexual women to engage in sexual play without others questioning their sexual identity. It was expected that by a player's dress off the field one could identify her sexual orientation. However, on the field, players largely expressed and embodied dress and actions equated with masculinity. Chapter 5 will consider the ways in which women
embodied masculinity on the football field as a way of expressing and reinforcing football masculinity.
Chapter 5: "Those Kinds of Bruises Only Come from Football":

Embodying Football Masculinity

Twenty minutes until warm-ups. I perched myself at the end of a bench in the locker room. Where to start? Dressing for a football game is a process, a marathon, not a sprint, so to speak. There is an order to putting on equipment. Socks before pants, sports bras before form fitting moisture-control compression shirts, and, believe it or not, jerseys before shoulder pads. Forget one item, and you end up taking off everything. "Fucking getting dressed takes longer than practice," one player quipped earlier in the season. "Getting this shit on is a workout," another responded. You probably could get dressed in five minutes, but getting dressed without rushing takes at least 15 minutes. And for those who need additional protective equipment, like knee braces and ankle tape, the process is even longer.

I slid my purple socks up to my knees, rolling the top down to keep them from sliding down during the game. I then carefully began the process of velcroing braces to both ankles. A long line had formed at the trainer's table, as players from both teams sought protection for ankles, wrists, fingers, toes, and other appendages. I preferred to have my ankles taped, as the tape seemed to offer more stability than the ankle braces I picked up at Kroger during a grocery run, but strapping on the braces was easier and less time consuming. Shannon pulled on a knee brace; other players would follow suit soon. Sydney carefully placed tape and Band-Aids on her foot, a ritual meant to reduce blisters. The smell of Ben-gay and other pain-alleviating ointments filled the air, to be replaced by sweat later.

I slipped hip, tailbone, and thigh pads into their rightful slots in a specially designed football girdle, and added knee pads to my black pants. "Does anybody have extra knee pads?" Marley asked from a distance. "Anyone?" Jenn pulled an extra set of knee pads from her bag.
"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" "I better get them back; people keep borrowing my stuff and not returning it," said a slightly irritated Jenn. "Ok," Marley said as she bounded back to her locker. Audrey frantically searched her bag for missing socks, finally finding them buried at the bottom. "Whew, I knew they were in there," she said laughing. I was now nearly ready. I leaned down to put on my cleats, no easy task with all that padding already strapped on. "Five minutes, ladies," Mary called out. Several players who had barely begun the clothing ritual scurried to their bags. Megan slipped her jersey on her shoulder pads, and then slid them over her head. "Can someone help me with these straps," asked Kourtnie, already wearing her shoulder pads. Angela added a skull cap to her head, while I tied a bandana to mine. Two people rushed in from the training room, while most finalized their uniforms, tucking in jerseys, grabbing last minute items, some nervously pacing about. "Okay, let's go," said Mary. The distinctive click-clack of cleats on the cement floor rang throughout the locker room as players made their way towards the field. "Let's go, ladies. Let's go!" yelled Li. "Let's bang!" Syd added.

This ritual of preparing for a game or practice is illustrates embodying one’s role as a football player. Creating and maintaining a football body becomes a project for athletes, one that runs in contradiction to the ideal body expected of women. Body projects involve individuals being conscious of and actively concerned about the management, maintenance, and appearance of their bodies. This involves a practical recognition of the significance of bodies; both as personal resources and as social symbols which give off messages about a person's self-identity (Shilling 1993/2003:4-5).

While body projects tend to be seen as an individual endeavor due to their connection to a person's self-identity, it is important to consider institutional and ideological forces that
challenge an individual's ability to engage in her body project. As discussed in Chapter 4, ideological expectations about the ideal female body confront women as they attempt to construct and reinforce football masculinity. This impacts their attempts to maintain their bodies throughout a football season, and forces women to consider their appearance both on and off the football field. For women playing tackle football, gaining, maintaining, and using a football body becomes the body project tied to the construction and maintenance of football masculinity. This requires embodying the "culture of sacrifice," embracing pain as a part of that sacrifice, and increasing one’s strength and musculature. As this chapter will show, this project is not without challenges. For many women, embodying football masculinity, and creating the football body, is fraught with contradictions, as they are expected to build muscle for the football field, yet would need to abstain from muscle growth to meet societal standards of the female body. In other words, women must manage the social reaction to the physical appearance of the body. Additionally, on an institutional level, football is considered a sport for men, challenging the ability of women to properly equip the body for play. Ultimately, a sport that demands consistent physical contact, like football, requires that the athlete continuously control, or manage, her body through the use of proper equipment safeguarding the body.

"Nice Bruise": Embodying the Culture of Sacrifice

In Chapter 4, I established the importance of the "culture of sacrifice" to the construction of football masculinity. Sacrificing the body is one way to embody this football masculinity. A player's adherence to the "culture of sacrifice" is valued on the field, and visible wounds are respected, shared, compared, and considered honorable "battle scars." Many practices started with the sharing of bruises and abrasions gained in previous practices and games. It was not
surprising to hear "nice bruise" during practices and film sessions. Often once one bruise was shared, several other players would show off their bruises, with discussion over whose was the worst. In one instance, Kathy shared a bruise that extended from a few inches below her shoulder down to her forearm. This bruise was the result of a strain of the arm muscles. Forearms seemed to gain the most bruising, especially for those playing on the line. The constant collision of arms with opponents’ shoulder pads left significant bruises on many. Other bruises and abrasions were a result of contact with opponents’ cleats. A huge bruise on Audrey’s leg was admired during one practice.

Audrey: Somebody kicked me.

Kathy: Hey, that's a footprint; look, there's cleat marks. Somebody stepped on you when you were down.

Visible cleat marks on the skin were fairly common.

Off the field these visible wounds are less admired, as they contradict expectations of the ideal female body. In his qualitative study of women football players, Packard (2009:335) found that people often speculated that the bruises women had were from being beaten by a boyfriend or husband. Members of the 2007 Pittsburgh Passion team also stated this in a documentary on their perfect season. Jennifer Cairns, who is a lawyer, said she has had to find ways to cover up bruises by using clothing and makeup. When she first started playing, she says “It was very hard to explain all the bruises away” (Yee 2009).

Sizzle players also have to explain their injuries when off the field. A colleague of Audrey’s told her "there’s a place you can get help" after seeing bruises on her body. Shannon's large forearm bruises prompted a coworker to say "Shannon, you look disgusting." She responded, "this is normal," to which her coworker said "Yeah, sure Shannon, you’re normal,"
inciting laughter from all. One of the students in my Sociology of Sports course, a university football player, stated he was sure I played football, "because those kinds of bruises only come from football." I wondered what other students thought. I had been asked about them many times, but only by people who knew I was playing football.

Bruises were not the only injuries that needed to be explained. As a rookie, Tammie, broke a bone in her foot during a winter practice before she even had the opportunity to play in a game. Worried about being stigmatized in her office, when she was asked if she broke her foot slipping on the ice, she agreed, allowing her coworkers to believe this was true. She said she did not want her coworkers to know that she plays football, because she did not want to hear the “I told you so” about getting injured playing football and being too old.

Each of these instances speaks to societal beliefs about women's bodies, and appropriate ways for these bodies to be used. They also speak to the assumptions that are made about visible signifiers on the body that may not initially be perceived as injuries from a sporting activity. Instead, for those who are unaware of these women's participation in football, the visible injuries may be stigmatized and/or attributed to other causes.

"Are you hurt, or are you injured?: Embracing Pain

The "culture of sacrifice" is based on the idea that there is a difference between pain, or being hurt, and being injured, an ethic held strongly by men and women football players alike (Coakley 2004; Migliaccio and Berg 2007). The difference is, “if you are hurt you can still play, if you are injured you can't” (Ward 1993). Consistent aches and pains, bruises, cuts, scrapes, muscle and joint soreness, and just sheer exhaustion are not injuries, they are just a part of the game (Messner 1992; Sabo and Messner 1993). Coaches consistently reified this notion with
players both directly and indirectly. For example, before a game in Indianapolis, a coach, angered by a player's request to be removed from the kickoff team due to an "injured" knee, responded, “There's a difference between being hurt, and being injured. You’re going to have to suck that shit up.” In this case, the player's stated ability to continue playing defense negated her desire to be removed from special teams play. It was determined by the coach that she was hurt, not injured, thus she could still play, and should play fully both on defense and special teams.

Some players felt this was a bad decision, deducing that if she was hurt, it was best that she focus on playing defense, and skip playing on the kickoff team. But, football is a dictatorship, with the coach(es) ruling all decisions. The coach's command to "suck that shit up" was a direct response to the perceived (or something?) difference between pain and injuries. The players' contestation of injury accounts was an indirect response to the "culture of sacrifice," and a clear avowal that there is a difference between being hurt and being injured.

There were plenty of "legitimate" injuries. Unfortunately, injuries in the game, significant injuries even, are not uncommon. Due to the number of severe injuries suffered by football players, B.R. Cahill (2003), a Professor of Surgery at the University of Illinois, has attributed the emergence of sports medicine as a new branch in the medical field to American football. At least five Sizzle players suffered season-ending injuries during the 2011 season, all requiring surgery. Tiffany, a veteran, effectively retired following the 2011 season due to a back injury. Kathy tore muscles and ligaments in her shoulder requiring surgery and a lengthy recovery. Diana missed the 2011 season, and half of the 2012 season, after having surgery on her knee. Mary received shots in her knees throughout the 2012 season just so she could continue to play. Alex ended up in the emergency room twice during the 2012 season, both times for lower leg injuries that landed her on crutches for weeks. Lindsey was hospitalized due
to dehydration and asthma-related symptoms. TJ, a retired player, managed to come out of retirement for one practice, during which she broke and dislocated her pinky finger. Li’s season ended when the bursa sac in her knee burst. I learned I had torn my hamstring several weeks after the 2012 season ended. I played the final three weeks of the season with the torn hamstring, adhering to the "culture of sacrifice." These are just some of the most significant injuries that we suffered. These do not include the many sprained ankles, twisted knees, jammed fingers, strained shoulders, hurt calves, or even nagging shin splints that afflicted players.

Also missing from this list are concussions, of which there were several. According to my notes, on four occasions I suffered dizziness, tunnel vision, and/or a bad headache after taking a hit. For example, following a practice I wrote:

Today in practice I was up against one of the new girls who didn't know she was supposed to block me on a 28 sweep. When Marley came across on the sweep, I sprinted in and hit her in the backfield. I didn't take a great angle, and I'm pretty sure her knee/leg struck my helmet. She hit me in the head very hard, and the phrase "get your bell rung" came to mind. This was not the first time I came up feeling a bit dazed, woozy, and bleary-eyed after a hit. I felt a bit dizzy for a few minutes, but shook it off and was back to full speed after two plays.

On another occasion, a hit in a game against the West Michigan Mayhem prompted this entry:

In the 4th quarter, on the last defensive play, I was playing on the defensive line, and got pounded by an offensive lineman. I fell back and slammed my head on the ground. I had a raging headache, which lasted throughout the five hour return trip [from Michigan] and was still there the following morning. I was a bit concerned about whether I had a concussion, but I didn't have other symptoms, so I figured it was fine.
Certainly in hindsight I question my assumption. I did not seek out the trainer after any of these incidents, and expect that other players had similar experiences.

Brie slammed the back of her head on the ground during a 2012 game, and experienced headaches for a week after. Her roommate, Alya, spent one practice trying to get other players to pressure Brie into speaking with a trainer. No trainer was at this practice, because technically it had been cancelled by the coach. Players who were already at the stadium decided to stay and practice anyway. "She's been complaining all week," Alya stated. A discussion ensued about the deaths of football players that had later been attributed to concussions. Many players were concerned, with most agreeing her symptoms sounded like a concussion. When we returned from a break from practice due to the Memorial Day holiday, Brie's symptoms had subsided.

The most "famous" concussion incident occurred during the first game I attended. I had not become a player yet, and was observing from the sideline. Marley took a vicious hit across the middle of the field, and was knocked out. Trainers, paramedics, and the coach tended to her on the field. When asked where she was, Marley responded, "Coach, I'm at Disneyland." She was loaded into the ambulance, where her vital signs were taken and other tests were performed. After refusing to be transported to the hospital and signing a waiver, she returned to the sideline where she remained for the rest of the game. Following the hit, "I'm at Disneyland" became a code word for a concussion, and was often fodder for comedy, especially with regards to big hits. When we watched the game film, the hit was replayed several times, with the coach saying "look, she's at Disneyland" upon impact. Laughter erupted in the room. When later in the film another player took a big hit it was remarked, "she wanted to go to Disneyland with Marley." By my count, at least seven players suffered concussions during my two year career, and this is likely a conservative estimate. Of those, two were knocked unconscious by the hit they
sustained. Robert Cantu, a concussion researcher at the Sports Legacy Institute, and Clinical Professor of Neurosurgery at the Boston University School of Medicine, says "The reality is that anybody who has played football has had concussions whether they recognized it or not" (James 2012). With new research (Fainaru-Wada and Fainaru 2013; James 2012) finding substantial long-term effects of concussions, I would expect that managing concussions will become a more prominent part of the football body project in the future.

To manage these injuries, and the aches and pains of the season, players employed various tactics. I spent many nights writing field notes in a warm Epsom salts bath, or tucked into a hooded sweatshirt in a freezing cold tub of ice. I used my privilege as a university student to use the recreation center hot tub, and massaging bubble wall. In addition to ibuprofen, aspirin, and topical creams, players employed all kinds of recovery formulas, from Gatorade to Muscle Milk. Photos of players under multiple bags of ice often adorned social media, along with photos of the many cuts, scrapes, and bruises gained on the playing field. These images offered a sense of solidarity between team members as everyone managed the aches, pains, and injuries of playing the game. These images also served as a "badge of honor" as visible markers of commitment to the game and team, and proved one's physical investment in football masculinity.

"Just One More Rep": Building the Football Body

Another key component of embodying football masculinity is increasing strength and muscularity. Outside of general cardiac conditioning, studies have shown that football-specific conditioning is important for injury prevention, as well as performance enhancement. One such study says “research and professional experience support the concept of specificity of training in that the more conditioning mimics the physiological demands and conditions of competition, the
greater the performance improvement is to be expected” (Rhea, Hunter, and Hunter 2006: 58). The study goes on to discuss the importance of conditioning programs that also take into account the level of play with which the training program is dedicated, examining high school, college, and NFL team programs.

Like football IQ (see Chapter 6), many Sizzle players were limited in their knowledge of football-specific conditioning and strength training. Much of this lack of education in football-specific conditioning, and even weight lifting more generally, may be explained by ideological expectations about the female body and women’s acceptance of these expectations. Generally research has shown that women, even those in high levels of athletic competition, manage their muscle growth in the interest of maintaining the socially accepted feminine physique. In her article on female soccer players, George (2005) establishes that college soccer players struggle with achieving the musculature that is necessary to play soccer at a high level, while still maintaining a feminine physique, which stereotypically lacks hard, sizable muscles. In this way, women athletes must negotiate the building of precisely the “right” amount of muscle (p. 317). Dworkin's (2001) ethnographic work in fitness centers suggests that women can and do gain muscle when working out consistently, but they use strategies of “backing off” and “holding back” to manage the amount of muscle they build. Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) found that even elite female wrestlers practice “holding back,” and work to become stronger without increasing the size of their muscles. Thus, in these cases, the differences in musculature between men and women are not necessarily biological, as is often assumed, but are due to the enactment of ideologies about the female body and its appearance.

Sizzle players approached conditioning and strength training differently than the women observed by Dworkin (2001), George (2005), and Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009). In fact, some
Sizzle players looked to build as much muscle as possible, often comparing muscles with one another, and challenging other players to strength competitions. Kourtnie and Davida spent one practice polling players on whose bicep was bigger. Li gained the nickname "Beast" due to her ability to bench press more than many players. Players also often challenged other players to push themselves to do "just one more rep" or add "just a little more weight." Upon Audrey's arrival on the team, Lindsey mentioned that she needed to “work on her arms, bulk up.”

However, while football offers a safe space for enacting these divergent ideologies, previous socialization may have contributed to a lack of education on proper lifting techniques, productive exercises, correct equipment use, and general knowledge on how to successfully build muscle for various purposes, such as those specific to football. In fact, players often had little knowledge of the proper way to use different pieces of equipment, increasing the risk of injury during use and decreasing effectiveness. At one conditioning session a player asked another player how to use a certain machine, with the response being, “I always just read the instruction card on the machine; that's how I figure it out.”

Although several new players received a sheet with various exercises listed, there was still no guidance given about repetitions or goal weights, nor was the sheet distributed to returning players. While many of the Sizzle players dedicate themselves to becoming physically fit to play, and building muscle, the knowledge of football-specific conditioning and strength training practices is limited, making player-run conditioning sessions less football-specific. Most of the offseason conditioning sessions were player-run. Players determined that football-specific activities were needed after watching several other football teams (semi-professional men's teams from the area) practice in the facility at the same time. Megan commented, “These are the kinds of drills we should be doing” as we watched one of the men's teams practice. These drills
were subsequently recreated and used in some future conditioning sessions. They included cone drills meant to enhance speed and quickness, sprinting drills meant to mimic the start and stop nature of football, in which physical exertion is done in short bursts followed by a short rest, and exercises meant to work on lower body strength and core muscles, both important in football. Coach-led conditioning and training sessions focused much less on the use of weight machines, and much more on the use of free weights. For many women this was their first exposure with free weight lifting. Lifting drills included the use of dumbbells, small weights that fit in the palm of your hand, complete bicep and triceps exercises, as well as lunges. Additionally, all players were required to complete bench presses and squats using a barbell. Lack of experience in the use of free weights was always apparent, especially during squat exercises. Although coaches provided general instructions on how to complete a squat, more specific techniques were not taught. This led to at least three incidents where players were hurt, or could have been hurt, due to the use of improper technique. When completing a squat using a barbell, the bar is placed and balanced on the lifter's back while she squats down until her buttocks are below her knees, and then returns to a standing position. The squats are completed in what is called a power rack. The lifter stands in the rack, which features four vertical posts, and two smaller horizontal posts on which the barbell rests. Two additional horizontal posts, catch posts, function to catch the bar if the lifter is to fall or drop the bar. During one lifting session, Jenn was unable to lift the weight back up, and ended up crumpled under the bar, which landed on the catch posts. In a similar incident, I strained a groin muscle when I was unable to return to the standing position during a squat, and like Jenn, ended up trapped under the bar as it fell on the catch posts. In my case, I was "maxing out" weight, or attempting to lift as much weight as I possibly could. Following this incident, a coach told me that I was unable to return
to a standing position because I "didn't explode out of the squat position." Once this tip was
given to other players, they were immediately able to lift heavier weights, myself included.
Michelle was also injured while doing squats. Her back injury was attributed to poor technique,
which a strength coach not affiliated with our team indicated could have been prevented. These
are just a few examples of free weight lifting incidents that happened largely due to the
inexperience of players with free weight lifting, and proper technique.

Conditioning sessions were also important for educating women on proper football
technique. The lack of opportunities for women to play organized football at young ages, and
during high school years, contributes to a lack of knowledge of core training tenets, which young
boys and men have often been exposed to over extended periods of time (see Chapter 6 for a full
discussion). “Coaching women is very different than coaching boys or men,” said one coach.
“They just don't have the background in football like men.” While many women indicate that
they played football as a young girl, this often was unorganized football with boys in the
neighborhood, or in the schoolyard. Boys entering high school often have already played several
years of organized football, and have been exposed to tackling technique, football terminology,
offensive and defensive schemes, rules of the game, and other football-specific skills, such as
which leg goes forward as a receiver prepares for a play, or how to stand in a three-point stance,
the crouched position used by linemen to start a play. Although some of this, like terminology,
can be picked up from playing unsanctioned football, watching football on television, or even
playing football video games, much must be taught to women entering the game for the first
time. Coaches and veteran players were tasked with teaching these aspects of the game to
newcomers. As opportunities for girls to play Pop Warner\(^8\) and school football continue to
increase, girls will be socialized into these aspects of the game at a younger age, decreasing the

\(^8\) Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc. is the largest non-profit youth football league in the world.
learning curve for those who decide to play as adults and increasing their ability to effectively manage their bodies on the football field.

"Is it supposed to fit like that?: Equipment Challenges

Although sacrificing the body is extremely important to football masculinity, one will not get admonished for protecting the body. Selecting and properly wearing the correct equipment is vital in the prevention of injuries and managing of pain associated with a physically demanding sport like football (Cahill 2003; Dixon and Gittelman 2008). As USA Football (2014) warns:

It is essential that every player has a properly fitted helmet and shoulder pads. League administrators, coaches and parents should be able to recognize equipment that fits properly and check the fit of equipment throughout the season. Improperly fitted equipment can place an athlete at greater risk for injury.

Women playing tackle football are constrained in their equipment choices due to size options and lack of education about proper fit.

Most football equipment is created with the male player in mind, thus causing fit issues for many females. Pam McQueer, former owner of the Southwest Michigan Jaguars, a team in the now-defunct NWFA said, “As the owner of a women's football team, it was very obvious to me that due to the physical attributes of my/all (sic) players, safety was an issue, due to the improper fit of the men's pads on a female frame. Not only was safety a factor, but also comfort” (Douglas Protective n.d.). Everything from helmets and shoulder pads, to shoes and pants, pose issues for women when it comes to finding the right fit. However, the most significant equipment issue for women is in the design of shoulder pads.

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9 USA Football is a development program that focuses on safety within youth football. It is a partner of the NFL.
Shoulder pads designed for men and youth are flat across the chest area and do not account for women's breasts. This can cause the pads to be uncomfortable, and also cause them to slide up on the woman's body, thus increasing opportunity for injury. Just prior to a practice session, Angela approached me and asked if she could touch my boobs. "Uh, sure," I replied. Her interest was actually in where my shoulder pads sat on my chest. She had purchased a new set, and was uncomfortable with where they sat on her chest. Her old shoulder pads completely covered her breasts, while her new pads sat much higher. My shoulder pads were actually youth pads, and like her new pads, sat high on my chest. I often noticed that they would slide up throughout a practice or game. Megan said that she had a similar issue with her pads. Kathy also joined the conversation.

Kathy: My nipples are hanging out.

Angela: My nipples are hanging out too.

Kathy: Well, my nipples are between my shoulder pads and rib protector.¹⁰

Angela: My nipples are poppin' out, and they didn't do that last year. So, I don't know if they got bigger, or if there's something different about these pads.

Kathy: Well, we know that these pads aren't made for someone with boobs.

Concerned about this issue, McQueer assisted Douglas Protective in the design of “female-specific” shoulder pads. She said,

The things that needed to be created for the women were a few "key" design changes. First, a "cupped" frontal plate for the breasts. Second, a longer shell design with a lower anchor point to hold the pads down form "riding up". And third, a low-profile, lower riding pad with a wider neck opening for mobility. (Douglas Protective n.d.).

¹⁰ A rib protector is a piece of equipment usually worn by skill players, like quarterbacks, running backs, and wide receivers that offers extra protection around the ribs. This protection is meant for those that are likely to get hit in the ribs while being tackled.
However, typically these “specialized” pads are expensive compared to men's and youth pads. Currently the retail price of the “female-specific” shoulder pads from Douglas is around $115 if ordered online, while men's and youth shoulder pads retail for as low as $50. Kathy told players that she had ordered her "female-specific" pads at a sporting goods store in downtown Cincinnati.

They will fit women for women’s football pads, so those of you who have boobs, and want to, you can go get a fitting. They cost $139, and they have to be specially ordered. It takes about 2 weeks for them to come in (Kathy).

These "female-specific" shoulder pads were not too popular with the Sizzle players. During my two seasons I noted only two players with these pads. For most, the extra cost was not manageable. Many borrowed shoulder pads from others, or purchased used pads from a retailer like Play it Again Sports. Sydney indicated interest in purchasing the "female-specific" shoulder pads, but opted for a new helmet instead. Other players said the pads looked nice, but never subsequently sought them out for purchase.

Shoulder pads are not the only equipment item that offers size and fit complications for women. For example, football cleats seem to only come in men's or youth sizes. Since the spikes on cleats are designed for specific sports, use of other kinds of cleats can be problematic. Spikes on softball cleats feature a circular pattern due to the twisting of the foot during pitching and batting, yet several players wore softball cleats. Other players wore soccer cleats, which are designed for use on the same playing surface as football, but still offer a different spike design. More specifically, football cleats feature a spike at the front of the toe meant to provide stability during the powerful short movements required of football. Soccer cleats are often lighter weight due to the extended length of time soccer players must run. I was able to purchase youth football
cleats due to the small size of my feet, but I found them to be uncomfortable on my foot, and purchased lacrosse cleats for my second season. The increase in women's lacrosse programs should offer a cleat solution to women football players in the future, as the cleats use a similar pattern. Although Sizzle players did not often complain about their cleats, many players suffered from shin splints continuously. Shin splints cause significant pain in the shin area when the tendons and muscles of the lower leg are unable to absorb the shock of running, cutting, and stopping. Shin splints can be caused by running on hard surfaces, increasing running, or improper footwear. As such, no direct connection can be made between improperly fitting footwear and shin splints, but this could have been a contributor. During my two seasons, 22 players indicated suffering from shin splints. Several players continuously struggled with shin splint pain. I had ongoing pain in my shins, and tried various remedies to no avail. I played in two different pairs of cleats during the two seasons, neither of which fit my foot well. To alleviate pain and attempt to reduce further pain I used ice, stretching, a technique of rolling my shins on a foam roll, medications, ointments, and even a brace meant to stop shin splints. I often discussed shin splint issues with Alya during the 2012 season, as we dealt with this sharp pain that feels like getting kicked in the shin with every step. It is possible that proper footwear could have assisted in alleviating shin splints for Sizzle players.

The entire equipment selection process was complicated by the lack of knowledge that many women have regarding how football equipment should fit. Proper fit is extremely important in managing pain and injuries sustained during the physical contact required of football. The men's semi-pro teams that worked out at the D1 Sports Training facility concurrent with the Sizzle, offered sizing assistance for their players, physically adjusting shoulder pads and helmets to ensure a proper fit. Considering the amount of football experience most of those
players likely have, it is telling that they still are given assistance in fitting their equipment. For women on our team, many of whom had no football experience, even figuring out what equipment to purchase, and how to put the equipment on, is a challenge. One rookie brought her shoulder pads to practice, and then proceeded to practice without them. When questioned by coaches about the whereabouts of her pads, she stated that she didn't know how to wear them. Shannon helped her put on her pads. Likewise, when Audrey, also a rookie, arrived at her first full-pad practice, beyond simply strapping the pads in place, she was confused about how tight the straps should be, and whether the pads fit well enough. "Is it supposed to fit like that?," she asked after strapping the pads on. Veteran players socialized her, and other rookie players, into the process of putting a jersey on with shoulder pads. Simply stated, you first place the jersey on the shoulder pads, and then slide on the pads.

Achieving the proper helmet fit was also difficult for many. I never felt as if my helmet fit properly. I often readjusted the chin strap, thinking that would make the fit more comfortable. I even bought a new chinstrap, but returned it when I could not get it to fit better. Several veterans attempted to adjust my helmet, with none of the adjustments leading to a better fit. Some suggested that I just needed to get used to the helmet. Lindsey indicated that she often ran through her neighborhood, or did household chores, in her helmet to get used to the fit and weight. Kourtnie said she enjoyed sitting around in her helmet, saying she would wear it when she watched television. Helmets add weight to the head and neck, hinder peripheral vision, and inhibit range of motion, so wearing them off the field allows a player the opportunity to get used to these challenges. Increased concerns about concussions (for full discussion see Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport 2013 and Neurosurgical Focus 2012) make comfort and proper
fit of helmets even more important, yet the lack of regulations did not force women to have a certain type of helmet, or a specific fit.

The lack of proper sizes and improper fit of equipment, whether due to lack of knowledge or availability, can place women at increased risk for injury during the relentless physical contact of tackle football. For example, I suffered a hip injury that our team athletic trainer thought could have been prevented had my hip pads been larger. I was playing in small youth hip pads; I promptly purchased new, larger pads upon receiving this information. Ultimately, the structure of the sporting institution, and its expectation that men and boys are football players, inhibit women's participation in the sport, and their ability to fully embody football masculinity. Chapter 6 will discuss additional ways in which football is maintained as a space for men through the constraint of women's participation.
Chapter 6: "Dude, those are girls": Boundary Maintenance on the Football Field

So far it had been a pretty typical practice. We had done our usual warm-ups of stretching and sprinting, jogged about 250 yards, and completed separate offensive and defensive drills. We only had 15 players, so we lined up for a 7-on-7 drill, with the offense challenging the defense. I headed to the defensive side. I had been learning to play safety, but now I was back at my typical cornerback spot. We ran a few plays, but some confusion within the offense caused a short delay. As we were waiting, I noticed the large crowd of people starting to cross the field from the baseball diamond that sat behind the football field. Since we played at a high school, we were often witness to the exodus of baseball fans once the home team finished their games. We lined back up and the offense ran a play. Once again they huddled together to work out some issues. On defense, we watched as groups of high school students wandered past parents and grandparents, and little kids sprinted past everyone, all proudly displaying school colors, red and white for the home team, and blue and white for the visitors. Several of the players wandered past, hauling their bat bags and eating snacks, having shed their cleats for sandals. "Dude, those are girls!" one of the visiting fans proclaimed, the heightening pitch of his voice indicating his shock. His friends turned to look at the field, laughter filling the air, while Sizzle players turned to meet their gaze. "Why does everyone always seem so shocked to see women playing football? They look at us like we’re crazy," Audrey stated in response. Other players remarked about the "ignorance" of people who do not think women can play football. One veteran remarked, "We’re here every week; it's not like it's the first time they've seen us out here."

Encountering people who are surprised to see or hear of women playing football is quite common, but its frequency does not make it less frustrating. For Sizzle players, the invisibility of women's football serves to devalue the team and the sport. More specifically, hiding women's
participation in football assists in "maintaining boundaries between dominant and subordinate groups" in the sporting institution (Schwalbe et al. 2000:430). This "boundary maintenance" has been identified by Schwalbe and co-authors (2000) as one of four generic processes that reifies gender inequality in society. In this process, boundaries are set to limit the subordinate group's access to valuable resources. One of the ways this is done is by limiting access to cultural capital (Schwalbe et al. 2000:434). Access to other resources, like game facilities, locker rooms, and football equipment, also impact women's participation in football. Finally, the visibility of the sport is limited by the media, which challenges the ability of teams and leagues to gain fan and financial support.

"Just tell me what to do": Limiting Cultural Capital, or the "Football IQ"

Limiting a group's access to important resources begins by restricting "knowledge, skills, habits, values, and tastes… which can be turned to one's advantage in particular social settings," or cultural capital (Schwalbe et al. 2000:430). Women entering organized competition on the football field have often been denied access to important pieces of knowledge, and skills of the game, what I call the "football IQ." Cultural capital is largely transmitted through processes of socialization. For many boys growing up in the U.S. the attainment of football knowledge and skills starts at a very young age. Boys as young as five are already playing tackle football, which allows them to learn the intricacies of the sport. While many Sizzle rookies entering the playing field for the first time were avid football fans, few had experience with playing the game in an organized setting. For many, backyard football with the boys was a staple during childhood. But this did not necessarily translate into participation in organized football, in which knowledge of positions, terminology, and the intricacies of the game would be learned. As one coach
explained, “coaching women is very different than coaching boys or men; [women] just don’t have the background in football like men.” For example, while I considered myself quite knowledgeable about the game when I started playing, I found that I actually knew very little. For women, learning to play football often requires new knowledge of the responsibilities of various positions on the field, a new vocabulary, and an understanding of the intricacies of the game. Sizzle veteran Mary acknowledged this in a 2006 *Cincinnati Post* article, saying, "We do spend a lot of time on fundamentals. The things that little kids are taught in pee wee (football) we're just now learning from scratch. There's times when (Coach Woods) gets frustrated and we get frustrated, but we're all doing the very best we can" (Boehmker 2006:B1). As she also acknowledges, failure on the field sometimes can be attributed to everything being "so new for everybody" (Boehmker 2006:B1). This was clear during my two seasons as rookies were socialized into the intricacies of tackle football.

"*Hey, what does a safety do?*"

While many, perhaps even most, avid football fans know where linebackers or offensive linemen play on the field, football positions are much more complicated. For example, linebackers play on the defensive side of the ball, lining up about five yards from the line of scrimmage, generally behind the defensive line. Linebackers may be asked to help stop offensive rushing attempts or they may drop back and help cover receivers, defending the passing game. There may be three or four linebackers on the field at one time, but each will have different responsibilities. Different defensive schemes change the responsibilities of linebackers, and may even change the terminology used to describe the position. While linebackers are generally referred to as outside or inside linebackers, they might also be called
Mikes, Macs, Sams, Strikers, Charlies, Bucks, Jacks, Wills, Bandits, Jokers, Victors, etc. depending on their positioning and "job" on the play. These complexities in the positions, terminology, and responsibilities must be learned by rookies upon joining the team, and rookies begin their careers with varying levels of knowledge.

The 2012 rookie class included 10 new players. Audrey, an avid football fan, espoused her knowledge early and often upon joining the team. She often had elaborate conversations with Coach Woods about the state of NFL football teams. During a social event at a local bar Audrey questioned Coach Woods' thoughts on the NFL Draft.

Audrey: Do you really think he is going to be the third DB [defensive back]? I think they're going to draft someone.

Coach Woods: No, they aren't going to draft a DB. You're crazy.

Audrey: I don't know, they need an upgrade.

Audrey's confidence in her football knowledge allowed her to challenge that of an NFL veteran when discussing pro football. But, disparity between Audrey's knowledge and that of other players was often evident. For example, Jess joined the team after learning about it from some friends. "Someone told me because of my size I should be a tight end or linebacker, so I had to watch some football on television to figure out which ones those were," Jess admitted. She was not the only rookie who had to seek out sources to learn more about positions. During one of her first practices, Alya was told she should go in and play safety. She looked around with a confused look on her face. "Hey, what does a safety do?" she quietly asked me. I was able to tell her generally what the responsibilities of a safety were, but even though I had already been playing for a year, I could not tell her specifically how to play the position. I directed her to Tahlia, a veteran player on the team. Beyond learning where specific positions played on the
field, many rookies, and even veterans, were overwhelmed by the need to learn multiple positions. This was a necessity due to the small number of players, especially during practices. Often players were expected to learn positions on both offense and defense, requiring an even broader range of vocabulary and memorization.

Li, a rookie in 2012, was vocal in her confusion about responsibilities. "I understand the purpose of offense and the purpose of defense, but I don't understand all of the positioning," Li explained to a male coach. "Well, hell, I've been doing this some-odd years, and I don't understand it sometimes," the coach responded. The coach's response is indicative of the complexities involved—for all football players regardless of gender—in learning multiple positions within various defensive schemes. Because Sizzle players play multiple positions, players often find that the breadth of knowledge necessary hinders the ability to play any one position well. Shelley, a retired player who returned to the team, had concerns: "I just feel like I don't know what I'm doing," she said. "It would be better if they let me learn something, instead of just giving me everything [every position]." I certainly understood the confusion. Although I had been pegged as a cornerback during my rookie season, over the course of my two years I played five different positions during games, one on offense and four on defense, and every position except for quarterback during practices. During a single game against West Michigan, I played cornerback, inside linebacker, outside linebacker, defensive line, safety, and was a kick returner on special teams. During this game I got scolded by coaches for not "getting low enough" while playing on the defensive line. I had never played on the defensive line before being inserted into the game, so I had no idea what my responsibilities were in this position, and certainly had no conception of proper technique. I would learn on the sideline that because the women I was playing against outweighed me by about 150 pounds each, I should use my hands
to make sure they did not grab my jersey, and drop down low to try to trip them up. It was intricacies such as this that made raising one’s football IQ more difficult.

Perhaps one of the most common questions posed by players was "where do I stand?" Both veterans and rookies asked this question. Whether it was how close to the line of scrimmage one was to stand, or how far away from another player one should be, lining up on the field often elicited this question. This question illustrates how something seemingly so simple, where a player should be standing, can be extremely complex. If you are a defender, where you line up, or stand, will depend on the defensive scheme, where the offensive players line up, the speed of the offensive players, and even the distance to a first down or the end zone. For example, if you are a cornerback your job is to cover, or defend, the wide receiver. You might line up close to the wide receiver, and try to hit them when the ball is snapped to impede her progress. Or, if she is faster than you are, you might line up several yards away, so you can catch up with her when she runs her route. Ultimately the answer to the question "where do I stand?" will be different from play to play.

"You should try playing Madden"

To assist in learning the game, the team would watch game film once a week during the season to analyze upcoming opponents and examine our own play. These sessions often focused on proper technique, and certainly on learning how to better execute plays. However, learning from college and professional games was also encouraged. Watching men’s football games on television was a common source for learning the game. On many occasions coaches suggested watching football as a way to learn various techniques, like tackling. "Watch those smaller guys especially. Watch how they tackle. They are going to go for the legs. The other guy can't run
without his legs," Coach stressed. Often during offseason workouts, players would watch football being played on the televisions in the gym. These included everything from high school games to college and professional games. Beyond watching games on television, players were encouraged by both coaches and teammates to play the Madden NFL video game. Audrey told me more than once that she had conversations with one of the coaches about how playing the game could help with deciphering plays, and especially with terminology. My own experience of playing the Madden game gave me useful information on various types of plays. For example, during one practice, and a subsequent film session, the coaches discussed implementing a counter play for the next game. A counter is an offensive play in which a running back is handed the ball by the quarterback, takes one step one direction, and immediately reverses and runs the other direction. The play is meant to get the defenders to commit one way, making it difficult for them to reverse their direction and catch the running back. Although the coaches had used the term many times, it was not until late in the film session that one player spoke up and asked what a counter was. Having played the Madden NFL game many times, I was familiar with this play, as it is a standard play used by NFL teams. I, and the coaches, took for granted that players knew what this term meant. In another example, several rookies were confused by the coaches' use of the terms "four-three defense", and "four-four defense". In these terms, the first number, in both cases "four", indicates the number of defensive lineman the defensive scheme will include. The second number indicates the number of linebackers. The team used both of these defensive schemes in games, so it was important to differentiate between the two. As with the offensive counter, these terms were used consistently with few questions openly raised. But in a more private setting, several players expressed
confusion. These were terms that I was familiar with from playing the Madden game, and from watching football on television, yet not everyone was clear on their meaning.

The "Light Bulb Moment"

Learning terminology and plays was easier for some than others. Even for those who were quick learners, it could take months to get a good grasp on the basics. As one coach indicated, "Some people can catch it in the first two or three months, some people take a couple years. I call it a light bulb moment… something goes off in the head and they understand what's going on" (Styles 2012). Coaches and veterans were tasked with teaching the game. Although teaching is a part of the men's and women's game, women often are experiencing the game for the first time. Shannon acknowledged this in a television interview meant to be used as a recruiting tool. She said:

We have people out here who have never played sports before, they just love the game, and they never thought they would have the opportunity to play…. You don't even need to know anything about the game because we'll teach you when you get here. I always tell people just have to have a desire, have a hunger to play and we'll do the rest (Gilbertson 2012).

Recruiting players for women's football usually means taking on players who have never played the game in an organized setting. Although some women have played flag football, or non-organized football, few have had the opportunity to play tackle football. Heidi, a veteran of the team who became the special teams coach in 2012, was the only Sizzle player to have played in high school. Even in 2013 young girls were fighting to be permitted to participate on "boys’" football teams.
"Let Her Play"

Recently, in perhaps the most publicized example of the restriction of football for girls, Maddy Paige, a 12 year-old girl, was kicked off her middle school football team after one year on the team. The school, located in Butts County, Georgia, claimed that the boys on the team might have impure thoughts as one of their justifications for her removal (Pan 2013). Eventually, Maddy's mom removed her from the school, began homeschooling her, and allows her to play for a local youth league. Additionally, Maddy began a Facebook page called "Let Her Play" that told the stories of girls who play sports with boys, and those fighting for their right to play. The page gained nearly 50,000 followers upon its inception, and was maintained regularly for about a year before posting ceased.

In another 2013 example, Makhaela Jenkins, a 12 year-old in Ohio was removed from the active roster of her middle school football team due to a long-standing policy in her school district that states females cannot play contact sports. The school eventually allowed Makhaela to play for the team, but they continued to defend their policy. The district stated the only reason they were allowing her to play was because they wanted to avoid an expensive and lengthy court battle they anticipated after the Ohio Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union became involved. In a statement the superintendent stated: “Our position on this issue has been made clear. However, we are also adamant that local tax dollars will not be wasted. We have no intent of competing with the deep pockets of the ACLU in any litigation situation in order to secure a favorable judgment” (Associated Press 2013). In this case the school district believed that their policy did not violate any federal regulations with regards to equal participation. Under Title IX this is likely true, as this legislation excludes protections for contact sports. However, the Equal Protection Clause has been used to gain girls access to the football field in other similar cases.
Restrictive policies, and ideological barriers, often limit the access girls, and women, have to playing opportunities at a young age, inhibiting the achievement of football-related cultural capital, or as I have called it, football IQ. But this is not the only resource to which access has been challenged for women.

"Is it legal for us to change out here?": Restricting Physical Resources

Gender boundaries are also maintained by restricting access to physical resources, including fields for practice and play, locker rooms in those facilities, and football equipment. Finding facilities willing to house women's football is a challenge. The Sizzle was lucky in that it had access to two indoor practice facilities during the two seasons I was a participant observer. Most offseason conditioning sessions were held at an indoor D1 Sports Training facility. D1 has 36 training facilities throughout the country, specializing in "athletic-based scholastic and adult training programs, expert coaching and the latest in sports therapy" at all levels (D1 Sports Holding 2014). The team was able to use their weight room and 50 yard indoor practice field. However, the Sizzle often had to wait for other teams to complete practices, and/or share the field. Several times the Sizzle practice was overtaken by a men's semi-professional team also on the field. During a January practice session we were limited to 10 yards at the end of the field. Lindsey set up several work stations for us, including drills with cones and an agility ladder. As we worked out in our small section of the field we were nearly hit by players from the other team several times as they worked on passing patterns using the rest of the field. "This is some bullshit," one of the players commented to Sizzle teammates, as a player from the other team ran into our space again. As another player pointed out, this often happens in school settings as well,

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11 An agility ladder is a piece of exercise equipment resembling a ladder that lays on the ground. Athletes do various footwork drills by running, skipping, or hopping through the various sections. The goal is to build quickness.
with boys’ teams getting gym, weight room, and field access for longer periods of time and in more convenient time slots. Girls’ teams are often relegated to secondary facilities, or time slots that are less desirable. She had experienced this issue while coaching girls’ basketball at a local high school.

In addition to some complications at our practice facility, there were also issues at the high school that served as our home field. Often other events at the field would interfere with our practices, or even games. Upon arrival to one practice I found that the parking lot was completely full. After finding a spot in the lot in front of the school building, I headed down to the field to find that a Special Olympics event was being held in the stadium. Coaches had not arrived yet, and it was clear players were not aware an event was scheduled. On several occasions a little league baseball team was practicing at the far end of the stadium. There were times when our paths would cross, and an errant baseball would roll into our field of play or vice versa. But their presence was less invasive than larger events, because they took up a very small section of the field.

We were able to play all of our home games in the same stadium. However, there was one game that was supposed to be moved to a new location due to a scheduling conflict. Our home stadium was hosting a track meet that would last into the evening. Generally we arrived at the field between 3 and 4 p.m. for a game starting at 7 p.m. In this case the school expected that the track meet would not end until at least 5:30 p.m. Coach worked out a deal to move the game to a different high school field. But playing at that stadium would mean no access to locker room facilities, or use of the press box. We would not have access to the scoreboard or public address system. Since we would be able to use the locker room and press box at our usual home
field it was decided that the game would not be moved. We simply would have to wait to enter the locker room facilities and field until after the track meet was completely finished.

On game day, both teams arrived at the field around 5 p.m. A walkthrough of plays had been scheduled for 6 p.m., with the expectation that the track meet would have ended by that time. Plans had to be amended when the track meet continued past 6 p.m. In the end we started our game about 15 minutes late so that both teams would have enough time to get prepared for the game. Although we had access to the press box, the school would not allow us to use the public address system due to complaints from the neighbors. Those living nearby had complained about the use of the address system all day long, prompting our inability to use the system. "We can't even play the national anthem?" Coach asked, frustrated by the restrictions.

We lacked access to other resources at the facility as well, most notably stadium lights, locker rooms, and restrooms at practices.

To accommodate players’ work schedules, practices were scheduled from 7 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. Darkness would begin to fall around 8 p.m., making the last hour of practice difficult to manage without lights. Although Coach spoke with the school several times about having the lights for our practices, we only were able to use lights several times over the two-year period, usually when another event was taking place at the school. Many nights we would run our practice-ending laps in complete darkness. Having an issue with lighting is not new for the team. When the team first began, the players would park their cars where their headlights could be used to illuminate the practice field. This practice has been used by other women’s pro football teams as well (Yee 2009). Luckily, lighting was never an issue during games.

As players, we never really knew what to expect with regards to locker room access. During practices at our home field we almost never had access to locker rooms. This meant that
during practice we had no bathrooms, and changing clothes before and after practice took place on the sideline. "Is it legal for us to change out here?" one player asked on a day when a couple hundred elementary-aged children were participating in activities on the field. Since we lacked access to bathrooms, many players would stop at a gas station down the street from the school before their arrival to use the restroom. Others would slip behind the away bleachers when it was a necessity.

Even when the locker room building was open, we were not necessarily guaranteed locker room space. During the 2011 season the Sizzle used the facility weight room as a locker room on game nights, while away teams used a locker room down the hall. Players would use weight benches, stacked weights, and other exercise equipment as a place to sit, and store their gear in the weight room. In 2012 both teams used locker rooms down the hall. At away stadiums we generally had access to locker rooms, but what was included in those locker rooms was never known. During a 2011 game in Indianapolis we used a gym as a locker room until near game time when semi-professional men's teams and little league baseball teams finally cleared out. Sizzle veterans told of times when locker rooms consisted of fold-up tables in a school hallway. A couple of times we lacked shower facilities even when in locker rooms.

In addition to issues accessing resources such as practice and game facilities and locker rooms, perhaps a bigger issue for Sizzle players was accessing football equipment. In Chapter 5 I discussed difficulties women experienced in properly protecting the body due to complications with the fit of protective equipment, and a lack of knowledge regarding the proper fit. All of these equipment challenges are compounded by playing a spring season. The two largest women's tackle leagues, the WFA and IWFL, both play a spring season. Sporting goods stores consider the spring to be the “off-season” for football, and instead increase their stock of items
for “spring sports,” like baseball, softball, and track. Size and fit issues are affected by the limited selection of equipment at local stores. For a woman who has never played tackle football, it is important to try on equipment to determine what sizes are needed. Stores lacking various sizes in helmets and shoulder pads during the spring limits women’s options. Most women on the Sizzle team buy their items locally at a major retailer, such as Dick's Sporting Goods, or a resale retailer, such as Play It Again Sports. Financial limitations make it difficult for many athletes to purchase the higher-priced items that might offer a better fit or comfort level, or may be more effective at injury prevention and pain management. Players who join the team after the fall football season ends are likely to have difficulty finding equipment. Darcy, a rookie, indicated that she had to go to three different stores to find her equipment, because none of the stores had all of the items needed in stock. When I went to purchase my own equipment, I was taken to the stock room where the equipment was being stored for the “offseason.” The store clerk and I dug through box after box looking for each of the basic equipment items necessary to play: a helmet, chinstrap, mouthguard, shoulder pads, practice jersey, practice pants, a belt, hip, knee, thigh, and tailbone pads, socks, and cleats. It being the “offseason,” this store had no football cleats in stock, so I had to travel to a different store for cleats, finding a limited selection there, again, due to the “offseason.” Stocking football equipment only during the fall serves as another boundary restricting women’s access to needed physical resources.

"Dude, those are girls": Rendering Women's Football Invisible

In perhaps the most impactful form of boundary maintenance, women's football is rendered invisible to the general public. Although the Cincinnati Sizzle franchise has existed for more than a decade, its presence is not well-known within the city. I encountered people with a
preexisting knowledge of the team only twice during my two years of research. In fact, not only were people surprised to hear there was a women’s team in Cincinnati, people generally were even more surprised to learn that women played tackle football at all. Most people I encountered assumed I was talking about flag football\textsuperscript{12} or powderpuff football\textsuperscript{13} when I mentioned my research.

As illustrated in the opening vignette, the Sizzle often met people who were unaware of the team, especially during practices at the home field, which was at an all-boys high school. Fans of other events taking place at the high school often walked past practices with confused stares. Outside of practices or games, players had similar experiences with the public in other venues. Upon arriving at the University Hospital emergency room with Alex after she suffered a leg injury during practice, we encountered several different reactions from the public. We both were still wearing football pants at the time, which clearly marked us as players. Immediately upon our arrival, a gentleman walking past the car stopped us to ask if we played "pee-wee football." My small stature, and that of Alex, who is smaller than me, led him to the conclusion that we played for a youth league. It is likely that our gender expression at the time did not present us as women, thus assisting with this conclusion. When we indicated that we played for the women's team, he did not seem surprised, but neither did he acknowledge that he had heard of the team. He mentioned that he coached at one time, made some small talk, and then headed on his way without many questions about our team. Upon entry into the emergency room waiting area we received other responses, mostly stares and confused looks from people already

\textsuperscript{12} Flag football is a form of the game where tackling is prohibited. Instead, each player wears a belt with dangling flags. To tackle a player the opponent simply needs to rip a flag off of the belt.

\textsuperscript{13} Powderpuff football games often take place at high schools and colleges. In these games, girls/women play the game, usually with flags or "two-hand touch," instead of tackling. Boys/men who play football generally coach the teams, and perform as cheerleaders. These events often coincide with homecoming festivities, sometimes being used as a fundraising event.
waiting. Although I did not leave the waiting room and enter the actual emergency room area of the hospital, Alex reported that many doctors and nurses came by to see her and learn more about the team. On a slow evening, learning of the women's team was exciting for those working in the ER. Alex said that none of the doctors or nurses had heard of the team, but many indicated interest in attending future games.

Other players and support staff had similar encounters. Katie, the team's athletic trainer, often spent time educating people on the existence of our football team. When her patients would ask about her upcoming sports schedules, and she indicated she was heading to our practices or games, she would often get the standard "Oh, I didn't know there was a women's team" response. Audrey, a college student, had this reaction from her classmates. And many of the players indicated similar responses from co-workers. As Shannon stated in a media interview,

People's first reaction is normally, 'Oh they have a team?' or 'Wow, really?' But then we get the obligatory questions like, 'Oh, is it flag football? Oh, is it two-hand touch? Oh, it must be powder-puff,' and I reply that it is just like men's football. Yes, we do wear pads. Yes, we do wear helmets (Gilbertson 2012).

Throughout my two years nearly every player on the team indicated having an interaction such as these with someone.

Interestingly, some players, especially those new to the sport, mentioned that they had initially reacted in this way as well. For example, Jess, a rookie during the 2012 season, indicated that she learned about the team from some friends. "No way, girls don't play football," she responded. "You're kidding." Although she did not immediately seek out the team, she was interested in the prospect of playing, and a year later decided to give it a try. "I didn't realize
girls had the opportunity to play 'real' football," she told me at her first practice, an off-season conditioning session. Beyond the invisibility of the team and women's football locally, I found that women's football seemed to be invisible in other areas of the country as well.

As the study was winding down, I spent much of my time speaking about my research in academic circles, in my department, at conferences, and to anyone who asked me about my dissertation work. I spoke to people from all areas of the country, from small and large universities, from sports enthusiasts to sports haters, and yet I rarely spoke to anyone who knew of women's football leagues. At conferences I did talk to sports sociologists that had heard of women's football. However, when I mentioned my research, most assumed that I was researching the Lingerie Football League (now called the Legends Football League). The LFL was fairly well-known to sports sociologists, largely due to the controversy surrounding its requirement that women play in lingerie. I often found myself explaining that there are many teams, and whole leagues, in which women play in the standard football uniform.

It took more than a year for me to encounter someone outside of academia who had heard of women's football. One night I was questioned by a city utility worker while leaving my apartment building for a home game. I was dressed in my football pants, a team logo t-shirt, and was carrying all of my equipment. As had happened at the hospital, this worker thought that I played for a youth league. When I told him that I played for the women's team, he asked if that was the team coached by Ickey Woods. Unlike other encounters, this was the first time someone indicated that they had heard of the team. The interaction caught me a bit off guard. I chatted with the worker for a few minutes, he wished me well in the game, and I headed on my way. I smiled as I thought about this conversation later. I was more than a month into my second football season, and this was the first time someone acknowledged that they knew there was a
women's team in Cincinnati. The team was so invisible that it took more than a year for me to find someone who had heard of them.

The Invisibility of Women's Football in the Media

It is likely that finding someone who has heard of women's football leagues is difficult due to the limited coverage of women's football within the mainstream media. This exists on a local and national level. In the Cincinnati area, the local media rarely cover the Sizzle. TJ, a retired player and the Sizzle's statistician, provided me with news articles that had been published in the Cincinnati media since the team's inception. This included five articles from publications including *Cincinnati Magazine* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, as well as smaller publications like the *The West Chester Liberty Pulse-Journal*, *The Western Star*, and the *Journal-News*. My own research through local newspaper archives uncovered four additional articles from the *Cincinnati Post* and *Dayton Daily News*. However, the most contemporary of these articles was from 2006. The focus of each of these articles was on the team's beginnings. I also located a short video clip from a WLWT-NBC news telecast in 2008, which focused on tryouts and the upcoming season. Subsequent local media coverage of the team could not be found.

During my time with the team, we received a fair amount of media attention. However, the main focus of much of this coverage was not on the team itself, but Coach Woods. For example, in early May 2011 the team was on a live telecast of a local news station's morning show. Coach Woods' 16-year-old son, Jovante, died in 2010 after an asthma attack following a high school football practice. Subsequently Coach Woods and his ex-wife, Chandra, a Sizzle player who retired after the 2011 season, created a foundation focused on asthma education and
research. On this day the foundation was holding a 5K run-walk. All Sizzle players were required to be in attendance at the event. After the 5K was complete, the newscast went live from the event, with the Sizzle in the foreground. Although the main focus of this coverage was the foundation and Coach Woods, the team did get some airtime.

The team received local media attention later in the 2011 season as well, but again the focus of this coverage was on Coach Woods. ESPN was in town to feature Coach on their show E:60. This story was framed as a story of triumph over tragedy both for Woods' ability to move forward when his career was cut short by injury, and for overcoming the death of his young son. WLWT-NBC featured the team in a short segment on the late news discussing ESPN's presence with the team. In this case, the newscast did feature some game footage. This was the only time there was local television media coverage of a game over the two-year span of the study.

The team received one additional segment of media coverage on the local Time Warner cable access show "Around Town." The mother of one of the players worked for Time Warner, and helped put together an eight-minute piece that aired on Time Warner access channels throughout the state of Ohio. This was an informative and in-depth piece examining the team’s history, the coaches, players, how to become a player, and when and where games were played. Being that this aired on an access channel, it may be a stretch to include this as an example of mainstream media coverage. However, as this was the most extensive coverage the team received during my two seasons, it warrants mention.

Just as with the local media coverage, national coverage of women's football is largely non-existent. As stated, the Sizzle did receive some airtime in the ESPN E:60 story that featured Coach Woods. The segment began with Coach Woods talking about some of the differences in coaching women and men, specifically the ways in which women often have difficulty dealing
with his approach and hold a grudge. Other portions of the program discussed how Woods became the Sizzle coach, and Woods' experience of coaching his ex-wife. Beyond the Sizzle, ESPN also featured a story on a player from the Houston Energy, of the Independent Women's Football League, during a 2012 airing of College GameDay. This story discussed University of Nebraska defensive lineman Thad Randle, whose mother, Julia, plays for the Energy. Interestingly, the report indirectly acknowledges the invisibility of women's football in the mainstream. During the lead-in to the story, ESPN anchor Chris Fowler says Thad has "a very interesting family story involving his football bloodlines," continuing to say in an excited tone that "this is unique." This is followed by a short introduction by ESPN reporter Gene Wojciechowski who argues that the accomplishments of Thad in his college career and academics are "nothing; just wait until [Thad's son] hears about grandma" (Wojciechowski 2013). Within the piece, even Thad admits to a lack of knowledge of women's football, at least before his mother began playing. When Julia said she wanted to play, Thad responded, "Mama, they don't do football like that for girls" (Wojciechowski 2013). Each of these reactions illustrates how limited the knowledge of women's football is in the mainstream. What is not acknowledged in this is that more coverage of women's football by ESPN would assist in increasing the visibility of women's participation in the sport. It is important to note that the piece itself speaks of Julia Randle as a tough, dedicated, hardworking, all-star player in much the same way a man playing the game would be discussed. This powerful portrayal of a woman playing football, which included a Nebraska assistant coach speaking highly of Julia's technique while watching her game film, has the potential to change stereotypes regarding women playing contact sports, not just tackle football. However, with so little coverage, the impact is not

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14 College GameDay is a show featured on ESPN every Saturday morning during college football season. The show is shot live at a different university each week, and has a cult following, drawing thousands of fans for the telecast.
enough to change long-standing cultural ideologies regarding women's bodies or participation in contact sport.

The WFA National Championship game has been aired on ESPN3 (now called WatchESPN), the network's online channel, for several years. But this coverage never makes it to the ESPN television channels. Women's teams have continuously used social media sites, like Facebook and Twitter, to request that ESPN air highlights of this and other women's games on SportsCenter and other ESPN programs without success. Requests have also been made for ESPN's website focusing on women's sports, ESPNW, to include coverage of women's football. Although the website does have a section on football, all coverage in this section is of men's football at the college and professional level. Women's football is invisible even on the website that states it "is fully dedicated to serving female athletes and fans" (ESPNW 2014).

Women's participation in football has occasionally been seen on other mainstream networks, such as CNN and the NFL Network. In a 2013 online CNN video story entitled "Women hit hard on the football field," players from the Atlanta Phoenix (WFA) talk about the hard hitting action they experience while playing football. Several players point out that there is no lingerie involved, making a clear distinction between the spectacle of the LFL and "real" tackle football. One player boasts that women are just as good as men at playing the game. The segment also includes the story of Maddy Baxter, the teen who is fighting for her opportunity to continue playing for her football team. A 2010 NFL Films segment that aired on the NFL Network and on ESPN spotlights Nikki Johnson of the Las Vegas Showgirlz. Johnson played flag football as a teen, and was "recruited" by the WFA's Showgirlz team during that time. She joined the Showgirlz as soon as she turned 18, while still in high school. The segment chronicles her journey to the football field and her love of the game. The story begins and ends by directly
acknowledging the invisibility of women's football, saying "on a team you've probably never heard of, in a league you likely didn't know exists" (NFL Films 2010).

Since "media representations of sport are particularly powerful in naturalizing and normalizing hegemonic meanings about the body and social relations" (Wright and Clarke 1999), the invisibility of women's participation in football reinforces the idea that football is a man's game. The visibility of strong, powerful women playing football at a high level would challenge the notion that women are not physically capable of playing the game or interested in playing.

The failure to cover the game in the media on the local level contributes to the lack of coverage on the national level and vice versa. Ultimately this reifies a societal structure that constrains girls and women. Opportunities for girls and young women to play football and other contact sports are still limited in today’s sports structure. Girls are still guided towards sports that are less physical in nature, many of which focus on artistic performance over physicality. It is still commonplace for girls to have to “fight the system” to gain access to opportunities within football. Withholding opportunity for girls and young women reinforces football as a masculine game meant for boys and men, or more specifically, for male bodies. This also stunts girls’ acquisition of important football skills that boys often receive from the time they are in elementary school. For women just beginning their careers, this means learning nearly every aspect of the game from scratch. This translates into what is perceived to be a lower level of play for women’s semi-professional and professional teams, which challenges fandom and acceptance from the broader culture. However, girls and boys can be socialized differently. A mother of young children who plays quarterback for the Las Vegas Showgirlz (WFA) shared this story: “I came to a Pop Warner game to support one of my teammates daughters who played on a boy’s team and when we pulled up in the parking lot my boys were like ‘boys play football?’”
because they only knew women played” (NFL Films 2010). Offering girls the opportunity to play throughout the life course, and letting boys see that girls and women can play, can alter both the opportunities available to girls and women and the ideology surrounding the game. However, currently the connection between football, masculinity, and male bodies remains strong. Chapter 7 will discuss the ways in which women's participation in football acts as a form of resistance to these ideological foundations, and the perceived importance of maintaining boundaries, so as not to disrupt the gender structure.
Chapter 7: "For Love of the Game": The Future of Women's Football

The final second ticked off the clock. My final football game was over. We had lost. Again. The season ended without a single win. Coming off the franchise's first winning season in 2011, the result in 2012 was difficult to swallow. I was relieved it was over for many reasons. I had a horrible pain in my right hamstring. For weeks I had been playing with this pain. As a football player, playing through the pain was important, so I did. My body was tired. The weeks had taken their toll. Finally I could relax. Perhaps I would get up one morning free of pain, a luxury not afforded during football season.

As relieved as I was for the end, there was also a strong feeling of sadness. I loved my teammates. I enjoyed the sport. Beyond the pain and exhaustion, I really liked the physical aspects. Hitting things, people even, was a great stress reliever. The physicality of the sport was empowering. On that field a woman could feel invincible. I anticipated that I would miss that feeling. But I had no idea how much I would miss it.

As my playing days got further into the past the most common question I received was "will you play again?" At first I answered this question with a resounding "no." As time passed, the answer to this question became much more complicated. "I miss it, but I wouldn't play again." "I definitely miss it, and some days I feel like I want to hit something, but I probably wouldn't play again." "I definitely miss it, and I might play again one day, because being that physical, hitting someone, feels good."

The answer to this question has evolved over time. Playing a sport like football requires a significant commitment. Women play "for love of the game." There is no monetary benefit, at
least not for most. You truly must love the game for the "sacrifice" to be worth it. Do I love the sport enough to play again? I don't know. Are there benefits to playing beyond simply because you love the game? Perhaps.

Playing a masculinized sport like football, offers women the opportunity to "do" masculinity in a way not necessarily available in other spaces, or at the very least, not accepted. Within this space, women are able, and even encouraged, to participate in an orthodox form of masculinity. Much like the hegemonic form embodied by males on the football field, this football masculinity requires aggressive physicality, bodily sacrifice, and the avoidance of and denigration of femininity. On the football field women are able to construct, reinforce, and embody these elements of football masculinity, upholding the expectations set forth by American football culture. However, women's performance of masculinity in this space also illustrates the fluid nature of gender performance. In "doing gender" women engage in both masculine and feminine performances, thus upholding and resisting feminine expectations (West and Zimmerman 1987). The hybrid gender performance seen within women's football demonstrates the potential this space has for altering understandings of gender, and transforming ideologies regarding what female bodies can achieve. Is this a sign of progress for women? The answer to this question is likely yes and no.

**Women's Football as a Space of Resistance**

Women's football can be seen as a space of resistance on both the individual and institutional level. On an individual level,

Resistance is seen to occur when women adopt behaviors or express themselves through activities which provide personal empowerment and which, at the same time, reflect a
challenge to dominant, restrictive or constraining views of femininity, sexuality, or motherhood (Shaw 2001:191).

This conceptualization of resistance acknowledges individual agency, while considering the structural constraints experienced due to societal ideologies and norms.

In this way, effective resistance "revolve[s] around whether that individual was able to... negotiate, reduce, or remove the power exerted over her by others" (Shaw 2001:194). The construction of an aggressive masculinity was certainly empowering for many women, especially when conquering the "double hesitation" (Young 2005). For example, Shannon spoke of her experience in a news article:

I think that football has helped me tremendously in the past nine years. I think not only have I grown more confident, I'm more outspoken. I think that has helped me in my job to be promoted... and it just makes me feel good. If I have a bad day at work, I know I'm going to be able to come to football and hit somebody and I'm going to feel a lot better. Actually my first hit was kind of empowering, because it made me want to go do that to somebody else, so it was actually a great feeling (Gilbertson 2012).

Overcoming the first hit has this outcome for many other players. Alex indicated a feeling of accomplishment when she finally overcame her hesitations. "It's awesome, I'm not scared now," she said, when discussing getting hit. Others found empowerment in proving they could play. Tammie confessed that at her age, she just wanted to see if she could do it. Although her husband disapproved, Tammie played anyway.

Participation in football clearly denotes resistance to societal expectations of femininity. As has been established, women playing football engage in a process of constructing a physical, aggressive orthodox masculinity, or football masculinity. For individual women this football
masculinity offers a significant form of resistance to their everyday performances of gender. For women who are gender-nonconforming on a daily basis, football is a space where their non-conformity is accepted. For individual women, this hybrid gender performance, and its acceptance in this space, can be seen as progress. In other words, the empowerment that comes from participation in football is liberating. On an institutional level women's football has yet to become a significant site of resistance, which limits its larger societal impact. However, women's football has the potential to alter gender discourse, especially that regarding the superiority of male bodies over female bodies.

**Altering Gender Discourses**

Women's football has the potential to alter societal understandings of gender performance, and physical bodies. The successful participation of women in an aggressive, physically demanding sport, and the orthodox masculinity that pervades it, refutes biologically essentialist notions that subordinate female bodies in sports and the workplace. Football's place as the most popular sport in the United States increases the impact of women's participation. Football is deeply ingrained in American culture, as illustrated by its impact in universities. Colleges and universities spend millions of dollars to fund football programs, while struggling to fund academic programs. On campus, football games are scheduled on weekday evenings to accommodate media broadcasts, often causing cancellations of afternoon and evening classes. Football players are asked to participate in long, grueling practices, conditioning sessions, and weightlifting that often exceeds limits set by the NCAA. And, more recently, an extended postseason pushes the football season beyond even the fall semester. Yet, the rhetoric around college football continues to be largely upbeat. University officials boast about the positive
economic impacts felt by their universities due to media contracts, donations, ticket sales, and an increasing student population. Boosters and alumni brag about school spirit and the free marketing offered by football telecasts. The NCAA proudly discusses the "free" education, life skills, and camaraderie that come from participation in the sport. This discourse surrounding college football often fails to acknowledge negative aspects of the sport allowing it to maintain a stronghold on American viewers. Between college football and the NFL, during certain parts of the football season not a single day goes by when there is not a televised football contest.

The popularity of football within American society makes it an important site of resistance for women. In addition to being embedded in the culture, football reinforces ideologies about male bodies as bigger, faster, and stronger, all while proclaiming itself to be a sport only for men. The message is that female bodies are simply too weak to play the game. Successful participation in football by female bodies can disrupt the notion that females are unfit for physical and/or aggressive spaces. The impact of this would certainly be felt outside of the sporting institution as well. Research has shown that women still experience difficulties obtaining and holding employment in occupations that are considered too physical for female bodies. This includes occupations such as firefighters, police officers, corrections officers (Britton 2003), military positions, and those in the building trades (Denissen 2010). Physicality is valued in each of these positions, thus it is expected that men, or at least male bodies, are better equipped to fill these roles. As with sports, changes in the view of female bodies over time has allowed for more integration of these positions, however they are still male-dominated numerically and ideologically. Additional changes in the expectations our culture has of the physical abilities of female bodies could positively impact opportunities for females in the occupational and sporting realm.
Many women playing football do experience challenges in overcoming the "double hesitation" (Young 2005), and in embodying the aggressive physicality required of the sport. However, these women are dedicated to achieving the physical body necessary to play the sport, and the aggressive mentality expected by coaches and fans. Women are achieving football masculinity on the field, but a very small audience has witnessed the power women exhibit in this sport. Increasing the visibility of the sport is a must if it is to have a significant impact on cultural ideologies about gendered bodies. As Deutsch (2007:121) has acknowledged, "resistant acts can also affect discourses about gender," and "... alternative discourses can create alternative conceptions of gender." Thus, the potential for altering the discourse surrounding female bodies and debunking essentialist views does exist.

Women football players have the potential to be especially influential on children's understandings of their capabilities. Since many women bring their children to practices and games, and talk about their football play at home, they are being socialized at a young age to see women as football players. As discussed previously, children who spend time around women football players may be surprised to learn that men play the game (NFL Films 2010). Increasing the visibility and popularity of women's football can also offer positive role models for young girls interested in the game. Lacking a support system and network of contacts has been an issue for women in male-dominated occupations, and seems to be an issue for girls and women who are interested in football. For example, while I was conducting this research I received an email from a parent interested in learning more about support systems for parents of girls who play football. On another occasion, my mother contacted me about offering support to a young girl who wanted to play the game, but was fearful of taking a hit, getting hurt, and playing with boys. Another young girl e-mailed me to learn more about women's football, asking questions about
what kinds of opportunities existed, and if players got paid. Increasing visibility of women playing football can normalize this activity for other women and girls, thus taking away the stigma, and changing the idea that football is a man's sport. But, perhaps women's football is not a significant form of progress for girls and women.

Why Women's Football May Not Be Progress

It is important to acknowledge the potential women's football has for inciting social change. However, we must also consider the challenges it will face in doing so. The masculine culture in football continues to be reinforced because football, and sports more generally, are "closed-loop systems" (Anderson 2005:74). In other words, those who coach, own, run, and maintain sporting organizations typically were participants. Participants become assistant coaches, coaches, and general managers. In the case of women's football, women largely learn to play from men who played the men's game. Therefore, components of the men's game, and the culture surrounding that game, are infused into women's football. In the case of the Sizzle, playing for a former NFL player meant never questioning his motives or reasoning. "I played this game at the highest level, and I can tell you what's going to work for you, and what is going to be the best," Coach Woods stated during one team meeting. This reasoning was used to justify decisions made about practice drills, play calling, play design, rest and recovery of pain and injuries, and injury prevention. As was often mentioned by coaches, the Sizzle team was a dictatorship, not a democracy. By maintaining control over discourses within the women's game, men were able to make sure the game was being played "right," and was not feminized.

Men are important in increasing the visibility of women's football, as endorsements by them will validate the sport. However, validation of women's football is not easy to gain, and
not all men want to validate women's participation in football. In discussing police work, Prokos and Padavic (2002:442) find that "women's presence and competent performance of the masculine aspects of the job mean that the job can no longer be enlisted straightforwardly in the project of confirming masculinity." As with police work, women's "competent performance" of orthodox masculinity on the football field has the potential to disrupt the gender hierarchy, and men's stronghold on the sport. Kimmel (2013) has argued that men, especially white men, are currently angry and fighting back, because they are losing many privileges they once had and still feel entitled to. Kimmel (2013:165) says, "It's the end of the era of men's entitlement, the era in which a young man could assume without question, it was not only 'a man's world' but a straight white man's world." This revelation has led men to begin reasserting traditional gender ideologies, more specifically traditional notions of masculinity, as a way to regain control (Kimmel 2013). Following Kimmel (2013), asking men to embrace women's football, and the orthodox masculine performance of women on the football field, would likely fail. If men are currently trying to regain control, it is unlikely that they would relinquish the power they hold over "their" sport, especially if at this point in history they consider it the "last bastion of manhood." Maintaining the invisibility and subordination of women's football reaffirms the sport as "for men."

Women's football is thriving, if you consider the number of teams and leagues. There are currently more teams than at any other point in history. However, the instability of women's football leagues is still a major concern, as turnover from year-to-year is consistent. Financial instability prevents teams from offering similar facilities and equipment afforded to men's teams. The semi-professional nature of the sport that pays women little to no money to play certainly impacts who is able to play the sport, and likely has a dramatic impact on the level of play.
Women who have to hold full-time jobs, or have unpaid family responsibilities, have limited time to attend meetings, conditioning sessions, and practices. Over the course of my two seasons, I believe only one player made it to every game and practice. Many practices included so few players that full drills could not be completed. Professional athletes have the opportunity to focus all of their time on game preparation, both physical and mental. This is a benefit not afforded to women in so-called professional football. It would be difficult to argue that reduced preparation time has no impact on the level of play. Add in that most women in these leagues are stepping into tackle football for the first time in their life, and it is easy to see the impact that a lack of game knowledge has on the level of play. Maintaining a lower level of play reinforces football as a game for men as well. Proving that the women's game is not equal to the men's game reifies notions that female bodies are not equipped to play football at a high level, and preserves men's football as the game. This is not to say that women's football is lacking in good franchises and great athletes; quite the opposite is true, which is another reason for optimism.

Future Examinations of Women's Football

The possibility of women's football as a space for social change marks it as one of particular value for gender scholars and sports sociologists. So far research on the sport has been fairly limited, with just four published studies on women’s football (Knapp 2011; Migliaccio and Berg 2007; Nett et al. 2010; Packard 2009). While women's participation in other contact sports has the potential for resisting ideological notions of female bodies, it is the popularity of football, and its deep connection to American culture, that makes it of special importance for future examination.
As I have documented here, the culture of women's football is much the same as that of the men's game. Women perform a type of orthodox masculinity, mirroring hegemonic ideals of masculinity even at a time when these are being considered harmful on and off the field. Health concerns on the field, and issues with violence off the field, have become concerns for men's football at all levels. The creation of programs to promote proper tackling technique, emphasis on proper equipment size and fit, rule changes, and harsher penalties for indiscretions on and off the field have addressed many of these concerns in the men's game. Yet, I found that many of these safety concerns were not addressed in the women's game. Many women played with ill-fitting equipment, tackling technique was haphazard, and concussion protocols were nonexistent. The fact that the women's game legislates much of this less than the men's game may seem counterintuitive. In other women's sports, like women's hockey, soccer, and basketball, much of the physical contact has been removed from the game. While these women's sports offer rules clearly distancing them from the men's version of the sport, women's football changes the rules only slightly, by reducing the size of the ball. Women's football seems to be behind in terms of amending rules and developing policies that address health and safety concerns. Future research should consider the impact this has on female bodies in more depth. Additionally, I would challenge us to question whether men's and/or women's football should continue to be played in their current form if there are so many health concerns. In the past authors have posited that the "male model" of sport, which values and emphasizes aggression and physicality, is problematic (Hargreaves 1994; Theberge 2003). Recent rules changes in the NFL have been met with much resistance, as players and coaches have argued that they are making the game "soft." Some have even suggested that in the future football will cease to exist due to these changes. These claims seem to mirror those made in the early 1900s, when some Americans argued that creating a
governing body and standardizing rules would end football. At that time, governance was called for due to a rash of deaths in the sport. Research considering players' concerns of the sanctity of the game, and offering insight into alternative models of play, would likely be beneficial as the landscape of football and other sports continues to change.

Additional consideration should be given to the ways in which women's adoption of orthodox football masculinity is a form of "subordinate adaptation," in which women may be "accepting practices that demean and disempower them in exchange for a degree of approval and protection" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:426). Orthodox masculinity is essentially hegemonic masculinity performed by a subordinated or marginalized group, like black men, gay men, or as in this case, women. As has been noted, women and subordinated and marginalized men can assist in the reification of hegemonic masculinity, often at the expense of themselves (Connell 2005). For women this is especially problematic, because all men benefit from hegemonic masculinity and the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2005:79), as masculinity's hegemony is predicated on the subordination of women. Based on the lower level of play that exists in women's football, performance of orthodox masculinity on the football field may be taken as inauthentic by men, thus enhancing women's complicity in strengthening hegemonic masculinity and its connection to "real" (men's) football. Examinations of masculine performance by women must be a research focus for gender and masculinity scholars moving forward. Currently studies on masculinity in female bodies largely focus on trans men (Halberstam 1998; Wickman 2003). More attention should be paid to women, more specifically gender non-conforming women and heterosexual women in this area of study.

Finally, I would argue that social scientists have an opportunity to effect positive changes in the game of women's football by examining the many structural constraints that exist for the
sport. As has been discussed, organizational issues and league instability threaten the viability of
the sport long-term. At several points in history women's football has been viable, only to fail to
remain financially stable. It seems clear from media accounts of women in the game that there
has been interest, from women, in playing football since the early 1900s. There has been less
interest from men in women playing the game. Women's participation in the sport over the years
has largely been supported by men only in use as spectacle, like halftime shows at NFL games,
and for financial gain for investors, like the Legends Football League. Much of this activity has
been exploitative of women who are truly interested in the competitive nature of the sport.
Throughout the history of women in football, journalists have seemed in awe of the fact that
women want to play football, and have the ability to play the game. Whether I read an article
from the 1920s or one written last month, this is the standard lead. What we know: women want
to play football; women can and do play football. The question moving forward then is, how do
we maintain and increase opportunities for women to play the game? This is a question that
social scientists may be able to assist in answering. Until then, teams like the Cincinnati Sizzle
will continue to fight for their survival, on and off the field. And for at least one more season,
the Sizzle will enter the field yelling, "let's bang!"
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