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**Understanding ‘the National Sport for New Zealand Women’:  
A Socio-Spatial Analysis of Netball**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of

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## Abstract

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, netball has been heralded ‘the national sport for New Zealand women’ and it continues to represent one of the few team sport environments not characterized by the interests and participation of men. Created by and for women, netball promotes and preserves a sense of women-onlyness. There is, however, a link between netball and femininity that has gone largely unexplored among contemporary studies of sport.

This research focuses on the social production of netball space and the ongoing and complex relationship between netball and heteronormative femininity in New Zealand. Drawing upon interviews with 16 recreational players and ethnographic fieldwork conducted over two years, I examine how women experience, negotiate and challenge notions of gender, sexuality, corporeality and subjectivity in spaces of netball. Adopting a poststructural feminist interpretation of Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory, I demonstrate how the relationship between women’s sporting bodies, space and social relations is mutually constituted.

In this thesis, I explain spaces of netball as reproducing and celebrating particular gendered and sexualized identities and thus, prioritizing a relatively narrow but culturally valued heteronormative feminine athletic ideal. Whilst some women enjoy and are empowered by the social conditions of this sport, the power relations operating on and through netball spaces can also work to subordinate and exclude alternative or ‘other’ femininities and bodies. Yet, as my research reveals, netball also offers opportunities for resistance as some netballers engage in oppositional politics and/or use this space to disrupt normative discourse. This is particularly evident in the ways some players resist the involvement of men, how mothers use netball space to obtain momentary reprieve from the expectations of motherhood, and how pregnant, ‘fat’ and older bodies challenge the discursive construction of the contemporary (feminine) athletic ideal via their participation in this sport. To this end, this research not only demonstrates the social geography of netball in the everyday lives of New Zealand women, but also the potential of theoretical syntheses between Lefebvre and feminism for offering productive new ways to think about the interrelationships between active bodies, identities, space, power and resistance in sport and female physical culture.

## **Dedication**

To Sue and Chris Marfell, two selfless, supportive and devoted parents who have nurtured both a love of netball and a passion for learning.

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## Preface

May 1996

It is a frosty Saturday morning. I arrive at the car park of the Central Hawkes Bay College Netball Courts with my mother beside me and we make our way through the crowded terraces to the front of the venue. My teammates are already here, huddled together in their blue skirts and white polo shirts. As I get closer, I notice that Becky's legs are covered in purple blotches and she is shivering from the cold. A couple of the girls are standing still and swaying their hips, their skirts billowing out sideways as the pleats catch the breeze like sails dancing in the wind. I look down at my own skirt and move my hips slowly. I like the way the thick material feels on my skin as it brushes back and forth past my thighs. With a glance up at my Mum and a warm and reassuring smile in return, I slip away from her side and hurriedly join my excited teammates. There I stand among the other girls: pale legs peeking from beneath my skirt, teeth chattering, and heart racing.

It has been a long wait. In fact, for an excited eight year-old girl, it has seemed like an eternity. For as long as I can remember, I have been watching the older girls play and listening to their stories. I have been watching them in their brightly coloured sneakers, short pleated skirts, tops and tie-up bibs and hearing about the fun they have in the weekend, the teams they beat or are beaten by, and the new skills they learn at trainings. I have been envious, dreaming of the day when I would be out there on court too. I want to be just like the older girls. I yearn to play netball and I desperately want to be a Silver Fern.<sup>1</sup>

A sharp whistle blast resonates across the court and I am jolted back into the present. A short woman dressed in polar fleece track pants, loose fitting shirt and sneakers beckons us towards her. As she turns away to check the time on the large clock at the north end of the courts, I see the word 'coach' in large red letters sprawled across the back of her shirt. Her voice is soft and nurturing and her smile is broad as she welcomes us over and gives instructions for our first game. Across the court I can see the other team, clad in forest green uniforms, they are also eagerly awaiting the starting whistle. Amongst my own team, there is an air of

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<sup>1</sup> The Silver Ferns are New Zealand's national netball team.

anticipation as our coach reaches into a large black bag to retrieve the bibs. There is a commotion occurring over who will wear the Goal Attack, Goal Shoot and Wing Attack bibs—it seems those are the ones everyone wants. The defensive bibs are handed out to the taller girls first and as one of the shortest members of the team it seems they will never be passed to me.

As the other girls continue to squabble over who gets the shooting bibs, I watch eagerly as our coach reaches into the bag once more. Rummaging through the remaining bibs she pulls out a bright blue one emblazoned with a large, white letter ‘C’. My eyes light up. “Who wants to play Centre today?” our coach calls loudly. Before anyone can speak, I step forward from the back of the group and raise my hand. “I’ll have it”, I announce excitedly. Even at the tender age of eight I had an overwhelming urge to be involved in everything that the game of netball had to offer. Leaving the other girls to continue their tug-o-war over the last attacking positions, I slip the ‘C’ bib over my head and take my place in the middle of the court.

The morning sun beats down on the dark grey asphalt, which steams a little as the last of the morning frost disappears into the air and the starting whistle blows. I can hear the voices of my teammates calling my name eagerly as flashes of blue and green begin to break the line and make advances, from all directions, towards me, as if bees to honey. I quickly pass the ball off to my Wing Attack and gather speed as I make my way down the court with long strides and casting an eye over my shoulder. As the ball makes its way down the court to the shooters I do the best I can to help out: coming forward from behind my opposition and making passes under the post. The game is, as you would expect, chaotic, messy and unstructured, as everyone flocks to the ball carrier eager to receive the next pass, waving their arms wildly in the air and shouting loudly. There are dropped passes, missed shots and cheers from the sidelines as mothers watch on, reliving their own youth, whilst their daughters get their first taste of the game. Cheers are also erupting from fathers, brothers, sisters and friends as they watch the ball make its way, back and forth, up and down the court. Although it is clear none of the players really know the rules yet, there is a definite sense of fulfilment as this group of 14 young girls run, jump, throw and catch. I can feel the exhilaration coursing through my veins: I have never felt anything like it.

My heart is pounding violently in my chest, a mixture of fatigue and excitement, as a loud whistle blast indicates the end of the game. Amidst the raucous cheers and applause emanating from the sidelines I run off the court, red-faced, smile a mile wide, and tuck into the post-game oranges. As the sweet juice dribbles down my chin and neck, I see my Mum smiling broadly. She gives me a cheeky wink and slowly mouths the words ‘well done’. I am buzzing with pride and joy. My body pulses with a mixture of exhaustion and accomplishment. Not only did I get my first proper taste of the game and make my mother proud, I also began what would turn out to be a fulfilling and lifelong relationship with this sport.

Indeed, since this day, my very first game of netball, I have never looked back. I still experience the same tingling sensation throughout my body that I did when I was eight years old every time I attach the Centre bib to the Velcro swatches on my uniform. I am also reminded of the thrill of the game with every cut, dodge and drive. I do, however, now reflect upon this sport with a sociological consciousness that has been developed and strengthened throughout my tertiary studies. As I was introduced to sociology, geography and gender studies, I began to wonder what it is about netball that makes it so appealing to New Zealand women? And, why do some girls and women choose not to engage their bodies in this sport despite it being touted as ‘the game for New Zealand girls’? Driven by an intense passion for the game of netball and a sense of curiosity about the social world in which I live, I set out to gain a more in depth understanding of netball and women’s experiences of this sport. This thesis is the product of this sociological, geographical and feminist journey.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

In 2003, Cathy van Ingen called for sport sociologists to engage with spatial theory and to interrogate the geography of social relations within sport sociology via explorations of how social relations “are produced, negotiated and contested in social space” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 201). In particular, she argued that research on sport and physical culture can no longer ignore the spatiality of social relations and, therefore, must develop more nuanced inquiries into the relations between the body, space and power. Building upon this contribution, Friedman and van Ingen (2011) more recently urged Physical Cultural Studies scholars to consider the possibilities of spatial analysis for understanding the moving body, particularly the ways in which “the body impacts and is impacted by the environment in which it exists” (p. 85). Incorporating spatial analysis into critical studies of sports and physical culture, they suggest, may enable sport sociologists to better interpret the causes and sources of inequitable social relationships whilst providing a fuller and more nuanced picture of the body via investigations of the influence of space in shaping social relations of various kinds (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011).

In this thesis, I take inspiration from these arguments to offer a socio-spatial analysis of netball in New Zealand and an exploration of the intersections between bodies, space and social relations. More particularly, I consider how netball bodies<sup>2</sup> and spaces produce and reproduce gendered and sexualized identities and relations of power. In so doing, I work through the relationships between netball, bodies, spaces, places and subjectivities. I explore the social geography and production of netball space in New Zealand and consider how the social relations operating on and through netball bodies and spaces influence and shape women’s everyday lived experiences of this sport. Put simply, I acknowledge that bodies, spaces, subjectivities and experiences cannot, and should not, be considered separately or independently of one another, and

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<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge that in the contemporary context both New Zealand men and women participate in the game of netball. The focus of this research, however, rests on the experiences of women netball players.

therefore, engage in critical thinking about how netball bodies, spaces and relations of power impact, interact with, and (re)produce one another.

The approach I take throughout this project is a feminist one. I approach this research from the perspective that women's lived experiences constitute important and legitimate knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007). I argue that women's involvement in netball is relevant to feminist politics, both in terms of women's participation in a sport created largely by and for women, and in how women experience and negotiate spatial and social relations, particularly the socio-culturally imposed limits set upon their moving bodies in this space. In examining the socio-spatial production of netball in New Zealand, I focus on the "complexities of power, privilege, oppression and representation, with gender foregrounded as the primary social relation" (England, 2006, p. 286). I also privilege a range of bodies and voices in order to understand the diversity of women's embodied and bodily experiences of sport (Hall, 1996). In thinking through these issues, I argue that the work of French philosopher and social theorist, Henri Lefebvre, offers a useful conceptual framework to "begin to unpack what space is, [and] how it is produced" (van Ingen, 2003, p. 201) and therefore, may be profitably put to work as part of this feminist analysis of the social geography of netball in New Zealand and the ways in which operations of power are produced, reproduced, negotiated and challenged in and through this physical cultural space.

Given that netball is a minority (or lesser-known) sport in a large number of countries and, therefore, may very well be unfamiliar to some, I begin by briefly outlining some of the details and finer points of this sport, before further discussing the aims, objectives and significance of this research project.

### **Defining netball**

The term 'netball' typically refers to a non-contact ball sport that is played either inside or outdoors by two opposing teams consisting of seven on-court players. In recent years, however, a number of hybrid forms of netball have developed that look very different from the traditional game. Indoor netball, for example, is a form of netball, played exclusively indoors, where the number of players is reduced to six and the playing surface is divided in half (instead of into thirds) and

surrounded on each side and overhead by a net. Fast5, a new variation of netball that emerged in the late 2000s, is characterized by shortened games, goals worth multiple points and a reduced number of players on court (five). Thus, it is important to note that whilst I acknowledge that the term ‘netball’ no longer describes a singular game, in this thesis, I use ‘netball’ to denote the traditional seven-a-side version of this sport.

In the contemporary context, netball is a fast, skillful, team-oriented invasion game based on running, jumping, throwing and catching (International Netball Federation, 2013). It is a sport that can be played at a number of different levels, from social to elite, and typically involves skills such as coordination, speed, agility, stamina, strength and the utmost cooperation between all members of the team, as no one player can ‘win’ a game alone. There are also a number of unique rules that characterize, and importantly, differentiate the game of netball from most other modern team sports. Most notably, players must avoid bodily contact and may not move their feet when they have possession of the ball (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Yet, what makes netball particularly unique is not its physical characteristics or its accessibility and appeal to a range of skill and commitment levels, but rather that it is one of the few sports worldwide that is played, almost exclusively, by women (Andrew, 1997). Netball is played in more than 80 countries throughout the world and by over 20 million people, the vast majority of whom are female (Netball Australia, n.d.). Netballers can be found in the United States of America, parts of Africa, in several areas of Asia and most extensively throughout Commonwealth countries such as England, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. In New Zealand in particular, netball is the premier team sport for girls and women and is, therefore, considered “New Zealand’s major female sporting code” (Teevale, 2008, p. 167; see also Andrew, 1997). Indeed, since its birth in New Zealand in the early twentieth century, netball has been heralded ‘the national sport for New Zealand women’ (Hawes & Barker, 1999) and it remains an important and celebrated part of the social fabric of women’s sport in the country. Not surprisingly, then, a vast number of New Zealand girls are exposed to, grow up around and subsequently choose to become involved in this female-dominated sport.

Netball is currently ranked among New Zealand's highest participation sports (Sport New Zealand, 2015a) and is the most popular sport for women 16 years and over (Sport New Zealand, 2015b). Netball New Zealand (2015) estimates that in a country with a population of just over 4.5 million,<sup>3</sup> netball has upwards of 143,000 registered female players at various levels and a further 80,000 people playing in social competitions for over 1000 clubs in 87 centres nationwide. More specific, albeit lesser known, statistics show, however, that this number is likely to be significantly higher. For example, in the Hamilton City competition alone, 481 teams (primary, secondary and open-grade) competed in the year 2014—the highest number of entries over the last nine years (personal communication, March 10, 2015).

The 2007/2008 'Active NZ Survey' also reports that netball is the most popular sport in New Zealand secondary schools and the most played sport among females 5-17 years of age (SPARC, 2007, 2008). Certainly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, netball is played by New Zealand girls and women with a considerable range of physical abilities and at school-girl, club, recreational, social, competitive, Masters, elite and semi-professional levels. Further, once considered a predominantly white middle-class women's sport (Taylor, 2001), in the contemporary context netball is enjoyed by a diverse New Zealand population, including some males and an increasing number of Māori (Indigenous New Zealanders) and Pacific Island women (SPARC, 2008; Tagg, 2008a, 2008b; Teevale, 2008).

Netball also has a large New Zealand following in terms of spectatorship and receives the most extensive media coverage of all women's sports in the country. As SKY Television, New Zealand's primary sport broadcaster, points out, "netball has an audience out there" (as cited in Brown & Nichols, 2006, p. 1). In fact, according to Dalziel (2011), netball had the highest average television audience (82,950) of all sports in New Zealand, followed by rugby union (henceforth referred to as rugby) at 74,010 in the year 2010. Margaret Henley (2012) has also discussed the prevalence of netball in New Zealand televised media suggesting that the 1999 Netball World Cup final between New Zealand and Australia captured over one million New Zealand viewers, out-rating a

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<sup>3</sup> These figures, obtained from Statistics New Zealand, are current as of March 2015.

popular rugby match between the same two countries which had an audience of approximately 873,000. Indeed, elite level netballers have a much higher media profile than most other New Zealand sportswomen (Andrew, 1997; Bruce, 2008; Henley, 2012). Live match broadcasts and television advertisements featuring the Silver Ferns have increased the visibility of netball and its elite players, sometimes to the point of making these women household names.

In a country that has long celebrated and glorified the achievements of male sports teams, and particularly rugby, the visibility of netball may seem surprising and, therefore, worthy of further investigation. Despite the popularity and social significance of netball in New Zealand, however, sustained academic analyses of contemporary netball or women's playing experiences are relatively scarce.

### **Women and netball: Existing research and contributions**

To date, scholarship on netball has emerged from four primary disciplines; history, psychology, physiology and sociology. Historical research has focused on the history of netball and its acceptability for women (Grundy & Shakelford, 2005; Treagus, 2005). Psychologists have studied the effects of psychological skills training on athletic performance (Callow & Hardy, 2001; Pates, Karageorghis, Fryer & Maynard, 2003). Physiologists have examined training responses and injury prevention (Bell, Cooper, Cobner & Longville, 1994; Hopper, McNair & Elliot, 1999) while sociologists have explored issues of race, ethnicity, cultural diversity and inclusiveness in netball in Australia (Taylor, 2004) and England (Chappell, Burdsey & Collinson, 2004). A select few sport studies scholars have focused on the position of netball in New Zealand society.

Academic research on netball in the New Zealand context has concentrated largely on the development of netball and a female sporting culture (Andrew, 1997; Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Hawes & Barker, 1999; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994) and the relationship between netball(ers) and the media (Bruce, 2008; Henley, 2004, 2010, 2012; Nauright, 1999; Thompson, 2003). Importantly, whilst this research makes up the bulk of scholarship on netball in New Zealand, a small body of research has diverged from these themes. Work by Melnick (1996)

and Teevale (2008), for example, investigates Māori and Pacific Island women's netball experiences and the ideas of positional segregation and 'island flair'. My Masters thesis, 'Netball in the lives of New Zealand Women: An Intergenerational Study', offers an investigation of the socio-cultural and political influence of netball in the lives of New Zealand women across four distinct historical junctures (the 1940s, 1970s, 1990s and 2010). This work not only documents the development of netball across time and context, but also investigates the experiences of New Zealand women netballers in relation to broader socio-cultural, political and structural change (Marfell, 2011). Finally, Brendan Tagg's (2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2014) research on men's netball and transgender participation provides a window into the gendered nature of this sport and the difficulties men experience integrating into the game. It also discusses, and importantly challenges, the stereotypes surrounding men who choose to play this sport, particularly the idea that all male netballers are "perverse 'gender-benders'" (Tagg, 2008a, p. 409).

Whilst this body of scholarship is extremely valuable in that it contributes to knowledge about netball and the sporting culture that surrounds it, it offers only a limited understanding of the multiple, diverse and everyday lived experiences of women who play this sport and the underlying meanings of this physical and cultural space. Importantly, it also tells us little about the socio-spatial relations of netball in New Zealand, that is, it offers little insight into the ways in which the relations of power operating within netball shape and structure this space and the bodies of those women who engage in this sport. In this way, existing work reveals little about the relationships between netball space, women's moving bodies and social relations or how gendered power relations function to produce and are reproduced through contemporary netball spaces and bodies. Thus, this thesis investigates netball culture in New Zealand and women's experiences of this sport by asking three key research questions:

- Are relations of femininity and heteronormativity (re)produced within and across the social space of contemporary netball in New Zealand, and if so, in what ways?
- What effects, positive and exclusionary, do the socio-spatial relations of

netball have on women's bodies and subjectivities?

- What opportunities for resistance, if any, does the social space of netball offer women players?

By asking these research questions, I attempt to better understand the social production of netball spatiality and its relationship to women's lived and embodied experiences of this sport. I aim to reveal how women's material bodies and identities are (re)produced and maintained in this physical and cultural sporting space, that is, how bodies and spaces simultaneously (re)create one another. Further, unlike the abundance of sociological research on women in sport, which aims to think critically about the experiences of female athletes in positions of minority among male-dominated physical cultural spaces such as rugby, surfing, snowboarding, windsurfing, ice hockey, soccer and boxing (e.g. Caudwell, 1999, 2002, 2003; Chase, 2006; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Mennesson, 2000; Olive, 2013; Theberge, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2000; Thorpe, 2005, 2008, 2009; Wheaton, 2002), my research project examines the lived experiences of women who uncharacteristically make up a sporting majority. As netballers, New Zealand women inhabit a space in which their participation is often socially celebrated, rather than resisted. They also occupy a position of relative sporting privilege in female recreation in the country in terms of social recognition. Thus, my political intention is not only to give voice to a group of women who have, surprisingly, remained somewhat voiceless among academic sport studies in New Zealand, but also to think about women's everyday experiences and understandings of netball in ways that enable me to challenge what is familiar, normalized and accepted.

It is important to note that I am not independent of this research. Rather, as the preface at the beginning of this thesis reveals, I am profoundly involved in and entangled with this project: I am an enthusiastic and committed netballer, former coach, occasional umpire, avid spectator *and* researcher. In the section that follows, therefore, I briefly consider the ways in which my own biography and relationships to this sport link with and have helped to form this research project.

### **Fragments of a netballer: My relationships with the game**

In many ways, this research project emerges from my longstanding passion for the game of netball. Indeed, the sport has always been a large and important part of my life. My first experiences of netball occurred even before I was old enough to play, such that my childhood was filled with the netball stories and memories of those women around me, particularly my grandmother and mother, both of whom were enthusiastic netball participants and spectators of the game. By the time I reached an age where I was finally permitted to begin playing, I was eager to fully immerse and thoroughly entrench myself in this sporting culture, such that I spent the vast majority of my weeknights and weekends during winter involved in some aspect of netball with my friends. As I continued to grow, I became more adept at this sport: I quickly reached the top level at both my primary and secondary schools, was selected for numerous representative teams and talent development initiatives, was invited to play premier women's club-level netball during high school, and subsequently stepped into a number of captaining roles. I also took on coaching positions in an effort to 'give back' to a sport and culture that I felt had given me so much.

As I am sure it has become apparent by now, the pleasure and sense of fulfillment that netball gave me was immense. I learnt physical, psychological and social skills and got to experience my body moving in ways that I haven't experienced elsewhere. I made many lifelong friends and formed relationships with girls and women I would not normally have had the chance to meet. I felt the hard asphalt beneath my sneakers, the wind in my hair, the flexing of my muscles, the sun at my back, frost biting at my nose, and I loved it all! You could say, netball has been the most lengthy infatuation of my life, my first true love. And still, to this very day, some twenty years later, I relish those 40 to 60 minutes out there on court, pushing my body to its physical limits, each Saturday during winter.

This thesis also arises from the sociological training I experienced during the pursuit of my Bachelor of Sport and Leisure Studies degree, and later my Honours and Masters qualifications, in which I formed and nurtured an interest in issues of gender, sexuality, femininity, and the experiences of women in sports and physical culture. By the time I had completed these qualifications, however, I

was frustrated with what I perceived as a lack of research on contemporary netball and women's playing experiences in New Zealand. I was also inspired by the potential of sociological and spatial analyses of the gendered nature of this sport for uncovering the everyday and hidden relations of power circulating within this sport—a theme that had begun to arise, but was not able to be fully explored throughout my Masters research. In many ways, therefore, this project is a culmination of my passion for this sport, as well as a growing sociological and spatial inquisitiveness about contemporary netball culture in New Zealand and the everyday lived experiences of the interesting, diverse and numerous women who choose to play. As such, I have been prompted to revisit many of my own assumptions about the game of netball and the opportunities and challenges it presents to New Zealand girls and women.

### **Thesis overview**

Having introduced the aims and objectives of this research and my relationships to this sport and culture, I now briefly describe the structure of the remainder of this thesis. In Chapter Two, I conduct a critical review of the literature as well as introduce the theoretical framework for this study. I begin by tracing the development of 'sporting geographies' both within the fields of cultural geography and sport sociology before narrowing my focus to the existing geographically infused research on women's sport. I consider how the spatialized dimensions of women's participation in sport and physical culture have been theorized and suggest that Henri Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual and systematic framework for the analysis of the (social) production of (social) space provides a useful way to examine the ongoing intersections between women's sporting bodies, space and social relations. In so doing, I consider how Lefebvre's spatial oeuvre can help to further unravel some of the complexities and intricacies of women's participation in particular sport spaces. I also discuss how a feminist (re)reading of Lefebvre's spatial theory helps to extend its resonance for explorations of the gendered and sexualized nature of sporting spaces and women's netball bodies.

In Chapter Three, I outline the ethnographic approach I took in order to research netball culture and New Zealand women's playing experiences. Before

offering a detailed discussion of my selected methods, however, I consider the importance of reflexivity and its significance throughout this research project. More particularly, I discuss some of the tensions and challenges I experienced researching a sport and culture in which I occupy an 'intimate insider' position (Taylor, 2011) and how I engaged in a process of 'thinking the social through my self' (Probyn, 1993) as a method to negotiate and overcome some of the ethical and methodological difficulties I faced occupying an athlete/researcher position. Next, I describe my use of participant-observation, interviews and media analysis as ethnographic methods of inquiry. In so doing, I provide details of my time in the field as a player and researcher, the 16 interviews I conducted, and the diverse characteristics of the women whom have contributed their insights to this research project. I also discuss how the methods I adopted were used in conversation with one another to deepen and develop my understanding of netball and the experiences of New Zealand women. In this way, Chapter Three outlines how playing netball, interviewing women players and analyzing various forms of online, print and televised media were used to establish a methodological approach to researching netball(ers) and to capture the complex, dynamic, multiple, fluid, subjective and embodied experiences of women who play this sport. Importantly, this chapter also discusses the link between my theoretical and methodological frameworks, that is, it considers how Lefebvrian spatial theory influenced and shaped my research practices.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present and discuss the findings from my ethnographic analysis of netball and are structured using Lefebvre's three-pronged model for the analysis of social space (discussed in Chapter Two). Chapter Four incorporates Lefebvre's (1991) ideas about 'representations of space' and 'spatial practices' to examine the social production of netball as feminized and heterosexualized space, and thus, the articulations between netball and femininity in New Zealand. More specifically, it explores how netball spaces and bodies are (re)produced via ideologies, discourse and knowledge, the physical landscape of netball, and the routines and behaviours that characterize women's participation within this physical and cultural context. In so doing, this chapter explains spaces of netball as reproducing and celebrating particular gendered and sexualized identities and thus, prioritizing a relatively narrow but culturally valued heteronormative feminine athletic ideal.

Drawing heavily on the voices and ‘stories’ of the 16 women I interviewed, Chapter’s Five and Six utilize Lefebvre’s conceptualization of ‘spaces of representation’, or lived space, to explore the ways in which women experience the everyday geographies of this space. Organized with reference to Lefebvre’s (1991) assertion that lived space contains both perils and potentialities for bodies, Chapter Five explores netball as a space of marginalization, regulation and exclusion along lines of gender, sexuality and corporeality. In so doing, I discuss how the very same operations of power that so often work to encourage women into this sport can also function to exclude, restrict and displace them (and others) at certain times in their lives. In particular, I focus on the ways women who are perceived by others and/or perceive themselves as not ‘girly’ enough to play netball (tomboys), lesbian participants and pregnant bodies are often made to feel they are ‘out of place’ in netball space.

In Chapter Six, I change tack from thinking about the ways lived space can act as a site of discrimination and marginalization to an analysis of the potentialities of netball space. In so doing, I consider the possibilities the social space of netball offers women to engage in practices of resistance and to disrupt normative and normalizing discourse. In particular, I discuss women’s resistance of men’s participation in this sport and how the negotiation and creative appropriation of netball space by mothers and transgressive female sporting bodies, particularly pregnant, ‘fat’<sup>4</sup> and older bodies, can enable them to challenge the social limitations placed on their bodies and the discursive construction of the contemporary (feminine) athletic ideal.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I draw conclusions from my study. Importantly, I reconcile the strands of Lefebvre’s conceptual framework to discuss the ongoing and complex intersections between representations of space, spatial practices and

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Fat’ is a contested term that has links to medical, psychological and social discourse. More recently, however, fatness has been theorized as an embodied experience such that there has been resistance to the use of terms like ‘obese’ and ‘obesity’ as their overtones of pathology conjure images of a body in an abnormal state of disease (Duncan, 2007). In accordance with many body studies scholars and ‘fat activists’ (e.g. Cooper, 2010; Longhurst, 2005, 2012; Murray, 2005; Throsby, 2015), I too adopt the term fat and use it throughout this thesis alongside other terms like ‘bigger’ and ‘larger’ without any derogatory intent. In doing so, I aim to move understandings of fatness past medicalization towards analyses of women’s experiences in bodies perceived (by themselves and broader society) to be carrying additional weight.

spaces of representation, that is, the relationships between the body, space and social relations with regard to netball in New Zealand. This leads me to a discussion of the contributions of this research and the usefulness of conversations between Lefebvre and feminism for understanding the multiple, complex and dynamic experiences of women in sport. To close, I look to the future with some suggestions for further research on netball and the socio-spatial relations surrounding women's everyday lived experiences of this sporting culture.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Intersections Between Gender, Space and Netball Bodies: A Feminist Reading of Lefebvre**

Feminist theorizing about sport has evolved into a well-established sub-discipline of research, particularly in the sociological study of sports and physical culture. Despite some early feminist interventions in sport sociology in the 1970s, it was arguably during the 1980s that feminist research on women in sport really came to fruition (Birrell, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Markula, 2005). Indeed, the 1980s and early 1990s marked “a period of developing theoretical sophistication” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 25) in feminist analyses of sport. During this time, there was an increase in the number of feminist publications with “more substantial theoretical content” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 25) as sport feminists began to emphasize the many ways in which women were ignored and marginalized from sport and various forms of leisure, as well as from research agendas and academic publications on sports and physical culture (Hargreaves, 1990; 1994; Wagg, Brick, Wheaton & Caudwell, 2009). In so doing, feminist sport scholarship moved past psychological analyses of sex differences and sex roles in sport towards considerations of gender differences and gender roles, to the sex/gender binary, and to patriarchy and the relations between genders (Birrell, 1988, 2000; Hall, 1996; Markula, 2005). Wagg et al. (2009) suggest, ‘women’ became a category of identity, and identity politics proved a useful way to explore women’s ongoing experiences of inequality in and exclusion from sport.

With this shift, feminist scholarship on sport became “characterized by relational research where gender is seen as structured through hegemonic power relations that prevail in sport” (Markula, 2005, p. 3). Feminist sport studies transformed into what Susan Birrell (1988) terms “a theoretically informed critical analysis of the cultural forces that work to produce the ideological practices that influence the relations of sport and gender” (as cited in Markula, 2005, p. 3). Importantly, this theoretical shift can be credited to the work of a number of influential North American and British second-wave feminist sport scholars such as Susan Birrell (1988), Nancy Theberge (1985), Ann Hall (1988, 1990, 1996), Carol Oglesby (1978, 1984) and Jennifer Hargreaves (1990, 1994) who critiqued

the “general neglect of an adequate treatment of gender relations in the sociology of sport” (Hargreaves, 1990, p. 287) and encouraged feminist scholars to examine women’s sporting experiences via a focus on the *relations* between men and women rather than the *differences* between them. Ultimately, with the growth of a feminist consciousness in sport studies, questions shifted away from a focus on why women are excluded from sport, to an emphasis on the specific social practices that achieve the physical and ideological exclusion of women from sport, women’s resistance towards such practices, and how women transform sport into a practice that reflects their own needs and desires (Birrell, 1988).

For the past three decades, feminist scholars have continued to ask these types of questions, and in doing so, have examined women’s sporting bodies and their experiences of movement in a variety of physical cultural contexts by theorizing the relations between gender, sexuality, the body, and masculinity and femininity. Indeed, contemporary feminist studies of sport have dedicated significant effort to understanding how women experience their sporting bodies, how women’s physically active bodies are influenced by various social and cultural discourses, and the symbolic representations of women’s bodies in movement. Today, feminist scholars draw on an array of methodological and theoretical perspectives to address key issues relating to women’s (and increasingly men’s) social, cultural, political, lived, interacting and/or gendered bodies in an array of physical and cultural contexts. The recent turn to feminist poststructuralism and a subsequent focus on poststructuralist social theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler, however, has signaled a shift to focus on the interplay between discourse, sexuality, regimes of regulation and the body more closely (Wagg et al., 2009).

Importantly, feminist poststructuralism can be considered both a method and a theoretical reflection to understand relations of power (Ravel & Rail, 2007). Combining both feminist theory and poststructuralism, which rejects the notion that the ‘self’ is a separate entity, this approach suggests that individuals are constructs whose experience of their own subjectivity is mediated by and/or grounded in social discourse far beyond individual control, and thus, subjective experiences are determined by macro factors (Alcoff, 1988). In this way, feminist poststructuralism is predominantly concerned with using language and other

forms of representation, such as discourse and texts, as tools for understanding women's subjective experiences through the contestation of social relations and power (Birrell, 2000; Denzin, 2004; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Through the lens of feminist poststructuralism, an individual can never be separate from the social world, but is instead continuous with it. This perspective, therefore, not only recognizes the power of discourse and the struggles faced by women but also "the dynamic interplay of social forces" (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1994, p. 189) that influence and shape individuals' experiences of everyday life.

Foucault's concepts and thinking around power and its effects on bodies have been central to the work of feminist scholars and used extensively to theorize the female body as a site of cultural and political struggle (Rail & Harvey, 1995)—particularly, how the moving body can become a contested site for the production and reproduction of power relations (Cooky, 2006). For example, Pirkko Markula (1995) has drawn on the work of Foucault to "reconstruct the cultural dialogue surrounding the female body" (p. 424) in fitness practices and to explore how discourses surrounding the female body are part of a complex system of power (see also Markula, 2001). In so doing, she has demonstrated how some women uncritically engage in the self-surveillance of their athletic bodies by partaking in disciplinary practices, including diet and various forms of exercise, in order to achieve the 'ideal' socially and discursively constructed feminine body portrayed widely in the media and popular culture (see also Bordo, 1993). Importantly, Markula's voice has been joined by a number of feminist sport scholars (e.g. Cooky, 2006; Duncan, 1994; Eskes, Duncan & Miller, 1998), whose work has investigated how sport, exercise and physical activity can serve as a powerful technology of domination that works to discipline women into "docile bodies who unquestioningly follow a discursive regime" (Markula, 2003a, p. 88).

Early Foucauldian approaches to the analysis of power, however, created little room for examinations of the ways women negotiate regimes of power and demonstrate practices of resistance. Building on and extending this foundational research, therefore, some feminist sociologists and gender studies scholars turned their attention towards critical analyses of the ways some women exert their agency to resist dominant discourses and disciplinary processes of gender and sexuality, and thus, to discussions of the "synchronous nature of constraint and

freedom” (McNay, 2000, p. 61). Feminist engagement with Foucault’s later works such as his ethical framework ‘technologies of self’ and the ideas of philosophers including Bourdieu (1990, 1991, 1998) and Deleuze (2006; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and feminist theorists such as Butler (1990, 1993), have been particularly important in this enterprise. More specifically, they have enabled analyses of the ways some women engage in practices of resistance and/or actively challenge binary opposites (e.g. masculinity/femininity, aggressive/passive, strong/weak) via their participation in sport, exercise and various forms of physical activity. For example, the works of Caudwell (1999, 2003), Cox and Thompson (2000), Heywood and Dworkin (2003), Krane (2001) and Obel (1996), to name but a few, have highlighted how women’s participation in sport, and more particularly traditionally defined ‘masculine’ sports such as football (soccer) and body-building, works to challenge the gender order and social constructions of heteronormative femininity.

Further, in drawing upon poststructuralist theories, numerous feminist sociologists and cultural studies scholars have demonstrated how some female athletes are engaging with power relationships in sport in increasingly creative and productive ways and are embracing opportunities to practice particular freedoms within the limits of their sporting and physical cultural contexts. For some women, this includes consciously positioning themselves against more traditional forms of femininity and constructing alternative feminine identities in and through their participation in sports such as rugby (Broad, 2001; Chase, 2006), skateboarding (Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2005), surfing (Olive, 2013; Roy, 2013) and snowboarding (Thorpe, 2008, 2009) and their engagement in fitness practices more broadly (Markula, 2004, 2006a).

For other feminist scholars, however, spatial inquiry has provided a useful point of departure for the exploration of women’s participation in sport and various forms of physical culture. Under the sway of the spatial turn, with its emphasis on “the reassertion of space into social theory” (Warf & Arias, 2009, p. 5), a small group of feminist sport sociologists and queer theorists have begun to ask new and important questions about women’s gendered and sexualized sporting experiences, and in so doing, have extended their theoretical foci to consider the complex nexus between physically active female bodies, social

relations *and* space. Indeed, there is a “sort of ‘disciplinary’ synthesis” (Bale, 2000, p. 171) occurring between sociological, cultural and geographical feminist studies of sport, such that there is now a growing body of feminist scholarship engaging with spatial theory in order to develop understandings of the spatialized (geographical) dimensions of women’s embodied sporting, exercise and movement-related experiences. That is, research that accounts for the ways in which sport spaces produce, reproduce and express normative discourse and relations of power (Valentine, 1993).

This thesis contributes to, and importantly builds upon, this relatively small but insightful corpus of research via a Lefebvrian spatial analysis of New Zealand women’s netball participation. More particularly, in drawing upon Lefebvre’s spatial dictum, specifically his theory of the (social) production of (social) space, I examine how women’s netball bodies influence and are influenced “by the environment in which they exist and the social relations evinced” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 85). In other words, I explore the mutually constitutive relationship between space, power and women’s everyday, lived experiences of this sport.

The remainder of this chapter is, therefore, divided into three key sections. First, I detail the development of a ‘geography of sport’ before introducing the recent sport studies scholarship that focuses on women’s sporting and movement experiences as they relate to the notion of ‘space’. Importantly, for the purposes of this chapter, this includes analyses that intersect sociological, cultural, queer and geographical perspectives. Here, I discuss the contributions of this literature, highlight the concepts and theories that sustain spatial analyses of women’s physical cultural participation, and demonstrate the scarcity of geographically infused studies of women’s sport that engage *explicitly* and *intently* with Lefebvre’s spatial theory. In so doing, I position my project within, and describe how it builds upon “the developing spatial research foci” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 12) with regards to critical examinations of women’s gendered and sexualized experiences of sport. Secondly, I outline Lefebvre’s critique of spatial inquiry, his (re)conceptualization of space and the aims of his spatioLOGY. I then introduce his three-pronged conceptual framework for the study of the production of (social)

space before highlighting the utility of this approach for exploring the intersections between physically active bodies, space and social relations.

Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how Lefebvre's spatial theory has informed this research project. In so doing, I detail how I have drawn upon Lefebvre's concepts and (re)read these through a feminist lens to shape my analysis of the interplay between bodies, space and power in netball. In other words, I describe how I have taken Lefebvre's spatial framework "into a feminist direction" (Kipfer, Saberi & Wieditz, 2013, p. 125) to explore the ways in which gender and sexuality intersect with netball spaces and bodies, and thus, to reveal the "multiple ways in which identities [and power] are produced, negotiated and contested in [and through this] social space" (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 90).

### **Space, place and sporting bodies**

Critical scholars of sports and physical culture began discovering space and place at a similar time as geographers began discovering sport (Bale, 2000). In an article titled 'The Place of 'Place' in Cultural Studies of Sports' that canvases the existing geographical work on sport at that time, John Bale (1988) notes that even though geographers had arrived relatively late "on the sport studies scene", interest in sports geography was indeed growing, "if not yet fully legitimized" (p. 507). Early geographies of sport, however, tended to adopt empiricist or positivist philosophies, often had "a fetish of cartography" (Bale, 2000, p. 173) and focused largely on the origins and migratory flows of sport participants, the global diffusion of sport, the (re)location of sports teams/clubs, and the impacts of sports facilities on the community (Bale, 1988, 2000; see also, Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). Whilst a small number of studies adopting a more humanistic and cultural-geographic view existed (see e.g. Eichberg, 1982, 1986), approaches embracing a structuralist perspective had not yet arrived on the geographical sport studies scene (Bale, 1988). In other words, investigations into the spatiality of sport, which Wagner (1981) describes as "culture *and* geography" (as cited in Bale, 1988, p. 510, emphasis in original), were yet to be developed. Recognizing this gap, Bale (1988) urged geographers to acknowledge the ways in which spatial analyses of sport could help to disclose the meanings that people attach to

particular areas and places and to relate these meanings to other dimensions and conditions of human experience.

Five years after the publication of Bale's review and his call for a more critical analysis of the symbiosis between sport, space and place, the first journal issue in the field of sport sociology dedicated to sport and space emerged. 'Sport and Space', a double issue edited by Núria Puig and Allen Ingham and published in the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (IRSS) in 1993, was born out of two earlier conference sessions (in 1983 and 1990) on this theme. It set out to address the general neglect of "the social nature of the spaces where sporting activities take place" (Puig & Ingham, 1993, p. 101) and to "build up a theoretical framework on the relations between these two social realities" (Puig & Ingham, 1993, p. 105). This issue comprised fourteen articles and broached topics such as the reformation of urban space for informal sports (Bach, 1993), issues of access to the countryside and wilderness for the purposes of leisure (Donnelly, 1993) and the development of sporting facilities in England (Bale, 1993; Metcalfe, 1993). Of these fourteen articles, only two explicitly focused on women—Klein's (1993) analysis of the relationships between urban living conditions and women's sports participation in Germany and Pfister's (1993) investigation of women's appropriation of sporting space.

The editor's introduction to the 'Sport and Space' issue clearly emphasizes its aim to account for the social construction of space and to examine space in and on sociological terms. This is most evident in the editor's insistence that "sport space is a social space" and that "space is always social" (Puig and Ingham, 1993, p. 101-102) which positions this publication at the intersection of culture and geography. Drawing from Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space* the editors put forward the idea that "almost all space in our societies is the product of human action, of ideologies, of social relations, of human and collective experiences, and so on" (Puig & Ingham, 1993, p. 102). In this way, the editors suggest that space is something that is socially produced and emphasize the significance of the body to its production (van Ingen, 2002, 2003). They also emphasize the need to consider the relationship between space and the exercise of power in society.

Yet, the body and human and collective experiences are noticeably absent among the publications featured in this issue. As van Ingen (2003) notes, whilst

contributing valuable knowledge, several papers limit the focus on social space to one of physical space (or place) via their analysis of concrete geographies and sports facilities (Eichberg, 1993, Metcalfe, 1993; Nagbøl, 1993; Puig, Martinez del Castillo, Pellegrino & Lambert, 1993). Further, there is, what van Ingen (2002) terms, “a striking lack of engagement” (p. 45) with theorists of space and with work from cultural/human geography, even though the need to integrate space into social theory had begun to be outlined by the early 1990s (see e.g. Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1991; McDowell, 1983, 1992; McDowell & Massey, 1984; Soja, 1989; Women and Geography Study Group, 1984). Indeed, any attention to the notion of ‘space’ within this volume is largely concerned with a particular sporting locale, rather than with space as an active social force, determinative, or process of production (van Ingen, 2002, 2003) such that space and place are largely regarded as synonymous. Further, there is very little evidence of thinking around the ways in which “societies or collectives produce a space and reproduce their power relationships through this same space” (Puig & Ingham, 1993, p. 102) despite this being discussed as a focus of the publication. However, as van Ingen (2002, 2003) points out, John Bale’s (1993) paper, ‘The Spatial Development of the Modern Stadium’, is a noteworthy exception to some of these critiques, and although it is not focused specifically on the sporting experiences of women, it warrants further critical attention here given its emphasis on the relations between bodies and spaces, its engagement with cultural geography, and its influence on shaping the future direction of contemporary spatial inquiries of sport more broadly.

Bale (1993) aims “to explore and interpret the territorialization of the British football stadium” (p. 121) and in so doing, to demonstrate the ways in which stadiums are highly and intentionally territorialized spaces. Although Bale’s study focuses on physical or concrete space, what he terms ‘intra-stadium space’, his work is significant in that it attempts to move beyond the physical to explore “how bodies are regulated and constrained in space” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 46). Adopting an approach informed by cultural geographic work on territoriality and Michel Foucault’s (1979, 1980) ideas about power and the surveillance and control of bodies via the Panopticon, Bale examines the evolution of the design of the football stadium—particularly how those who govern the game have altered the space in which it occurs. More specifically, he describes how “an activity

which was initially undertaken in open spaces with ‘permeable’ boundaries and where control was openly and sometimes brutally enforced” has come to be “contained within highly segmented and specialized spaces and with increasingly invisible forms of control” (Bale, 1993, p. 123). What is more, this research also explores the relationship between power and the body via an investigation into the ways in which those who use the stadium interact with this space and resist the restrictions imposed by design. Bale’s emphasis in this work, therefore, is not only on a particular sporting place but also on socio-spatial relations such that he positions football stadia as more than simply places in which people play and watch the game. Yet, what sets Bale’s work apart from other early sporting geographies, is not only his appreciation of the connection between bodies and space, but his insistence of the centrality of the spatial dimension of sport, that is, that space is an important point of departure for the development of critical knowledge (van Ingen, 2002, 2003)

Building on the IRSS special issue and Bale’s geography of sporting stadiums, numerous scholars have turned their attention to producing critical ‘geographies of sport’. In fact, the spatial analysis of sport has recently gained momentum among a number of (sometimes overlapping) academic disciplines, not just geography but also history, sociology, gender studies and cultural studies. As such, there has been a recent surge in the number of spatially infused studies seeking to explore the ways discourses of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and the body more broadly, are (re)produced and lived in and through various spaces and places of sport (see Bale, 1994; Borden, 2001; Friedman, 2010; Fusco, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; McCormack, 1999; Newman & Giardina, 2008; Silk, 2004; Stoddart, 2010; Tervo, 2001; van Ingen, 2002, 2004; Vertsinsky & Bale, 2004; Waitt, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008; Waitt & Warren, 2008). For example, Waitt (2008) has explored the dynamic relationships between space, gender and surfing bodies via research with youth who surf the breaks of the Illawara in New South Wales, Australia (see also Waitt & Warren, 2008). Similarly, Stoddart (2010) has investigated how the social construction of skiing landscapes shapes gendered power relations, and more particularly, how specific spaces for skiing are constructed as masculinized spaces. Fusco (2005, 2006a, 2006b) has also paid attention to the relationship between subjectivities and space via her spatial

ethnography of locker rooms and her examinations of the discursive constructions of subjectivity, health and the body, which take place in this sporting space.

These geographically framed studies have shed important light on the relationships between bodies and spaces and the ways in which “social processes continue to produce and reproduce the worlds we live [play and move] in” (Borden, 2001, p. 9). For the purposes of this review, however, I am interested specifically in that literature which is dedicated to the spatialized dimensions of women’s sport and physical culture, and more particularly, to examining the gendered, sexed and sexualized nature of the sporting spaces in which women find themselves. It is this work, therefore, that forms the basis of this review and is explored further and in greater depth throughout the remainder of this section.

### ***Spatializing female sporting bodies***

Among the burgeoning geographical analyses of sport, there is a handful of research dedicated specifically to understanding the spatialized dimensions of women’s participation in movement culture and the relationship between female sporting bodies and space. Indeed, some feminist geographers, sociologists and queer theorists are not only interrogating the materiality of sporting spaces but also the relations between sport, space and place in an effort to develop an understanding of the ways that normative and regulatory discourses become visible in the spaces where sport takes place. In so doing, a small number of feminist scholars have turned their critical gaze towards how subjectivity is discursively constructed in and through particular sport spaces, and hence, how sporting spaces and bodies are discursively constructed as gendered, sexed and sexualized. Recent studies by Caudwell (2007), Johnston (1996, 1998), Lambert (2009), McEwan (2002), Muller (2007; see also Muller Myrdahl, 2009) and Ravel and Rail (2007) are of particular interest in this regard.

In her ethnographic analysis of female body-builders, Johnston (1996, 1998) explores the social relations and dimensions of power operating within gym spaces and how these spaces act as a site of averment, identity formation and disruption of cultural norms for women who partake in the practice of body-building. Using the work of Foucault (1976, 1980) and feminist theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz (1987, 1992, 1993, 1994), Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Julia

Kristeva (1982), she examines how the training environment of the female body-builder (the 'hard core gym') constitutes "a material and discursive environment that reworks bodies in the feminine/masculine binary" (Johnston, 1996, p. 327). Johnston (1998) argues that space is bound up with power/knowledge relationships, and therefore, gym spaces are central to the identity and subjectivity of gym users. The constitutive relationship between the body and its environment or the ways "spatialities are constitutive of specific subjectivities" (Rose, 1995, as cited in Johnston, 1998, p. 247), she observes, provides an important lens through which to explore contradictory characteristics of the performative corporeality of female body-builders and the identities that are constructed in and through women's participation in this physical cultural practice. Her research highlights the ways in which particular gym spaces are promoted to particular bodies—women to aerobic and circuit training areas and men to the weights room—and thus, how bodies not only shape the gym environment, but are also shaped by it. In this way, Johnston reveals that female body-building bodies, that is, women who occupy the weights room and actively pursue opportunities to increase their muscle size/mass, simultaneously deconstruct, reconstruct, challenge and resist stereotypic and hegemonic notions of sexuality, sex and corporeality: at once, the muscled (built) female body-builder fits the regulatory notion of a docile body, transgresses this by resisting dominant notions of sex and sexuality and invokes abject reactions—"feelings of complete horror as well as fascination" (Johnston, 1996, p. 337).

Similarly, McEwan (2002) draws on feminist critiques of the Cartesian subject (e.g. Grosz, 1993; Longhurst, 1997; Rose, 1993) to problematize gendered binaries and to explore how distinctly gendered golfing spaces, practices and boundaries influence women's experiences of this sport and their opportunities to occupy and enjoy particular golfing environments (e.g. clubrooms, bars). For example, McEwan discusses the struggles female golfers' experience claiming space (and facilities) in golfing clubhouses, how they are allocated their own 'feminine' areas and thus, how they are segregated from those spaces considered more 'masculine' or exclusive to men such as 'dirty' bars and main entrances to the clubhouse. McEwan (2002) presents an analysis that reveals, "how discourses of golf mobilize the hierarchical dualisms of mind/body, male/female, masculine/feminine and public/private" (p. 104). Importantly, she also

demonstrates how some female golfers challenge and modify these gender dichotomies and ideas about male/female spaces at certain times and in certain places such as during tournaments when women are able to access and use spaces such as clubrooms, locker rooms and bars that are typically reserved for men, thus, highlighting the notion of subjectivity as “necessarily embodied, fractured, multiple, and highly contradictory” (McEwan, 2002, p. 91).

Research on female sexual minorities has equally demonstrated the importance of spatializing women’s movement-related experiences. In her study of a lesbian-identified soccer team in England, Caudwell (2007) examines the notion of space and the diversity of sex-gender-sexuality experiences via research that focuses on ‘stigmatized’ players: the ‘femme-inine’ player/defender and the transsexual player/striker. Here, Caudwell (2007) employs feminist-queer theorizing and a feminist geographic understanding of space to explore “the social relations that exist within lesbian sporting communities” (p. 183) and to understand how women’s football bodies take up (occupy) football space. Caudwell argues that in this ‘out’ lesbian team space, ‘butch’ is considered to be the authentic lesbian-gender, whilst a femme lesbian identity and ‘femme-ininity’ work to disturb the normativity of the order woman-masculine-lesbian. Further, she reveals how a transsexual player is read in terms of “essentialist notions of the sexed body” (Caudwell, 2007, p. 192) that is, within dominant discourses that suggest being born a man (male-female transsexuality) offers distinct physical benefits and thereby gives her an unfair advantage. Caudwell (2007) has observed that despite the challenge to heteronormativity that a lesbian football community represents, there remains evidence of normative practices in this space that “devalue femme-ininity and transsexuality, and, at times, deny some players access to positions on the field of play” (p. 192).

Lambert (2009) also considers how marginalized lesbian identities are experienced, lived, constituted, negotiated and contested in sport via her analysis of the 2002 Sydney Gay Games. Drawing inspiration from queerly theorized empirical work in feminist geography that explores the intersections between identity, place and space and Thrift’s (1999) non-representational theory, Lambert investigates the sociocultural meanings of spatiality via interviews with five women from her own Gay Games soccer team. Her research is underpinned by the

notion “that places and people constitute each other materially, psychically, and emotionally” (Lambert, 2009, p. 332) and she uses this idea to understand how the Gay Games experience operated as a significant place and event in these women’s lives, and thus, played a crucial part in the participants’ ongoing and complex process of sexual identity formation. Lambert’s (2009) research demonstrates how ‘selves’ and particular places “come to matter(ialize) (to feel, remember and speak) in ‘queer’ ways” (p. 323), that is, how bodies and selves are affected by the sensory and spatial intricacies of particular physical cultural spaces and events.

Employing an approach inspired by poststructuralism and queer theory, Ravel and Rail (2007) examine the experiences of non-heterosexual women in sport via an analysis that investigates the construction of a ‘gaie’<sup>5</sup> sport space in Quebec, Canada. They not only discuss the ways in which non-heterosexual women convey their sexuality in sport spaces, but also how “in/ex/clusion discourses are inscribed in space” and how “subjects are impacted by and, in turn, impact these discourses” (Ravel & Rail, 2007, p. 402). In this way, Ravel and Rail reveal the normalization of gaie sexuality and how gaie sport spaces are discursively constructed in such a way as to silence the presence of those who do not identify with this term (e.g. lesbian, bisexual and queer individuals as well as those individuals who refuse labels altogether). Unlike Caudwell’s study (2007), in which she found a butch hegemony within an ‘out’ lesbian soccer space, Ravel and Rail observe the opposite, whereby gaie players (e.g. those who adopt a more conventionally feminine version of lesbian sexuality) tend to constitute the ‘norm’ and the butch female athlete is seen as ‘other’. As such, Ravel and Rail (2007) claim that gaie sport space is “reinforced and secured by the double marginalization of ‘butchy’ and—to a lesser extent—‘not *gaie*-enough’ women” (p. 416, emphasis in original). What is also revealed here is the importance of studying space, whereby Ravel and Rail’s (2007) research not only reveals the prioritization of particular non-heterosexual identities among lesbian sport participants and the ways women occupy these spaces, but also the role of space in (re)producing discourse and relations of power.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ravel and Rail (2007) ‘gaie’ is a Francophone term that is considered to represent (linguistically) the feminine form of ‘gai’—the Francophone translation of ‘gay’.

In contrast to Caudwell (2007), Lambert (2009) and Ravel and Rail (2007), whose work has explored the experiences of women with ‘non-conventional’ sexualities in non-heterosexual sport spaces, Muller (2007; see also Muller Myrdahl, 2009) examines the experiences of lesbian women via a spatial analysis of the (hetero)normative game space of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). Using two case studies, a kiss-in protest organized by lesbian fans during a game in New York and the experiences of lesbian fans from Minnesota, Muller focuses on the socio-spatiality of WNBA venues and how “heteronormativity is naturalized, as well as accepted and resisted by lesbian fans” (Muller, 2007, p. 197). In so doing, she utilizes a feminist geographic framework to illustrate the contradictions within WNBA game spaces and how these spaces are produced. More particularly, she examines the role of the venue and media in silencing lesbian fans via the promotion of ‘family-friendliness’ and the celebration of a heterosexual image. To this end, Muller (2007) concludes that “WNBA spaces are material illustrations of contested terrain: they are spaces in which the lesbian fan is both welcomed and disregarded” in both implicit and explicit ways “through stated league values, marketing techniques, and game day practices” (p. 200).

These studies are invaluable in that they open up important ways in which to think about and connect with the relationships between women’s moving bodies and the sporting spaces they inhabit. On the basis of my review, however, I conclude that there exists a tendency among this work to prioritize social relations and the theorization of how these act on women’s bodies in sporting spaces. For example, a number of these studies focus on the ways in which social relations *exist* within spaces of sport or how women’s bodies are *affected by* the dimensions of power operating on bodies in physical cultural spaces. In this way, less attention has typically been afforded to the relationships *between* different types of space or to how space is actively produced and the role of the body in this process (Listerborn, 2002; Merrifield, 2000). Johnston (1996, 1998) and Muller’s (2007; Muller Myrdahl, 2009) work are exceptions to this trend as both of these scholars engage with the *production* of social relations and subjectivities. Nevertheless, research that explicitly considers the ways in which power relations are produced, reproduced and maintained through discursive and material practices that occur in and through spaces of sport, and how these relations of

power shape and are shaped by women participants remains limited—particularly within the sociology of sport. Therefore, research that explicates the dialectical relationship between bodies, space and social relations, or the ways in which “space is both the ever-changing product of, and productive of, social relations” (Muller Myrdahl, 2011, p. 157) and how the lived body produces space and is simultaneously “constructed and inscribed by the production of space” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 97) can contribute to and even build upon some of this work.

Indeed, according to Bill Hillier (1996), “space and spatial configurations are not just abstract ideas with which we engage at a conscious level, but also constitute the media, or ‘fabric’, through which thinking occurs” (as cited in Listerborn, 2002, p. 41). What he means by this is that space, in both its concrete and imagined forms, can never be separated from how we experience, think about and live in the world, and thus, this symbiotic relationship between bodies, spaces and social relations must be acknowledged and importantly, accounted for. What may be particularly useful for socio-spatial studies of women’s sporting and physical cultural participation, therefore, is a thorough analysis of the interrelationships between physical space (nature), mental space (formal abstractions about space), *and* social space (the space of human action and conflict and sensory phenomena), that is, how these various forms or types of space interact with, shape and (re)produce one another (Merrifield, 2000). An interdisciplinary approach to space that simultaneously considers the ways in which relations of power both shape spaces and places and are constituted spatially and how we “react to and interact with the physical environments we inhabit, which both provide the context for, and constitute, our social relations and personal experiences” (Listerborn, 2002, p. 42) is of particular value in this enterprise.

For some sport scholars, Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) theory of the production of space goes a long way toward incorporating these ideas in that it provides a systematic and incisive framework for “understanding how bodies and identities are always and inevitably mediated through space” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 99; see also, van Ingen, 2002, 2003). Whilst some of the existing spatial research on women’s sport situates itself within a broader Lefebvrian

understanding of space, that is, “as fluid, constructed, and constantly altered” (Ravel & Rail, 2007, p. 405) and where social relations are produced, maintained and contested, none of this research establishes a strong connection to Lefebvre’s spatial framework or engages “in a spatial imagination that reflects an *explicitly* Lefebvorean spatial approach” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 44, emphasis in original; see also van Ingen, 2003). Further, Muller’s (2007) work, which examines the social production of power relations within spaces of the WNBA, overlooks Lefebvre’s dialectical spatial framework. Lefebvre’s spatiology, and particularly his concepts of the production of social space, therefore, remain noticeably absent among the efforts of feminists to understand, explore and theorize the gendered, sexed and sexualized dimensions of women’s participation in and embodied experiences of sporting and physical cultural spaces.

Recently, sport sociologists Cathy van Ingen and Michael Friedman (see van Ingen, 2002, 2003; Friedman & van Ingen, 2011) have called for engagement with Lefebvre’s spatial theory in order to examine the interconnections between social space, power, and the moving body and to “uncover and narrate the socio-spatial production of identity” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 90). Applying Lefebvorean theory to her analysis of an LGBT runners group, van Ingen (2003) suggests his work offers a valuable theoretical tool “to explore the production of space, place the body at the centre of inquiry and explore the ways in which socially constructed differences are materialized in social space” (p. 207). Lefebvre’s work has also been applied to investigate the social production of sport spaces such as Washington Nationals Park (Friedman & Andrews, 2010; Friedman, 2010), the spatial experiences of skateboarders (Borden, 2001), bicyclists (Morhayim, 2012) and parkour participants (Kidder, 2012) and earthquake affected sporting and leisure spaces (Thorpe, 2013). According to Friedman and van Ingen (2011), Lefebvre’s extensive work on space and his understanding of the relationship between bodies and spaces offers a means to explore more deeply “the power relations that are created and reproduced through space and the body” (p. 99) in myriad forms of physical culture. His theory, they suggest, provides a systematic analytical framework that not only acknowledges, but also, importantly, helps to unravel, the *mutually constitutive* and ongoing relationships between the moving body, space and social relations.

With the work of Friedman and van Ingen and other scholars who have applied Lefebvre's theory to their analyses of the production of sport spaces in mind, I see much value in a Lefebvrian spatial approach for building upon and extending the foundational work of existing feminist geographies of women's sport. More particularly, I argue that Lefebvre's spatial theory provides an important theoretical platform from which to examine the spatialized dimensions of women's sport and represent the social and material dimensions of their sporting lives. As an extension of the aforementioned research, I offer Lefebvrian spatial theory as a worthwhile theoretical schema for examining the lives and experiences of female netballers in New Zealand and the intersections between gender, sexuality, space and netball bodies. Thus, what sets my work apart from the existing literature on the socio-spatial experiences of women in sports and physical culture is not only its contextual location within the traditionally feminine space of netball in New Zealand and its focus on a multitude of different netball bodies, but also my use of a Lefebvrian production-oriented theoretical perspective on space. It is in this direction that I now take this chapter via a discussion of Lefebvre's unique (re)conceptualization of space, and importantly, his analytical framework for investigating the production of spatial and social relations.

### **Henri Lefebvre and *The Production of Space***

To speak of 'producing space' sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it. Questions immediately arise here: what spaces? And what does it mean to speak of 'producing space'? (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 15).

Henri Lefebvre is recognized among the foremost spatial thinkers and is renowned as one of France's most influential social theorists (Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2002). He was a neo-Marxist and existentialist philosopher, a sociologist interested in urban and rural life and a theorist of the state, capital and of social space (Shields, 2010). Lefebvre published work in a wide array of fields and alongside a number of prominent social theorists more familiar to Anglo-scholars, including Lacan, Foucault, Satre, Debord, Althusser and Baudrillard, to name but a few (Stewart, 1995; Shields, 1999; van Ingen, 2002). In his highly productive

and prolific seven-decade long career, he generated over 300 academic works, publishing more than 60 books (two published posthumously) on topics ranging from dialectical materialism and the sociology of Marx to urban revolution. His work on the production and regulation of social space, however, is perhaps best known among English speakers and arguably marks the keystone of Lefebvre's theoretical contributions. As Stanek (2011) puts it, "no concept is more attached to the name 'Henri Lefebvre' than that of 'the production of space'" (p. 81).

It is important to note that the concept of space has been considered by a number of social theorists whose work has examined the dynamics of power relations in social life. For example, in their theorizing of social relations, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have all (in various ways and to various degrees) engaged with the notion of space. Giddens (1989) argued that "we cannot speak about space without talking of the spatial attributes of a substantive phenomenon" (p. 280), whilst in his later work Foucault (1993) observed the ways "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (p. 168). Similarly, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus', which refers to the "ensemble of dispositions" (p. 91; see also Bourdieu, 1989) that shape action and perception and occur when people form specific codes of spatial performance through social situations, enabled him to begin to explore the "complex understandings of the interplay of social structures (fields) and individual agency" (McNay, 1999, p. 101).

Despite this theoretical interest in the notion of space among a number of influential and oft-cited social theorists, however, it has arguably been the work of Henri Lefebvre that has represented the most comprehensive attempt "to refashion social theory to take into account the reflexive relationship between space and social action" (Gothum & Brumley, 2002, p. 270; see also Soja, 1996). In fact, Lefebvre is considered by some to have been "more influential than any other scholar in opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality" (Soja, 1996, p. 6). Importantly, whilst Lefebvre was concerned with social interaction and operations of power, it was primarily via an analysis of these *in* space that he believed could produce a critical examination of 'everyday life'. In this way, Lefebvre's oeuvre differs from that of most social theorists in

the ways he made space “an *explicit* focus of his work” (Beebe, Davis & Gleadle, 2012, p. 527, emphasis added).

Lefebvre dedicated a great deal of his philosophical writings to understanding the importance of (the production of) space. This idea runs throughout a number of his publications including *La survie du capitalisme; la re-production des rapports de production* (*Survival of Capitalism* - 1976) and *The Right to the City* (1968 translated in 1996) but is best espoused in the better known *La Production de l'espace* (*The Production of Space*), which is largely regarded as the pinnacle of Lefebvre’s spatial analysis. *The Production of Space*—originally published in French in 1974 and later translated into English in 1991—is based upon a lifetime of Lefebvre’s work but represents a preliminary inquiry into the concept of space. It comprises themes that interested Lefebvre throughout much of his life such as alienation and mystification, a critique of daily life, and importantly, the production of space. Considered “an intensely political document” (Harvey, 1991, p. 431), it is a complex work, simultaneously historical, philosophical, semiotic, and Marxist. Not surprisingly, therefore, Lefebvre’s theorization of space is difficult to summarize and is widely considered a metaphilosophy due to the fact that it engages in a broad and extensive range of social theory and philosophy (Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2003). As Unwin (2000) rightly points out, reading *The Production of Space* can be likened to “walking across quicksand, or trying to find the end of a rainbow” (p. 14) as Lefebvre attempts to make complex what is taken for granted and to encourage the reader to problematize his or her own understandings of ‘space’. Importantly, however, what *is* clear about Lefebvre’s spatial approach is the importance of understanding the complexities and intricacies of space itself.

*The Production of Space* begins with a critique of how space is understood, and thus, has come to be theorized. In particular, Lefebvre identifies what he sees as the shortcomings of current spatial theories that rely on “spatial metaphors to identify the spatial imagination”, but fail to “clearly explicate the way in which space is conceptualized” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 13). This discussion is embedded in Lefebvre’s critical reading of the accounts of space in philosophy, the sciences and architectural theory. He questions what he saw as the inability of the French philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s to provide the foundation for a science capable

of producing something more than “either mere descriptions which never achieve analytical, much less theoretical, status, or else fragments and cross-sections of space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 7; see also Stanek, 2011). In critiquing the underdevelopment of spatial thinking, Lefebvre (1991) recognizes and laments the prevailing tendency within spatial theory, which he suggests compartmentalizes space and breaks it up into fragments. According to Lefebvre (1991):

It enumerates the things, the various objects, that space contains. Specializations divide space among them and act upon its truncated parts, setting up mental barriers and practico-social frontiers. Thus, architects are assigned architectural space as their (private) property, economists come into possession of economic space, geographers get their own ‘place in the sun’, and so on. The *ideologically* dominant tendency divides space up into parts and parcels (p. 89, emphasis in original).

In this way, Lefebvre understood spatial theory as perpetuating “limited and unproblematized evocations of spatiality” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 14). Knowledges of space, he suggests, “wavers between description and dissection” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 91): there are descriptions of things in space and of pieces of space whilst fragments are removed for analysis from social space as a whole. Accordingly, argues Lefebvre (1991):

We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth. . . Thus Michel Foucault can calmly assert that ‘knowledge [*savoir*] is also the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse’. Foucault never explains what space it is he is referring to, nor how it bridges the gap between the theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, between the mental and the social, between the space of the philosophers and the space of people who deal with material things (p. 3-4, emphasis in original).

Certainly, what is clear from these quotations is that Lefebvre opposed the reductionist theorization of space that examines not space itself, but things in space. He exhibited strident objections to the idea of space as “a passive receptacle” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 90) and thus, remained wary of the inclination of scholars to “fetishize space as a mental thing, a container or place where social

action [is] played out” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 202). The problem with this type of scholarship, claims Lefebvre (1991), is that although it may give rise to an understanding of what exists *in* space or even help to form a discourse *on* space, it cannot ever provide the basis for a *knowledge of* space.

According to Stanek (2011), Lefebvre had identified a theoretical weakness that stood out against the intensity of debates about space at that time as well as with concepts of space derived from phenomenology (Bachelard) and psychoanalysis (Lacan), spatial conceptualizations of ideology (Baurillard, Debord), power (Foucault, Deleuze and Guatarri) and text (Derrida, Kristeva, Barthes). Lefebvre insisted that the relationships between these multiple spaces are not adequately theorized: on the one hand, structuralism assumes their identity, and on the other, poststructuralists overstate the discrepancies between them (Smith & Katz, 1993; Stanek, 2011). Put simply, Lefebvre argues that work with a focus *on* space is not sufficient for an *understanding of* space. Without such a knowledge, he suggests, it is inevitable that we transfer onto the level of discourse or mental space a large quantity of the attributes, characteristics and properties of what is in fact social space (Lefebvre, 1991).

Undoubtedly, for Lefebvre it is essential that an epistemology of space be clearly developed, and in order to develop this knowledge, it is necessary “to break with the widespread understanding of space as imagined as an independent material reality existing ‘in itself’” (Schmid, 2008, p. 28). Lefebvre insists it is wrong to think of space “as an autonomous determinant, separate from the structure of social relations” and thus, “according to an old and facile ‘history versus structure or logic’ opposition” (Ross, 1988, p. 9). Against such a view, Lefebvre uses the concept of the *production of space*, a view that considers space as intimately connected with social reality, to demonstrate that space can never operate as an epistemological starting point (Schmid, 2008). Instead, Lefebvre argues that space should be considered one of the universal forms of social practice, just as commodity and labour are in the works of Marx, who is the main influence in his arguments (Stanek, 2011). In this manner, space, Lefebvre (1991) urges, must not be thought of as something “simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to be filled” but rather “a social product...a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (p. 24).

Importantly, Lefebvre's revolutionary reinterpretation of space also privileges the body, and thus, aligns well with a Physical Cultural Studies perspective, which also works to reclaim the body and subsequently places it at the centre of inquiry (Andrews, 2008; Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). In her examination of the contributions of *The Production of Space*, Stewart (1995) suggests "Lefebvre treats space as a *product* of the human body, as a perception *and* as a conception, not simply as a physical imposition of a concept, or a space *upon* the human body" (p. 610, emphasis in original). Simonsen (2005) also suggests that Lefebvre's theory represents his efforts to generate an "anatomy of space" that is produced by material, living bodies and which focuses on the body's role in the formation of a "sensory-sensual space" (p. 4). In *The Production of Space*, therefore, Lefebvre engages politically and ideologically with the decorporealization of philosophy and social theory. In Lefebvre's (1991) own words:

Western philosophy has *betrayed* the body: it has actively participated in the great process of metaphorization that has *abandoned* the body, and it has *denied* the body. The living body, being at once 'subject' and 'object', cannot tolerate such conceptual division, and consequently philosophical concepts fall into the category of the 'signs of non-body'. (p. 407, emphasis in original)

For Lefebvre, theorizing the body inevitably involves a focus on space, and reciprocally, theorizing space involves attention to the body (Simonsen, 2005).

Although this approach has much in common with other postmodern perspectives, it is important to note the differences between the work of Lefebvre and other social theorists (van Ingen, 2003). For example, both Stewart (1995) and van Ingen (2002) suggest there are some resemblances between a Lefebvrian and a Foucauldian project—particularly as both position the human body as essential to understanding the relationship between power and space (see also Ryan, 2010; Soja, 1996). As van Ingen (2002) points out, however, there are important differences that need to be brought to bear on discussions of Lefebvre's and Foucault's theoretical dictums.

Despite, never fully developing his conceptualizations of space in great depth, Foucault was nonetheless concerned with understanding spatiality and he

maintained that any analysis of power must equally appreciate the role of space (Smith & Katz, 1993; Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2003). Yet, in Foucault's regime of modern power space is largely understood to be "an architectural code or grid for defining the body" (Stewart 1995, p. 609-610). Indeed, throughout his major works, Foucault seems to deal somewhat separately with the spaces of institutions (physical space), with control and surveillance, the space of the body and with epistemological space (Lefebvre, 1991; Smethurst, 2000). Further, whilst Foucault was interested in the formation and enactment of power, he develops only a very limited theorization of the relationship between space and power and his work falls short of developing a nuanced conceptualization of resistance (Stewart, 1995; van Ingen, 2002). Put differently, in Foucauldian terms the 'space' between the metaphorical and physical (e.g. social space) is radically denied (Smith & Katz, 1993). In this way, Foucault, "who so brilliantly excavated the deployment of power in the institutions of everyday life and the mundane practices associated with them" (Smith & Katz, 1993, p. 72) neglects to consider how space and socio-spatial relations are produced, reproduced, accepted and resisted by social agents.

Contrastingly, for Lefebvre, social reality is not something that simply exists 'in' space, or is coincidentally spatial. Rather, Lefebvre was adamant that social reality "is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes" (Soja, 1996, p. 46). Space is an object of political struggle, "a constitutive component of human agency and identity, and a facilitator as well as a constraint upon action" (Gothum & Brumley, 2002, p. 269). In fact, Lefebvre insisted that a theory of the production of space underpins "a politics of resistance that must be (and indeed, can only be) a 'politics of space'" (Shields, 1999, p. 4). From this perspective, relations of power, domination, resistance and agency do not occur aspatially, but are essentially formed, shaped, negotiated and contested in and through space. Furthermore, space becomes reconceptualized not as a lifeless, inert object, "but as organic and fluid and alive; it has a pulse, it palpitates, it flows and collides with other spaces" (Merrifield, 2000, p. 171) and importantly, with bodies.

Certainly, for Lefebvre, space holds potential for bodies, via imagination and action, to resist operations of power and to generate social change. Thus, whilst Lefebvre was interested in the production and use of social space, the

capabilities, capacities and creativities of the human body were also central to his work. As Lefebvre (1976) explains, “the body, at the very heart of space and of the discourses of power, is irreducible and subversive. It is the body which is the point of return” (as cited in Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 90). Hence, for Lefebvre, the body plays a key role in the production of difference and is a vital component with respect to practices of resistance (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). Instead of defining the body through space, Lefebvre examines the ways bodies produce space and importantly, the ways this ability to produce social spaces provides opportunities for agency and resistance (Blum & Nast, 1996; van Ingen, 2002). From this perspective, it is not only space that holds the potential for resistance, but individuals themselves who struggle against and resist domination in all manner of space.

Undeniably, Lefebvre argued for an ‘embodied space’ that begins to unite disjunctions between the material and representational and asserts the “importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a centre of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world” (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003, p. 2). It is this notion of creative, moving bodies and the body’s ability to resist domination and to transform the spaces and circumstances in which power operates that is integral to Lefebvre’s spatioLOGY, and to the potential of Lefebvre’s spatial theory for critical studies of sport more particularly (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). Importantly, few theorists, including Foucault, ever made this “super-charged relationship between space, knowledge, [the body] and power so explicit and far-reaching” (Soja, 1996, p. 32).

What *The Production of Space* represents, therefore, is Lefebvre’s (1991) insistence on the need for what he terms a “unitary theory” (p. 11) between different dimensions of space, which had, up until this point, been considered separately in Western intellectual practice (Merrifield, 1993). This theory, attempts to “both reconnect elements that have been separated and to replace confusion by clear distinctions; to rejoin the severed and reanalyse the commingled” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 413). This involves reconciliation between physical space (nature), mental space (ideas about space) and social space (the space of the body and sensory phenomena). In other words, in his powerful treatise, Lefebvre (1991) calls for and advocates an interdisciplinary approach to

understanding space that bridges the gaps set between the mental realm on the one hand, and the physical and social realms on the other. Key to his theory is the view that the production of space can be divided into three dialectically interconnected ‘moments’ or dimensions of space.

### ***Spatial dialectics: Three ‘moments’ in The Production of Space***

The foundation of Lefebvre’s theoretical approach is his three-pronged spatial dialectic (Schmid, 2008; van Ingen, 2002) in which he attempts to “expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their generation together” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 16). Indeed, for Lefebvre (1991, p. 353), “just as white light, though uniform in appearance, may be broken down into a spectrum, space likewise decomposes when subjected to analysis”. Thus, whilst Lefebvre is often “tantalizingly vague” (Merrifield, 1993, p. 524) about most of the concepts in his work, his most explicit theorization is his deconstruction of space. Here, he identifies and breaks down three key ‘moments’ in the production of social space: spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, for Lefebvre, these three ‘moments’ are interconnected. Although, they are presented separately in his work, Lefebvre stresses that these forms of social space are actually inseparable: each is “influencing and being influenced by the others” (Ryan, 2010, p. 5), that is, they are enmeshed, intertwining and overlapping in the overall production of space (Zhang, 2006). However, they are also capable of producing space in their own right. For the purposes of understanding Lefebvre’s spatial approach, I now outline each of these three moments more explicitly and in greater depth.

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<sup>6</sup> In *The Production of Space* (1991) the term ‘representational spaces’ denotes the third ‘moment’ in Lefebvre’s spatial theory. However, many geographers, sociologists and cultural studies scholars, including Rob Shields, Kirsten Simonsen, Edward Soja and Cathy van Ingen, have adopted the term ‘spaces of representation’ to more clearly distinguish it from ‘representations of space’. I too see value in this distinction, and thus, use the term ‘spaces of representation’ to more clearly distinguish between these two spatial ‘moments’.

*Spatial practice (perceived space)*

Spatial practice refers to “the production and use of material or physical space” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 202). It represents the built environment or the “material dimension of social activity and interaction” (Schmid, 2008, p. 36). According to Lefebvre, spatial practice can be thought of as space that is perceived: it is material, tangible, concrete and physical (Elden, 2004). Lefebvre describes perceived space in terms of concrete geographies such as the street corner, marketplace, shopping centre or other public places. In this way, perceived spaces can be empirically located and mapped. They relate to physical landscapes, or “bounded space” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 202) and could, therefore, include gymnasiums, stadia and playing fields, or more specifically, the site of a netball centre—the courts, women’s changing sheds, car parks, and canteen areas.

Importantly, however, spatial practice not only refers to the physical and built environment, but also to the routine activities of everyday life that occur within it. Thus, Lefebvre’s conceptualization of spatial practice extends beyond the concrete or material places that we inhabit and includes our everyday behaviour and routines (van Ingen, 2003). As Shields (1999) explains, spatial practice presupposes the use of the body and often describes the everyday, tedious and unreflective practices of everyday life. These routines are the behaviours and actions that occur in social space and which act to produce these spaces. Lefebvre (1991) himself suggests, “modern spatial practice may be defined as the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project” (p. 38). From a sporting standpoint, movement is an undeniable form of spatial practice (van Ingen, 2003). In relation to netball specifically, passing, shooting, defending, dodging, cutting, rolling, wearing skirts and dresses, and attempting to avoid purposeful physical contact are all forms of spatial practice that actively work to produce and define the social space of netball. Netball is “a spatial ensemble” (Shields, 1999, p. 163) that requires a specific type of spatial practice.

According to Lefebvre, it is via everyday practices in these built environments that space is dialectically configured as a human and social space (Simonsen, 2005). Perceived space, therefore, embodies the interrelationship between institutional practices and everyday lived experience and routine (Simonsen, 2005). It “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular

locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” ensuring “continuity and some degree of cohesion” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33).

*Representations of space (conceived space)*

Representations of space are imagined or abstract spaces. They refer to spaces that can be ‘conceived’. Conceived space is the space that we engage with via thought, ideas and memories and is considered the dominant space in society (or mode of production): “a storehouse of epistemological power” (Soja, 1996, p. 67; see also van Ingen, 2002). Among representations of space, Lefebvre counts scientific theories of space, techniques of its control, architectural and urbanistic conventions of design, cartographic procedures, and normative discourses on space (Stanek, 2011). Representations of space, therefore give an image, and, in so doing, help to define and articulate space such that conceived space is related to the dominant ‘order’ of society, and thus, with its rules, codes, signs and various knowledges about space (Schmid, 2008; Simonsen, 2005). In describing representations of space, Lefebvre sought to draw attention to the ways spaces are conceived and constructed in and through discourse and shaped by operations of social power.

Importantly, for Lefebvre (1991) representations of space have a practical impact, that is, “they intervene in and modify spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology” (p. 42, emphasis in original). For example, a netball court is not only a physical space, but it is also laden with ideologies, discourses and knowledges. There exists a collective understanding about who occupies this space, including what seems like ‘normal’ behaviour in the space and what is tolerated (van Ingen, 2002). Representations of space, therefore, have an unquestionable role in the overall production of space and work to regulate and control spatial practices. Further, Lefebvre (1991) suggests representations of space facilitate the manipulation and formation of spaces of representation, or the ways space is lived. While spatial practice (perceived space) tends towards the visual, conceived space is dependent on texts and (re)produces regulatory discourses (Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2002).

### *Spaces of representation (lived space)*

The third strand in the spatial triad—spaces of representation, or lived space—is viewed by Lefebvre as both distinct from and encompassing the other two forms of space (Soja, 1996). It is the dialectic of spatial practice and representations of space: simultaneously a third strand which is a synthesis of the two, and a fourth, which is neither. Put differently, lived space is an embodied experience *and* the space in which people simultaneously negotiate the tensions and collision between the material reality of perceived space and the social expectations of conceived space (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). Spaces of representation are the space of experiences “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39, emphasis in original). It is the space that overlays physical space and is lived in the everyday course of life: “where the ‘dominant’ conceived space(s) and material spatial practice(s) are directly *lived*” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 20, emphasis in original). Lived space, therefore, represents Lefebvre’s attempt to disrupt ideas that assume space to be concrete, something able to be mapped, analyzed, and therefore, explained (van Ingen, 2003). Lived space combines “the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*” (Soja, 1996, p. 68, emphasis in original). It is where spatial practices and representations of space are intertwined and lived.

It is important to acknowledge that Lefebvre considered lived space both oppressive *and* enabling: “a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of production*” (1991, p. 85, emphasis in original). Indeed, lived space is where marginalization occurs and is reinforced—the site of discriminatory practices such as racism, sexism, homophobia and ageism (van Ingen, 2003). Yet, lived space simultaneously “contains potentialities” for bodies, “which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 349). Lefebvre recognizes that despite the effort of dominant groups, individuals possess the ability to “live their lives, express themselves, and perhaps...transform a space, its meanings and uses” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 96; see also, Lefebvre, 1991; van Ingen, 2003). Subsequently, lived space, is the terrain of struggle, counter-discourse, agency and resistance (Shields, 1999; Simonsen, 2005; Stewart, 1995).

### ***Lefebvre's spatial triad and 'thinking trialectically' about space***

Lefebvre's triad of spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation, or perceived, conceived and lived space, is the core of Lefebvre's spatiology and represents his attempts at a transdisciplinary theory of space (Stanek, 2011; van Ingen, 2002). Importantly, for Lefebvre, two terms were never enough and he insisted on triads in his work as a means of recognizing three (or more) elements as opposed to being limited to two (Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2002). According to Lefebvre (1991, p. 39), "relations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms. They are defined by significant effects: echoes, repercussions, mirror effects". In this way, Lefebvre's concepts of perceived, conceived and lived space are "doubly determined and correspondingly doubly designated" (Schmid, 2008, p. 29) and work to move his theory beyond dualisms and binarized logic. Further, Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triadic approach is designed to address the fact that it is never easy to return from the object (product or work) to the process that produced or created it, because as soon as "construction is completed, the scaffolding is taken down; likewise, the fate of an author's rough draft is to be torn up and tossed away" (p. 113). Lefebvre (1991) insists, therefore, that what needs to be done is to "reconstitute the process of its genesis and the development of its meaning" (p. 113). Lefebvre's penchant for thinking about these three dimensions of space as interconnected and interrelated is what Soja (1996) and van Ingen (2002) term 'thinking trialectically'.

A number of scholars have attempted to explain Lefebvre's spatial theory, and particularly his three-part approach to the analysis of social space, since the English translation of *The Production of Space* in 1991 (see e.g. Merrifield, 2000; Schmid, 2008; Shields, 1999, 2010; Stanek, 2011; Watkins, 2005). It is, arguably, Soja's (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, however, that offers the most detailed and comprehensive interpretation of Lefebvre's spatiology and his trialectic approach to spatial thinking. Thirdspace, which is Soja's (1996) conceptualization of lived space, represents "a transcending composite of all spaces" (p. 62). It encapsulates Lefebvre's view of social space as simultaneously perceived, conceived and lived and works against what van Ingen (2002) terms "theoretical closure and reductionism" (p. 21). According to Soja (1996), lived space is:

A knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centres and peripheries, the abstract and the concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in *spatial praxis* (p. 31, emphasis in original).

In this way, Lefebvre's three-part spatial theory represents what Soja (1996) suggests might best be termed "a cumulative *trialectics*" that is radically open to alternative ways of thinking about space and in so doing, "to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge" (p. 61, emphasis in original). In its essence, Lefebvre's theory represents a three-dimensional conceptualization of social reality putting forth the idea that each strand of space must be considered, and importantly theorized as ontologically and epistemologically central to the spatiality of social life, and thus, vital in understanding the ways space is produced, reproduced and lived (Schmid, 2008; Soja, 1989). From this perspective, Lefebvre suggests that each mode of thinking about space or each dimension of human spatiality—the physical, the mental, the social—must be conceptualized "as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical" (Soja, 1996, p. 65). What is more, Lefebvre insists that in order to understand lived experience it is essential that one acknowledges and importantly, understands the material and discursive space in which it occurs.

Arguably, therefore, the purpose of Lefebvre's spatial triad is to convey that space has "a complex character" (Gottdiener, 1993, p. 131) and constitutes social relations at all scales. Its aim is to "build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known" (Soja, 1996, p. 61). Thus, an understanding that space is both the medium and result of social relations is vital for a Lefebvrian inspired understanding of space (van Ingen, 2003). For Lefebvre, space is simultaneously shaped by rules and discourse, an abstraction that influences the behaviour of individuals, and finally, a medium through which the body interacts and lives among the bodies of others (Gottdiener, 1993). In other words, Lefebvre proposes a theory of space that unites the physical, mental and social in an effort to avoid reductionism and encourages us to think about the production and regulation of space and bodies in new and exciting ways. More specifically, his work inspires a particular

sensitivity to the relationship between the body, space and power.

Yet, in itself, Lefebvre's conceptual triad does not explain anything about particular spatialities or particular bodies. Indeed, Lefebvre (1991) admits that his triad is essentially a hollow, abstract device that must be applied to concrete and real life situations if it is to have any meaning or practical significance: the perceived-conceived-lived triad "loses all its force if it is treated as an abstract 'model'. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the 'immediate'), then its import is severely limited" (p. 40; see also, Merrifield, 1993). As Merrifield (2000) notes, Lefebvre's thematic triad "needs to be *embodied* with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events" (p. 175, emphasis in original).

Applied to the context of netball in New Zealand, Lefebvre's concepts enable me to begin to unpack the social production of this space, and importantly, the ways in which "spaces are inexorably linked to the social construction of dominant ideologies and to the politics of identity" (van Ingen, 2003, p. 210). They help me to understand that the geography of netball "is the outcome of an unfolding relationship between different types of space" (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003, p. 74) and offer a framework through which to assess netball for the types of power relations through which it is produced and which it reproduces, contests and those which it works to transform (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). More specifically, in drawing from Lefebvre's dialectical spatiology, I am able to provide a critical reading of netball space, which is so often taken for granted as everyday, normal and banal and begin to unpack its contradictions as well as its often unnoticed and overlooked potentialities (van Ingen, 2002). Importantly, in order to relate the production of netball space to women's everyday lived experiences of this sport, I have taken Lefebvre's work "into a feminist direction" (Kipfer et al., 2013, p. 125).

### **(Re)reading Lefebvre through feminism**

Lefebvre was not a feminist, nor did his work engage explicitly with "the production and practices of [gendered] and sexualized bodies and their relationship to social space" (Simonsen, 2005, p. 10; see also Kipfer et al., 2012).

In fact, Lefebvre's work on space "contains glaring omissions" (van Ingen, 2003, p. 212) on gender and sexuality and he had a tendency to describe men and women in essentialist terms or engage gendered or heteronormative imagery to explain the world (Blum & Nast, 1996; Kipfer et al., 2012). Further, despite his usefulness for understanding the connections between the body, space and social relations, it is important to note that Lefebvre did not achieve a clear and comprehensible theory of the body (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Simonsen, 2005).

Rather, what he did deliver was "a conceptual effort calling attention to human capacities and creativities involved in an 'authentic' everyday life and a focus on the spatiality and the temporality of the body" (Simonsen, 2005, p. 9). In other words, Lefebvre's theory operates more like a systematic and instructional framework on spatiality rather than as a way to address the complex and intricate everyday lived processes that work to shape human lives and experiences (Unwin, 2000). Thus, whilst Lefebvre's work can be considered "ground breaking" (Blum & Nast, 1996, p. 577) and a useful schema for "understanding the role of space in shaping social relations of all kind" (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 99), some argue that there are also a number of problems with Lefebvre's spatioLOGY, which limit the utility of his work for understanding women's lives and experiences (see Blum & Nast, 1996; Shields, 2010 Simonsen, 2005). Of course, as Thorpe (2009) points out, "all theories have strengths and shortcomings and, because they are a matter of perspective, are always open to debate" (p. 510). Indeed, theory is not a limitless explanation for the social world, but rather, a tool or starting point for our understandings of particular contexts (Andrews, 2002; Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). In this way, all theory "begs to be expanded, contradicted, refined [reinterpreted and] replaced" (Birrell, 2000, p. 62).

In Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, social space is produced by social relations, and importantly, social relations are produced by space. Thus, in engaging with Lefebvre's spatioLOGY, many feminists observed that in the production of space, space becomes gendered. Massey (1994) discusses this idea in her book *Space, Place and Gender*:

Space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in the struggles to change them. From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which

they transmit, to straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood. The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination (p. 179).

In spite of criticisms, therefore, a number of feminist geographers and sport studies scholars have still recognized the potential in, been influenced by, and made good use of Lefebvre's oeuvre for deepening and developing feminist theorizations of "space as the terrain of political practice" (Ross, 1988, p. 8). For example, Ross (1996) has employed Lefebvre's spatiology to explore the gendered relationships between domestic and late colonial culture in urban France. McLeod (1997) has discussed Lefebvre's relevance for feminist analyses of architecture, and Massey (1994) has argued for the benefits of bringing Lefebvre's theory into conversation with feminist debates about economic geography and radical democracy. More recently, Lefebvre's work has been employed to highlight the ways in which the geography of sex work is the outcome of a dialectical relationship between different dimensions of space (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003) and to explore the interconnections between urban space and women's fear (Listerborn, 2002). From a sporting perspective, his work has been applied to critical examinations of the multiple forms of in/exclusion along lines of race, gender, social class and sexuality operating within a running club for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender athletes (van Ingen, 2002). Importantly, Simonsen (2005) has also discussed the need to read Lefebvre's work on the relationship between bodies and spaces alongside feminist literature on the body, suggesting that a synthesis between Lefebvre's work and the ideas of feminists, who are also interested in material bodily practices, would stimulate his spatial project.

Drawing inspiration from the arguments of Simonsen (2005) and other feminist engagements with Lefebvre, particularly van Ingen's (2002, 2003) work on the geography of social relations within sporting space, I too see potential in a feminist reading of Lefebvre, and more specifically, a Lefebvorean feminist synthesis. Bodies, as implied by the title of this chapter, are central to this project. They are present (and theorized) in terms of their relationship to netball space,

their relationships to each other and their capacities to resist the socially imposed limitations and boundaries set upon them in and through space. What Lefebvre's theory has offered me with respect to the study of the body is two-fold. Firstly, it has provided a way to understand the dialectical relationship between the body, space and social relations. Secondly, it has provided a means to transcend the division between studies that, on the one hand, analyze the active role of the body in social life and the body as lived, and on the other, those that examine the body as acted upon, inscribed, and socially and historically constructed (Simonsen, 2005). Indeed, Lefebvre's spatial theory has offered useful and suggestive insights into what to look for and what to study in my efforts to engage in a spatial analysis of the experiences of women netballers in New Zealand.

Importantly, however, Lefebvre's theory also has limitations for the aims of this project, and as such, it has not always helped me to unpack women's everyday lived experiences or to deepen and develop my knowledge concerning how the social relations circulating within this physical cultural space act on women's bodies. Rather, for this I have turned to the work of feminist scholars whom have expended significant effort investigating the gendered, sexed and sexualized nature of particular spaces and bodies, including those related to sport.

Throughout the duration of this project, I was particularly aware that "the search for the exact theoretical fit is futile" (Thorpe, 2014, p. 218), that is, that no single theory will ever fit perfectly with my data and the aims of this research. In this study, therefore, I have deployed Lefebvre's spatial theory at the same time as critiquing it, and in so doing, have applied the ideas of feminist scholars of gender, sexuality, space and the body in order to extend its theoretical reach. Gill Valentine's (1993, 1996, 2002) ideas about sexualized spaces, Robyn Longhurst's (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2008) extensive work on space, gender and maternal bodies and Elspeth Probyn's (2003) engagement with the spatial imperative of subjectivities, for example, have been particularly influential in this endeavor. Importantly, this research, among the work of others, has helped me to extend Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and has enabled me to analyze, in more depth, the complexities and intricacies of women's lived experiences of this sport. These works have not only helped me to tease out the ways in which "space and place are gendered and sexed" and how "gender

relations and sexuality are ‘spaced’” (McDowell, 1999, p. 65), but also to discuss how women netballers negotiate, accept and/or challenge the gendered and sexed nature of this sporting space and culture. Put differently, a ‘Lefebvrian feminist synthesis’ has helped me to further “disentangle the interrelatedness of space, politics and identity” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 208) and to deepen my understanding of the ways in which the production of netball space interacts with women’s bodies, that is, how it influences and shapes New Zealand women’s participation and experiences in this sport.

In conclusion, I suggest that a theoretical synthesis between feminism and Lefebvre’s spatio-temporality provides a fruitful strategy for analyzing multidimensional social phenomena such as women’s participation in sport, and importantly, offers new ways to productively (re)conceptualize the relationship between moving female bodies, space and social relations. A feminist (re)reading of Lefebvre’s work adds “a much needed genderization/sexualization to Lefebvre’s spatio-temporal bodies” (Simonsen, 2005, p. 10). More specifically, an ongoing dialogue between these two critical perspectives helps to account for the complex, dynamic, embodied, gendered, sexualized, subjective and spatial aspects of netball and women’s involvement in this sport, as well as providing useful tools for considering multiple perspectives, understandings and experiences. The next chapter outlines the ethnographic approaches I adopted to capture these perspectives and discusses the reflexive and methodological challenges of undertaking an embodied research project.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Exploring Women's Embodied Netball Experiences: An Ethnographic Approach**

With the aim of examining the social space of netball in New Zealand and women's everyday lived experiences of this sport I adopted an ethnographic approach.<sup>7</sup> According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 1), "in its most characteristic form it [ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives...watching what happens, listening to what is said, [and] asking questions". Ethnographic approaches have been widely used among a number of contemporary scholars of sport and physical culture interested in understanding the embodied nature of participation and the meanings individuals make of their experiences in particular movement contexts (Butts, 2001; Crocket, 2012, 2013; De Garis, 1999; Evers, 2006; Howe, 2001; Markula, 1995, 2006b; Newman, 2007; Olive, 2013; Peluso, 2010; Roy, 2013; Thorpe, 2005, 2007; Wheaton, 2002). Adopted and developed from participant-observation methods of 20<sup>th</sup> century social and cultural anthropology, contemporary sport researchers have employed ethnographic research techniques including participation, observations, interviews, focus groups and textual and media analysis in the belief that these "unique research method[s] and cross-cultural perspective[s] can yield a rich and textured look at human behaviour" (Sands, 2002, p. 8; see also Bolin & Granskog, 2003a; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Markula & Silk, 2011). Although there are various kinds of ethnography, this approach often allows for a long-term view, provides participants with a voice, emphasizes lived experience and facilitates the investigation of how the everyday contributes to the maintenance and regulation of various forms of social power (Skeggs, 2001).

In general, ethnographic approaches tend to generate information of a qualitative nature. Focusing on meanings as a way of making sense of how individuals and groups participate in and experience sport and physical activity,

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<sup>7</sup> I acknowledge the colonial roots of ethnography as a methodological technique and am aware of the connotations sometimes associated with this term. In response, I have chosen to adopt the expression 'ethnographic approach' to refer to the set of methods I used in order to collect data for this project.

an ethnographic approach typically captures understandings and interpretations that are grounded in place, time and culture. Ethnography is largely regarded as “a situated activity that locates the [researcher] in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Subsequently, this approach to research is considered descriptive as opposed to definitive, subjective instead of objective, qualitative rather than quantitative. It draws upon qualitative material practices that “make the world visible” in an attempt “to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). In my attempts to make sense of and interpret New Zealand women’s experiences and meanings of netball, therefore, I drew upon an array of qualitative ethnographic research methods including; participation, interviews and media analysis.

Yet, before I could employ these research methods in ways that would enable me to understand, in depth, the complex, varied and multifaceted lives and experiences of New Zealand women netballers, it was first necessary to engage in reflexive thinking regarding the process of conducting research within my own physical cultural community and the potential pitfalls of my insider knowledge and experiences. I begin, therefore, in somewhat of an unorthodox fashion by firstly locating this chapter within, and secondly, writing into, ‘the reflexive moment’ in sport sociology, and feminist research more broadly. I go about the latter by offering a reflexive and reflective examination of my positionality within the ethnographic field, and more particularly, the challenges I faced embarking on this research project alongside my relationships and experiences with this sport as a cultural ‘insider’.

In this chapter, I draw upon feminist-inspired ideas about reflexivity as “self critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” (England, 1994, p. 82, emphasis in original) to explain how researching within my own sporting culture encouraged me to think through, and at times wrestle with, my deeply ingrained understandings of netball and my implicated and embodied female/researcher/athlete/feminist subjectivities. In so doing, I am careful to reveal that whilst “using my body to research ‘other bodies’...was sociologically valuable” it was also, importantly, “personally troublesome” (Monaghan, 2006, p. 226) in that it involved negotiating the constantly shifting and blurring positions of female researcher and active netballer,

and how these roles were influencing the theoretical, methodological and empirical development of this project. Following this, I turn my attention to discussing in more detail my use of participation, interviewing and media analysis as ethnographic methods of inquiry and their potential for capturing the lived experiences of netballers in New Zealand, before concluding this chapter with an overview of my approach to data analysis and representation.

### **Reflexivity in feminist and sociology of sport research**

For several decades, feminist theorists have considered the importance of reflexivity and critical reflection in the research process (Harding, 1991; Hertz, 1996; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Ryan & Golden, 2006; Smith, 1987). In so doing, feminist theory and feminist researchers have furthered discussions of reflexivity by positioning it as fundamental to feminist research practice and methodology (Clough, 1992; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Pillow, 2003). Foundational feminist scholars such as Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway and Elspeth Probyn, for example, have contributed concepts such as ‘strong reflexivity’ (Harding, 1996), ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway, 1991) and ‘thinking the social through the self’ (Probyn, 1993) as part of a feminist critique of mainstream scientific research methods such that an entire body of social research has emerged where reflexivity, and often a highly critical self-reflexivity, has come to be celebrated (Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Ryan & Golden, 2006).

For feminist researchers, reflexivity “permeates every aspect of the research process challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of those we study [with] and those we select as our audience” (Hertz, 1996, as cited in Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 496). In this way, reflexivity typically begins prior to entering the field of study and is “a self-critical action whereby the researcher finds that the world is mediated by the self”, that is, “what can be known can only be known through oneself, one’s lived experiences and one’s biography” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 496). Reflexivity, therefore, is a type of methodological openness and transparency (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011) that is characterized by honesty about how, where and by whom the data were collected and its ability to locate the researcher as a participant in the dynamic interrelationship of the research process (Ryan &

Golden, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2010). It can be used in a number of contexts with varying aims, such as to enrich the credibility and rigour of the research process as well as make visible the positionality of the research(er) (DeSouza, 2004).

Indeed, a number of feminist scholars have drawn upon the idea of reflexivity to reveal the complexities and contradictions of their political, researcher, personal and gendered positions within their research (Bordo, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1991, St. Pierre, 1997a, 1997b). The aim of all of this, suggests Pillow (2003), is to generate scholarship that “questions its own interpretations” and is critical about “its own knowledge production” (p. 178) in ways capable of encouraging ongoing self critique and awareness. Thus, reflexivity can be understood as much more than a methodological device or theoretical concept, and rather as an essential element in the practice of embodied, ethical and political ethnographic research (Olive & Thorpe, 2011; see also England, 1994)

Sport sociologists too, have considered the importance of reflexive and subjective writing practices and engaging in a process that does not circle “back on the writer/subject in such a way as to enclose the ‘self’” (Pollock, 1998, p. 86). Indeed, the ‘reflexive turn’ in the social sciences and humanities has worked to create a sense of consensus among a number of ethnographers of sport and physical culture in the virtue of reflexivity and ‘writing the self into’ research practice. Drawing inspiration from some pivotal early critical and reflexive sporting ethnographies as demonstrated in the work of Loic Wacquant (1995), Andrew Sparkes (1996), Toni Bruce (1998), Robert Rinehart (1998) and Jim Denison and Pirkko Markula (2003; see also Denison, 1996; Markula & Denison, 2000), to name but a few, a new generation of critical scholars of sport and physical culture are highlighting the potential of “writing subjectively and placing the self in flux” (Markula & Denison, 2000, p. 419) within their research (see e.g. Giardina & Newman, 2011a; Grainger, 2011; Laurendeau, 2011; Newman, 2011; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe, Barbour & Bruce, 2011). According to Giardina and Newman (2011b, p. 187, emphasis in original), “we need to both make use of *and also reflect on* how our own bodies frame and are framed by the critical cultural analyses we undertake”.

Joshua Newman's (2011) work, titled '[Un]comfortable in My Own Skin: Articulation, Reflexivity, and the Duality of Self,' is a particularly noteworthy example. Newman attempts to "rethink the 'dualistic' spaces we as researcher-scholars inhabit and bring to life through the research act" so as to present a "reflexive [re]discovery" (p. 545). In so doing, he explores his own Whiteness, Southern-ness and masculinity as they are reflected in and onto the spaces and social relations he studies, particularly within the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) in the Southern United States. In a similar way, Jason Laurendeau (2011) engages in critical reflection on his initial and final experiences of BASE-jumping and the relationship between risk and responsibility in the construction of gender, particularly with regard to the social construction of masculinities. In so doing, he attempts to write into a space of uncertainty, complexity and polyvocality where the many 'voices' of his sociological project, including his own, converge. Drawing upon both feminist inspired ideas about the body and reflexivity, Rebecca Olive and Holly Thorpe (2011) also reveal some of the tensions they have experienced in their efforts to negotiate their multiple, dynamic and sometimes conflicting, female, feminist, researcher and surfer/snowboarding subjectivities in the ethnographic field. They suggest that whilst their past and present cultural commitment to their respective sports, their physical abilities and their social capital have provided access to cultural spaces and helped them form relationships with participants, these aspects of their sporting identities have also posed methodological, ethical and theoretical challenges.

Despite the centrality of reflexivity to feminist research and a growing number of critical scholars of sports and physical culture, reflexivity is still only sometimes centralized or placed ahead of more systematic discussions of the exact methods that have guided data collection in a Doctoral thesis. I concur with Giardina and Newman (2011a) who argue that many sports studies scholars "too often gloss over how we come to position, *and* be positioned by" (p. 525, emphasis in original) our experiences, feelings, thoughts and research vulnerabilities. Building on the reflexive trend in sport sociology and the increasing number of critical sport scholars who have "bared their souls" (Ryan & Golden, 2006, p. 1193) so to speak, I move away from the more traditional style of 'the methodology chapter', and instead foreground and weave discussions,

throughout this text, of the ways in which my personal politics and experiences have influenced my ethnographic positionings and shaped my research journey. I also highlight the potential of engaging in reflexivity *alongside* a range of ethnographic research methods. In presenting this chapter in this style, I demonstrate how reflexivity, and more particularly reflexive research practice, was central to this research project as a whole. In so doing, I acknowledge Nabhan-Warren's (2011) insistence that "methodological reflexivity...should not be something that is an afterthought: *it should be the very basis by which fieldwork is done*" (p. 384, emphasis added). To this end, I now continue forth by examining the complexities of my 'insider' positionality within the ethnographic field and engage in a process of writing my own moments of researcher frailty, wondering and reflection into, and importantly, throughout this text.

### **Reflexive beginnings and researching from the 'intimate inside'**

Positionality [is] a perpetual source of questioning and self-revelation...Although initially we may see ourselves primarily as researcher, other roles, past experiences, and our own personal subjectivities significantly define how we conduct our research (Marshall, 2002, p. 176).

This project is based within a sporting culture that I have been involved in for many years. As previously mentioned, I have lived, breathed, played and loved netball for as long as I can remember. I have been involved in this culture in a variety of ways, including; via coaching competitive high school netball for a number of years, umpiring, spectating regularly at senior women's netball matches, enthusiastically following elite national and international netball in the media and playing netball for various school, club, social, competitive and representative teams. I have developed and maintained close friendships with women who are active participants in netball and talk frequently with others about my interests in and experiences with this sport, both academically and recreationally. Indeed, netball is an important and ongoing part of my identity such that many of my memories, interests, relationships, tastes and experiences are deeply embedded in this physical and cultural space. Thus, as I embarked on my ethnographic study of netball and women's experiences of this sport at the

Hamilton City Netball Centre (henceforth referred to as the HCNC)—a large, public, outdoor netball venue located on the Western side of Hamilton City—I was doing so from the ‘inside’. More than this, however, I was endeavoring to conduct what Jodie Taylor (2011) terms ‘intimate insider research’, an approach that entails the researcher:

working, at the deepest level, within their own ‘backyard’; that is, a contemporary cultural space with which the researcher has regular and ongoing contact; where the researcher’s personal relationships are deeply embedded in the field; where one’s quotidian interactions and performances of identity are made visible; where the researcher has been and remains a key social actor within the field and thus becomes engaged in a process of self-interpretation to some degree; and where the researcher is privy to undocumented historical knowledge of the people and cultural phenomenon being studied (p. 9).

In other words, netball space is more to me than a place I go to collect data, more than just the physical site of this study (St. Pierre, 1997a).

The advantages of research conducted with a close degree of proximity to the people and culture under investigation and by researchers who possess ‘street credentials’ and ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton, 1995) have been well documented (see e.g. Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hodkinson, 2005; Sugden, 2002, 2004, 2007). In terms of my own research, the value of this approach was that my existing relationships to netball and the women who play gave me access to a number of interview participants and aided in establishing rapport with those women I was unfamiliar with but whom I invited to be part of this study. In addition, embarking on this project as a researcher *and* active netballer meant that I could conduct my research in a community in which I was accepted and included in various and meaningful ways. For instance, not only did I have express permission to conduct my research at the HCNC (discussed in detail later in this chapter) but I was also registered to play and licensed to umpire in this context. I had achieved a level of inclusion in this community and culture that provided significant opportunities for access and an established sense of belonging and acceptance.

Yet, this also meant that, as a researcher conducting research in my own ‘backyard’, I experienced significant pressures and moments of discomfort.

Although prior to and upon entering the field, I had theoretically understood the broader debate on insider research and the methodological benefits of such an approach, I had no idea how this might unfold in my own ethnographic investigation of netball and women's playing experiences. How was I to negotiate my multiple social identities in this setting and what is more, what challenges might I face? As I began to collect data and immerse my body deeper into the culture of netball in New Zealand, like Beoku-Betts (1994, p. 430) "I came to realize that while the insider standpoint [is] a valid approach to the research process it [is] more fragile and complex than it is often portrayed as being". In a similar way to Chavez (2008) and like so many other fledgling ethnographers, I entered the field with only limited training (e.g. advice from my supervisors and information regarding insider issues gleaned from academic articles and textbooks) and little understanding of the unique implications of my positionality.

As a sociologist adopting a poststructural feminist theoretical approach and seeking to uncover new knowledge about women's netball experiences, I had a vested interest in examining how power and agency operate against and are managed by women in this physical cultural context. I had set out not only to explore the positive experiences of New Zealand netballers but also the multiple tensions being negotiated by women in this space. However, as a passionate netballer who has played and/or consumed netball for at least two thirds of my life and because the majority of my positive movement experiences have occurred in this space, I felt pressure to tell what McWilliam, Lather and Morgan (1997) call a 'victory narrative': I was determined "to highlight the emancipatory potential" (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014, p. 224) of netball for women's moving bodies. As an 'insider', and because I confidently engage my body in the practices and rituals of this sport, I took solace in the belief that this was the case for all New Zealand women, especially during the early stages of my research. For many years I had uncritically subscribed to the idea that netball is the 'national sport for [all] New Zealand women' (Hawes & Barker, 1999)—a game "eminently suitable for *every* girl" (*Otago Daily Times*, 1926, as cited in Nauright & Broomhall, p. 394, emphasis added). From my 'intimate insider' perspective, I was eager to paint a romanticized picture of netball as an empowering and liberating practice, thus, found the idea of critiquing this sport and culture particularly daunting.

As Thorpe (2011) highlights in her book, *Snowboarding Bodies in Theory and Practice*, researchers often find the act of combining critical social theorizing with their sport and leisure participation incredibly challenging and feel that it poses risk to their joyous movement experiences. Similarly, Leane and Buchanan (2002), report that thought and enjoyment are often characterized as mutually exclusive as theoretical analysis is believed, by some, to represent the “theft of enjoyment” and the “robbery of unselfconscious pleasure” (as cited in Thorpe, 2011, p. 267). Indeed, “not everyone wants the stars in their eyes to be revealed as a mere trick of light” (Leane & Buchanan, 2002, p. 254) and thus, “sociologists are [arguably,] no more ready than other men [sic] to cast a cold eye on their own doings” (Gouldner, 2004, p. 381). Not surprisingly, then, despite the gentle encouragement of my supervisors to challenge some of my beliefs and assumptions, I found it difficult to cast a critical gaze over the culture that I had felt on my body countless times and that had provided me with many fond memories and experiences.

Indeed, my personal history, experiences and relationships to netball were proving to have an important impact on this project—perhaps more important than I had initially bargained for. Not only did they mean I was included in this community, which provided an important level of access and acceptance, but they also meant I had a social and knowledgeable attachment to the culture (and often the women) I was researching. Like St. Pierre (1997a) who conducted research in the town in which she grew up, I came to realize that despite only recently embarking on this project, I had actually been collecting ‘data’ about netball all my life—“I had been involved in a long-term prior ethnography” (p. 17) of this space. My experiences of netball growing up and throughout my life had significantly shaped my view of this sport and thus, the data I was open to collecting.

When I began my research at the HCNC, I arrived with expectations of what netball was, what it looked like, the ‘types’ of women who play, how players behave and what it feels like to participate in this sport (Vaughn, 2004). In many ways, at the beginning of this project playing and observing netball at the HCNC aligned with my expectations and I saw nothing immediately out of the norm. Furthermore, the ‘field’ “took a thoroughly embodied form in me” (Vaughn, 2004,

p. 397)—I was positively ‘buzzing’ with excitement from engaging my body in a sport that I love. The field began as a ‘pleasure-scape’ for me, and I had to consistently remind myself that my primary role within this space was to conduct research, that is, to critically interrogate the social geography of netball in New Zealand. My understandings of netball *and* my research endeavors to this point had, as Vaughn (2004) aptly puts it, been absolutely “coloured by my own prior ethnography” (p. 397). In short, a large part of my identity was deeply entangled with the culture I was researching, and as such, I needed to consider, question and importantly, account for this complex relationship (Olive, 2013). This meant that I would need to find a way to think through and reflect upon the impacts and limitations of my insider position and what this might mean for the research process—how were my identities, subjectivities and experiences influencing my research project?

Building on St. Pierre (1997a) and Vaughn’s (2004) thinking around the impacts of my existing ethnographic knowledge, I drew on Elspeth Probyn’s work to help me move beyond the ways my own understandings and experiences of netball were impacting what I could and wanted to know about this sporting culture. In her book *Sexing the Self*, Probyn (1993) introduces the idea of ‘thinking the social through the self’ as a method of inquiry. Thinking the social through the self is, as Couldry (2000) puts it, “a two-way process involving reflections on both the social and the self, and their mutual conditioning” (p. 114) and, as such, provides a methodological approach to negotiating the ways our experiences and subjectivities become folded through and implicated in our research. Probyn (1993) suggests that the reflexive self should be “both an object of enquiry and the means of analyzing where and how the self is lodged within the social formation” (p. 80). Thus, this position recognizes that particular selves, including all their uncertainties, complexities and contradictions, should be acknowledged, heard, and importantly, accounted for, in the types of conclusions we make about cultures and experience (Couldry, 2000). Adopting such an approach helped me to reflect on the ways in which my own identities and experiences of netball could influence, limit and shape what I was able to see and know, that is, what I would allow myself to discover about this physical cultural space and women’s experiences of this sport.

Drawing upon Probyn (1993) I realized that my own understandings of netball would always and inevitably be implicated in this research but that I could (and should) recognize and move past these in ways that would enable me to open up the lines of inquiry so that this project could work *through* but at the same time, develop *beyond* me (Olive, 2013). Thinking the social through the self provided me with “a conceptual and reflexive tool for positioning myself within the research, and for considering the limitations and potential blind-spots of that position” (Olive, 2013, p. 53). It also offered a means to acknowledge Smith’s (1988) warning that research is never complete “until it includes an understanding of the active role of the analyst’s self which is exercised throughout the research process” (p. 18). As such, thinking the social through the self offered me a tool to think through and reflect on “the pleasures and pains of my being in the social” (Probyn, 1993, p. 3). It facilitated a reflexive approach to insider research that not only helped me to recognize but also to negotiate the inevitable but important folds, complexities and tensions between my researcher/athlete/female/feminist subjectivities and experiences.

Importantly, my reflexivity and awareness surrounding the impacts of my prior knowledge and experiences were not only prompted by the ‘confessional tales’, advice and insights of others, but they also occurred haphazardly, and often somewhat unexpectedly, as I moved in and through various interviews and phases of data collection. For example, part way through my fieldwork (I had already conducted several interviews) I engaged in a particularly moving discussion with Natasha (pseudonym), a successful elite sportswoman in two different sports. During the interview I was inspired by Natasha’s emotional account of the ways netball space has offered her a sanctuary from the constant accusations of lesbianism she experiences as a female participant in a male-dominated sport. What struck me most was the way she described her participation in netball as “the equivalent of being married with kids” in terms of its role in helping to highlight and reaffirm her gendered and (hetero)sexed subjectivities. I was particularly captured by Natasha’s understanding and experiences of netball such that her words resonated with me for days. An excerpt from my research notes reveals my deliberations:

I've found myself going back to [Natasha's] transcript over and over again since our interview. Each time I am teary eyed as I read over and reflect on our interview and her experiences of netball. They're *nothing* like mine, and I'm captivated by how different her understanding of netball is to that of my own and what this sport has meant to her in her life. I find it amazing that two people, not entirely dissimilar, can have such different relationships with the game. For me, netball is a space of so many pleasures, yet for [Natasha], netball is far more than that and is fundamentally an escape—a space she feels safe from questions and accusations regarding her sexuality (research notes, 2013).

To say the least, Natasha's experiences of netball prompted me to think differently, and not just about the social construction of netball space and netballers themselves or the gendered politics of netball in New Zealand, but also, importantly, about how my ideas, perspectives and knowledges about netball have been influenced by my own experiences and subject positions.

The significance of recognizing my own prior ethnography and its influence on this research and engaging in a process of thinking the social through my self, then, was that it enabled me to think critically about the discourses of netball *alongside* my own experiences and taken for granted notions of this sport (Vaughn, 2004). Acknowledging the ways this aspect of my identity, my self, had begun to influence my research made me realize two things: firstly, that I had taken for granted my positive netball experiences and the ways my athletic body 'fits', seemingly unproblematically, into netball spaces; and secondly, what I may be missing because of this position. In recognizing this, I was able to acknowledge the ways my own understandings of netball are implicated in this research and in drawing upon theory, method and existing literature I became committed to moving beyond these (at least as much as possible). Thus, in order to successfully negotiate my positionality and importantly, to think critically about netball and women's participation in this sport, I needed to bring clarity to my research. For me, this process was achieved via a "process of looking 'inward' to the self—self-objectification—that allowed me to see 'inside' culture more clearly" (Taylor, 2011, p. 16).

In this way, "reflexively locating ourselves and our impacts within our research" is anything but self-indulgent and instead works to "provide us with

insight into what we find, what we don't find and what may remain hidden from us, no matter how hard we look" (Olive, 2013, p. 48). Put differently, choosing to see my netball experiences (my prior ethnography) and my 'self' as implicated in my understandings of netball more broadly, and my research more specifically, I became grounded in the field. This approach worked "to relieve insider myopia" and make "possible observation and critique of the seemingly mundane" (Taylor, 2011, p. 16) and 'everyday' politics of netball in New Zealand. It also enabled me to use my participation, interviews and media analysis to push this research in directions that both challenged my own understandings and assumptions of netball, and provided fresh insights into this sporting culture. I now go on to discuss each of these specific research methods in turn.

#### **'Taking the court': An athlete/researcher in netball space**

Feminist scholars have consistently spoken up for the importance of "mooring feminist research within women's bodily experiences" (Bolin & Granskog, 2003b, p. 7; see also Brooks, 2007; Buch & Staller, 2007; Hargreaves, 1982; Hesse-Biber, 2007; McDermott, 1996; Smith, 1987; Theberge, 1985). According to McDermott (1996) one cannot hope to understand women's existence within a patriarchal society without acknowledging that their existence is intimately connected to their lived, bodily experiences, including that of their physically active, material and corporeal experiences. Indeed, the corporeal body is "always present in a dialectical relationship with the cultural" (Somerville, 2004, p. 51) and thus, it is vital that research on lived experience acknowledge, and importantly, engage with this dialectic. This is made possible, suggests Witz (2000) by thinking about the body *through* constructs such as gender and sexuality and working to "recuperate those 'fleshy matters' relegated to the status of residual facticity...and [often] left sitting on the sidelines of feminist sociology" (p. 7). McDermott (1996) insists that this entails grasping the meaning of the subjectively lived body and women's embodied movement experiences. In this research I drew inspiration from McDermott's arguments as well as those of feminist scholar Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) who suggests that "concrete lived experience is a key place from which to build knowledge" (p. 3). In so doing, I chose to engage my own physical, material and lived body in netball as a method of data collection.

Participatory approaches are common among contemporary ethnographic studies of sports and physical culture (see e.g. Butts, 2001; Crocket, 2012, 2013; De Garis, 1999; Evers, 2006; Markula, 2004; Olive, 2013; Thorpe, 2011, Wacquant, 1992; Wheaton, 2002) where it is commonplace for researchers to study cultures where they already experience membership or in which they become participants for the purposes of the project. In other words, it is now common for ethnographers of sport and physical culture to “*actively embod[y]*” (Monaghan, 2006, p. 231, emphasis in original) the field of inquiry, participating in practices and rituals alongside those participants and in the spaces they wish to understand. These researchers demonstrate how their participation can bring to the fore a complexity and depth of knowledge that is difficult to obtain from reading about, watching, or talking to those who participate, whilst also facilitating unique experiences of the physicality and sensuality of these physical cultural spaces (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014). For example, with regards to his analysis of professional wrestling, De Garis (1999) claims that a “performative<sup>8</sup> approach to ethnography opens possibilities for sensuous knowledge beyond the scope of the usual visual data” (p. 66). In a similar vein, Butts (2001) suggests his research on Florida surfing subculture would not contain the same levels of depth and insight if he had not become a surfer himself.

For feminist researchers in particular, taking part enables a certain type of ‘situatedness’, that is, feminist researchers who engage their bodies in the fields of inquiry are not only able to share in the frustrations, challenges, joys and pleasures experienced by participants, but also in the negotiations that occur in these spaces in response to “the operations and effects of gendered power and agency” (Pavlidis & Olive, 2014, p. 220). Immersing themselves in the field of inquiry has enabled feminist researchers to understand and represent issues of gender, sexuality, corporeality and identity in an array of physical cultures using women’s experiences, memories, thoughts, words and movements as opposed to relying on observations and secondary sources (Dworkin, 2003; Markula, 1995,

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that a performative approach, in De Garis’ terms, does not correlate with what Norman Denzin (2003) refers to as ‘performance ethnography’, which takes what one discovers via their fieldwork and turns this into a theatrical representation of culture. Instead, De Garis refers to the utility of ‘performing’ the body in the activities of a particular culture in order to move beyond what can be known by simply standing back and observing.

2003b; 2005; Olive, 2013; Peluso, 2010; Roy, 2013; Thorpe, 2007; Wheaton, 2002). Arguably, forming a relationship with a particular physical culture and being accepted as a ‘member’ of that community not only helps access cultural currency, but also the signs, symbols and norms of that culture, and hence, various other types of information (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, 2007; Punch, 2014; Spradley, 1980).

In an attempt to extend the practice of participatory research, however, Wacquant (2004) describes a need to conduct research not only *of* the body (as the focus of study), but also *from* the body, that is, using the body as a tool of inquiry. Evers (2006) echoes this idea in his research on men’s experiences of surfing when he suggests that it is not enough to simply conduct research *on* bodies, rather, the researchers’ body is integral to any understanding of how a sporting culture, such as surfing, works (see also Olive, 2013). Researching through the body, or “positing [the] body as part of what it researches” (Evers, 2006, p. 230), he claims, offers a potentially fruitful way to enable the researcher’s body to feel and become entangled with the field it is investigating. Put simply, researching through the body rather than about the body forces the researcher to deal with the viscerality, leakiness, sensuality, imagination, movement, affects, textures, emotions, fluids, relations and capabilities of bodies (Evers, 2006).

Thus, what this literature inspired in me, was the potential of using my body to research in a way that not only enabled me to interact with netballers by talking to them, but also by playing netball with, alongside, and sometimes against them. That is, to use my own lived body as an ‘instrument of research’ (see e.g. Longhurst, Ho & Johnston, 2008) and in so doing, “get up, get out, and *engage* in the world of lived experience” (Atkinson, 2012, p. 66-67, emphasis added). Importantly, this approach also aligns with a Lefebvrian (1991) perspective on studying space, which suggests that exploring space not only with “the eyes and intellect”, but also “with the total body” (p. 391) enables one to become more aware of particular geographies and importantly, the conflicts and relations of power operating on bodies within them.

To ‘do’ my ethnographic research, I joined a local (Hamilton-based) netball club and team and took part in competitive netball during two winter seasons. It is important to note, however, that prior to taking up this project I had

not played netball for approximately seven years as I was focusing my energies on other aspects of my life such as my tertiary studies, work commitments and family. My participation in netball as an athlete/researcher, therefore, recommenced primarily for the purposes of this research project.

My decision to locate this project in the Waikato region, and in Hamilton city specifically, was based on a number of factors. Firstly, the time available to me to complete this project meant that conducting research in a locale in which I was permanently situated enabled me to maximize my data collection—conducting research in the city in which I study and live meant I could play netball, conduct observations and talk informally with players most weekends rather than sporadically throughout the netball season. But more than this, I drew inspiration from the view that ethnography involves the researcher becoming immersed, for a prolonged period of time, in the daily lives and culture of those they are studying (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995; Cushion, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Therefore, I decided that rather than spend short periods of time researching netball in various areas of New Zealand, I would instead concentrate my efforts in a place I could maintain “regular, in-depth, and prolonged contact” (Cushion, 2014, p. 172). In so doing, I aimed to understand the “routine and repeating practices...and complex patterning” (Cushion, 2014, p. 172) of this sport and culture. I also recognized that the Waikato region is a growing ‘hub’ of sports and netball participation—it is home to a plethora of netball clubs and New Zealand’s most successful regional netball team, The Waikato/Bay of Plenty Magic. Thus, I decided to conduct my research primarily in Hamilton City (the region’s most populous and New Zealand’s fourth most populous city) and more particularly at the HCNC—the largest outdoor netball facility in the Waikato area.

Although I played netball primarily at the HCNC, I also participated at other netball facilities, such as the Rotorua<sup>9</sup> netball courts during the popular annual ‘Kurungaituku’<sup>10</sup> tournament and at a large netball venue in Hamilton where indoor games are held. I played in a social ‘summer league’ netball competition at the HCNC with a group of friends/teammates as supplementary to

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<sup>9</sup> Rotorua is a city located approximately 105 kilometers South East of Hamilton.

<sup>10</sup> The ‘Kurungaituku Netball Tournament’ is the largest netball tournament in New Zealand. It is hosted over three weekends and incorporates upwards of 100 teams across social, competitive and schoolgirl grades (Martin, 2011).

my regular netball participation and I frequently occupied ‘other’ spaces of netball such as clubrooms, bars and restaurants, teammates’ houses, tournament locations, netball retail areas and stadiums over the course of a two-year period. Given that this research did not occur in only one location it can be considered multi-sited. Drawing on a Lefebvrian perspective of space, I was aware that women’s experiences of ‘netball’ do not only occur on the court, but are also formed in and shaped by the spaces they inhabit when prioritizing, celebrating and struggling with aspects of their netballer identities. This led me, therefore, to “construct various sites temporarily occupied by [netball] players...as forming my ‘field’ of research” (Crocket, 2013, p. 111) rather than to conduct this research in a specified number of places where netball is played.

With ethical approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee, I began to seek permission and support for this project. Despite this research being conducted in a variety of public spaces, I went to considerable effort to conduct it in an ethical manner. It was neither feasible nor required for me to gain formal consent to inhabit many of the sites I frequented during my research. However, I felt an ethical responsibility towards those women who participate in netball at my primary research site, the HCNC, and thus, I worked to ensure these women were informed about this project and my presence as a researcher. As O’Reilly (2005) observes, the extent to which we are able to gain fully informed consent from participants poses challenges and raises dilemmas for every ethnographer. Indeed, the number of players registered to play at the HCNC made obtaining express and informed consent from every individual player, coach and umpire unfeasible. Thus, it was especially necessary for me to be “increasingly reflexive and critical, but also informed about [my] ethical practices” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 81). My strategy, instead, was to obtain formal consent to conduct this research at the HCNC from the manager of this facility and to work with him/her to publicize my presence as a researcher in such a way that all players and teams would receive sufficient information about this project so that they could be sure of my research intentions.

Obtaining permission to conduct my research at the HCNC was a relatively straightforward process. As I was a member of a well-known Hamilton-based netball club, I found the manager at this venue was happy to facilitate my

research and offered generous support for the project. My long-term commitment to the sport greatly facilitated my rapport with the manager, and his/her willingness to support this project (McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In order to gain formal consent, I contacted the manager via telephone and then email, where I arranged a formal meeting to introduce myself, communicate the intentions of this research and to seek support for my project. I provided the manager with an information sheet that detailed this study and requested that a consent form be signed to demonstrate both awareness of and support for this research (see Appendix 2 and 3). I also requested the manager aid me with the distribution of information to all registered players/teams/clubs and officials via email and signs posted on the HCNC notice board in an effort to notify those women who play and officiate at the HCNC of my research and presence in this space. In addition, I provided both verbal and written information about my study and research identity to my teammates and coaching staff as I felt it important they be aware of and understand my dual roles in this space (see Appendix 4). During my time in the field I was happy to answer any questions and/or to provide additional information. I also worked hard to ensure the anonymity of the individuals who occupy this setting.

For this research, I spent as much time as I could immersing myself in the practices and rituals of netball on the court, at trainings, at tournaments, at umpiring clinics, attending club nights and fundraisers, going to bars, restaurants and elite netball games with teammates and ‘hanging out’ at the courts, such that I spent hundreds of hours and the majority of my weekends involved in some aspect of netball across the two-year course of this fieldwork. During these moments I watched, listened, reflected, engaged in conversation, asked questions, told stories, laughed, joked, had ‘a few drinks’<sup>11</sup> and debated topics, issues and player selections. I made friends and rivals, umpired, kept score, got wet, cold and

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<sup>11</sup> I am aware of the practical, methodological and ethical concerns of alcohol consumption with and by research participants (Donnelly, 2014; Palmer & Thompson, 2010). Yet, as I found out, socializing over ‘a few drinks’ or being in spaces for drinking is very much a part of the social world I chose to study. While I was careful to ensure my own participation in drinking practices over the course of this fieldwork did not lead to inebriation, there were instances when I observed the drunken behaviour of others. In these moments, I took care to uphold my ethical responsibilities and ensured I thought carefully about what to include as information and what to omit from this study (Palmer & Thompson, 2010; Donnelly, 2014).

hungry, felt exhausted and dripped with sweat. I won, lost, drew, injured myself and sometimes others, experienced disappointment, pain, triumph, anger, resentment and excitement and generally felt the pleasures and pitfalls of being a netballer. As such, this approach to research was valuable in a number of ways.

Firstly, playing netball situated me in the field of inquiry, that is, the physical, cultural and social space of the women on which this research is focused. In addition to talking with women about their experiences of this sport, their relationships with other women, and the pleasures and frustrations of their participation, I could purposefully locate myself amongst them and use my body as a vehicle to access and share in some of their experiences, both positive and negative (Evers, 2006; Giardina & Newman, 2011a; Nabhan-Warren, 2011; Olive, 2013). As a player, I shared with my teammates and other women at the courts the experience of playing netball. Basically, I went and did what they do: like them, I pulled on my uniform and sneakers each week rain, hail or shine, I experienced, and became a part of, the social and sporting politics implicit in being a member of a netball team, and I felt the pleasures, pains and challenges of engaging my body physically in this sport. This not only helped me to understand and remember what it feels like to play netball, but also, importantly, to relate to the women I researched and to understand the ways they would talk about and make meaning of netball when we would engage in informal conversations at the courts or in discussions in the interview space (Olive, 2013). I appreciated what it is like to play netball, but, at the same time, was equally intrigued to discover the subtleties, nuances and marked differences that exist in relation to women's netball playing experiences.

Playing netball also helped me to understand what I was seeing in various netball spaces. Observations are considered an integral part of ethnography and have been used among social scientists to understand the lives and experiences of individuals in diverse settings, including sport, for decades. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) entering into a social situation and watching is an important method of obtaining knowledge about the social world. Indeed, a large part of my participation in netball centred around watching what was 'going on' such that during my fieldwork I conducted what Markula and Silk (2011) term 'descriptive', 'focused' and 'selective' observations—I broadened and narrowed my visual

spotlight to capture general and sweeping documentations of netball space (e.g. the features within the physical landscape of the HCNC) and more specific and unique occurrences (e.g. interactions between players and coaches, teammates, players and umpires). I found that playing netball helped me to make observations that were grounded in contextual understandings of both this sport and culture. In other words, I spent less time “figuring out...what these people [were] up to” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011, p. 22) or validating what I saw with other women and more time collecting information about and analyzing players’ actions and interactions in this space. Being involved in netball in a playing sense also meant that I could easily and unobtrusively frequent an array of netball spaces such as changing rooms, clubrooms, cafeterias, netball retail spaces, team-building and club nights as well as the courts themselves. Whilst many of those around me (especially my teammates and coaches but also a number of women who visited the courts) were explicitly aware that I was conducting research, for the most part I was just a netballer engaging in the day-to-day practices of this sport such as changing for my game, shopping for ankle supports at the ‘netball shop’ and watching games or engaging in team-building activities for the betterment of my team. Thus, rather than conducting observations as a netballer conducting research, or a researcher playing netball, I was able to watch the flow of bodies and everyday workings of netball as a netballer/researcher—embodied, involved and engaged in constant negotiation and interaction with this space and culture (Coffey, 1999; Kanuha, 2000; Olive, 2013; Olive & Thorpe, 2011).

It is important to note, however, that despite gaining express permission to conduct my research at the HCNC and distributing detailed information about this project and myself (e.g. via email and public noticeboards) I could not always ensure the observations I conducted in this space were overt. I could not guarantee that I was collecting data with the knowledge of *all* women who play netball at and occupy space at the HCNC (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Although *some* deem covert ethnographic observations to be deceptive and unethical (see e.g. Lugosi, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014 for a discussion) this was in fact an unavoidable aspect of this research in terms of the scale of the HCNC and the sheer number of women who pass through the gates of this facility during netball season. A “fully overt” ethnographic approach was “practically and conceptually impossible” (McFee, 2010, p. 157). For example, in order to conduct an entirely overt

ethnographic study I had to rely on a number of things outside of my own control, including: that the manager of the HCNC would indeed distribute, via email, the information I had given him/her; that *all* of the women who play at the courts would receive, check and/or read their emails; and that the notices I put up would in fact be seen. Whilst there were many instances when women approached me to discuss and/or inquire about my research and how it was progressing, I was also aware that there were women at the courts who had no idea I was frequenting this space in order to collect information (in addition to my participation) despite my best efforts to notify them. Overt and covert approaches, therefore, often became blurred and as such, I found it necessary to (re)introduce myself and the aims of my research to women at the courts in order to ask questions, gather information and to use what I had observed at the HCNC in an ethical manner.

Finally, engrossing my body physically in netball provided me with a way to understand and explain the sensorial aspects of this sport. Recently, a number of anthropologists, mobilities scholars, sport sociologists and cultural geographers (e.g. Büscher & Urry, 2009; Evers, 2006; Howes, 2003; Pink, 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2012; Thrift, 2008) have highlighted the experiential, sensory, kinaesthetic, affective and corporeal dimensions of the body such that researchers are now being encouraged to consider the sensual aspects of particular spaces and places and to engage with them in their research. Importantly, this focus on the sensual and sensing body also aligns with a Lefebvrian perspective on space, which suggests spaces are composed of more than physical and discursive dimensions—they are also lived and experienced by bodies. Thus, it is important to recognize that netball is not only visible, tangible and socially constructed space, but a highly sensual one that is comprised of smells, tastes, emotions, affects, movements, sounds, feelings, relationships, textures and experiences.

Playing netball has certainly helped me to capture these multifarious and complex sensual aspects and to account for them in my research. Engaging my body in this sport means I have been privy to particular sensual and affective experiences not available to those who stand at the margins watching and taking notes. These include: the jubilation of a hard-fought victory; the pain of rolled ankles elbows to the chest and the ball clipping cold, stiff fingers on chilly winter afternoons; the sensation of a textured ball between my hands as I pull in an

intercept; and the sting of blisters on sweltering feet encased in tightly laced shoes. I've tasted beads of sweat as they trickle down my face and smelt the sweet odor of my opposition pressing her body tightly against mine. I've experienced hands clap my back after a well executed feed and heard the words of my coach ringing in my ears. Although these are all important parts of the netball experience, importantly, they are also extremely difficult to describe and, therefore, often elusive to even the most experienced of researchers. In this way, playing netball has been an important means of grasping what Bloch (1998) describes as “the most profound type of knowledge [which] is not spoken of at all” (as cited in Bendix, 2000, p. 41; see also Pink, 2009) and therefore, often inaccessible to ethnographic observation or interview. In short, playing netball has enabled me to capture and importantly, to understand, that which is so often unable to be expressed, explained and accounted for.

In accordance with an ethnographic approach I took detailed research notes that documented both my own experiences of playing netball and what I noticed, observed and heard at the HCNC and in other spaces of netball. I did my best to make these notes as often and as soon as possible after engaging in trainings, games, social events and other netball-related activities. However, for various reasons, I chose never to write my notes in the field. Most commonly, it was usually cold, wet and windy at the courts during the winter season and sitting down to record my experiences, thoughts and observations in these conditions seemed like an impractical and sometimes near impossible task. I also took issue with the idea of sitting down and visibly writing notes in this public setting as I would likely be the only one engaging in this type of practice and I feared that others may read over my shoulder on the crowded sidelines or terraced seating at the courts. My notebook, therefore, often lay buried under my warm-up gear and tracksuit at the bottom of my gear bag and I would wait until I got home to write my notes—at times rushing through the front entrance of the house to my office and shutting the door behind me, and at others, waiting until my thoughts and observations had washed over my body and circled the drain following a well-deserved hot shower.

Despite strong arguments suggesting it is important to write research notes within or as close as possible to being in the field (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Given,

2008) I found my approach did not hinder or detract from the data collection process. In contrast, I found that creating at least some interpretive distance between what I had experienced, seen or heard gave me time and space to think, engage and reflect: to wonder about and wrestle with my ‘data’ and interpretations. In this way, my research notes typically represent more than notes or descriptions ‘jotted’ in the moment and are instead interspersed with what I have seen and heard as well as my own reflections, questions and confusions about my observations and experiences in the field (Emerson et al., 2011; Kaplan-Weinger & Ullman, 2015).

Indeed, my research notes were an important place for me to reflect on some of the tensions I felt engaging my body physically in the practices of this sport and occupying this space as an athlete and feminist researcher. It is important to note, that whilst a participatory approach to ethnography had many methodological and empirical benefits, it was also fraught with challenges and tension. Participating in netball as part of this research raised many questions for me and there were numerous times I felt ‘uncomfortable in my own skin’ (Newman, 2011) that is, uneasy about the blurring of what, until now, had been two separate selves. Although I had a long (and relatively successful) history as an athlete in netball space, I had never before inhabited this context or reflected upon my experiences here as a researcher, let alone as a researcher with a distinct set of everyday feminist politics. As such, there were many instances where I felt caught between my personal and academic lives and experiences.

Throughout this research my life, interactions, relationships, feelings, memories and experiences took on different meanings and roles. They became things to attempt to understand and interpret, sources of data and critical self-reflection, and this was not always easy for me (Brunier, 2006; Coffey, 1999; Olive, 2013). Like Olive (2013), who has reflected on her experiences combining her surfing and researching practices, my playing and researching became inextricably intertwined: I was never playing netball without researching, and I was never researching without playing (or at least being involved in) netball. In this way, the usual comments I encountered from teammates and coaches about my socially and aesthetically desirable fit, female sporting body were highlighted and occurred in tension with my feminist epistemology and assumptions, whilst

routine behaviours I engage in when training for competitive sport such as ‘watching’ what I eat and admiring the developments of my athletic body in the mirror began to trouble me. Indeed, “feminist theory and critiques became my constant companions, whispering in my ear, pointing to contradictions, questioning my assumptions, keeping me reflexive” (Olive, 2013, p. 57) of my subjective relationship to netball and the increasingly complex and confusing feelings I experienced as an athlete/researcher in this space.

Writing through these “entanglements of co-presence” (Spry, 2011, p. 507) and reflecting on them in my notes was an important part of this research process. On the one hand, it helped me stay in tune with my researching identity so as to prevent me from collapsing fully into my role as an athlete—or, what some refer to as ‘going native’, to borrow a “crude anthropological idiom” (Newman, 2011, p. 550; see also Bolin & Granskog, 2003b; Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). On the other hand, it helped me to appreciate that although I was endeavoring to investigate the experiences of women in netball as a critical feminist sociologist, importantly, I *also* occupied this space as a young, white/Pākehā<sup>12</sup>, heterosexual, fit, tertiary-educated female athlete with feelings, perspectives, understandings and embodied experiences that should not and could not be ignored.

Indeed, ideas about researchers as “any person, without gender, personality, or historical location, who would objectively produce the same findings as any other person” (Warren, 1988, p. 7) are entirely mythical and completely absurd. Like the women in my study, I too had been exposed to and influenced by powerful and pervasive social constructions of ideal femininity, discourses of competitive sport, health and fitness, and ideas about the ‘body beautiful’. Although these discourses often collided with my own feminist politics, they had undoubtedly affected my experiences and understandings of this and other physical cultural spaces. I was not a “dematerialized, disembodied entit[y]” and despite my efforts, could not “conveniently tuck away the personal behind the professional because fieldwork *is* personal” (England, 1994, p. 85, emphasis in original). These feelings and reflections were an important step towards understanding in depth the ways women experience netball in, through and

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<sup>12</sup> Pākehā is the Māori term for New Zealanders of European descent.

alongside discourse and relations of power and for helping me to recognize the potential difficulties faced by feminists as they endeavor to negotiate competing ideas, desires and practices relating to their own bodies (Longhurst, 2012).

Ultimately, playing netball as a means of conducting research was enlightening, challenging, rewarding, exhausting, complicated and fun. It enabled me to make use of my netball knowledge and identity, whilst also making space for me to move and develop beyond these. Adopting a participatory approach not only kept me connected corporeally to an activity that has been a significant part of my life, but also, with the culture and women I was researching (Olive, 2013). Approaching this project as an athlete/researcher enabled me to study netball culture “without arousing suspicion, standing out, or antagonizing those within the group in any way” (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p. 183). Importantly, it also provided a valuable means to ensure I took heed of Denzin’s (1997) argument that “seeing is not understanding. Understanding is more than visual knowledge. Understanding is visceral” (p. 46). Playing netball was a means to involve my body in ways that ensured insights collected were “imaginative, sensual even, in that they speak to experience, which includes the senses rather than simply cognition” (Barrett 2000, as cited in Evers, 2009, p. 894). It provided a way “to move with, and to moved by” (Büscher & Urry, 2009, p. 103) this sport and culture and revealed valuable insights into the fleeting, distributed, multiple, sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic aspects of women’s everyday experiences of netball.

### **Interviews: Talking with ‘the girls’<sup>13</sup>**

In addition to playing netball to research this space and culture, I conducted qualitative interviews so as to include a variety of voices and ‘stories’ of netball in this project. Qualitative interviews are a popular method of data collection within the social sciences and are considered one of the most important tools in our attempts to understand the experiences and lives of others (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Mason, 2002; Rapley, 2007; Thorpe, 2012). Among

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<sup>13</sup> A colloquial title often used to describe a group of women that one regularly interacts and/or has formed a relationship with. In the context of New Zealand it is also used as a euphemism for women’s breasts (often by women themselves) and to refer, with some affection, to a farmer’s cows. I use ‘the girls’ in this section because many of the women I interviewed used this term to describe their teammates and/or other netballers.

sociologists of sport, exercise and physical culture in particular, qualitative interviews are used extensively to understand and explore the experiences, memories and interpretations of individuals and groups within an array of sporting contexts (Atkinson, 2012; Markula & Silk, 2011; Thorpe, 2012). Indeed, “talking with others is a fundamental human activity” that has the power to reveal much about others, as well as ourselves, “and research talk simply systematizes that activity” (DeVault & Gross, 2007).

Nevertheless, ‘research talk’ is complex and there are various ways of engaging in dialogue for the purposes of inquiry such that qualitative interviews are typically conducted in three main styles; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. As Fontana and Frey (2005) explain:

The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behaviour within pre-established categories, whereas the latter attempts to understand the complex behaviours of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry (p. 706).

Indeed, different ontological and epistemological perspectives guide the researcher in making choices between these various approaches and shape the “many how-to-do decisions throughout an interview investigation” (Kvale, 2007, p. 22; see also Thorpe, 2012). As such, structured interviewing techniques are typically employed by those working within a positivist paradigm, whilst less structured styles tend to be adopted by those working from interpretivist and poststructuralist perspectives (Markula & Silk, 2011; Mason, 2002).

My own ontological and epistemological positions, which suggest “that people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality” and that talking interactively with others is a legitimate and meaningful means of data collection, steered me towards semi-structured or more “loosely structured forms of interviewing” (Mason, 2002, p. 62-63). Drawing inspiration from Fontana & Frey (2005) I used semi-structured interviews in order to understand the complex lives and experiences of women netballers without imposing rigid limits on the field of inquiry. In a deliberate move away from more structured styles of interviews, which can constrain data collection, I employed semi-structured interviews in the

hope that “unexpected data [may] emerge” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 157) and in an effort to encourage participants to demonstrate attitudes and behaviour that may have escaped my prior knowledge. In utilizing this approach I not only aimed to listen carefully “so as to hear the meaning” (Warren, 2002, p. 85) of what participants were trying to say, but also to provide them with “some latitude and freedom” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.102) to discuss what it is that interests and is of significance to them. In other words, with respect to a feminist approach to interviewing, I attempted to make space for women to convey meanings, understandings and experiences in and on their own terms (Kitzinger, 2007).

There are a variety of interview styles and positions adopted by qualitative researchers (e.g. postmodern, performative, feminist), with much debate concerning the most ethical and effective relationships between interviewer and interviewee. There is, however, a general consensus or what Sherman Heyl (2001) terms a “broad-based commitment” (p. 370) to ‘do’ contemporary interviewing in ethical ways such that researchers show respect for those who voluntarily share not only their time, but also their opinions, understandings, memories, thoughts and experiences for the purposes of research (Thorpe, 2012). Part of this commitment to ethics is the recognition that interviews are not “neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people” that lead to “negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 698). In this way, the qualitative interview should be considered a “social encounter in which knowledge is constructed” (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p. 4) in collaboration with participants, as opposed to a mere data-gathering exercise. Following the advice of Gubrium and Holstein (2003) I found it useful to conceive of the interview as “an interactional accomplishment” rather than “a form of stimulus and response” (p. 34). In this way, I treated the interviewees as “meaning makers” rather than “passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers” (Warren, 2002, p. 83; see also, Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Although I recognized that the interviewees were adept to present to me their own ‘stories’ of their netball participation during the conversations that took place in interview spaces, I also acknowledged that the narratives constructed were a product of our interactions. According to Kvale (2007), the Latin meaning

of conversation is “wandering together with” (p. 19). Interviews, therefore, can be considered a journey on which both interviewer and interviewee embark:

The route may be planned ahead of time, but will lead to unexpected twists and turns as interviewer-travelers follow their particular interests and adjust their paths according to what those met along the way choose to share...new knowledge and experiences [are] influenced by just how much one manages to connect to the people one meets along the way and how long one stays to talk, learn and build a relationship with them. Both the traveler and those met are changed by those relationships involving meaningful dialogue (Sherman Heyl, 2001, p. 371).

The approach to interviewing I adopted in this project very much aligns with this idea of journeying and “wandering together with” (Kvale, 2007, p. 19). I did not enter the interview space with rigid guidelines or expectations. Instead, I sat ready to journey with participants through their lives, memories and experiences and was prepared to go where they wished to take me such that I treated my questions simply as a guide.

I generally began the interviews with broad questions about each woman’s netball experiences, their understandings of this sport and culture and the meaning of netball in their lives. I followed these questions with more specific lines of inquiry that depended largely on the information the women communicated and my interest in following up particular comments and finding out more of their ‘stories’ in order to help me address my overall research questions. I coupled this style of questioning with what Tierney and Dilley (2002) describe as a life story (or life history) approach that enabled me to “make sense of the multiple identities that individuals can hold, create and manage over the course of a lifetime” (p. 462). As such, I was not only interested to hear about these women’s present netball experiences, but also their past participation, how they became involved in netball, what has sustained their involvement, and their ongoing relationship to their bodies in and through their engagement with this sport. These questions were integrated with an interest in each woman’s family, working and educational lives to help me contextualize their netball experiences and participation.

It is important to note, however, that as the data collection phase of this research progressed and my theoretical lens became clearer, I did explore some

themes more extensively with some women than others. Further, I conducted a number of interviews with a much clearer focus—for example, exploring the netball experiences of pregnant women, lesbians and older netball players. My engagement with Lefebvrian spatial theory significantly shaped not only whom I chose to interview, but also the questions asked within interviews. Nevertheless, throughout all of the interviews, I aimed to establish rapport with participants, I listened thoughtfully to what they had to tell me, and I recognized the importance of participants as collaborators in this research project (Fontana & Frey, 2005, Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Kitzinger, 2007; Sherman Heyl, 2001).

Importantly, I was also prepared to ‘think on my feet’ (Mason, 2002) and to share my own experiences of netball so that our interview discussions could take the twists and turns that Sherman Heyl (2001) speaks of. I recognized that as I endeavored to treat interviewees with care and respect, getting to know them and their stories through the interview discussions, I could “no longer remain [an] objective, faceless interviewer” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 374) but had to disclose my ‘self’ as I attempted to learn about and ‘travel’ with others. Like Collins (1998) I could not be “merely a passive observer in all this”: even though it was fundamentally the interviewee’s life which was being unraveled in the interview space, I could not “maintain a lofty silence” and was “increasingly moved to contribute my own stories” (as cited in Rapley, 2007, p. 22). In our interviews, participants asked me questions about my netball experiences, my academic work and what it was that I was discovering. I found that discussing these aspects of my identity and research was helpful in enabling me to exchange and critique ideas with participants and to develop my understandings of netball in more reflexive and reflective ways. What is more, my own experiences of netball were an important part of ‘wandering *together*’ through this research (Kvale, 2007).

Certainly, my experiences of netball and my identity as a player, and in some cases fellow team member, allowed me to engage in what Johnson (2002) terms “strict reciprocity” (p. 109) with participants for the fact that I could share with interviewees some of my own perceptions, views, feelings and understandings of the topics we discussed. Thus, despite my encouragement of interviewees to construct their own narratives and to put forth their own ideas, with respect to the idea of journeying, interviews often involved “interviewer and

respondent tell[ing] a story together” (Denzin, 2002, p. 839). Thus, the interview interactions must be considered “collaborative, communicative events that evolve their own norms and rules” in the “context of an ongoing relationship” (Ellis & Berger, 2002, p. 851). Indeed, I took heed of Turkel’s (1995) advice to “stay loose, stay flexible” (as cited in Rapley, 2007, p. 30) and Rapley’s (2007) call to “*just get on with interacting*” (p. 16, emphasis in original) in my approach to the interview process.

The 16 women I interviewed were a diverse group, including single, married, and women in defacto relationships. Some were working in either full or part-time employment, others were unemployed and/or enrolled in tertiary education. Ten were mothers, one was an expectant mother, and one was a grandmother. They ranged from 18 to 64 years of age, and were of both Māori (seven) and New Zealand European/Pākehā (six) descent, with three women identifying as having mixed heritage. All, except one, of the participants identified as heterosexual.

All of the women had played netball at some stage of their lives and most were currently involved in regular trainings and/or games at the time of interviewing—two women had recently retired from regular and organized netball competition (Natasha & Nikki) and one woman (Alex) had only a very short affiliation with this sport via her experiences of Physical Education at her school and her occasional involvement in social mixed netball (see Table 3.1. for interviewee information). Alex’s inclusion in this study in particular, was based on key themes that emerged via my ethnographic methods and the many informal conversations I had with both committed netballers and non-netball players regarding women’s decisions whether or not to play this sport. I found the experiences of those women who had chosen *not* to play netball interesting and also often particularly relevant to my project, specifically with respect to my investigation of the links between netball and femininity in New Zealand. Thus, I decided to explore these themes a little further and in greater depth via a formal interview.

**Table 3.1. Interviewee information**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Approx. Length of Participation in Netball</b>	<b>Level(s) of Participation in Netball</b>
Alex	35-30	Māori/Pākehā	6 months	Social
Amber	20-24	Māori	15 years	Competitive
Cara	25-30	Māori	15 years	Competitive
Debbie	41-45	Māori	33 years	Elite, Competitive, Social
Elizabeth	20-24	New Zealand European/Pākehā	15 years	Competitive
Heather	41-45	New Zealand European/Pākehā	20 years	Competitive, Social
Jane	36-40	Māori/Pākehā	30 years	Competitive, Social
Jess	31-35	Māori/Pākehā	20 years	Competitive, Social
Katie	25-30	New Zealand European/Pākehā	20 years	Competitive
Natasha	25-30	New Zealand European/Pākehā	24 years	Elite, Competitive
Nikki	50+	Māori	40 years	Competitive, Social
Paige	25-30	Māori	15 years	Competitive
Rachel	20-24	New Zealand European/Pākehā	15 years	Elite, Competitive, Social
Rebecca	25-30	New Zealand European/Pākehā	21 years	Elite, Competitive, Social
Sarah	36-40	Māori	35 years	Competitive, Social
Stacey	18-20	Māori	10 years	Elite, Competitive, Social

Overall, this group of women had participated in netball at a range of physical skill levels, for differing lengths of time and at various degrees of ‘seriousness’ (e.g. social, competitive, representative, and elite— usually a mixture of two or more throughout their lifetime). Approximately one third of the women had been representative players who had travelled and played in different areas of the country across their playing careers, and most had occupied a number of roles, often simultaneously, within the culture of netball in New Zealand (e.g. player, coach, manager, umpire, committee member).

Despite frequently sharing little in the way of social identifiers, these women, although diverse, are connected in many ways including through their identities as able-bodied New Zealand women, through their experiences and connections to netball culture, and/or via their passion for and commitment to this sport. Although I only interviewed a relatively small number of women (especially with regards to the number of women who play netball in New Zealand and at the HCNC), it is important to note, that I was not interested in producing a grand narrative of New Zealand women’s netball experiences, and therefore, admit that this project is a located account that makes visible the subjective experiences and understandings of a collection of players. I do argue, however, that these women’s experiences playing in a variety of netball communities and regions across New Zealand help to extend the resonance of the findings in this project beyond the limits of the HCNC and across other spaces of netball.

I employed a range of techniques to recruit participants for this study. I began the interview process by approaching some of my teammates to ask whether they would be interested in talking to me about their netball experiences. For me, this was a useful way to begin building my confidence in interviewing and to establish some themes that I might like to explore further with other women. Each teammate I invited to participate did so and they provided me with valuable data to begin working with. Following these ‘pilot’ interviews (Gratton & Jones, 2004) I began to gather participants for interviews by approaching women in the ‘field’. As a player at the HCNC I found it relatively easy to talk with women at the courts about netball in general and my research more specifically. These conversations were often lengthy and frequently led to me

inviting those I spoke with to become involved in this project via their participation in an interview. I felt fortunate in that most women I asked to participate in this project graciously (and often enthusiastically) accepted my invitation. The information pertaining to this research project distributed via the HCNC also proved to be a particularly effective means of gathering participants as I had several women contact me via email to express their interest in participating in my study. Often these women put me in touch with their netball-playing friends and I was able to recruit more participants using the snowball sampling method.

The interviews were interesting, humorous, complex, puzzling, emotional, informative and, at times, confronting with each providing a rich source of information that significantly shaped my research and thinking. Each interview was typically one-on-one, face-to-face, audio recorded and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I did, however, conduct three group interviews consisting of two to three women at the request of some participants or as a result of some women inviting their friends to join. Interviews were held at times and in places of the participants' choosing, which included their homes or mine, local cafés and bars, and in a meeting room at one of the women's places of work. These interviews were conducted in addition to many informal conversations at the courts. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary and I ensured that all women received a written information sheet about this project and signed a formal consent form to demonstrate their understanding of the research process and their willingness to participate prior to the commencement of any interviews (see Appendix 5 & 6).

I also did my utmost to ensure confidentiality. I was careful never to divulge information about other participants including who said what in interviews, I provided all participants with pseudonyms to protect their identities and have as much as possible omitted obvious identifiers unless I have been given express permission to include these via the participant details sheet (see Appendix 7). I transcribed all of the interviews myself. Although this was often a very time consuming and laborious task, it was also extremely valuable in that it enabled me to develop an intimate relationship with each interview discussion (Thorpe, 2012). In addition to face-to-face interviews, I engaged in email communication with

three participants. This was generally to seek clarification on some aspects of our initial interview as part of the process of returning transcripts, but also included me asking some follow-up questions or seeking their opinions on issues/topics that arose later in this study.

As with my participation in netball at the HCNC, my researching/playing identities were complicated during interviews, especially those with my teammates or women I knew. Most women appeared to consider me a fellow netballer over and above a researcher and whilst this was particularly useful for my attempts to recruit interviewees and to establish rapport, it prompted me to reflect on the implications of these women's relaxed attitudes to divulging information in the interview space. There was a sense that as a fellow netballer I not only understood what interviewees were trying to tell me, but that I could be trusted with their inner most thoughts, opinions and experiences. Although I was incredibly humbled by the trust these women had in me, the blurring of my researching/playing identities in the interviews encouraged me to consider the ways I balance an "academic translation" (Taylor, 2011, p. 14) of netball with my relationships and identities in the field. For example, careful consideration was often required when discussing coaching or particular teams, whereby interviewees frequently used the interview space to vent their frustrations about particular players, their teammates and coaches. During interviews, therefore, I became especially attuned to what was being discussed with me as a netballer rather than as a researcher.

The perspectives, understandings and experiences of interviewees helped to challenge my subjective understandings of netball and encouraged me to explore the diverse ways in which women experience this sport. Over the course of this research I spoke with a variety of women who play netball for very different reasons and experience their bodies in this context in a myriad of ways. In this sense, the ideas and themes that arose over the course of this project became something that were negotiated and contested in the interviews as the women's perspectives and experiences strengthened, deepened, confirmed and challenged my assumptions, understandings and knowledge. The interview space, therefore, was an important means for me to discuss and develop ideas with the participants such that the conversations we shared were pivotal in that they

highlighted the ways our netball experiences and understandings aligned and importantly, where and how they diverged and/or sat in tension with one another.

### **Media analysis: Poring over the ‘pages’**

In conjunction with my participation and interviews, I also gathered empirical information about netball and netballers from an array of publicly available media sources and texts. Media analysis can be defined as “the systematic analysis of how images, words, video, and a host of other ‘texts’ are distributed to and received by people through print or electronic mediums” (Atkinson, 2012, p. 136). As we are surrounded by various forms of texts, and because netball features heavily in the New Zealand media (in comparison to other women’s sports), I had no difficulty finding sources for my analysis. I read newspaper articles, women’s lifestyle magazine spreads and publications such as *‘Netball’*—a free annual guide that profiles players and discusses upcoming games and test matches. I perused online news stories, visited player and team social media pages and online blogs about netball and I watched televised netball games (both national and international), television advertisements featuring netball players, prime time news broadcasts and programmes dedicated to this sport (e.g. NetballZone—a post-match commentary and netball-based news show).

I read and watched these texts paying close attention to how netball and netballers are (re)presented and constructed via both language and images. I took notes, highlighted interesting and insightful information and saved web pages, articles, blog entries, social media posts and images on my computer. Since there have been relatively few academic publications dedicated to examining the lived experiences of contemporary women netball participants in New Zealand, or elsewhere for that matter (e.g. Marfell, 2011; Schaaf, 2011; Taylor, 2000, 2004; Teevale, 2000), I embarked on this media analysis as a means to understand and familiarize myself with the discourses operating on and through contemporary netball spaces and bodies. My aim was to draw upon a discourse analysis approach “in order to expose the dominant *episteme* (knowledge), assumptions, ideologies or values underwriting” (Atkinson, 2012, p. 138, emphasis in original) and being (re)produced via these texts.

My media analysis was not an exhaustive discourse analysis of all online and/or print texts on netball. Rather, in accordance with my ethnographic approach to data collection, it was another way for me to ensure I was “watching what happens, listening to what is said...collecting documents and artifacts” and generally, “gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Thus, my media analysis is a selective overview of some recurring themes throughout a broad sample of recent online and print media on netball that reinforces the idea that “media texts offer especially rich opportunities to observe the cultural construction of meaning, locations where we can see the social production of ideas and values happening before our eyes” (Turner, 1997, p. 326). As Markula and Silk (2011) point out, samples for textual analysis, like in all forms of qualitative research, are not selected at random, but rather purposefully to seek answers to specific research questions. The texts I have included in this research, therefore, represent those that best provide a window into the social production of netball space and the identities of netballers themselves. Further, these media texts have been used to support, challenge and extend themes emerging from my own playing experiences, interviews and participant-observations.

The analysis of various online, televised and print media was a particularly important part of this project and there was much insight to be gained from reading through and watching these various forms of media for my thesis. The media clearly plays an important role in the distribution of knowledge about netball and thus, how this sport and its players are read. Although I have always been interested in reading about or watching netball, my awareness of the ways netballers are described, represented, depicted and therefore, consumed, stemmed largely from my critical engagement with netball ‘texts’ for this research.

### **Understanding and (re)presenting women’s netball experiences**

As Thorpe (2012) suggests, a researcher’s approach to data analysis is always intimately connected to their theoretical interests. Researchers working within poststructural or postmodern paradigms, however, “are often vague about how they work with their empirical material” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 108). Markula and Silk (2011) claim,

this is partly due to their subjective epistemology, which does not necessitate detailed verification of the research process to ensure objectivity. There is much stronger emphasis on understanding individual meaning making within a social, political, historical and economic context (p. 108).

Instead, critical scholars “are expected to adopt a well-articulated theoretical frame for interpreting” the meanings in their data and to “explain how their theoretical lens informed their analysis” (Thorpe, 2012, p. 62). For some scholars, their particular theoretical orientations point them in the direction of very specific theoretically based analytical techniques (e.g. Foucault and genealogy, Deleuze and rhizomatics, Derrida and deconstruction). Many theoretical approaches, however, do not prioritize a specific style of analysis and thus, Markula and Silk (2011) offer poststructural researchers some suggestions of more general patterns for the analysis of empirical materials, including; “the identification of themes, analysis of themes, intersections with themes, discrepancies with themes, ‘new themes’ [and] connection with power relations, theory and previous literature” (p. 109; see also Thorpe, 2012). Such practices provide useful information to form clearer understandings of the issues imbedded in the data and how these fit together without the need for forming explicit allegiances to a particular theoretical lens prior to data collection (Hennick, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

I embarked on the analysis process early in the data collection phase of this research—soon after I began playing netball for the purposes of this research and had conducted my first two to three interviews. Therefore, although I have separated my participation, interviews, media analysis and data analysis for clarity in this chapter, it is important to note, that during this study, research methods and analysis were not employed in a linear fashion, for it is “impossible to disentangle *data*, *data collection* and *data analysis*” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 622, emphasis in original). I began the analysis process by reading and rereading my interview transcripts and research notes and attempting to identify relevant themes. Rather than focusing on each individual transcript, however, I looked for broad, sweeping themes across the interviews whilst paying particular attention to any emerging themes or inconsistencies in the data and how these linked to what I had observed and experienced in the ‘field’ or throughout my media analysis. I regularly discussed these ideas with my supervisors and began to piece together potential

themes, focuses and structures for my thesis based on what my data were beginning to expose. I pursued what I identified as key themes emerging from my data with future interviewees, which were supported, extended deepened and sometimes challenged during our conversations. Examples of these themes include: the presumed heterosexuality of female players; netball as a space of marginalization, exclusion and regulation; and netball as a practice of resistance.

Alongside this analysis, I embarked upon “hard theoretical reading” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621), which I engaged in an ongoing conversation with what was being highlighted throughout my research notes, media analysis and interview transcripts. According to Bruce (2010), Bourdieu perhaps best encapsulates the significance of the “dance” (p. 7) between theory and the empirical when he claims that “research without theory is blind and theory without research is empty” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 162). It is the case; my data made little sense to me without an interpretative framework or theory through which it could be filtered. Importantly, therefore, I was not one of those “emerging researchers [who] confidently conclude their data-gathering process only to embark on a desperate bid to find the theory” (Thorpe, 2012, p. 56) that fits neatly with their data. In other words, I did not adopt a grounded theoretical approach that involved waiting until the conclusion of data collection before aligning my data with particular theories and concepts (Atkinson, 2012; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Thorpe, 2012). Rather, theory played an important part *throughout* my investigation of netball and women’s experiences of this sport and was pivotal in helping me to work with and interpret my ethnographic data. I constantly engaged my empirical information in conversation with critical theoretical approaches, particularly poststructural feminism, feminist geography and Lefebvrian spatial theory, which helped direct me to particular themes in my data “depending on the sociological questions being asked” (Thorpe, 2012, p. 63).

Although my project was always informed by a poststructural feminist approach, it was not until late in the first year of my Doctoral studies that I came across and began to familiarize myself with Lefebvre’s work, and particularly, Lefebvrian spatial theory. By this time, I had already read and engaged with the work of a number of poststructural theorists including Foucault and Deleuze in an effort to deepen and develop my understandings of New Zealand women’s

experiences of netball and the power relations operating on and through women's moving bodies in this sport. It was my engagement with Lefebvrian spatial theory, in particular, however, that proved extremely influential for this research. Not only did Lefebvre's work seem useful for addressing the aims of my project, but I also recognized the potential of his theoretical schema for offering an original and unique contribution to the field, and for exploring New Zealand women's experiences of this sport. When applied to my project, Lefebvre's spatial dialectics, made me realize that my project was just as much about exploring the social production of netball space and the 'context' of netball as it was about capturing women's voices, stories and experiences of this sport. As a result, I began to approach my interviews with different and more focused questions in mind, I sought out particular interviewees, I looked upon media representations of netball in new ways and I began to engage more deeply with the work of feminist geographers given the spatial orientation of their work.

Importantly, Lefebvrian spatial theory not only helped me to analyze my data, but also significantly shaped the way in which I organized my evidence, that is, the empirical information I collected throughout this research. Drawing upon Lefebvre's spatial triad and his thematic categorization of space, helped me to develop a logical structure for this thesis and a coherent way in which to order and systemize my findings. More specifically, Lefebvre's understanding of the relationship between representations of space and spatial practices and their influence on the ways people occupy, experience and express themselves in and through particular spaces has informed the presentation of my data. Subsequently, I have organized this thesis and my data into three separate (but theoretically interrelated) themes; the social production of netball as feminized and heterosexualized space (representations of space and spatial practice), netball as a space of marginalization, exclusion and regulation (lived space) and, finally, netball as a space of resistance (lived space).

Of course, I cannot simply represent all of the information I have collected over the three-year duration of this study in these chapters (Atkinson, 2012) and there are certain inferences that could not be made for me by theory alone. Therefore, as a researcher, I have had to make important decisions about the representation of my data including: whose voices are included (and excluded) in

this research; how many and which quotes are selected; and how these have been woven with theoretical insights; as well as overall writing style. Often choices surrounding the quotes I included in this research were based on the ability of some participants to be more critical and reflexive about their experiences. Some themes that I explored in this research were more relevant to particular participants, and thus, their voices may be more dominant or appear more frequently in specific sections of this thesis. I attempted to use as many quotes as I could to illustrate the salience of particular themes in the lives of New Zealand women players and therefore, the chapters are laden with the voices of the women I interviewed. With my participant-observations playing such a significant role in this project, I also included some of my own experiences as findings and these are woven throughout the various chapters.

The decisions I made regarding the writing up of this research have been influenced by Smith (1989) who suggests that an interpretive researcher “can only choose to do some things as opposed to others based on what seems reasonable, given his or her interests and purposes, the context of the situation, and so on” (as cited in Sparkes, 1992, p. 30). For researchers adopting a poststructural approach to knowledge generation “an underlying assumption is that representations of findings are always partial arbitrary, and situated, rather than unitary, final and holistic” (Roulston, 2010, p. 220). Researchers operating from this position are not attempting to “reach a precise, definitive, singular truth” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 55), but instead, “to open up spaces for new ways of thinking, being, and doing” (Roulston, 2010, p. 220). With a feminist poststructural sensibility underpinning my work, my writing style reflects my efforts to present women’s voices and ‘stories’ of netball in meaningful ways. In drawing upon a narrative style of writing, I have also chosen to adopt an active first person authorial voice, and thus, present my data in a way that not only aims to effectively demonstrate the experiences, struggles, pleasures and lived realities of women netball players, but also to contextualize these within relations of gender and broader dimensions of power. In the following chapters, therefore, I draw upon the voices of participants, my research notes and other cultural sources (e.g. magazines, websites, images, blog posts, commentary) “to bring abstract theoretical concepts ‘to life’” (Thorpe, 2012, p. 63), to provide verification as to the relevance of particular themes in the

lives of participants and to connect “personal experiences to theory, research, and cultural critique” (Ellingson, 2011, p. 600).

### **Summary**

Engaging my body in the practices and spaces of netball, conducting interviews with women players and analyzing an array of contemporary media texts was a valuable set of methods in that they provided a way for me to understand and engage with netballers and netball culture. These approaches accommodated as well as challenged my athlete subjectivity in ways that enabled me to draw upon but also to occupy new subject positions in order to generate new knowledge and insights about this sport and the women who play. The insights included in this thesis developed out of the practices and experiences I felt, saw and heard and thus, reveal a range of perspectives, understandings and experiences of netball, some of which closely align with my own, but also many others that reveal the subtleties, nuances and marked differences evident in women’s lives and their experiences of this sport and culture.

Having described my research methods and approach to data analysis, I now discuss my research findings. I begin by drawing upon Lefebvre’s understanding of space, particularly the first two strands of his spatial triad, to explore the social production of netball space and more specifically, the links between netball and femininity in New Zealand. Chapters Five and Six then move onto analytical discussions of netball as a space of marginalization, regulation and exclusion and a space for women’s demonstration of resistance respectively.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **‘The Game for New Zealand Girls’: The Feminization and Heterosexualization of Netball Space**

In New Zealand, netball is a sport that is “unambiguously for women” (Donnelly, 2011, p. 3). It is a physical pursuit that is, by and large, regarded as exclusively (or at least the most appropriately) for females (Hawes & Barker, 1999; Kerr, 2008; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994; Tagg, 2008a, 2014). This is evidenced by its promotion to girls and young women in schools, the number of girls and women’s netball teams, clubs, organizations and leagues in existence, and the invisibility, in both the media and wider society, of men’s netball<sup>14</sup> in the country. In this sense, it is widely acknowledged that netball promotes and preserves a sense of ‘women-onlyness’.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, whilst the women-onlyness of netball is a significant and unique aspect of this sport for many women (a topic returned to later in this chapter), netball represents much more than a women-dominated physical culture or a ‘game for girls’.<sup>16</sup> It is also a sporting space that is intimately and inextricably linked to the (re)production of a dominant femininity in New Zealand. Prior to explaining how this connection has been made, and continues to be (re)produced,

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<sup>14</sup> The gender marking of men’s netball can also be considered a way of emphasizing that this sport is for women. Gender marking is typically used to highlight “women’s incursion into a traditionally masculine cultural practice” (Donnelly, 2011, p. 135), to represent men’s sports as the norm (Messner, Duncan & Jensen, 1993) and is considered by most sport scholars as a means of trivializing and ‘othering’ women’s participation. In netball, however, gender marking is used only when men engage in this sport. The term ‘men’s netball’, therefore, sends the message that the women’s version of this sport and women netballers are the universal norm, whilst men’s netball is marked as ‘other’.

<sup>15</sup> There has been over 30 years of debate among feminist scholars surrounding the potential and limitations of female-only groups for women’s positive experiences and empowerment (Birrell, 1984; Birrell & Richter, 1987; Castelnova & Guthrie, 1998; DeWelde, 2003; Freedman, 1979; Green 1998; Guthrie, 1995; Handler, 1995; McDermott, 2004; Pelak, Taylor & Whittier, 1999). Most recently, Donnelly (2011) has engaged and extended the term in her analysis of women’s flat track roller derby and women-only Do-It-Yourself (DIY) workshops.

<sup>16</sup> I am aware that ‘girls’ is a contested term among sociologists due to its association with the infantilization of women. In this chapter and throughout this thesis, however, I use this term because of its historical links to the proclamation of the suitability of this sport for New Zealand females (e.g. ‘a game eminently suitable for every girl’ or ‘the good game for kiwi girls’). Moreover, many of my participants used this term to describe themselves and others.

I briefly contextualize this dominant femininity within broader New Zealand society.

In a similar way to the hegemonic form of masculinity celebrated in New Zealand and exemplified among a number of rugby heroes (Phillips, 1996; Pringle, 2001, 2004), the type of femininity privileged in the country can be considered what Phillips (1996) terms “a regional variant of Victorian British attitudes” (p. 4) that has links to New Zealand’s colonial and rural roots (MacDonald, 1999). Late-nineteenth century European (or Pākehā) women typically lived very different lives and engaged in markedly different activities than most of their English counterparts (Brooking, 2004; Dalziel, 1977; Lineham, 2011; Thompson, 2003). Like their English contemporaries, they lived in a patriarchal social structure such that they were expected to marry and submit to their husbands. However, the frontier nature of colonial New Zealand life tended to circumvent the rigid compartmentalization of women’s roles that dominated English middle-class society and confined women largely to the home (Crawford, 1987). New Zealand women often had to work hard and engage in tremendously physical types of work that required them to act as partners in the running of farms and businesses and, in so doing, to challenge the passive and “demure image of the Victorian woman” (Lineham, 2011, p. 78; see also Crawford, 1987; Thompson, 2003). In this manner, “raw, frontier New Zealand” had little use for “ornamental females” (Brooking, 2004, p. 87) and instead required them be fit, strong, courageous, determined and unencumbered (Thompson, 2003).

Indeed, colonial New Zealand females did not, and could not, conform to Victorian expectations that suggested women “ought not be expected to lift anything heavier than pins and needles, and never more than a cotton reel” (*Christian Observer*, 1870, as cited in Lineham, 2011, p. 82). Rather, those women who embodied the ideal of the tireless homemaker “who acted as a combination of laborer, domestic servant, and child-producing machine” (Brooking, 2002, p. 87, emphasis added) were widely valued and praised. Whilst adopting some Victorian traditions (especially those associated with marriage and women’s domestic responsibilities), colonies such as New Zealand also provided space for girls and women to experience some freedom from, and the potential to (re)negotiate, certain Victorian notions of femininity (Moruzi & Smith, 2014).

Ultimately, the need for females to work to contribute to the development of New Zealand society functioned to privilege a particular and alternative type of femininity—one that celebrates characteristics of heteronormativity *as well as* physical fitness, cooperation, stamina and strength—and thus, has offered New Zealand women and socio-cultural notions of femininity some scope outside of what was imaginable in Britain and many other Western societies (MacDonald, 1999). In short, femininity has and continues to be “epitomised by ‘usefulness’” (Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002, p. 136) in New Zealand, that is, the belief that women should display domesticity, heterosexuality and femininity whilst also being able to perform the most laborious of chores and often in rural and rugged settings.

In this chapter, I examine the articulations between netball and this culturally valued version of femininity via an analysis of the social production of netball space. In so doing, I draw upon Lefebvre’s ideas about the relations between bodies and spaces, and particularly his concepts of representations of space and spatial practice, in order to explore the ways netball has and continues to be (re)produced as feminized and heterosexualized space. For Lefebvre, representations of space are directly linked to ideology and discourse. Thus, describing the representation of any space involves identifying the ways in which spaces are “conceived and constructed through discourse...[and] shaped through the intersection of knowledge and power by elite groups” (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 96). Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of spatial practice “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” ensuring “continuity and some degree of cohesion” (p. 33). Accordingly, throughout this chapter, I pay close attention to how netball spaces and bodies are (re)produced via ideologies, discourse and knowledge, the physical landscape of netball, and the routines and behaviours that characterize women’s participation within this physical and cultural context.

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre introduces spatial practice, or perceived space, as the first ‘moment’ in the overall production of space. It is important to recognize, however, that his spatiology does not privilege one moment above another. Put simply, no element of Lefebvre’s spatial triad can be considered “superior to, or determinative of the others” (Friedman & van Ingen,

2011, p. 96). Rather, as Merrifield (2006) suggests, Lefebvre's triad features mutually constitutive elements, that is, it is "fluid and alive, with three specific moments that blur into each other" (as cited in Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 96). Importantly, whilst intimately intertwined and profoundly connected, each moment has a distinct role in producing and regulating social space. Thus, for the purposes of gaining a deeper understanding of this unique and culturally significant women's sport in New Zealand, it is necessary to unpack each moment in the production of this space carefully and critically.

Throughout this discussion I simultaneously draw upon Lefebvre's ideas regarding representations of space and spatial practice to highlight the spatialized power relations operating on and within netball in New Zealand. I argue that understanding the representation of this space and the spatial practices of this sport, or the ways in which netball is conceived and perceived, is not only vital for understanding women's experiences of this sport, but also the entanglement of oppression and resistance that exists within this social space. Moreover, the representation of netball space appears intimately connected to the spatial practices of this sport and vice versa.

I begin my analysis of the social geography of netball and New Zealand women's experiences of this sport by examining the ways in which representations of space and spatial practice have and continue to produce netball(ers) in past and present contexts. In particular, I explore the ways in which spaces of netball are both gendered and structured by heterosexuality, thus helping to (re)produce "the stereotype of the [New Zealand] netballer" as "someone who is heterosexual and conventionally feminine" (Treagus, 2005, p. 102). Importantly, whilst much time and effort has been afforded to understanding the cultural significance of rugby in the country and how this sport serves to instill a "culturally exhalted" (Pringle, 2001, p. 426) form of masculinity in the identities of New Zealand males (Nauright & Chandler, 1996; Park, 2000; Pringle, 2001, 2004, 2009; Pringle & Markula, 2005) netball and its relationship to femininity in New Zealand has received much less academic attention. More specifically, the ways netball, which has long been considered an appropriately 'feminine game', continues to act as a vehicle for teaching and (re)producing a particular and

dominant type of femininity appear to have gone largely unnoticed among studies of contemporary New Zealand sports and physical culture.

In this chapter, therefore, I pay attention to the ongoing and complex relationships between women's moving bodies, netball space and social relations, that is, "the ways in which space presses against our bodies, and of necessity touches at our subjectivities" (Probyn, 2003, p. 294). In so doing, I focus on how the historical and contemporary representations of netball space and the spatial practices of netball(ers) work to (re)produce and celebrate particular gendered and sexualized identities and bodies, and thus, prioritize a relatively narrow but socially valued heteronormative feminine athletic ideal. To conclude this chapter, I turn to Lefebvre's conceptualization of 'counterspaces', which I use to position netball not only as an alternative sporting spatiality to dominant (masculinized) sport space in New Zealand but also, importantly, to make sense of netball as a space of contradiction: "a space of both domination and resistance" (van Ingen, 2002, p. 106) and of constraints and possibilities for New Zealand women (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). Chapters Four and Five then draw further upon Lefebvre's (1991) ideas about social space to examine the multiple spatialities that exist within netball in New Zealand and to extend the analysis of the intersections between bodies, space and power. That is, I examine the social geography of netball in the everyday lives and experiences of New Zealand women.

Before commencing my discussion of the social production of netball space, it is important to note that despite adopting a feminist methodology, which seeks to privilege the voices and 'stories' of women, this chapter often relies somewhat heavily on data gathered via historical texts, media analysis and observations. Although I endeavored to generate discussion regarding the underlying assumptions about netball(ers) and the ideologies circulating within this sporting space during interviews, I found that the majority of participants seemed unable or unwilling to reflect upon netball as celebrating a particular version of femininity. As such, there were often significant silences surrounding these themes, and particularly regarding the notion of the 'conceived space' of netball in New Zealand. Importantly, however, researchers should not only critically examine the issues and themes arising from the spoken aspects of their

research, but also from the silences in the research process (Scharff, 2010). Similarly, Leatherby (2003) suggests “silences are as important as noise in research and the interpretation of silence is as important as the interpretation of what is being said” (p. 109). Indeed, whilst these silences were, at times, extremely frustrating, what remained unspoken in the interviews also told me two important things: firstly, that the social relations operating on and through netball spaces and bodies had become so powerful that they often remain taken for granted and thus, invisible to most women; and secondly, that I would need to draw upon additional research methods and sources of information in order to explore the dimensions of power operating within this social space.

With all of this in mind, I turned to historical texts and employed media analysis and observations in addition to, and in conversation with, interview discussions in order to more fully understand and critically analyze the social production of netball space and the ongoing and complex relationship between netball and femininity in New Zealand. What follows in this chapter, therefore, is the product of the silences that occurred throughout the research process and my efforts to weave the voices and understandings of women, where possible, together with insights generated via historical reading and additional qualitative ethnographic research methods.

### **Netball, Lefebvre and the spatialization of the past**

According to White (2010), historians have traditionally paid little attention to the concept of space, or more specifically, to the interrelationship between space and time (see also Bender, 2007; Ethington, 2007). Accordingly, suggests White (2010), historians still routinely document political change, social change, class relations, gender relations and cultural change as though the spatial dimensions of these issues matter little, if at all. In response to such concerns, a small group of historians have recently begun to rethink the representation of the past in an effort “to reconnect history, geography, time and space” (Bender, 2007, p. 500). Importantly, some scholars, such as Ethington (2007), suggest history should not be considered simply an “account of ‘change over time’, as the cliché goes, but rather change through space” (p. 466). Similarly, feminist sports historian Patricia Vertinsky (2004) claims that a growing number of historians are drawing upon the

spatial turn in the social sciences to point out that “space is not the unchanging backdrop against which life is played out” (p. 12). To help bring the spatial characteristics of social life into representations of the past some scholars are turning to the work of social theorists such as Lefebvre.

A foundational aspect of Lefebvre’s work on the production of space is an appreciation that space itself is constructed by time, just as time is equally constructed by space (Bender, 2007). So, if space is produced, that is, if there is considered to be a productive process, then we are undeniably speaking of history (Lefebvre, 1991). In laying the foundation for his spatiology, Lefebvre explores the relationship between time and space, and in so doing, introduces the idea that “space is neither simply natural geography nor an empty container filled by history” (White, 2010, p. 2; see also Molotch, 1993). Rather, for Lefebvre, space is fluid and dynamic, it is something produced by human beings *over time*. In Lefebvre’s (1991) own words “time is distinguishable but not separable from space” (p. 175), such that:

the historical and its consequences, the ‘diachronic’, the ‘etymology’ of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or space and thereby changed it—all of this becomes inscribed in space. The past leaves its traces (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 37).

From this perspective, space and time exist in a dialectical relationship, that is, “space is itself historical” (White, 2010, p. 2.). Importantly, Lefebvre also positions the body at the intersection of and in dialectical relationships with both time and space (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Simonsen, 2005).

Certainly, the space of netball in New Zealand has been and continues to be constructed by time, just as the history of women’s sport participation in New Zealand has been influenced and shaped by netball space (see e.g. Marfell, 2011; Nauright, 1996; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994). Hence, it is useful to explore the links between what Lefebvre calls the ‘representations’ of this space and ‘spatial practice’, time and the body.

### **Feminizing netball space: A historical discussion**

The story of the invention of ‘basket ball’<sup>17</sup> and the history of netball is well documented by numerous historians (Grundy & Shakelford, 2005; Hawes & Barker, 1999; Romanos & Woods, 1992; Treagus, 2005). To begin to contextualize the production of netball in time and space, however, it is useful to briefly (re)introduce this narrative and the international origins and development of this sport.<sup>18</sup> Thus, this section begins with a brief discussion of the invention of basket ball and importantly, its modification for female participation in the United States of America before moving onto an analysis of the production of netball space in the New Zealand context.

#### ***Exploring international origins: The development of netball abroad***

As Andrew (1997) suggests, basket ball<sup>19</sup> was developed by Doctor James Naismith, a staff member of the international training seminary for the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) at Springfield in Massachusetts. Despite physical activity being a priority in this institution, Naismith was concerned at the lack of interest shown by his pupils in the existing physical activities offered to students, namely gymnastics and calisthenics. Thus, in an attempt to better accommodate his students’ needs, Naismith devised an indoor men’s 9-a-side game called basket ball, in which the object was to pass the ball amongst team members across the length of a court in order to shoot a ball through a suspended basket. Said to have “revolutionized sport” (Hawes & Barker, 1999, p. 1) Naismith’s game not only facilitated the fitness of male baseball and football players during their off-season, but it also offered a sporting space with minimal threat of injury. Recognizing the risks posed by sports that incorporated running

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that netball was originally known as ‘basket ball’ until 1970 when a name change occurred to more clearly distinguish it from men’s basketball. To avoid confusion, in this chapter I use the term ‘basket ball’ to refer to the *men’s* game, and use netball when referring to the *women’s* game in both historical and contemporary contexts.

<sup>18</sup> For a more comprehensive historical account of the development of netball see Mandy Treagus’ (2005) paper titled ‘Playing like ladies: basketball, netball and feminine restraint.’

<sup>19</sup> Although Naismith’s game was termed ‘basket ball’, it is important to point out that to a modern observer basket ball would likely appear more like a physical version of netball than what we now know and recognize as the sport of basketball today (Andrew, 1997).

with the ball, dribbling, or hitting it, Naismith aimed to create a game, that by counteracting these sporting behaviours, minimized potential risks of injury whilst at the same time provided fair competition and amusement (Andrew, 1997).

Netball is a direct descendant of Naismith's original game. Unlike the development of basket ball, however, "the beginning of netball for women was by coincidence rather than design" (Andrew, 1997, p. 29). As this socially enjoyable game gained popularity among men, it also caught the attention of a few key women. Within weeks of its inception, an early publication by Naismith, in which he outlined the rules of his new game, attracted the attention of North American female physical education teacher and women's physical activity advocate, Senda Berenson. Despite games being an important part of the school lives of boys during this time, girls' schools had only been able to endorse female participation in games under strict conditions. Pervasive patriarchal discourses and the influence of socially constructed gender stratification ensured men's and women's opportunities to experience movement via sport and physical activity were markedly different. Thus, female physical educators negotiated the adoption of games for girls very carefully (Treagus, 2005). Whilst Berenson was intrigued by this new sport, she was equally aware that Naismith's game would not be suitable for women's participation. Accordingly, Berenson set about modifying the rules in an effort to create a socially acceptable game for her female students and a sporting space encouraging of feminine subjectivities.

The early games of basket ball under Naismith's rules were extremely physical. Indeed, the current rules and format of this sport limited its acceptability for female participation as the physical nature of most sports was already limiting the involvement of women (Andrew, 1997). Thus, in order to create a sport conducive to reproducing socially sanctioned ideals of femininity, Berenson was aware that some of Naismith's rules must be altered. Put simply, basket ball "wasn't invented for girls, and there [wasn't] anything effeminate about it" (Grundy & Shakelford, 2005, p. 19). Subsequently, Berenson transformed the spatial practices of basket ball in two important ways.

Firstly, defensive players were prohibited from attempting to obtain possession of the ball from an attacking player and the centre 'jump ball' to begin and restart the game after scoring was replaced by alternative centre passes. These

changes were administered to alleviate Berenson's concerns regarding unfeminine behaviour and to enable netball to adhere to discursive constructions of femininity: "unless a game as exciting as [netball] is carefully guided by such rules as will eliminate roughness, the great desire to win and the excitement of the game will make our women do sadly unwomanly things" (Berenson, n.d., as cited in Treagus, 2005, p. 92). Berenson ensured that this new sport for women would not be sabotaged by any display of undisciplined or unruly conduct (Treagus, 2005).

Secondly, Berenson divided the court into thirds and confined each player to one. Teams could have anywhere from five to ten players meaning the division of the court significantly restricted women's movements. The compartmentalization of playing space was justified on the grounds that women's bodies were incapable of handling the physical demands of playing over the length of a full court surface. These changes were, therefore, implemented to protect participants from potential physical exhaustion in accordance with scientific and medical discourses that proclaimed women to be delicate and fragile beings whose reproductive systems could be damaged by excessive physical exertion (Andrew, 1997; Grundy & Shackelford, 2005; Treagus, 2005; Vertinsky, 1990).

In order to further ensure the (re)production of feminine subjectivities in netball, particular attention was also paid to women's playing attire. Indeed, sport for women and girls raised concern about dress for all sporting participants and their instructors (Treagus, 2005). Initially, when women began to play sports such as netball they tended to wear slightly modified versions of conventional female dress, which usually included corsets, heels, hats and long skirts. A little later, however, women began to "sweat off" (Treagus, 2005, p. 99-100) the corsets and adopted more appropriate and functional sporting attire. Whilst there existed a range of netball uniforms during this time—from 'bloomers', an early version of women's gym clothes worn by American women, to the long skirts and shirts worn by the English—netballers "were nothing if not sticklers to the strictest sense of modesty" (Grundy, 2001, as cited in Grundy & Shakelford, 2005, p. 29). Certainly, by restricting women's movements to limit the physicality of the game and by adhering to standards of feminine dress, Berenson and other advocates of

netball were able to create a feminized sporting space conducive to and encouraging of particular feminine subjectivities.

Ultimately, in modifying the spatial practices of Naismith's basket ball, Berenson created an almost entirely separate women's game that attempted to meet the social expectations surrounding women's physical activity during this time. This was an especially bold move during a period where ideals of femininity were strict and women's involvement in physical activity and sport was extremely limited. Importantly, this development increased the visibility of women in physical culture and signaled a change in direction in women's college sport as women were introduced to more vigorous and competitive physical pursuits (Vertinsky, 1994). Further, the participation of North American women in this newfound female-specific physical activity quickly caught the attention of women's sport and physical education advocates in England, and later in Commonwealth countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

### ***The arrival of the 'national sport for New Zealand women'***

By most accounts, netball was introduced to New Zealand by Presbyterian Reverend J. C. Jamieson in 1906 (Hawes & Barker 1999; Nauright, 1996; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994). It is important to note, however, that some commentaries suggest that netball in fact predated the turn of the century (Andrews, 1997; Henley, 2012). Regardless of how and when netball was introduced to the country, there is little doubt that it has contributed significantly to New Zealand women's public visibility. Despite early political recognition, restrictions on New Zealand women's participation in most public spaces remained rigid during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Nauright, 1996) such that the right for women to vote "was not accompanied by a major revolution in gendered roles and values" (Nauright & Broomhall, 1994, p. 390). In other words, the increased political visibility of New Zealand women during this time did not translate into wider opportunities for females in the public sphere. Consequently, women had to "carve out their own public spaces" (Nauright, 1996, p. 13) in pursuits such as education, health, and sports.

Although middle-class women took control of women's sports, their integration into particular sporting spaces proved difficult as women's and men's leisure were based on distinctly different value systems (Daley, 1999). Whilst it was accepted that women could be physically active, it was generally not considered suitable for a woman to compete or for her to make a spectacle of herself in public (Brookes, Olssen & Beer, 2003). Most women were, therefore, painfully aware that females who engaged in sport faced immediate criticism (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000). Indeed, "to partake in vigorous sport and emerge red-faced and sweaty did not square with male perceptions of how women should behave" (Simpson, 1999, p. 63) in the public sphere. Subsequently, many middle-class women supported and adhered to restrictions on women's participation in sports considered too masculine for females and instead chose to participate in sports and physical activities thought suitable for reinforcing 'ladylike' behaviour and reproducing feminine traits (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Nauright, 1996; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994). Most notably, New Zealand women's participation could be observed in tennis and especially netball during this time.

Prior to its arrival in New Zealand, netball had already received strong media support. In 1897, *The Otago Witness* wrote of the beauty of the sport and its fame in the United States where it was "completely eclipsing lawn tennis, and effectually nipping in the bud the threatened revival of croquet" (Ladies' Gossip, 1897, p. 44). Positive public perceptions of netball were also reflected in an article in the *Christchurch Sun* in 1926 where it was expressed that netball "provides splendid exercise for those engaged in it, but has the added charm of not being too rough...which makes it so good a game for girls" (as cited in Nauright & Broomhall, 1994, p. 394). Already, the representation of netball space as suitably feminine was having a profound influence on this sport's acceptability for New Zealand girls and women.

There is little doubt that netball prospered largely because of the restrictions placed on women's moving bodies during this time (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Nauright, 1996). More to the point, netball offered New Zealand women an important opportunity to participate in team sports without engaging in typically 'masculine' behaviour, and whilst developing their self-control, loyalty, fair play, sense of responsibility, courage, and cooperation (Treagus, 2005). New

Zealand's adoption of Berenson's modified rules and the introduction of nine players instead of five ensured that women's movements in netball were extremely small and that physical contact remained an intolerable aspect of the game. Accordingly, critics who had attacked women's participation in sports such as cricket and hockey did not attack netball, since it did not promote physical contact, individual brilliance, winning, or the competitive characteristics usually associated with traditionally masculine pursuits (Nauright & Broomhall, 1994; Treagus, 2005). Rather, netball became celebrated among doctors, reformers, politicians, the media, and middle-class women as it not only helped to produce 'healthy' New Zealand girls and women but it also embodied and prioritized feminine characteristics (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000). Indeed, as Treagus (2005) points out, netball embodied one of the key attributes of appropriate femininity during this time: restraint. Thus, it became "an ideal ideological vehicle for teaching [and reproducing appropriate] femininity" (Treagus, 2005, p. 102).

Although netball began "as a socially conservative force" (Nauright, 1996, p. 13), it quickly became an important public space for women's physical identities. Importantly, the development of netball was aided by the control that women exerted over this space and a lack of interest from males. Netball grew largely in the schoolyard and convents, away from the concern of men, such that for most of its sporting history, netball has remained a separate sporting space for women (Hawes & Barker, 1999). Unlike other sports, males demonstrated little interest in netball during this time. In fact, despite men's hostility towards women's sport participation more broadly, some men supported netball and women's involvement in this sport (Nauright, 1996). Netball largely escaped accusations of female muscularity and tended to be viewed as more associated with grace than power (Treagus, 2005). Thus, although women's participation in other sporting pursuits was largely considered a threat to male sports, "netball was relatively benign" (Treagus, 2005, p. 100). Accordingly, netball prospered, as women were able to control the sport outside of male influence (Nauright & Broomhall, 1994). Further, whilst athleticism was intimately connected with discourses of masculinity in the public imagination, ideologies about netball seemed to circumvent this, enabling the sport to make a space for itself outside of these ideals (Treagus, 2005). In other words, New Zealand women netballers were

able to successfully carve out a female-centred sporting culture and public space where they exerted (some) power and control with little interference from men.

Like North American and British advocates of the game, administrators of netball in New Zealand promoted a modified, yet conventionally feminine dress code. Most acknowledged that the prodigious dresses of the time, the tight sleeves, the bodices, petticoats and wide-brimmed hats were not functional for any type of sport or physical activity (Hawes & Barker, 1999). Yet, they were also aware that change was difficult. In order to liberate women's bodies from the confines of heavy and restrictive material and to suppress concerns regarding the exposure of female flesh, administrators of netball in New Zealand thoughtfully adopted the 'gym frock'—a modest tunic designed specifically for women's involvement in physical activity. Men, and many women too, were relieved to see that this ladylike attire reflected traditional notions of femininity (Grundy & Shakelford, 2005, Taylor, 2001). The key to middle ground between “mountains of heavy material and charges of semi-nudity” (Hawes & Barker, 1999, p. 19) the gym frock reinforced the femininity of players and of netball space more broadly, whilst facilitating the involvement of women in this sport.

As the above historical narrative reveals, netball has been constructed through rigid discourses of femininity and female physicality that have imposed particular rules on the spatial practices of women. Importantly, however, it has been these restrictions that have enabled netball to develop and prosper within a patriarchal social structure. Indeed, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the representations of this space and spatial practices of this sport contributed significantly to the growth of netball and its acceptability in New Zealand society. In adapting basket ball into a game of their own, the pioneers of netball were able to develop an institution that not only encouraged women to participate in physical activity, but that also ensured they conformed, to most degrees, to the demands of traditional femininity (Treagus, 2005). In other words, “netball was a 'girls' game' that allowed women to stake a claim on sport participation and still be viewed as ladies” (Taylor, 2001, p. 71). In this way, netball was not only welcomed and celebrated by women themselves, but also by key agents in women's sport and physical activity such as males, the media, politicians, doctors and reformers who conceived of netball as “a game eminently suitable for every

girl” (*Otago Daily Times*, 1926, as cited in Nauright & Broomhall, 1994, p. 394) and a sport capable of helping to (re)produce the ‘ideal’ New Zealand female.

Thus, as women began to carve out their own space in sports, netball offered women a more socially acceptable space to begin to cultivate a sporting and public identity without posing threats to the gender order (Nauright & Broomhall, 1994). Less entrenched in traditional gender regimes than those sports originally designed by males for males (e.g. rugby, soccer, cricket), netball offered New Zealand women a more accessible and socially acceptable sporting space in which to engage their moving bodies.

### **Feminizing and (hetero)sexualizing contemporary netball space**

Although gendered representations of netball in New Zealand were largely produced during the formative years of the sport, they continue to be reproduced and maintained in the contemporary context. Indeed, the traditional view of netball’s success suggests that this sport was able to and continues to provide, in effect, “an island of female-centred sporting culture in the sea of masculinity that characterize[s] New Zealand sports” (Andrew, 1997, p. 3). Put differently, the dominant social position of netball among other women’s sports in New Zealand rests upon the (re)production of a feminized physical and cultural space. Importantly, however, in the contemporary context, netball is not only (re)produced as gendered, but also as heterosexualized space.

According to Ravel and Rail (2007), sport is inscribed within and constructed through dominant as well as marginal gender and sexuality discourses. In this sense, sexuality and spatiality are understood to be inextricably intertwined (Ravel & Rail, 2007). As Valentine (1996) explains, the production of heterosexual space “is not only tied up with the performance of heterosexual desire but also with the performance of gender identities” (p. 147). Similarly, in introducing her ‘heterosexual matrix’, which is the hegemonic belief in the relationship between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire, Butler (1990) argues that femininity is not independent or separable from sexuality. Rather, gender is considered “fundamental to the intelligibility of sex, sexual desire and practice” (Lock, 2010, p. 113) and as implicated in the production and maintenance of

gender as socially sanctioned ideas about gender are read as an indication of (hetero)sexuality. Heterosexuality is, therefore, thought to be constitutive of femininity, that is, to be feminine is also to be heterosexual (Davis & Weaving, 2010). Thus, sexuality is believed to be both relevant and crucial to any discussions involving gender (Lock, 2010).

Certainly, thinking about the perceived relationship between heterosexuality and gender enables us to consider how heteronormativity relies upon sorting bodies into two diverse but mutually constitutive gender categories—male is to masculinity as female is to femininity (Cavanagh, 2010). Consequently, despite Rubin's (1984) claim that "it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence" (as cited in Valentine, 1996, p. 147), it is difficult, and perhaps erroneous, to disregard the role that gender identities play in the (re)production of heterosexual space and vice versa. Thus, whilst gender and sexuality are certainly *not* the same thing, they are believed to be closely related, mutually constitutive perhaps (Butler, 1990; Valentine, 1993).

Indeed, in the contemporary context, netball is not only feminized, but also, by implication, heterosexualized space. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I explore the feminization *and* heterosexing of contemporary netball spaces and bodies via a focus on the discursive and material practices occurring in this context. In so doing, and drawing further on Lefebvre's concepts of representations of space and spatial practice, I focus particularly on how netball is feminized and heterosexualized via the media, the physical landscape of netball and women's routines and behaviours within this sporting space respectively.

### ***(Re)producing netball femininities: The influence of media***

Just as the privileged position of netball among other women's sports in New Zealand has been facilitated by an abundance of media coverage, so too has the feminization and heterosexing of contemporary netball(ers). Whilst both New Zealand and international scholarship demonstrate the ways in which women's sport typically struggles for recognition in the 'everyday' coverage that makes up the bulk of mediasport reporting (Bruce, 2008) netball has, and continues to

receive positive and plentiful media coverage. Since the 1980s netball has gradually risen to become the most covered women's sport in New Zealand, even closing the divide between the coverage of male and female sports in this country as television ratings for individual netball matches have, at times, outranked international All Blacks<sup>20</sup> rugby tests and Olympic Games coverage (Bruce, 2008; Henley, 2012). Certainly, as Australian international netballer Natalie Medhurst (2009) laments, at the elite level in New Zealand, netball and its players "receive the recognition and media coverage" that other sportswomen "could only dream of" (para. 5). As Nauright (1999) observes, the media has played an influential role in "propping up netball" (p. 62) as the national women's sport in the country. Importantly, however, the New Zealand media also plays a significant role in (re)producing feminized and heterosexualized representations of netball(ers).

In the New Zealand sports media, that is, in sport specific publications, amongst the sports pages of newspapers and online news forums, during live netball coverage, and in televised sports news broadcasts, netballers are typically depicted as 'athletes first'. Images of these women most often depict them 'in action' in sport-specific contexts; jumping, running, diving for the ball, shooting goals, gaining intercepts, clashing with other players, and/or vigorously defending the opposition (see Figure 4.1). In the same vein, textual reports tend to focus on upcoming tests/matches, player injuries/recoveries and changes to teams/squads, match results, and national/international successes and failures. Similarly, live commentary during national and international netball games often describes the physicality of the sport and the athleticism of its players. During an international match between the New Zealand Silver Ferns and Australian Diamonds netball teams on May 6 in 2013, for example, Liz Ellis, a well-known former Australian netballer and current sports commentator exclaimed: "They're really taking some hard knocks out there, you get the feeling every player relishes the physicality of it [the game]" (research notes, 2013). In this way, the athleticism and physical prowess of netballers in New Zealand are not only highly visible but they are also openly celebrated.

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<sup>20</sup> The All Blacks are New Zealand's national men's rugby team. These sportsmen are celebrated as symbols of hegemonic masculinity in New Zealand and their sporting successes are often regarded as contributing to the maintenance of a sense of nationalism in the country (Nauright & Chandler, 1996; Pringle, 2001, 2004).



**Figure 4.1.** Typical and frequent representation of netballers ‘in action’ in and across New Zealand sports media. From, *Radio New Zealand News*, by B. Tunnicliffe, 2015, Retrieved from <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/sport>

Nevertheless, amidst this largely athlete-focused media, there is regular, although sometimes relatively inconspicuous, reference made to players’ femininity and/or their heterosexuality. For instance, during live televised match commentary players are often referred to as ‘girls’ or ‘Mums’, pre-match player profiles feature glamourized images of netballers smiling sweetly and wearing makeup with their hair preened, the audience’s attention is occasionally diverted to focus on male partners watching on from the stands, and in an exceptional example, Australian Diamonds and Adelaide Thunderbirds captain Natalie von Bertouch’s engagement was announced and discussed by commentators post-match during the ANZ Championship netball competition—a fiercely competitive trans-Tasman netball contest between New Zealand and Australian regional teams (see Duncan, 2006; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Messner & Cooky, 2010 for examples of similar trends within the U.S. sports media). By the same token, NetballZone—a netball specific news and chat-show broadcast on SKY Sport Television—typically discusses ANZ championship games, international test matches, and profiles key players and rising talent. However, this sports forum is also quick to highlight the ways some elite netballers, including Joline Henry and Liana De Bruin, successfully negotiate the challenges and demands of

motherhood with maintaining the hectic schedule of an elite semi-professional netball career.

The representation of netball(ers) amongst the sports pages of various print and online medias also work to (re)produce netballers and this sport as appropriately feminine and heterosexual in subtle, and not so subtle ways. For example, in 2012, the sports pages of *The New Zealand Herald* ran a story covering Silver Fern shooter Maria Tutaia's netball career, her sporting triumphs and her journey from schoolgirl netball to elite international competition. Despite focusing primarily on her illustrious athletic accomplishments and her promising netball career, the article satirically tagged Tutaia "the glamour girl of the Silver Ferns" (Perrott, 2012, para. 1). Further, the article is accompanied by a provocative and sexualized image of the sportswoman with her bra and cleavage exposed under a loosely draped shirt, doe-eyed and staring deep into the camera with not a netball-specific image of Tutaia in sight (see Figure 4.2). Aiming perhaps to appeal to heterosexual men, this image of Tutaia works to downplay her athletic prowess and instead emphasizes her feminine physical attributes, beauty and sex appeal. As such, this image not only encourages the reader to view Tutaia and her body as appropriately feminine, but also as explicitly and overtly heterosexual.



**Figure 4.2.** Silver Fern Maria Tutaia. From *The New Zealand Herald*, by A. Perrott, 2012, Retrieved from <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news>

Similarly, in 2011 Silver Fern defender Leana de Bruin featured on the online news site *Stuff.co.nz* after being named joint recipient of the most valuable player award for the ANZ Championship competition. In recognizing her athletic contribution to both her team and the overall tournament, this article celebrated her athletic accomplishments whilst describing de Bruin as playing “some of the best netball of her career” (Egan, 2011, para. 9). Importantly, however, whilst this media emphasized De Bruin’s athletic identity in the text, it also juxtaposed this with a discussion of her role as a mother, and rather than accompanying the discussion of her award with an image of the talented player ‘in action’, it featured an image of her wearing jeans and holding her infant son (see Figure 4.3). As Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) discuss, these ambivalent representations of women in sport where positive descriptions and images sit alongside those that trivialize women’s successes and sporting identities are common among sports media. Whilst highlighting the athleticism of New Zealand netballers, sports media also frequently (re)produce the representation of this space and women’s bodies as appropriately feminine and heterosexual, reminding readers that whilst these women are athletes, they are also ‘authentically female’.



**Figure 4.3.** Silver Fern (and then, Southern Steel member) Liana de Bruin. From *Stuff Sports News*, by B. Egan, 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/netball>

As national celebrities and role models, many elite New Zealand netballers also experience significant exposure in the mainstream media, particularly among the pages of women's lifestyle magazines. Despite significant achievements on the court, however, these types of media rarely focus on the players' physical prowess or their athletic accomplishments. Rather, images and descriptions frequently downplay sport and instead focus on women's looks, relationships, sexual orientations and their lives outside of the game. In so doing, these media typically represent and emphasize compulsory heterosexuality, highlighting netballers in heterosexually prescribed roles such as girlfriend, wife or mother over and above athlete (Bruce, 2008; Duncan, 2006; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

Recently, well-known past and present elite New Zealand netballers such as Temepara George, Irene van Dyk, Catherine Latu, Casey Kopua, Maria Tutaia, Anna Harrison and Joline Henry have featured in the pages of popular women's magazines including *New Idea*, *New Zealand Women's Weekly* and *Woman's Day*. Yet, each and every spread has emphasized these women's femininity and heterosexuality in place of their athletic achievements via discussions about relationships, breakups, engagements, weddings, childbirth, family or weight loss. For example, following her retirement from international netball, Temepara George—arguably one of New Zealand's best mid court players—featured in *New Zealand Women's Weekly*. This article, however, focused primarily on her engagement, impending wedding and family life with little regard for her long and illustrious career as an elite and acclaimed New Zealand athlete.

Images of these women in the mainstream media also frequently soften their athletic identities as close-up glamourized shots and sexualized images take the place of the athletically strong, sweaty, makeup-free, and often slightly disheveled appearance we see on court. In *Woman's Day* magazine (2013), for example, Maria Tutaia featured standing in a swimming pool wearing a figure-hugging, cut-out one-piece swimsuit that accentuates her breasts and toned torso, with her hands on her hips, smiling into the camera. Other minor images of this athlete showcase what the magazine calls her 'statuesque' figure, toned legs and shoulders, flowing dark hair and her relationship with a fellow sportsman. Interestingly, among these images there is only one of the talented shooter 'in action' within the spread, but it is placed at the margins of the article and occupies

less than a quarter of the page (see Figure 4.4). In another more recent publication of the same magazine that discusses Tutaia's break from netball following an injury, she again poses seductively in a swimming pool brushing her wet hair back with her hands, wearing white bikini bottoms and a see-through white singlet that showcases her athletic body. This time, however, there is not a single netball-related image featured in the spread.



Figure 4.4. Maria Tutaia—"Netball Beauty". From *Woman's Day Magazine* (p. 18-19), December 13, 2013.

Ultimately, as these examples demonstrate, in the mainstream media, female netballers are typically portrayed as heterosexual and appropriately feminine first, and as successful, strong and physically-capable athletes second, if at all. Importantly, in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) suggests that representations of space have "a substantive role and specific influence in the production of space" (p. 42). Their intervention, he continues, occurs by means of construction. Thus, "we may be sure that representations of space have a practical impact, that they intervene in and modify spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 42, emphasis in original). Extending the work of Lefebvre, Soja (1996) explains that representations of

space, or 'conceived' space are not only socially constructed, but they are representations of power and ideology, of control and surveillance. They are the 'ideal' of how society should be (Ryan, 2010). In Lefebvrian terms, therefore, these images and descriptions of netballers work to (re)produce and maintain the dominant 'order' of society, by reconciling women netballers' athletic identities with conventions of (hetero)normative femininity.

Netball-related advertising in New Zealand also tends to reinforce the links between netball and appropriate femininity. With sponsorship partners such as Fisher & Paykel, LG, Haier (household appliance brands), San Remo, Inghams, Mother Earth (grocery brands), and New World (supermarket chain), women's sporting identities are often juxtaposed with discourses of traditional femininity. Indeed, in advertising for these brands, netballers are frequently depicted in traditionally defined women's roles such as cooking and/or cleaning. In contrast to male athletes (namely the All Blacks rugby players) who are frequently depicted in advertisements that emphasize their strength, power and athletic prowess, the emphasis in netball-related brand advertising is generally placed on the relationship between women and domesticity. For example, Fisher & Paykel, an established appliance brand in New Zealand, was famous for featuring the Silver Ferns in their campaigns during the 1990s, usually in satirical advertisements squabbling over whose turn it was to do the laundry or the washing up and 'shooting' their dirty sports gear into the machine. In more recent advertising campaigns, appliance brands LG and Haier have reinforced their relationship with netball in much the same way, merging a netball goal with the image of a front loader washing machine (see Figure 4.5) and featuring well-known New Zealand netballers in their campaigns loading dishwashers, washing machines and dryers to upbeat music. In so doing, these media not only use the famous faces of the Silver Ferns to sell their product, but they also regularly remind us that whilst these women are athletes, they are also conventionally feminine in that they engage in practices that are typically thought to be for women such as cooking, doing laundry and washing up.



**Figure 4.5.** Advertisement for LG Appliances. From the *ANZ Championship Souvenir Guide* (p. 3-4), 2012. Retrieved from <http://rugbynewsnz.realviewdigital.com>

In sum, the media plays a powerful role in (re)producing contemporary representations of netball(ers) in New Zealand. Whilst the New Zealand sports media typically celebrates netballers' athleticism, skill and physical prowess via images and descriptions, there also exists both covert and overt references to players' femininity and heterosexuality. Similarly, heteronormative femininity is frequently emphasized in the mainstream media. Thus, just as netball has been historically conceived of as a suitably feminine sporting space, in the contemporary context, these representations are continually being reproduced via the media. Furthermore, in and through these various media formats, netballers themselves are also being (re)produced as possessing conventionally feminine and heterosexual subjectivities.

***Exploring spatial practice: The effects of the 'perceived'***

What is perceived, particularly the physical landscape of netball and the behaviours of women in this space, also (re)produce netball as feminized and heterosexed. Certainly, representations of space (conceived space) and spatial practice (perceived space) are intimately connected. More particularly, the

physical landscape of netball and women's behaviours in this sport are produced in accordance with the discursive construction of this space. In the words of Lefebvre (1991, p. 50, emphasis in original) "in *spatial practice*, the reproduction of social relations is predominant".

In discussing the relationship between subjectivities and space, Probyn (2003) suggests there exists a plethora of spaces that seem to be either naturally masculine or feminine. For example, she continues, the kitchen appears to be a feminine domain—a place where mothers cook for their families, and where girls gather to talk at parties. Alternatively, spaces such as bars are largely regarded as masculine space. Indeed, the socio-cultural discourses circulating within particular spaces not only play an influential role in the ways social spaces are produced, but also the ways in which they are occupied, used and consumed, and importantly, in defining the meanings attached to each space. Thus, the sports field (or court) is not simply a place for sporting competition, it is a social space where gendered identities are constructed, (re)produced and 'played out' (Hall, 2005).

Certainly, "space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them...are gendered through and through" (Massey, 2000, p. 129). According to Grosz (1992), there is a "complex feedback relation" between bodies and spaces, in which "neither the body nor its environment can be assumed to form an organically unified ecosystem" (p. 242). Rather, she continues, "the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citified', urbanized as a distinctly metropolitan body" (Grosz, 1992, p. 242). In short, there is a mutually defining or constitutive relationship between bodies and spaces (Grosz, 1992; Longhurst, 1998).

In this way, axes of identity such as age, sexuality and gender never operate outside of space "but are inextricably bound up with the particular spaces and places within which, and in relation to which, people live" (Bondi & Rose, 2003, p. 232). Thus, examining the ways in which bodies are "psychically, socially, sexually and discursively or representationally produced" and how, "in turn, that bodies reinscribe and project themselves onto their socio-cultural environment so that this environment both produces and reflects the form and interests of the body" (Grosz, 1992, p. 242) is a potentially insightful avenue of research for geographers and fundamental for understanding the relationship

between bodies and space (Longhurst, 1998). A thorough analysis of gender and space, therefore, recognizes that definitions of masculinity and femininity are constructed in and through particular spaces and places, that is, “gendered spaces themselves shape, and are shaped by daily activities” (Spain, 1992, p. 28) and everyday life.

During the observation phases of this research, I regularly wandered the HCNC taking note of the physical landscape of this space and the behaviours of women. In so doing, I was interested in the relationship between the space of netball and women’s moving bodies. In particular, I was intrigued by the ways this space is feminized by and in turn feminizes the bodies of female players. To paraphrase Longhurst (1998), I began to explore some of the ways in which a specific sporting space can work to produce bodies with particular capacities and forms. In the following sections, therefore, I draw upon data gathered via observations and interviews to explore how the physical space of netball (e.g. the courts and surrounding areas) and the behaviours of women players on the court work to (re)produce netball and women’s moving bodies as gendered and heterosexed.

### ***Court in the spotlight:<sup>21</sup> Examining the landscape of netball***

The HCNC is a large outdoor grassroots community netball centre situated in a quiet but centrally located residential area of Hamilton city. It is surrounded by family homes, lush grass covered embankment areas, established hedging and trees, and a small lake reserve with a wooden boardwalk. Occupying more than five acres of land, the HCNC is comprised of 21 full-sized (30.5m long x 15.25m wide) netball courts—19 grey asphalt courts and two ‘top’ courts with bright green anti-slip surfaces and large concrete terraced seating, which are usually reserved for top level (premier) and finals games. Unlike other spaces where netball courts are typically located, the HCNC is a *netball-specific* space, meaning no other sports (e.g. tennis or basketball) are played in or on its grounds, even

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<sup>21</sup> ‘*Court in the spotlight*’ is the title of Hawes and Barker’s (1999) history of the development of netball in New Zealand. I use this title to illustrate my examination of the physical landscape of the HCNC and its contribution to the (re)production of a dominant and heteronormative type of femininity.

during the off-season. Consequently, the courts are painted with only one set of lines demarcating each court's boundaries; the thirds, centre pass-off circle, and two shooting areas. Due to its size, the HCNC is used by both school-aged girls and women for representative, competitive and social grades of recreational netball. Some men also use this facility during the winter season and especially during summer social mixed and business-house<sup>22</sup> competitions.

Along the fenced perimeters of the HCNC are large and colourful placards advertising various businesses within the Hamilton City area including Heathcote Appliances (a locally-owned whiteware stockist), VegeKing (a discount fruit and vegetable grocer), Lodge Real Estate and Hamilton's largest shopping precinct, The Base. Netball New Zealand administered signs indicating the zero-tolerance of 'sport rage' are also placed intermittently around the venue warning spectators of the supportive nature of the space and working to promote an encouraging and supportive sporting environment for all players and officials. A sprawling site, the HCNC is one of the largest team sport venues in Hamilton city. Further, it is the only sporting space I know of in which upwards of 15 games of any team sport code can be, and regularly are, played simultaneously each week (see Figure 4.6).

There are a variety of facilities at the HCNC including: a proportionately small (and frequently congested) car parking area; three female and two male sets of changing rooms and toilets; first-aid area; a newly built high performance fitness and training centre; a netball-themed retail outlet called 'Nothing But Netball' that sells among other things, strapping tape and support garments, uniforms, whistles, rule books, netballs, bibs and shoes; a small registration office and umpires' lounge; a set of wooden swings and a see-saw; and a cafeteria and tuck-shop. A limestone BMX race track is also accessible via the HCNC and a large, modern children's playground including barked play area is situated on the perimeter of the grounds next to the lake.

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<sup>22</sup> Business-house netball competitions are typically organized social netball competitions in which workplaces and/or groups of friends make up and enter their own teams into what is usually considered to be a 'friendly' and fun contest.



**Figure 4.6.** The expansive site of the HCNC. Author's own photograph, 2013.

At numerous other sporting facilities there are spaces that promote ideas of masculinity (e.g. bars), and thus, masculinize the bodies that occupy these spaces. At the HCNC, however, there are numerous spaces that promote (stereotypical notions of) domesticity and motherhood. As such, the netball courts open up discursive and material space for women's bodies to be viewed as appropriately feminine (Longhurst, 1998). In particular, the advertising space at the HCNC reiterates notions of traditional femininity and is directed towards women's identities as wives and mothers who are (presumably) responsible for the family grocery shopping and whose lives are spent using an array of different whiteware for the purposes of cooking and cleaning up after their families (see Figure 4.7). Similarly, the netball retail outlet, which is painted pink inside and features a pink netball insignia as its logo (clearly emphasizing that this is a feminine space), caters to the demands of those women who juggle their roles as wives, mothers and netballers by stocking goods typically required for participation in this sport. By being situated in the very space in which women play, this feature of the HCNC ensures that little extra time need be dedicated to fulfilling women's sporting needs outside of the needs of their family. In so doing, these spaces

reinforce the idea that in their roles as wives and mothers, it is often women who spend the most time and money engaging in shopping practices (Winchester, 1992).



**Figure 4.7.** VegeKing: An advertising placard located at the HCNC. Author’s own photograph, 2013.

The inclusion of children’s playgrounds in the grounds of the HCNC and the close proximity of the BMX race track also reinforces the idea that the HCNC is a space of motherhood. Playgrounds are typically considered spaces of mothering (Gottdiener, Hutchison & Ryan, 2015), and thus, they rarely appear in the open spaces dedicated to traditionally male-dominated pursuits such as sports. The playground and BMX race track, however, make provisions for mothering at the HCNC and emphasize the idea that this facility is an appropriate space for women, and importantly, for players to bring their children/families. This further highlights the relationship between netball space and normative femininity.

Certainly, although “bodies are undoubtedly material possessing a variety of characteristics such as size and shape and so inevitably taking up space” (McDowell, 1999, p. 34), they are also produced by space. That is, “the ways in

which bodies are presented to and seen by others vary according to the spaces and places in which they find themselves” (McDowell, 1999, p. 34). In this way, as women’s’ bodies feminize spaces of netball, the feminized physical landscape of the HCNC, or the perceived space of netball, equally works to feminize women’s active, moving and sporting bodies.

***‘It’s all part of the game’: An analysis of the physical practices of netball***

Just as the environment of the HCNC works to feminize women’s netball bodies, the physical practices of women in this sport also (re)produce players and this space as appropriately feminine. In particular, the clothing worn by netballers during games and the ways in which women move on the court ensure the social (re)production of appropriately feminine and heterosexual subjectivities.

According to Kellner (1994, p. 160) “in modernity, fashion is an important constituent of one’s identity, helping to determine how one is perceived and accepted”. Indeed, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, clothing performs an important role in the social construction of identity (Crane, 2000). Not only do clothes serve to insulate the body and to hide particular areas of flesh, they are also used to “construct different images, at different times and in different spatial contexts” (Longhurst, 2008, p. 51). Thus, shaping and being shaped by social space also relates to fashion and the ways in which people clothe themselves.

Since the birth of netball in New Zealand during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the uniform has been an important part of this social space. In particular, it has traditionally served to illuminate and preserve the feminine identities of players. Thus, regulations surrounding the netball uniform have been strict and except for recent changes in length and style to fit with broadening conventions of appropriate femininity, have remained relatively unchanged. For example, in the contemporary context women are free to clothe themselves for netball trainings, and typically wear either shorts or gym tights and a sports T-shirt or singlet. Competition netball games at all levels (e.g. semi-professional, elite, competitive, social, schoolgirl) however, are played in either a skirt and top or a fitted dress in team/club colours. Importantly, as I moved through the interviews exploring the

ways contemporary netball space is feminized, and in turn, works to feminize the bodies of women players, it became clear that the netball uniform plays a pivotal role in all participants' understandings of this process.

According to Entwistle (2000), clothes draw our attention to the sex of the wearer enabling one to tell, usually immediately, whether the wearer is a man or a woman. Consequently, we expect men to dress in ways that ensure they 'look like' men and for women to dress to 'look like' women. Indeed, for each of the women interviewed, the wearing of dresses and/or skirts during their netball participation was considered a normal and acceptable part of their involvement in this sport. Although some women challenged the wearing of dresses during our conversations by suggesting that, at times, shorts would perhaps be more practical, all participants understood that the netball uniform plays an important and necessary part in defining players as women: "netballers wear dresses because that's synonymous with being a woman traditionally" (Jess). Certainly, the wearing of dresses/skirts highlights the female form: just as signs on toilet doors with women wearing skirts are readily recognizable as female spaces (Entwistle, 2000), netballers in dresses/skirts are equally and as readily identifiable as women. Ultimately, by wearing dresses/skirts, netballers are conforming to conventional understandings of womanhood.

Yet, clothing does more than simply draw attention to the body and illuminate bodily differences. Importantly, clothing also:

works to imbue the body with significance, adding layers of cultural meanings, which, because they are so close to the body, are mistaken as natural. It is therefore the case that items of clothing do not neutrally reveal the body, but embellish it (Entwistle, 2000, p. 141).

For example, in men's dress, the male suit not only accentuates male bodily features (e.g. broad shoulders and chests), but in doing so, it also adds masculinity to the body (Entwistle, 2000). Thus, as an aspect of culture, clothing is fundamental in the (re)production of masculinity and femininity: "it turns nature into culture, layering cultural meanings on the body" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 143). Certainly, an array of subjectivities including gender and sexuality become expressed via the wearing of clothes in particular spaces (Longhurst, 2008). Throughout the interviews, participants frequently discussed how clothing,

particularly sporting attire, feminizes or masculinizes the bodies of its wearers. Jess notes, for instance, that those women who play rugby are not only masculinized via the ideology that rugby is traditionally a male preserve, but also by the uniform itself. She remarks:

You see women on the rugby field with their mouth guards and their shorts and their baggy tops that men wear on the rugby field, you know, and it does look very masculine. It's like if a man wore a dress his masculinity would be questioned! The same happens when women wear gear that is considered male.

Jess also puts forth the (not unproblematic) idea that in social spaces outside of sport, the wearing of non-female-specific clothing can create ambiguities about women's gendered and sexual identities:

It's the same as going to a nightclub, a girl with jeans and a baggy T-shirt versus a girl with a mini skirt on, stereotypically you'd look at the girl in the jeans and say '*I think she might be a lesbian but I don't think the girl in the skirt is*'. (Jess' emphasis)

By wearing men's attire and clothing (sporting or otherwise) that obscures women's feminine features (e.g. narrow shoulders, breasts and tapered thighs) it appears that women's bodies can be (mis)interpreted as masculine and/or queer.<sup>23</sup>

When discussing the netball uniform, all of the women recognized the part played by these garments in imbuing their body with femininity: "[netballers are considered] feminine because of how players present themselves in dresses" (Natasha). Indeed, the uniform is considered by all participants to be an important part of their feminine athletic identities. Jess suggests that the ways in which her netball uniform emphasizes her womanly 'curves' (e.g. her breasts, buttocks and thighs) and reveals her flesh works to accentuate and reinforce her femininity and heterosexuality. She explains:

Today [netball uniforms] are becoming quite fitting and the design gives you that silhouette look, you know, it really emphasizes your curves, and with the muscle tee back it's kind of showing off a lot more skin than you used to. No one would question your femininity or your sexuality wearing something like that!

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<sup>23</sup> I use the term 'queer' here, and throughout other chapters in this thesis, to refer to the disruption of normative gender and sexuality categories and to the sweeping category that encompasses individuals of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and other non-heterosexual subjectivities (Caudwell, 2006).

The tendency for contemporary netball uniforms to place women's physical attributes on display is considered by Jess to create a feminine and heterosexual identity that cannot be questioned. It is important to note, however, that the fitted design of the contemporary netball uniform also plays a pivotal role in defining and regulating the size and shape of the 'ideal' netballer. During my time at the HCNC I observed a number of 'bigger' players restricted by their playing attire and with ill-fitting uniforms. Whilst some were constantly tugging at their shirts to keep their stomachs covered, others wore dresses they could not pull down past their hips, which resembled something more of a shirt/top and required them to wear shorts to cover their lower halves (research notes, 2014). In fact, I noted very few larger players wearing uniforms that looked comfortable and/or appropriately covered their bodies, which spoke volumes about whose body is deemed suited to participate and/or valued in this sport. In this way, whilst feminizing and heterosexing the body of its wearer, the netball uniform also appears to reinforce the idea that netball is for a particular type of material body: ideally, one that is fit, toned and carrying little to no excess weight.

Although there is no natural link between an item of clothing and femininity, masculinity or sexuality, the comments and opinions of these participants are indicative of the fact that there does exist an arbitrary set of associations between clothing and gender, which are culturally specific and "fundamental to our 'commonsense' readings of bodies" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 144). Indeed, there is an important relationship between clothing, bodies, identity construction, subjectivities and space. Ultimately, whilst the netball uniform is important in defining women's moving bodies as female, it is also implicated in embellishing women's bodies in accordance with normative ideals of femininity and heterosexuality and with highlighting the fit, toned and athletic-looking body as an archetype of netball in New Zealand.

Equally, the ways in which women participate in netball (particularly the level of physicality displayed) are implicated in the social (re)production of women players' feminine and heterosexual subjectivities and the overall feminization of netball space. In the contemporary context, netball is a far cry from the relatively static game developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, despite becoming "increasingly fast, vigorous and skilful" (Kerr, 2008, p. 99; see also

Treagus, 2005) and thus requiring its players to be fit, strong and athletic, netball is, by definition, a limited contact sport (Netball New Zealand, 2009) such that bodily exchanges between opponents are intensely surveyed and regulated. What this means is that whilst physical contact does indeed occur between players, deliberate and violent contact is discouraged and thus penalized within the confines of the rules of the sport: players who frequently engage in purposeful bodily contact are punished by being made to 'stand down' from defending the opposition and in extreme cases, they may be removed from the court. This element of netball makes it distinctly different from some more masculinized team sports, in which many forms of physical contact between the bodies of players are a tolerated, necessary and/or celebrated part of the game.

In discussing how netball feminizes the bodies of players, participants frequently compared the spatial practices of netballers with women who participate in more (traditionally male) confrontational team sports. According to Okely (1996), whilst rugby demands that players use their bodies as weapons throwing themselves and their opposition to the ground, no such use of the body is permitted in sports considered to be for women. Similarly, Sarah suggests that there exists vast differences between the spatial practices of rugby and netball, and thus, differences in the ways female players' are perceived in relation to norms of gender and sexuality. In particular, according to Sarah the confrontational nature and heavy-contact required in rugby works in opposition to ideals of (hetero)normative femininity:

The difference between the two sports in my opinion is that rugby is a contact sport and is very physical, it's a sport typically played by males, so I guess you are expected to deliver and take a few knocks and hits. As for netball...you play and compete hard without purposely causing contact or hurting anyone...[because of this] there is definitely a stereotype with women rugby players that isn't there when you think about netballers.

Debbie similarly commented on how the risk of injury and bruised female bodies in sports such as hockey, cricket and softball work to masculinize women players, and sporting spaces themselves:

There's always been a stereotype with hockey girls and female cricketers, you know? Hockey girls were seen as a bit harder I think, just because the ball was really small and fast and hard and there's an element of danger there, you could get really hurt, you

know, bruised, shattered bones and things. Girls playing cricket and softball is a bit like that too, it's considered a bit more masculine to play those sports, they're considered to be for males.

Indeed, Sarah and Debbie both recognize that “the image of the bruised and battered female rugby player”, and athlete in general, “exists in opposition to images of ideal female bodies and to notions of normative femininity” (Chase, 2006, p. 229-230). Alternatively, the fact that netball discourages and restricts physical contact and poses only a small threat of injury appears to work to produce netballers' bodies and this sporting space as appropriately feminine. In other words, whilst sports such as rugby require “women to get dirty and bloody and to hit other women” (Chase, 2006, p. 229), netball discourages this kind of behaviour, instead restricting the physicality and contact of women's bodies in this space in accordance with feminine ideals. In this way, in netball, notions of traditional femininity are, quite literally, written into the rules of this sport.

It is not only the limited bodily contact involved in netball that works to feminize women's moving bodies, but also the ways women's bodies move within this space. Interestingly, whilst most other sports encourage women to behave in traditionally masculine ways (e.g. to tackle, kick, hit or throw great distances), netball promotes a sense of elegance and grace through movement that is directly observable. Jess explains:

I think if you look at netball in comparison to other sports like rugby it's a lot more graceful. The movements you make are a bit more graceful, not in terms of dance but, you know, going up for those intercepts. It's quite a nice, lovely sport to watch whereas rugby is more like 'bang', 'hit' and you don't usually see women in those aggressive contact type situations. I'm not saying netball isn't aggressive, because it is extremely aggressive, but in a different way. I guess it is quite a pretty sport (laughs), as bad as that sounds. I think there is a sense of elegance with some of the stuff you do, the ability to jump and pluck those balls out of the air and stretch and all that kind of stuff.

Jess' statement reiterates and reflects much of the existing literature on netball, which highlights the connections between women's movements in netball and traditional femininity (e.g. Nauright & Broomhall, 1996; Nauright, 1994; Tagg, 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Treagus, 2005).

The spatial practices of women on the netball court appear to align with

discursive constructions of normative femininity. Whilst women's participation in most male-dominated team sports (e.g. cricket, hockey, soccer, rugby, basketball) typically challenges ideals of appropriate femininity and prompts concern and confusion about women's gendered identities (Bolin & Granskog, 2003a; Choi, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004; Pringle, 2008), women's participation in netball does not challenge dominant understandings of gender. In particular, the spatial practices of netball appear to encourage and reinforce traditionally feminine characteristics (e.g. elegance, grace and restraint) whilst enabling women to develop their fitness, athleticism and to some extent, their physical strength. Therefore, the embodiment of femininity in netball, it can be argued, is made clear not only "in the ways girls and women use their bodies", but also, in "the ways they do not" (Roth & Basow, 2004, p. 250).

### **Netball and the (re)production of a dominant femininity**

As has been illustrated throughout this chapter, netball is not only the most popular women's sport in New Zealand or a context of women-onlyness, but it also, importantly, represents a feminized and heterosexualized space. More than this, however, netball continues to be responsible for (re)producing and imbuing women's moving bodies with an image and physical disposition that sits comfortably alongside, and within, the parameters of a dominant and heteronormative type of femininity in New Zealand. Just as rugby has been implicated in the masculinization of New Zealand males and is repeatedly discussed as a "*real* man's game" (Pringle, 2001, p. 427, emphasis in original), netball can be considered both a discursive space that facilitates the (re)production of what some may term a type of 'hegemonic femininity'<sup>24</sup> in New Zealand, and

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<sup>24</sup> Connell (1987) first introduced the concepts of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasized femininity' to denote the dominant forms of male and female sexual character. In so doing, he argued against the existence of 'hegemonic femininity', suggesting because all forms of femininity are constructed in the context of women's subordination by men, there can never be a "femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men" (p. 187). More recently, however, some scholars are using the term 'hegemonic femininity' to describe the cultural dominance of a particular femininity in society and the ways in which this femininity is made to appear more natural, legitimate and normal than other femininities (see e.g. Bartlett, Gratton & Rolf, 2010; Choi, 2000; Krane et al., 2004).

an important institutional force in the maintenance and (re)production of a specific and socially valued feminine identity for New Zealand women.

Arguably, of those team sports in which New Zealand women partake, netball best encourages and reproduces the socially desirable elements of the dominant femininity prioritized in the country (Cox & Thompson, 2000; Kerr, 2008). The increased pace and vigour of contemporary netball enables women to develop an athletic build and visible (but not extreme) musculature (Kerr, 2008). Indeed, women netballers in New Zealand are very rarely overly skinny and often possess what could be termed a more ‘healthy’ looking body—they are usually young, strong, athletic, aerobically fit, nimble and toned but not too muscular. In other words, they are not too ‘masculine’ whilst remaining anything but delicate or ‘ornamental’. The physical demands of netball in the contemporary context help to reproduce the type of ‘useful’ female body celebrated in New Zealand society: that which is fit, athletic and physically strong and perhaps capable of helping out around the home or farm by mowing lawns, participating in renovation projects, or herding livestock, among other things.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps most notably, however, netball is a physical pursuit that enables women to maintain their femininity and heterosexuality whilst participating, often very vigorously, in the broader and “highly valued male terrain” (Thompson, 2003, p. 253) of New Zealand sport. As Kerr (2008) notes, netballers appear to be accepted as females who manage to successfully conform to dominant notions of femininity as well as being respected for their physical prowess. In particular, the discipline and restraint required of a netballer—she cannot move with the ball; she cannot hold it for longer than three seconds; she cannot make contact with an opposition player; and she must wear a skirt/dress whilst doing (or not doing) all of these things—reflects the restraint required of 20<sup>th</sup> century girls and women in order for them to be viewed as feminine (Treagus, 2005). Indeed, netball enables women to incorporate just enough athletic traits that they are respected for their skills and capabilities, but not so much unbridled sporting prowess that their

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<sup>25</sup> Casey Kopua—the Silver Ferns captain and arguably the most highly visible netballer in New Zealand—is frequently portrayed in the media helping her father with physical work on their family farm in the Waikato region. The media has also made connections between rural New Zealand life and other well-known Silver Ferns such as Leana De Bruin and Laura Langman.

femininities may be called into disrepute (Kerr, 2008). It can be argued, therefore that netball helps to reproduce and maintain the physically capable but simultaneously restrained femininity prioritized in New Zealand. Netball not only offers women the opportunity to develop socially valued characteristics of fitness, athleticism and strength, but also, importantly, to conform to dominant ideals of (hetero)normative femininity whilst doing so (Kerr, 2008; Taylor, 2001).

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the historical and contemporary representations of netball and the spatial practices of netball(ers) work to (re)produce netball as feminized and heterosexualized space. To paraphrase Valentine (2002) netball space can be thought of as brought into being by representations and performances whilst, at the same time, being performative of particular relations of power. From this perspective, therefore, netball is more than just a space of women-onlyness or a female-dominated sport. It is a social space that is ascribed with normative and regulatory meanings and which ascribes those meanings onto the bodies of those who inhabit it. In this manner, I argue that netball can be considered what Lefebvre (1991) terms a ‘counterspace’.

### **Netball as counterspace**

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1991) argues that social space “contains potentialities” (p. 349) for bodies to inaugurate the project of a ‘different’ space. These different spaces are termed ‘counterspaces’ and are deemed to be lived spaces, which emerge in relation to conceived and perceived space. Lefebvre was particularly interested in the ways individuals are able to develop counterspaces among the spaces of everyday life (Soja, 1996; van Ingen, 2002). Thus, the concept of counterspace derives from Lefebvre’s investigation of space as a tool for capitalist accumulation and political domination by elite groups, which is considered to incite resistance and the project of a ‘different’ or ‘alternative’ space (Dempsey, Parker & Krone, 2011). Importantly, for Lefebvre, “transforming everyday life can only be achieved through social struggles that produce new spatialities” (van Ingen, 2011, p. 173), that is, spaces in which alternative orders of material and symbolic space are imagined and struggled over.

For Lefebvre (1991), counterspaces are “an initially utopian alternative to actually existing ‘real’ space” (p. 349) that offer opportunities for “diverse,

resistant, and oppositional practices” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 204). According to Lefebvre (1991), the “quest for a counterspace” (p. 383) arises from bodies through the appropriation of space and the ability to create new and innovative forms of space—such as a space of enjoyment (see also Stewart, 1995). In this way, counterspaces are shaped and formed by “(re)appropriating, (re)politicizing and de-alienating” (Knierbein, 2015, p. 54) space and bodies. They are formed by individuals and groups via the claiming of space and importantly, the use of one’s capacity to modify and fashion new environments and social relations (Stewart, 1995; van Ingen, 2002).

As a sporting space that represents an alternative to, and differs vastly from, most other popular mainstream team sports (e.g. rugby, soccer, hockey, cricket, basketball) which are typically dominated, organized and characterized by the interests and participation of men, netball fits comfortably within Lefebvre’s notion of counterspace. As I discussed earlier in this chapter (also see Marfell, 2011) netball arose from the efforts of a few key women who sought to provide women with an alternative to men’s sport, and thus, has contributed significantly to the development of a women-centred sporting culture in New Zealand. Importantly, netball has also been responsible for providing some women with space to engage their moving bodies without the feelings of marginalization, displacement, alienation and subordination they often encounter in many other (usually male-oriented) physical cultural contexts (see e.g. Bolin & Granskog, 2003a; Hargreaves, 1994; Messner, 2002). Indeed, netball can be considered an “exuberant new branch” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 385) or offshoot of the traditional spatial arrangement of sport that has emerged as women have struggled to make space for, and sense of, their physically active bodies.

For many of the women I interviewed, the women-onlyness of netball is significant and appears to facilitate a number of positive feelings, experiences and pleasures. For example, netball is considered by some to work against male dominance in sport in that it offers women an important opportunity to take ownership and control over their sporting experiences. According to Rachel, the women-onlyness of this sport means that “women can *be involved* in netball, and not just as spectators, but in a playing sense, managers, coaching, umpires, commentating, advisory roles, the list goes on” (Rachel’s emphasis). This aspect

of netball she continues, enables women to feel “like [they] have some control, some authority, some say”—an occurrence she claims “doesn’t happen too often”.

Similarly, for Jane, who recognizes the supremacy of men and rugby in New Zealand sport culture and society, there is a sense of empowerment in the way netball offers her an important and rare opportunity to be what she considers an ‘expert’ and to exert authority through both her participation and knowledge about this sport. She suggests “it’s quite nice to have something that’s ours [women’s] that we understand that they [men] really can’t interfere with” (Jane). Indeed, for some participants the women-only environment of netball is certainly “central to their desire to be active as opposed to passive agents” (McDermott, 2004, p. 290) within sport and society more broadly. In a similar way to the women-only groups in Donnelly’s (2011) discussion of female-only leisure spaces “the physical space of [this] women-only leisure activit[y] serves as a temporary clubhouse for women”—a space where women “feel comfortable, and sometimes even dominant, powerful, or in control” (p. 113). Netball is viewed as an alternative geography to sports in which women are generally believed to be “participating in ‘a man’s world’” (Jane).

The potential of the women-onlyness of netball for facilitating important and meaningful social connections also appears to be of value to a number of women. All of the participants placed an overwhelming emphasis on sociality and the opportunities netball provides them to develop relationships with other women and to experience feelings of belonging such that netball was described as a space devoted to bringing women together. According to Emma, the women-centred nature and female-only setting of traditional (7-a-side) netball has positive effects on women’s ability to establish same-sex relationships and connections:

Netball brings a lot of females together and I think because it’s typically only girls who are playing together that you feel this sort of bond with your teammates...With other sports, especially mixed sports, I don’t really feel that there’s that kind of connection.

For many of these women, netball is not just a matter of simply “being with the girls” (Heather). Rather, it appears women’s participation and experiences of pleasure in this sport are linked to fostering a sense of community and shared identity. Netball was described as allowing players “to bond with a completely different group” (Emma) of women than they would usually associate with and to

share with them the “uplifting feeling of playing netball and being in a netball team” (Debbie). Women’s participation was also defined, particularly among some of the Māori women I interviewed, as being centred around ideas of “whakawhanaungatanga”<sup>26</sup> and “whānau”<sup>27</sup> (Paige), that is, forming meaningful social relationships and a sense of reciprocal support between team members. The opportunities netball offers women “to extend their network of friends and supports” (Jess) and to experience a sense of “group solidarity” (Stacey) was also of considerable importance.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, whilst shedding light on some of the many pleasures of New Zealand women’s participation in netball, these insights also align with much of the existing research on women-onlyness and the potential of female-only spaces (Birrell & Richter, 1987; Castelnovo & Guthrie, 1998; DeWelde, 2003; Donnelly, 2011; Freedman, 1979; Green, 1998; Guthrie, 1995; Handler, 1995; McDermott, 2004; Pelak, Taylor & Whittier, 1999) which suggests, among other things, that women-only social and sporting formations “have the potential to enable women to be agents of their own gendered existence” (DeWelde, 2003, p. 273), are nurturing of women’s same-sex relationships (see e.g. Cahn, 1993, 1994; Davis Delano, 2014; Mennesson & Clement, 2003; Ravel & Rail, 2008; Shire, Brackenridge & Fuller, 2000) and can lead to “changes in the ways women not only experience their bodies but also [importantly, the ways they experience] their world” (Guthrie, 1995, p. 119). Thus, although these findings are not particularly new in relation to women’s participation in women-only spaces, they do reveal that the women-onlyness of netball is typically a welcomed and celebrated aspect of this sport and culture for many New Zealand women.

Whilst counterspaces tend to “fracture the stable, predicable and homogenizing use of space by enabling new spatial and therefore social relations”

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<sup>26</sup> Whakawhanaungatanga is a Māori term that refers to relationship, kinship and a sense of family connection. It can be defined as a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging.

<sup>27</sup> Whānau is a Māori term often translated as ‘family’.

<sup>28</sup> These ideas link strongly with dominant (but not entirely unproblematic) narratives of Māori culture as based on a powerful collective identity and shared values, rather than individuality (Hook, 2007; Hook, Waaka & Raumati, 2007; Macfarlane, Glynn, Grace, Penetito & Bateman, 2008; Smith, 2000).

(van Ingen, 2002, p. 106), they are also “dynamic social spaces, which can be filled with both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic meanings” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 108). Although they are spaces that give rise to alternative spatialities and offer the potential for resistant practices and oppositional politics, counterspaces can also easily slip back into normative and regulatory orderings of space as they succumb to pervasive and powerful pressures to regulate not only spaces but bodies too (van Ingen, 2002). Indeed, as Hershkovitz (1993) points out, space can never be completely closed off and thus its uses and meanings can never be entirely given. In this way, the tension that exists between the discourses and fields of regulation that exist in space and its appropriation is an important part of the process that continually produces and transforms social space (Hershkovitz, 1993). Accordingly, counterspaces never operate or exist outside of this dialectic, and must therefore, be understood as spaces of contradiction: they are never completely free from operations of power and are, at the same time, filled with normalizing and normative discourses *and* opportunities for creativity and resistance (van Ingen, 2002).

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, netball prioritizes a socially valued but relatively narrow normative ideal: particularly the athletic-looking and physically capable, but not too muscular hetero-feminine body. Thus, whilst operating as a counterspace in terms of offering women an alternative sporting spatiality to most existing (male-dominated) sport spaces, netball is not exempt from nor does it operate outside of the hegemonic fields of regulation that exist in dominant culture or those that define the type of body deemed ‘fit’ for participation in sport more generally (Cole, 1993; Duncan, 2007; Hargreaves, 1994; Peluso, 2011). Like other sports, netball is where cultural ideas about the desirability and normalization of bodies and identities are produced and certain physical characteristics and subjectivities are celebrated, while others are marginalized, degraded and displaced (Berger, 2009; Obel & Kerr, 2007; Peluso, 2011; Saavedra, 2005).

Thus, although netball demonstrates and works to overcome *some* of the limitations of dominant sport space, it does not succeed entirely in escaping its grasp (Lefebvre, 1991). It is both an alternative geography of women-onlyness and a sporting space not separate from or existing entirely outside of dominant

and normative discourses and regulatory regimes. In this sense, I argue that netball is “as much an agent of co-optation as it is itself co-opted; and both an assimilative and an assimilated part of the ‘system’” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 383) of modern sports and society more broadly. It is a space some women can and do enjoy, a space of normative and normalizing discourse and a context that holds the potential for women’s agency and resistance.

### **Summary**

Through the methods of playing netball, analyzing a range of media and historical texts, conducting observations and interviewing a range of women netballers in Hamilton, I have systematically explored the relationship between netball and a dominant femininity in New Zealand. Whilst netball is a sport space that can be considered positively as ‘other’, it also remains bound up and entangled with dominant discourses and systems of regulation. Having highlighted the ways netball both reproduces and prioritizes particular identities and subjectivities, it is interesting to consider the complex and diverse effects these relations of power have on women’s moving bodies and how women negotiate, (re)imagine, use and contest this space. From a Lefebvrian perspective, netball space is produced over time via ideology and spatial practice, which has important implications for the ways women occupy, understand and experience this sport.

The next two chapters will, therefore, consider further, and in greater depth, the implications of the social production of netball space for women’s participation in this sport, that is, the ongoing intersections between bodies, space and social relations in this context. More particularly, in the chapters that follow I focus upon women’s lived experiences of netball and how these are influenced, shaped and mediated by the social and material conditions of this space. Drawing from Lefebvre’s (1991) understanding of space as the site of both discriminatory practices *and* “alternative (revolutionary) restructurings of institutionalized discourses” (Shields, 1999, p. 164), I pay attention to the everyday exercise, negotiation and disruption of power in the everyday lives of netballers in New Zealand. From the outset, this research has paid attention to the lived experiences of New Zealand women netballers. However, in order to contextualize women’s sporting participation within gender relations and discourse, it was important to

firstly understand the social geography of netball space. In this way, the focus of this research has always been on the experiences and understandings of women in a particular gendered and cultural context.

In accordance with the poststructural feminist theoretical approach in which I located this research in Chapter Three, and Lefebvre's third element of his spatial triad, spaces of representation (lived space), the following two chapters draw upon the experiences of New Zealand women to explore how netballers are 'living' netball space. In so doing, and as a strategy to challenge the often uncritical normalization of netball as an appropriate sport for New Zealand women, I argue that the production of this space can be both constraining and facilitative of women's moving bodies, subjectivities, and their opportunities for particular sporting experiences and pleasures. Put differently, I argue that netball can, at times, work to marginalize, regulate, exclude and alienate the bodies of some, whilst also opening up opportunities for women to begin to challenge particular discourses and to enact oppositional politics. Drawing upon Lefebvre's understanding of social space, therefore, I treat netball as not only a space of opportunity, but also as a space of constraint for New Zealand women. In so doing, I endeavor to think through the ways space presses against bodies differently and how "spatial structures...bear upon us in quite different ways" (Probyn, 1995, p. 83). In short, I examine the ways space offers possibilities and potentialities for bodies, but also how it produces conflict, contradiction and tension (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). I now go on to explore netball as a space of marginalization, regulation and exclusion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Marginalized Female Bodies in Netball Space: ‘A Game Eminently Suitable for Every Girl’?**

Netball is a social space that (re)produces, regulates and maintains women’s bodies and identities in accordance with a socially valued and heteronormative type of femininity. Certainly, for contemporary women players in New Zealand, the representations of netball space and the spatial practices of this sport significantly influence how their bodies are viewed, and hence, how they are understood. Importantly, the socio-spatial relations operating on and through netball also have significant affects on women’s participation in this sport such that the link between netball and a dominant type of femininity in New Zealand materializes in the lives and experiences of women in important and interesting ways.

The women I interviewed were a particularly diverse group in terms of age, ethnicity, employment, marital status, and level of athletic ability. However, they all shared similar sentiments regarding the feminization of netball spaces and bodies and, particularly, the socio-cultural pressures placed on New Zealand females to become involved in this sport. Thus, despite being described as a significant source of an array of social, physical and psychological pleasures, netball was also often referred to as “the right choice...the right sport to play for New Zealand females” (Katie). Indeed, many of the women recalled being ‘channelled’ into this sport by way of encouragement from their mothers, sisters, aunts and female friends, or via their schools, rather than simply choosing this sport over and above other recreational activities—a sentiment I can relate to having been encouraged to play netball by my mother and primary school teachers whilst the boys at my primary school were guided towards the rugby and soccer fields.

In many ways, therefore, netball was something these women felt was expected of them growing up in New Zealand. The participants described netball as an integral part of New Zealand sporting culture for women, and more importantly, as an essential part of what it means to be a ‘good Kiwi girl’.

Natasha, in particular, recalled how her involvement in netball during her youth was not necessarily based on her love of the game, but rather occurred as a result of her wanting to conform to socio-cultural norms of female sport participation.

She recalls:

I played Saturday netball purely because that was *the* sport, the thing girls did in Winter...I played cricket as well, and rugby, but mostly netball...it was more netball, because that was the thing [for females] to do, what you *should* play as a girl growing up in New Zealand. (Natasha's emphasis)

Katie shared similar views about how the socio-spatial relations of this sport and its links to a dominant and celebrated identity for New Zealand females worked to channel young women's bodies, including her own, into netball space:

To be honest it [netball] was kind of instilled in me, not necessarily by my parents but there was kind of this broader perception that it was the best sport for New Zealand girls to play, it was kind of like no questions asked, '*you're playing netball*' in a way. And I mean, it's so New Zealand...[if you were a girl] you just automatically played netball. (Katie's emphasis)

Certainly, these comments point to the powerful social relationship between netball and femininity in New Zealand. More specifically, the women reveal how their netball participation was informed by socio-cultural expectations and pervasive dimensions of power. According to Jane, netball has become such a distinct and valued part of the culture of women's sports in New Zealand that it remains "the done thing for [girls and] women". Ultimately, for many New Zealand females, the socio-spatial relations of netball act in powerful and meaningful ways: bodies, space and social relations intertwine such that their participation in this sport is normalized, expected, celebrated and thus, most often goes unquestioned.

Importantly, whilst the relations of power and fields of regulation operating on and through netball spaces and bodies work to socialize women into this sport, they can, at the same time, have significant implications for women's continued participation. That is, the very same operations of power that so often work to draw women into this sport in the first place can also function to exclude, restrict and displace them (and others) at particular times in their lives. In this chapter, therefore, I focus on the ways in which netball space can operate as a site

of marginalization, alienation and control for some New Zealand women and/or at particular stages of women's lives. More specifically, I discuss how the socio-spatial relations of netball and the relatively narrow heteronormative feminine athletic ideal prioritized and celebrated in this space can exclude alternative or 'other' femininities, subjectivities and bodies. I begin by briefly contextualizing this aspect of my research within, and importantly describing how it builds upon, existing scholarship that explores netball as a space of marginalization and exclusion, particularly that which examines these themes along axes of race and in relation to male and transgender netball participants. Then, in the main body of the chapter, I offer three cases of women who have felt excluded from the heteronormative feminine netball space: 1) a woman who, from a very young age, did not consider herself 'girly' enough to play netball, 2) a woman who came to realize that she did not identify as heterosexual, and 3) women who fall pregnant. In this sense, I draw upon Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of lived space as where marginalization occurs and is reinforced to consider how particular women's bodies can be, in various ways and for various reasons, made to feel that they do not belong, or are 'out of place', in netball space.

### **Exploring embodied tensions in netball**

An array of critical scholars of sport have discussed the significance of netball, the prestige of this game among other women's sports and its contribution to the creation of a female-centred sporting culture in New Zealand (e.g. Andrew, 1997; Bruce, 2008; Hawes & Barker, 1999; Henley, 2012; Nauright 1996; Nauright & Broomhall, 1994; Taylor, 2001; Treagus, 2005). Yet, netball has rarely been considered a discriminatory or exclusionary space for females. Notable exceptions, however, include a small body of research that focuses on race, ethnicity and cultural diversity (e.g. Taylor, 2000, 2004; Teevale, 2008). Among these studies, due consideration has been paid to how race/ethnicity intersects with netball and women's participation and thereby influences and shapes their lived experiences of this sport and culture. Of particular interest has been the ways in which cultural diversity is either highlighted via ideologies of 'Pacific flair' (Teevale, 2007) or suppressed by expectations of cultural conformity (Taylor, 2000, 2004) in both local and global netball spaces.

Although race has been identified as an axis of identity that influences women's opportunities for participation and their experiences of netball, little attention has been afforded to gender, sexuality and/or corporeality as bases for discriminatory practices. Indeed, the relationship between the feminization and heterosexualization of netball space and women's experiences of this sport has been left largely unexplored. Of course, in light of the evidence presented at the beginning of this chapter, this is hardly surprising considering Judith Lorber's (1992) point that it "usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to [prompt us to] pay attention to how [gender] is produced" (p. 13-14) negotiated and lived. One such disruption in netball is, most obviously, men's participation.

The discursive construction of netball as an appropriately and predominantly feminine game and the rising number of men participating in this sport has led to an informative collection of research that explores the experiences of male and male-female transgender players in New Zealand (see Tagg, 2008a, 2008b, 2012, 2014). In particular, Tagg's work highlights some of the difficulties males experience participating in a feminized sporting space, specifically the ways the discursive production of netball works to negate male bodies, subjectivities and heteronormative masculinities. In this way, Tagg describes New Zealand men's netball as 'contested terrain'—a space where discourse influences, and at times, constrains men's participation in and experiences of this sport.

Interestingly, however, netball is rarely considered 'contested terrain' for female players, that is, the gendered, heteronormative and corporeal discourses operating on and through netball space are seldom thought to have a detrimental impact on women's lived experiences of this sport or their opportunities to play. Thus, there is often little consideration, except for studies of race and ethnicity, of the possibility that netball may not be an inclusive space for *all* female subjectivities and bodies. Arguably, this oversight has led to assumptions that netball is the 'national sport for *all* New Zealand women' and 'eminently suitable for *every* girl'—ideologies that not only suggest that netball is an inclusive space for each and every New Zealand female, but importantly, that all female bodies are the same, as opposed to recognizing women as "a diverse and heterogeneous group" (Aitchison, 1999, p. 28). Certainly, as Probyn (1995) points out, "space is

a pressing matter and it matters which bodies, where and how, press up against it” (p. 81).

So, how do different female bodies experience netball spaces differently? It is important to note that there are many ways New Zealand girls and women could be made to feel they are ‘out of place’ within the social space of netball in New Zealand. In this chapter, however, I draw upon interview discussions with Alex who does not identify as particularly feminine, Rebecca a gay<sup>29</sup> netballer, and a selection of women who have participated in netball pregnant to explore how some women can be marginalized by the socio-spatial relations of this sport. More particularly, I examine how those who are considered not feminine enough (tomboys and lesbians) and those who occupy bodies that are perceived as the epitome of femininity but not aesthetically ‘ideal’ (pregnant women) are particularly aware of and can be constrained by the power relations operating on and through bodies in this space. In so doing, I discuss how these women understand, occupy, negotiate and experience netball from subject positions and/or in bodies alternative to or ‘other’ than those typically prioritized in this space. Following Lefebvre, I consider the complexities of embodied lived experience and the ways “socially lived space depends on material as well as mental constructs” (Simonsen, 2005, p. 7).

### **‘A game for girls’: Gendering bodies in netball space**

As argued in Chapter Four, netball can be considered to engender and feminize the bodies of New Zealand women. In this way, netball space is “not just the scenery for the playing out of gender” (Garber & Turner, 1995, p. xviii), rather, it marks bodies with particular and important qualities and characteristics. Yet, the ways netball space works to feminize women’s active bodies, and the opportunities available to women whose bodies are feminized by this sport, are not always apparent to those who frequently occupy this space. Most participants in this study were, for example, unaware of the ways in which their participation

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<sup>29</sup> During our interview, Rebecca expressed a strong dislike for the term ‘lesbian’. Instead, she preferred to refer to herself as a ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ woman. Therefore, I use the terms gay and homosexual when referring directly to Rebecca’s sexual orientation, and the term lesbian to refer more broadly to women who do identify as lesbian.

in netball affords them with an unquestioned sense of femininity, even in physical and overtly aggressive encounters: “I don’t know why girls who play netball, even if they are more aggressive on the netball court, aren’t belittled as much for it” (Debbie). Similarly, when asked about how the feminization of netball might influence who plays and/or keep particular female bodies out of this space, comments were equally as ambiguous:

I don’t know...I guess, without categorizing, but a lot of women you would consider as ‘butch’ don’t really play netball. I don’t really know whether it’s because of the skirts or what (laughs) but you don’t seem to find a lot of, what you would typically call ‘butch’ women, playing netball. (Heather)

As these comments demonstrate, space is often taken for granted or ignored, and not solely by theorists. Rather, those who benefit from existing spatial arrangements, that is, those who fit into and feel that they belong in particular spaces, are especially prone to this blind spot (Spain, 1992). Those women whose bodies are easily and readily feminized by netball space, rarely consider how the gendered nature of netball might impact on other women’s experiences and opportunities in this sport.

In an effort to understand the production of social space and the ways spaces are experienced, lived and understood differently, Lefebvre (1991) introduces the concept of ‘mirroring’, an idea he uses to describe the ways each individual places themselves at the centre, designates themselves, measures themselves, and uses themselves as a measure. According to Lefebvre (1991, p. 183) “every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-renewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection”. In this way, Lefebvre’s notion of mirroring attempts to conceptualize an individual’s relationship to the socio-spatial landscape: “it is about how a subject identifies with and becomes materially and spatially embedded within the material world” (Blum & Nast, 1996, p. 565). This idea helps us to understand how a change in position or surroundings is enough to enable what was covert to become overt, to make what was cryptic become explicitly clear (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, as we inhabit different social spaces, or importantly, as we inhabit social spaces

differently, we are able to more clearly see the gaps and tensions, contacts and separations of particular spaces.

For Alex, a self-confessed ‘tomboy’, the feminization of netball space is particularly obvious. As Alex engages in the process of reciprocal reflection between her own body and the bodies of netballers portrayed in magazines and celebrated among broader society, she is intimately aware of the ways in which netball is constructed via discourses of normative femininity, and importantly, of the separation and tension between her own identity and those of the women whom she considers to be the ‘typical’ netballer. For the purposes of understanding the ways the discursive production and spatial practices of netball influence and shape New Zealand women’s lived experiences of this sport, therefore, Alex’s insights are particularly important. More specifically, her understandings and experiences demonstrate much more than her choice not to play this sport (a decision made by a number of contemporary female athletes in New Zealand), but importantly, how this decision has been shaped by the socio-spatial relations of netball and the celebration of a particular type of femininity and corporeality in this space. Thus, despite little consideration of the ways the gendered nature of netball spaces may work to marginalize the bodies of some women by participants and researchers alike, Alex’s experiences demonstrate one instance of how the discursive construction of netball and the spatial practices of this sport can limit the experiences and pleasures of particular female bodies and subjectivities.

***Reluctant to play the ‘girly’ game: (Not) fitting into netball space***

Unlike the other women interviewed for this project, Alex does not consider herself a committed netball player. She has only had fleeting experiences with the sport in and through her participation in Physical Education programmes during her years of schooling. Early in her youth, Alex made a distinct decision not to become involved in organized traditional forms of this sport: “it was definitely a conscious choice of thinking *‘I’m not going to play netball’*” (Alex’s emphasis). Instead, she chose to play sports such as hockey, basketball and touch rugby. Although Alex has respect for the sport itself, enjoys watching televised games and experiences great pleasure from her involvement in social mixed indoor

netball with her male friends, she has little interest in participating in competitive women's netball herself. In fact, Alex reports that she feels extremely 'out of place' in this social and physical space. She explains:

As a sport, I totally take my hat off to the players and I love watching netball, like, I follow it on TV and stuff. And I love playing it socially with guys. But if one of my girlfriends said to me '*let's play netball*', you know, in like a competitive [women's] league, I'd still say no. Whereas, if she said '*let's play touch*', I'd be like '*yip, let's do it!*' ...I'm not really that drawn to [playing] the game [of netball]...it's still very much a feminine game...[and] that's not me. (Alex's emphasis)

Alex suggests that because of its links to the reproduction of a particular and dominant type of femininity she's "built it [netball] up in [her] head as something that's just not for [her]" and as "a space [where she doesn't] fit". In this sense, Alex's decision not to play netball is not based on her dislike of the sport, the influence of her peers, or a lack of opportunity, but rather, due to the fact that netball spaces are celebratory of a specific version of femininity—one that she feels particularly at odds with. Thus, Alex's comments not only imply that she has, like a number of other girls and women in New Zealand, made a conscious decision not to play this sport, but also that the feminine ideal reproduced and celebrated in netball creates unique and significant barriers for her enjoyment and feelings of belonging in this particular sporting space.

During our discussion, Alex talked frequently about the ways she does not feel as though she fits in, in netball, which she related back to the type of body and identity prioritized in this space: "I think a lot of it [my feelings of exclusion from netball] comes back to the body, like when I think about my own body, if you put me on a netball court with your average netball team, I would just look so strange (laughs)". When asked to explain why and how she made the decision not to become a netballer, Alex placed significant emphasis on the relationship between netball and a dominant type of feminine embodiment in New Zealand. In so doing, she put forth the following reason for her feelings of being displaced from this space:

*I definitely* wasn't that [ideal netball body]! You know...tall, trim, nice long hair (laughs). I was like short, stocky...frizzy hair. I think my identity clashed a little bit with netball and being a netballer. And as much as I hate to admit it, I probably was scared of playing

netball, not because of the physicality, but because of the difference I would bring. I wouldn't fit in...You know, in terms of femininity—the straightened hair, the long limbs, toned body [of a netballer]...it's kind of like model-esque. (Alex's emphasis)

Despite most participants rejecting the idea that there is an 'ideal' netball body and suggesting that netball is a sport inclusive of females of a variety of different shapes and forms, some of their comments do indeed resonate with Alex's understanding of the type of body prioritized in this space in that they indicate that taller, trimmer, toned, but not too muscular and fitter-looking women are celebrated and valued in this space. Paige and Jess explain:

I was the shortest in the team and so they wouldn't choose me to get into the rep[resentative] teams. They'd pick a tall person who couldn't play netball for shit and it used to really piss me off! I'd get right through to the last selections and then I wouldn't get through. They'd pick someone that was tall and teach them netball, whereas I had natural talent but not the height, but I'll jump for it. So even though people say it's not a height thing, it always is. (Paige)

I don't think there is an ideal image or body...I guess it [netball] leans towards a more fitter looking person in terms of their appearance. You know, if they have to get 17.3 on the Beep Test<sup>30</sup> then they're going to be pretty fit people and look active (laughs). [Netball] definitely leans towards someone who is leaner and fitter...it's ok to look pretty too, you know, have your eyeliner<sup>31</sup> on and look pretty. (Jess)

I too experienced firsthand the ways particular female bodies are prioritized in netball space in my first year of this project and of playing club netball in Hamilton after being told that I was selected for the team based on my "trim figure and athletic looks" (research notes, 2013).

Indeed, as structural changes (e.g. women's increased visibility in political, educational and economic spaces) have increased the opportunities of women in sport and society more broadly, notions of femininity and bodily 'ideals' have continued to change, such that femininity and athleticism are no longer being

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<sup>30</sup> The Beep Test is a multi-stage fitness test that is commonly used by sports coaches and trainers to measure an athlete's aerobic capacity.

<sup>31</sup> Jess' comment about wearing eyeliner while playing netball could be read as a coded reference to former Silver Fern player Irene van Dyk who is well known for wearing eye-makeup during international netball matches during the early 2000s.

heralded as mutually exclusive (Cahn, 1994; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Instead, contemporary ideals of femininity have broadened to include and celebrate particular attributes of athleticism, meaning there is often an emphasis placed on the tight and toned body, which is seen as contributing to the new ‘feminine ideal’ in sporting spaces (Bordo, 1990; Duncan, 1994; Krane et al., 2004; Markula, 1995). As Bordo (1990) puts it, the athletic feminine ideal oscillates “back and forth between a spare ‘minimalist’ look and a solid, muscular athletic look” (p. 90), thereby emphasizing not only the slender, waif-like elements of traditional femininity, but also the tight, taut and toned physique of the contemporary female athlete. Kerr (2008) reiterates this point when she suggests that embodying a small amount of traditionally ‘masculine’ athleticism but still appearing feminine is the epitome of the contemporary ideal of femininity. Consequently, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, women who are accepted and/or celebrated in sports such as netball are typically those who are able to successfully blur the lines between and embody both femininity and athleticism.

For Alex, the feminine athletic identity prioritized in this space proved (and still proves) particularly limiting. As someone who considers herself less conventionally feminine, embodying more ‘androgynous’ qualities, and of a shorter, muscular stature, Alex feels that her identity is at odds with the expectations placed on the aesthetics of women’s bodies in this space. Therefore, part of the reason Alex has felt a sense of disconnection from netball and that her body is likely to be marginalized in this space is because she “didn’t know if [she’d] hit that feminine quota”. That is, she is unsure whether, as someone who “[doesn’t] view [or present herself] as particularly feminine”, she can successfully negotiate socio-cultural expectations to combine both athleticism *and* femininity in this space. In this sense, as Alex engages in what Lefebvre (1991) terms “a to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection” (p. 183) between her own body and the bodies of those women who play netball it becomes apparent that the celebration of a particular type of femininity works to marginalize and exclude her from this social space. In short, Alex understands netball to prioritize a different type of femininity from that which she embodies such that her feelings of inadequacy in netball and her choice not to play this sport have been shaped by feelings of embodied and bodily difference and insecurity.

The feminization of netball spaces and the feminine identity prioritized in this context are particularly salient in Alex's feelings of being 'out of place' in this space. Importantly, however, she also described how the playing attire worn by netballers functioned to keep her out of this context, especially during her early adolescence. Despite "wearing [her] big sister's skirt around the house" from time to time, Alex felt uncomfortable in this type of sporting attire in public: she found the idea of playing sport in a short skirt "a bit intimidating" and was uneasy about the ways the uniform would reveal, and potentially sexualize, particular aspects of her body, namely her thighs and her buttocks. As someone who identifies as "a bit of a tomboy" and therefore, not particularly 'girly', having to wear a skirt, and particularly a short skirt as part of the netball uniform was incredibly unnerving.

Interestingly, although all of the netballers interviewed for this project reported having no issues with wearing a skirt, some reported knowing of other women who, like Alex, felt uneasy about displaying their bodies in such a way as is characteristic of the netball uniform. Sarah in particular, reported that she knew of a number of women whose decision not to play netball had been informed by the playing attire of this sport:

I know basketball players who won't play [netball] because you have to wear a skirt. You know, if the skirt was a bit longer or you could wear shorts, they would play [netball]. (Sarah)

Certainly, for women who don't identify as traditionally feminine, or who may experience anxiety regarding the display of their female bodies, the netball uniform can act as a barrier to their participation and can work to keep their bodies out of this social space. The fact that "there [is] no choice about it; your body [is] the vehicle of feminine display" (Fleming & Fullagar, 2007, p. 243) in netball can be particularly unsettling for some New Zealand women.

Indeed, because Alex was especially self-conscious of her body and its development in her youth— she suggested she "didn't develop until quite a bit later and therefore [she] didn't fit the [stereotype of the] curvy, boobs, netball player [who looks good in a short skirt]"—she has come to understand the netball uniform as emphasizing the corporeal differences between herself and others. Wearing a netball skirt was considered by Alex to reveal her body in undesirable and uncontrollable ways, to position it as 'other', and thus, the uniform ultimately

worked to displace her from netball space. Instead, Alex has experienced more positive experiences of netball in a social mixed indoor netball setting, which she describes as “a much safer space” for her as it is not so bound up in ideas about traditional femininity and as such she can wear clothing that aligns more closely with her own tastes and athletic identity.

In sum, Alex’s insights and experiences further demonstrate the relationship between netball, gender and ideals of appropriate femininity. Importantly, however, her experiences also highlight how the gendered space of netball in New Zealand and the type of femininity reproduced and celebrated in this context may be limiting for some women. As a woman who identifies as less traditionally feminine, Alex not only discovered that the representations of netball space and the spatial practices of this sport are at odds with her conceptions of self, but that these can work to highlight her body as ‘other’, and thus, to alienate her from netball space. Arguably, netball spaces appear to be less conducive to, or accommodating of, women who do not embody traditionally feminine qualities and identities. That is, netball can be a space in which those women who position themselves, or sit outside of the parameters of the type of femininity celebrated in New Zealand can feel marginalized, alienated and excluded.

Just as spaces of netball emphasize and imbue women’s bodies with femininity, importantly as I demonstrated in Chapter Four, they also work to (re)produce a particular sexualized identity. In the following section, therefore, I explore further the ways netball spaces are conducive to and celebratory of heterosexuality and heterosexual female bodies. In so doing, I discuss how the heterosexualization of netball space can cause tensions and difficulties for non-heterosexual women players, that is, how the spatialized sexuality of this sport can work to marginalize, exclude and potentially displace women who embody lesbian and/or non-heterosexual subjectivities.

### **‘It’s a very straight space’: (Hetero)sexual politics in netball**

As I highlighted in the previous chapter, there is thought to be an intimate connection between gender and sexuality, that is, gender and sexuality are considered inseparable constructs. In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and*

*the Subversion of Identity*, Butler (1990) suggests that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 33). Butler’s work on performance/performativity is not only useful for theorizing gender, but it is also an important tool for helping us to think differently about bodies, gender, sexuality and space (Valentine, 2002). For example, as Valentine (1993) argues, just as gender can be considered a repetitive stylization, in the same way, the heterosexing of space can be considered a “performative act naturalized through repetition and regulation” (p. 146). This understanding of the heterosexing of space is particularly useful in that it denaturalizes the presumed heteronormativity of everyday spaces. Importantly, therefore, the street, workplace, or in this case spaces of netball, do not pre-exist their performance. Rather particular performances produce these spaces and these spaces are themselves performative of power relations (Valentine, 2002).

Sexual politics permeate all kinds of space—private, public, urban, rural, and at the macro and micro levels—such that sexuality has a profound influence and effect on the ways in which people live in and engage with space (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). Not surprisingly, however, heterosexuals are often completely oblivious to the ways in which spaces interact with and (re)produce particular identities (Valentine, 1996). As the ‘dominant’ performance of space, those who freely and easily occupy heterosexual space rarely notice or think about it in critical ways. Indeed, as I attempted to explore the heterosexualized representation of netball in New Zealand during interviews, most participants met my questions with confused looks, raised eyebrows, furrowed brows, awkward silences, and/or rapid changes in the direction of conversation. It was clear to me that most participants had never thought of netball as a heterosexualized space nor considered the relationship between netball and the (re)production of heteronormative femininity. They were also equally as reserved about discussing ideas surrounding lesbianism in sport.

As a group of mostly heterosexual New Zealand women, who are either single, in a long-term relationship with a male partner, married, and/or have children, and who have typically played netball exclusively (or at least the most competitively) throughout the majority of their lives, many of these women have

little experience of involvement in sporting “spaces where they don’t belong” (Probyn, 1992, p. 505). Thus, few have ever experienced the need to be conscious of, or monitor their own performativity in sport (Valentine, 1996). As such, many of these women experienced difficulty teasing out how the power relations circulating within this space, particularly the feminization and heterosexualization of netball, can and do influence some women’s experiences, opportunities and pleasures. When asked about their thoughts on the ways netball space is linked to ideas about the heterosexuality of women players, therefore, most responded in ways best summarized by Heather’s remarks:

**Amy:** We constantly hear women who participate in sports such as rugby or soccer being labeled lesbians, butch or dykes, do you think netballers experience the same accusations?

**Heather:** In all my [netball] experiences I can honestly say out of all the teams I’ve played with and against, I don’t think I’ve ever on court thought ‘*wow, that’s one butch girl*’, ever! (Heather’s emphasis)

**Amy:** Why do you think that is?

**Heather:** You know, society kind of go ‘if you’re a woman and you play rugby you must be butch or gay or whatever’, but in netball, no one ever goes ‘*oh she must be gay!*’ It never even crosses your mind, I’ve never thought about sexuality and netball. (Heather’s emphasis)

Whilst I was initially frustrated by the lack of critical awareness demonstrated by most of the (heterosexual) participants, I soon came to realize that this is a ‘normal’ and expected aspect of living in and through space—particularly when heterosexualized space is the hegemonic form. As Valentine (2006) explains, heterosexuals often take everyday spaces such as netball as “commonsense heterosexual space precisely because they take for granted their freedom to perform their own identities” (p. 149). Indeed, most participants have never thought about the “marking of self and space as heterosexual” (Caudwell, 2002, p. 41) within netball in New Zealand and were confused by my questions about the sexualization of this space because naturalized heterosexuality renders sexuality itself virtually invisible to the straight population (Ahmed, 2006; Valentine, 1992). Such is the strength of the unspoken understandings and the assumptions of the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality that most people are oblivious

to the ways in which it operates as a process of power relations in *all* spaces (Browne, Lim & Brown, 2007; Valentine, 1993). Thus, despite operating on bodies in most everyday settings, heterosexuality is typically “a *taken for granted* process of power relations” (Valentine, 1993, p. 410, emphasis in original), particularly by those who conform to heteronormative gender stereotypes and norms. Alternatively, however, sexual minorities are often intimately aware of the performative nature of identities and spaces, as they frequently inhabit environments considered to be heterosexual. In this way, “to be a lesbian or gay is both to perceive and to experience the heterosexuality of the majority of environments” (Valentine, 1993, p. 396). Certainly, “as an ideological current, heterosexuality, or heteronormativity pervades all aspects of life” (Probyn, 2003, p. 295).

Importantly, Lefebvre’s concept of mirroring can also be applied to understand the ways in which netball spaces are experienced and understood differently by heterosexual and homosexual women players. In Lefebvre’s (1991) words:

Space is actually experienced, *in its depths*, as duplications, echoes and reverberations, redundancies and doublings up which engender—and are, engendered by—the strangest of contrasts...it offers sequences, sets of objects, concatenations of bodies—so much so, in fact, that anyone can at any time discover new ones, forever slipping from the non-visible realm into the visible, from opacity into transparency (p. 183-184, emphasis in original).

Indeed, Rebecca<sup>32</sup> is acutely aware of the reverberations and redundancies of netball spaces, those of which appear to be opaque to most heterosexual players. As a gay netballer who has competed at both elite (regional) and competitive levels, the heterosexuality of netball space is glaringly obvious to her: “netball is just such a ‘straight’ environment”. Put differently, as a gay woman in an ideologically straight space, Rebecca is explicitly aware of the ways netball is produced via heteronormative discourses and importantly, of the separation, tension and contrasts between her own sexual identity and the spatialized

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<sup>32</sup> At the time of interviewing in 2013, Rebecca had stopped playing netball because she had been living overseas and had just returned to New Zealand. Thus, the insights she provided for the purposes of this project are largely a reflection on her playing experiences before she left. There are, however, a few comments extracted from emails between Rebecca and myself following her return to netball in early 2014.

sexuality of this sport. Thus, I draw on Rebecca's experiences as a "lesbian in space" (Probyn, 1995, p. 77) to explore some of the ways in which the discursive production of netball as heterosexualized space is negotiated, experienced and lived by female bodies who do not identify as heterosexual.

It is important to note that by only concentrating on the experiences of one woman netballer who identifies as gay, I do not intend to dichotomize sexuality into 'gay' or 'straight'. Rather, I recognize that "sexual identities can be fluid; and that there are multiple sexual identities within and outside the dominant heterosexual-homosexual discourses" (Valentine, 1993, p. 397), for example, bisexualities, and transsexuals and transgender people—who have significant involvement in netball in New Zealand (see Tagg, 2012, 2014). Due to the difficulties I experienced finding and accessing gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer female netballers, however, the experiences of Rebecca have been privileged here. Also, Rebecca's 'story' of her netball participation is not intended to be representative of other gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer netball players in New Zealand. Instead, I have drawn upon Rebecca's perceptions, understandings and experiences to begin to highlight and raise awareness about some of the ways different female bodies, inhabit, negotiate, experience and importantly, feel excluded from netball space.

***'I enjoyed [it]...until I realized I was gay': Homosexual bodies in netball space***

Like most young girls in New Zealand, Rebecca was introduced to netball during her primary school years and quickly took up the sport with enthusiasm and rigor. As time passed, she grew to 'love' netball becoming proficient at the physical skills required for competitive and later, elite participation. Rebecca enjoyed the opportunities for social interaction that netball provided her, particularly the ways netball allowed her to establish "great friendships" and to participate alongside her sister:

We [my sister and I] came from a small country town...so we grew up playing netball...We started playing at whatever age you were allowed to start playing, six or seven I think, and we both just loved it and it was something we would always do together. Right through high school, we had success with our high school team so we went to nationals and stuff and did really well. And I guess those were just amazing experiences for us.

Whilst on court Rebecca enjoyed developing “a variety of skills, the psychological stimulation when you beat a team by one goal”, “how a game can change in 30 seconds” and the sensuality of getting to “build muscle, agility and speed”. Importantly, netball was also an outlet for Rebecca to engage her body competitively and a space for her to demonstrate physical competency:

I came up here [to the Waikato region] and played for Waikato age groups and a couple of netball clubs in this area, which was always fun...It was one thing that I was really good at so it always made me happy, I suppose. I’m a very competitive person and I enjoyed netball, as it was an outlet for that, you know.

Despite there being an intimate connection between Rebecca’s netball participation and a range of social, physical, sensual and psychological pleasures, as Rebecca grew older, became more involved in elite level netball and importantly, realized in her early 20s that she was gay, her experiences of netball and her feelings of belonging in this space significantly changed.

As a young woman, who had moved away from her hometown, Rebecca not only struggled to find her place in various social environments (e.g. bars/clubs, parties), but sporting spaces too. Indeed, as Rebecca began to come to terms with her sexuality “being with like-minded females” and having “that familiarity around [her]” became particularly important. She says:

It’s hard to explain, but you feel at home when you are around gay people, as they have things in common with you...it’s just been important to me to have those like-minded individuals around me in sport.

During our discussion Rebecca placed significant emphasis on the benefits and pleasures she experiences being around other gay/lesbian women. For Rebecca, sporting spaces such as women’s rugby, in which she is aware of a number of other gay women and a distinct lesbian subculture, offer an environment, or what Caudwell (2002) terms a ‘dykescape’, where she can be with other non-heterosexual women and thus, feel “comfortable in her own skin” (Rebecca). Rebecca discussed the ways these particular sporting spaces offer her the opportunity to form social networks and to connect with individuals who share similar interests and pleasures such as going to ‘gay parties’ and sharing jokes about being gay (Pritchard, Morgan & Sedgley, 2002).

According to Rebecca, these opportunities rarely exist in the heteronormative social space of netball in New Zealand. In fact, Rebecca's participation in heterosexualized netball spaces not only means that she is often, as she describes, "the only gay in the village", but also that the differences between her own interests and pleasures and those of straight woman players are highlighted. Thus, as a sexual minority in the heteronormative environment of netball, Rebecca not only discovered that it is difficult to connect with "like-minded [non-heterosexual] individuals" because she "didn't know anyone in the netball scene that was gay", but also, importantly, that her social tastes vary, often significantly, to those of her team'mates' (Caudwell, 2002). Rebecca highlights how socializing with her straight team'mates' is not always a pleasurable experience:

Well, the players would always talk about guys (laughs). You know, how it gets really social when you're playing with your mates and stuff and they're like '*yeah let's go out*'. I was a bit like '*do...do...do*' (laughs). I felt a bit like I didn't belong really...I suppose if I look back, I struggled with the environment, definitely. With my personal life, I definitely didn't feel like I fit[ted] in... Netball is just such a 'straight' environment...[socially] I didn't seem to fit. (Rebecca's emphasis)

As a homosexual woman in heterosexualized space, Rebecca often "felt isolated" and she struggled to achieve a sense of belonging, that is, a feeling that she is a legitimate member of this group. In Lefebvrian terms, there are significant gaps, separations and tensions between Rebecca's identity as a gay woman, and her participation in the heterosexualized space of netball in New Zealand that often prevent her from feeling as though she 'fits in', in this space. Subsequently, her social and emotional attachment to the social space of netball began to fade: "I enjoyed netball and wanted to be the best...until I realized I was gay".

The heterosexualized space of netball in New Zealand not only prompted a decrease in the social pleasures she enjoyed, but also a strong socio-psychological response in Rebecca. It is important to note that during our interview Rebecca described the relationship between her netball experiences and her sexual identity in complex, complicated and paradoxical ways. On the one hand, she drew distinct lines between her involvement in netball and her sexual identity, suggesting she did not consider her (homo)sexuality a large or relevant part of her

identity as a netballer (see also Fusco, 1998; Ravel & Rail, 2007). On the other hand, however, her comments reveal that being a gay woman in heterosexualized space influences her involvement, inclusion and enjoyment of netball in important ways. More specifically, whilst Rebecca largely perceives her sexual and sporting identities to be separate, her comments highlight how her identity as a gay woman influences and shapes her participation in this sport and culture and her negotiation of this space:

It [my sexuality] is a part of who I am but playing netball definitely didn't turn me gay and I didn't play netball because I was gay (laughs), I just played netball because I loved it. You know, it's a game that I grew up with and continued to love. It just so happened that it's a very straight space, and it just so happens I'm gay (laughs). None of that mattered [to me] when I played netball though. When I play netball I'm just a netball player. You know, I've never fancied my Wing-D<sup>33</sup> partner or anything (laughs). It's never crossed my mind! (laughs) There were never moments when I didn't want to restrict my partner too closely, but no one knew then [about my sexuality]. But if someone was to find out, I was definitely conscious of that! I guess my sexuality has been a bit of a barrier really.

As Probyn (1995) suggests “the lesbian subject is always a doubled subject caught up in the doubling of being a woman and a lesbian” (p. 147). In this way, Rebecca's experiences of netball are not only folded through her identity as a woman, but importantly, as a homosexual woman in heterosexualized space.

Undeniably, Rebecca's participation in the heterosexualized space of netball in New Zealand is in direct tension with her sexual identity and her concept of self. For example, whilst she suggested that “mentally and emotionally [netball] gave [her] a release from thinking about outside issues [such as the difficulties of being gay/accepting her sexuality]”, the heterosexualized space of netball also meant she “couldn't be [herself—gay] in the netball environment...or, [she] was too scared to”. Thus, although Rebecca continued to enjoy the game itself and relished the opportunities netball provided her to engage her moving body physically, the social space of netball had become less pleasurable, inclusive and fraught with tension.

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Wing-D’ is an abbreviated slang term used to denote the Wing Defense position in netball.

Just as private spaces such as the home are heterosexualized, so too are many public spaces (Kirby & Hay, 1997; Valentine, 1993, 1996, 2002). Thus, whilst heterosexuality and heterosexual behaviour are displayed freely in public spaces, displays of homosexuality remain restricted. Certainly, the heterosexualized representation of netball means that Rebecca found it difficult to be 'out' in netball space. According to Rebecca, her teammates finding out about her sexuality was always a significant and pressing concern:

Being 'outed' while playing netball was a massive thing for me because everyone was so straight and I didn't want that [my sexuality] to get in the way. I think the girls kind of knew, but thankfully they just didn't bring it up with me. I was worried they would think of me differently, and if I got too close on the court. As it's not common that many netball players are lesbian, I suppose it's harder to judge people's attitude towards homosexuality [in this space].

As Rebecca's comments demonstrate, the heterosexuality of netball space made it difficult for her to be herself "and relaxed, not worrying if someone found out [about her sexuality]". Although she occupied other social spaces, such as women's rugby in which she felt comfortable to reveal her sexuality because "there's 'that' [lesbian] environment", in netball Rebecca was, and since her return to this sport still is, constantly "worried about if it [her sexuality] will come up and at what point, it's like it's always in the back of [her] mind" (Rebecca, email communication, 2014). As one woman in Krane and Barber's (2003) study of lesbian coaches admitted, "it's a terrible strain to walk around always being cautious, always looking around...always thinking, always trying to be prepared to answer something" (p. 77). Certainly, the heterosexual organization of this space places immense strain on Rebecca's lived experiences and sporting pleasures in the netball environment.

In response to the heterosexuality of most spaces and the pressure to suppress homosexual behaviours in public spaces such as sport, many lesbians employ a strategy known as 'covering'. Covering refers to "being 'less out' in certain spaces and 'more out' in others" (Muller Myrdahl, 2013, p. 28) and is according to Yoshino (2006) a "strategy of flexibility that everyone uses to one degree or another to fit into the mythical 'mainstream'" (as cited in Muller Myrdahl, 2013 p. 28). Distinct from closeting one's sexual identity, covering is

not the denial of one's sexuality, rather, it is the temporary and spatially determined muting of particular enactments of one's identity (Muller Myrdahl, 2013). As Rebecca explains, being 'less out' in the elite space of New Zealand netball is a way to conform to this dominantly heterosexist environment:

It's [my sexuality] not something that I feel the need to hide anymore, but when I was playing for Waikato it definitely was. I think I didn't want to be out in the Waikato scene—this will sound crazy—but I knew no one else who was a rep[resentative] player and was a lesbian...I didn't want to be the first...looking back I could have been a role model, but that was too scary back then.

Indeed, according to Krane and Barber (2003), silence has been identified as the prevailing norm amongst lesbians. Thus, whilst some suggest that 'sexual dissidents' may actively appropriate and 'queer' space (Caudwell, 2007; Probyn, 1995; Valentine, 1996), the behaviour of 'covering' employed by Rebecca helps make and keep netball space 'straight'. The "assimilationist approach that covering encourages...assumes the primacy of 'straight' environments" (Muller Myrdahl, 2013, p. 28). By acting in ways so as not to attract attention to her sexual identity, therefore, Rebecca is helping to preserve the heterosexuality of netball space (Kirby & Hay, 1997; Muller Myrdahl, 2013). In other words, Rebecca's performance of a heterosexual identity in netball (or the covering of her non-heterosexual one) seemingly contributes to the heterosexualization of this sporting milieu. Further, by concealing her sexual identity, as a gay woman Rebecca becomes virtually invisible within this social space. Certainly, as Kirby and Hay (1997) and Valentine (1993) suggest, by hiding their sexuality gay and lesbian individuals are undetectable in everyday spaces, and thus, help to support the spatial supremacy of heterosexuality. Nevertheless, in Rebecca's experiences, covering was, and sometimes still is, an important technique for assimilating into the 'straight' environment of netball in New Zealand, especially at the elite representative level.

Covering is not only a means to conform to the heterosexualization of social space, but it is also a useful technique to avoid the threats associated with non-conformity (Muller Myrdahl, 2013). Indeed, both lesbians and gay men are frequently aware that failing to comply with sport's heterosexist norms can result in both subtle and blatant forms of prejudice and discrimination (Krane & Barber,

2005; Satore & Cunningham, 2009; Valentine, 1996, 2003). As Eliason, Donelan and Randall (1992) and Satore and Cunningham (2009) explain, lesbian stereotypes in particular, carry connotations of sexual seduction and unwanted predatory advances which create considerable barriers for sexual minorities. As Rebecca's comments show, the assumption that she was sexually attracted to her teammates was perceived to pose a significant and relevant threat to her inclusion in this space:

I suppose I hid my sexuality mostly because I felt like they [my teammates] might think I was coming onto them. That was the major thing, because we were all so tight and going out together and stuff. I just didn't want my teammates to think differently of me while we were playing netball I suppose.

Not surprisingly, it is not uncommon for many lesbians to “exercise constant self-vigilance, policing their own dress, behaviour and desires to avoid confrontation” (Valentine, 1996, p. 148) via strategies such as covering. Whilst the way Rebecca dresses in this space was not discussed as an issue— perhaps due to the spatial practices of netball in New Zealand (see Chapter Four)—constant self-vigilance and policing of behaviour did offer Rebecca an important means to avoid the seemingly inevitable perceptions of lesbian desire. For example, in the following excerpt from our email dialogue, Rebecca reveals the ways she is especially careful not to engage in unnecessary or overly affectionate forms of touching with her teammates:

I think I train differently. In a restricting or defensive drill I think I'm more stand-offish at training compared to a game...I had a situation where one of my teammates and I were doing a defensive drill together, she was getting pissed off because I kept dodging her and when I dodged her again she just jokingly kind of wraps her arms around me in an effort to hold me back, and it made me think, 'I wonder if she would have done the same if she had known I was gay?' (email communication, 2014)

Whilst she “would never not restrict [her] opposition in a game situation”, Rebecca does pay particular attention to how she engages her body amongst the bodies of her heterosexual female teammates during trainings.

Certainly, her teammates finding out about her sexuality is a concern for Rebecca. Employing the strategy of covering within netball space, however, is relatively easy. According to Rebecca, the “assumption that gay women don't

play netball” means that sexuality is a topic that is very rarely bridged in this context. The representation of netball space as heterosexualized means that seldom is it considered that Rebecca might be anything other than heterosexual or importantly, that a homosexual women might inhabit this space:

I think it's easy to hide your sexuality in netball as hardly ever is your sexuality questioned in this sport because it's known as a feminine sport. People definitely assumed I was straight because I played netball. I think they were less aware of my sexuality purely because it's not known as a sport that many lesbians will or do play.

As Rebecca explained, a number of “situations or comments have been made that [indicate that] they [her teammates] think [she's] straight” (email communication 2014). For example, conversations and remarks about boys and male partners are not only directed at select individuals in the group, but at the team as a whole as assumptions are made that each player is attracted to or paired up with a member of the opposite sex. Further, Rebecca suggested that whilst questions are always asked surrounding her sexuality in the masculinized environment of women's rugby, hardly ever does anyone pay attention to her sexual identity in netball spaces. Arguably, therefore, the representations of netball space and the spatial practices of this sport significantly influence others' perceptions of a netballer's sexual identity, and in Rebecca's case, her ability to assimilate into the heterosexualized space of netball in New Zealand. Importantly, the assumption that Rebecca is straight also highlights the suppression of non-heterosexual subjectivities in this space.

Although assumptions that Rebecca is straight allow her to avoid potentially awkward and untimely discussions about her sexuality with her straight teammates, this also causes her frustration. As someone who has now accepted and embraced her sexuality in most other social spaces, at times, she feels weighed down by the anxiety she experiences regarding her teammates finding out. She explains:

It frustrates me that it's assumed I'm straight in netball, but it's not just netball, it's also in general too...ideally it would be great if society assume people are gay and actually ask them if they are straight...I wouldn't mind if they [my netball team] all knew, at least then it's out there...and at least then I wouldn't worry about if it was awkward for some or not. (email communication 2014)

Expectations that Rebecca is straight and the process of covering to protect herself and others from the repercussions of revelations that she's gay, play a large part in her experiences of this social space. According to Krane and Barber (2003), whilst such strategies may initially aide non-heterosexuals in assimilating into straight environments, their execution can be stressful. For these reasons, Rebecca expressed experiencing more and different pleasures from her participation in women's rugby as opposed to her netball participation. For instance, whilst Rebecca described the physical and sensual pleasures she experiences playing netball (e.g. developing fitness and musculature, gaining intercepts, demonstrating physical competency), she suggested women's rugby offers her more valuable opportunities to experience the social and psychological pleasures associated with sports participation, namely forming close friendships, bonding, socializing outside of sport and feelings of belonging and inclusion.

In sum, as Rebecca's experiences demonstrate, the relationships between sexualities and space are made explicit when we think about the power of particular environments as either liberatory or oppressive for the performance of our sexed bodies (Bell & Valentine 1995). Certainly, for Rebecca, the heterosexualization of netball spaces and bodies influence her netball experiences in complex and meaningful ways. In particular, Rebecca has found it difficult to identify with her heterosexual teammates, to establish friendships and to be "comfortable in her own skin" (Rebecca) in this space. In terms of her pleasures, the heterosexualization of netball space means that whilst Rebecca is able to experience the physical pleasures of involving her body in this sport, the representation of netball(ers) creates tensions between her sexual identity and the heterosexual identities of the other women who play. Thus, whilst it is important to consider the ways gendered space inscribes and disciplines the bodies of women, it is also imperative to explore how heterosexualized sporting spaces, such as netball, influence and shape lesbian and non-heterosexual women's experiences, opportunities and pleasures. That is, how the heteronormative feminine social setting of netball can work to marginalize, exclude and displace women who identify with alternative or 'other' sexualities.

Importantly however, it is not only those women who identify as tomboys and lesbians whose bodies can be marginalized in heteronormative feminine

netball space. Rather, those who inhabit bodies that deviate from social and sporting norms may also be made to feel as though they do not belong. More particularly, despite “accomplishing a highly valued route to femininity” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004, p. 611) and embodying the quintessence of heteronormativity, pregnant bodies are rarely considered to fit within dominant notions of physical capability, and thus, as belonging in sporting spaces such as netball. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I draw upon data gathered via observations, interview discussions and media analysis to highlight some of the ways pregnant bodies are made to feel they are ‘out of place’ in netball space and the challenges and tensions experienced by expectant mothers who choose to engage their bodies physically in spaces of netball. In short, this section aims to explore the ways in which pregnant bodies “are influenced by social and cultural processes and the politics of [netball] space” (Longhurst, 2008, p. 1).

### **Feeling ‘out of place’: Pregnancy, netball and the active female body**

As Shannon Jette (2006) explains, whether in real life or via images in the mass media, the visibility of the pregnant sporting body is a relatively new occurrence in Western society. For a long time, it was considered undesirable and of significant risk for pregnant women to engage in sports such that medical opinion regularly cautioned women, and society more broadly, of the dangers of physical overexertion during pregnancy (Jette, 2006, 2011; Longhurst, 1995, 2001c). In 1953, for example, The New Zealand Gynaecological Society warned that:

Strenuous activities [for pregnant women] are to be condemned. Those which should be avoided are swimming, cycling, horseback riding, golf, tennis, violent movements and jolts, running, lifting heavy weights and hurrying up and down stairs (as cited in Longhurst, 1995, p. 13).

Pregnant women were typically advised by most medical professionals to avoid exercise more strenuous than a light stroll due to perceptions of the pregnant body as “fragile and incongruous with physical activity” (Jette, 2006, p. 331). Instead, gentle physical pursuits such as easy walking, simple calisthenics or light housework were the only activities widely endorsed for expectant mothers.

Interestingly, such advice reinforced normative gender roles and restricted pregnant women largely to the home (Longhurst, 1995).

Medical guidelines have, however, become less restrictive over the last two decades such that whilst pregnant bodies are still largely considered to be ‘at risk’, pregnant women are nonetheless being encouraged to engage in some forms of moderate exercise (Jette, 2006, 2011; Longhurst, 1995). In fact, recent findings suggest that exercise during pregnancy has been associated with a reduced incidence of caesarean section and shorter post-birth hospitalisation (Hall & Kaufmann, 1987), shorter active labour (Clapp, 1990), the promotion of good maternal posture, the management of excess maternal weight gain and a reduction in lower back pain (Dewey & McCrory, 1994). From a psychological perspective, exercise during pregnancy has also been considered to improve a woman’s body image (Dewey & McCrory, 1994), reduce depression (Derosis & Pellegrino, 1982) and increase women’s self-esteem (Wallace, Boyer, Dan & Holm, 1986).

On the basis of such evidence, in January 2002, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) published new recommendations and guidelines for exercise during pregnancy and the postpartum period that promote regular exercise for the overall health of pregnant women. They concluded that although “pregnancy is associated with profound anatomical and physiological changes, there are few instances that should preclude otherwise healthy, pregnant women from following the same [physical activity] recommendations” as other healthy adults (Artal & O’Toole, 2003, p. 6). In short, these guidelines propose that pregnancy should no longer be treated as a state of confinement. Rather, pregnant women *and* competitive and recreational athletes with uncomplicated pregnancies are deemed to be able to “exercise with few restrictions without adversely affecting either their babies or themselves” (Sternfeld, 1997, as cited in Clarke & Gross, 2004, p. 134; see also Artal & O’Toole, 2003).

In New Zealand, a number of government authorities and popular parenting advice forums have taken up this perspective. For example, both the Ministry of Health and Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC)—now known as Sport New Zealand—have advocated that pregnant women engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week to maintain, among other things, a healthy weight and level of fitness. Further, SPARC acknowledges

that whilst it is not advisable that women begin a new sport during pregnancy, it is possible for pregnant women to continue with their sport if this is considered safe (see SPARC's '*Pregnancy and Activity*' guidelines, n.d.). Changes in the recommendations of physical activity for pregnant women also, importantly, coincide with modern neo-liberal pressures "placed on citizens to take personal responsibility for their health" and particularly their weight "through lifestyle management (including regular moderate exercise)" (Jette, 2011, p. 297).

Fitness discourses have likewise been instrumental in promoting physical activity to pregnant women. During the 1990s, the pregnancy fitness industry formed as a niche market of the broader women's health and fitness sector and began to encourage some types of physical activity for women to prepare for the physical demands of labour and childbirth and to shorten the time it takes to "bounce back" from pregnancy (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004, p. 615; see also Jette, 2011). In the US especially, there was a proliferation of publications such as *Maternal Fitness: Preparing for a Healthy Pregnancy* and *Primetime Pregnancy: The Proven Program for Staying in Shape Before and After Your Baby is Born*, home workout tapes such as *Jane Fonda's New Pregnancy Workout*, pregnancy fitness magazines and fitness centres with classes aimed especially at pregnant women (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004; Jette, 2006).

In the last few years, there has been a growth in the promotion of pregnancy fitness in New Zealand with publications such as *New Zealand Women's Weekly* producing articles on how to 'bump up' your exercise regime during pregnancy, numerous parenting and pregnancy websites offering access to international pregnancy fitness publications and home DVD workouts, and an explosion of fitness facilities and programmes such as '*Fit Bumps*', '*Yummy Mummy Fitness*' and '*Preggy Aqua*' across the country, all of which promise to help women maintain their figures during pregnancy and/or shed excess 'baby weight'. Thus, after many years of thinking about the pregnant body as incapable of and unsuited to more rigorous levels of physical activity, "the 'rules of formation' shaping what [is] 'sayable' about the active pregnant body" (Jette, 2011, p. 296) have begun to shift and creak.



**Figure 5.1.** Former Silver Fern Bernice Mene poses naked and pregnant. From *New Zealand Women's Weekly* (cover), S. Kitchin, May 3, 2010.

Certainly, this new emphasis on pregnancy fitness has begun to change the way the pregnant body is viewed, and vice versa, changes in the perception of pregnant bodies has enabled pregnant women to engage in particular and more fitness practices. As such, “a good and fit pregnant body with a taut, tight ‘bump’ is perceived to be an achievement” (Nash, 2011, p. 50) that is, pregnant women who embody ideals of ‘fit pregnancy’ are often celebrated, such that fit and sporting pregnant bodies are increasingly visible among the media. Recently, internationally recognized female athletes Paula Radcliffe, a British marathoner, and Jana Rawlinson, an Australian hurdler, who continued their sporting participation whilst pregnant have experienced significant media exposure overseas. In fact, these women have been praised for their commitment to their training and their tight and toned pregnant figures (Nash, 2011). Referred to as ‘superheroes’, they were upheld as ideal models of fit pregnancy and their bodies imbued with social and physical capital (Nash, 2011). Similarly, in New Zealand, former Silver Fern captain, Bernice Mene, featured naked and pregnant on the

cover of *New Zealand Women's Weekly* in 2010 (see Figure 5.8). In particular, the magazine celebrates Mene's efforts to stay in shape during her pregnancy and what it terms her 'beautiful baby body', which displays very little body fat, no pregnancy stretch marks, toned arms and chest, and glowing, iridescent skin. In this way, Mene's body can be read as a celebration of the fit, pregnant female form, which is "currently predicated on a monolithic slender body" (Nash, 2012, p. 307) and importantly, as an 'ideal' for pregnant New Zealand women to aspire to.

Yet, despite changes in the ways we understand the relationship between pregnant bodies, fitness and physical activity, social anxieties about the reproductive body and the need to delimit proper physical activity (along with many other lifestyle behaviours) to protect the health and well-being of the mother and, even more importantly, the fetus, have remained constant (Jette, 2011). For example, despite the recent advice sometimes given to pregnant women, 'to carry on as usual' (Longhurst, 1995) netball is generally not considered an appropriate or safe sport for pregnant women to play, even if they have been involved right up until their pregnancy and despite no evidence that their participation in this sport will harm themselves or their unborn child (White, 2002).

For example, in 2001 Australian officials imposed a temporary ban on pregnant netballers due to the perceived risks and social anxieties associated with playing netball during pregnancy. In particular, it was argued that women's participation in netball could cause physical harm to both women and their unborn children, making it an activity that posed too greater risk for expectant mothers. This incident sparked significant debate over the dangers and suitability of netball for pregnant women and also over the legal and human rights of expectant mothers to engage in sport both in Australia and New Zealand (see e.g. Carter & Ash, 2001; Dekker, 2001; Stuff Sport, 2001; White, 2002 for more details of this debate).

Indeed, there are still tensions in New Zealand (and across most of the Western world) surrounding the pregnant body 'in motion' such that the types of sports and physical activities pregnant women participate in are intensely surveyed. Thus, pregnant bodies exist in tension between ideas about the frailty of the pregnant female body and social expectations to achieve pregnancy fitness. As Nash (2012) explains, pregnancy is largely considered a period of emotional,

psychological and physical chaos and is represented as “a time when a woman must surrender her ‘self’ (physical and emotional/intellectual) to this ‘natural’ process” (p. 308). In this sense, pregnant women have to “negotiate a [careful] balance between personal freedom and the social acceptance of their publicly pregnant bodies” (Nash, 2011, p. 51) in a neo-liberal and socio-political context that both promotes and constrains their choices to be involved in sport. In contemporary Western society, the messages regarding physical activity, sport and exercise during pregnancy are complex, conflicting and confusing (Jette, 2009).

Nevertheless, in both local and global contexts, a number of elite female athletes are choosing to continue their participation in various sports (e.g. Alison Hargreaves in mountaineering, Paula Radcliffe in marathon running, Jana Rawlinson in hurdling, Anna-Maria Johansson in handball, Nur Suryani Mohamed Taibi in shooting), including netball (e.g. Adine Wilson, Tania Dalton, Leana De Bruin, Julie Seymour, Daneka Wipiiti, Anna Harrison) well into their pregnancies. Whilst this is, arguably, an increasing trend, among both elite and recreational female athletes, and especially within the context of netball in New Zealand, surprisingly, very few scholars have considered the everyday experiences of pregnant women in recreational sport and physical culture and the complexities of negotiating physical activity and expectant motherhood (notable exceptions include Longhurst, 1995, 2001; Nash, 2011). Although sociologists have been paying increasing attention to the relationship between sport and women’s gendered, sexed, aged and raced bodies, there has been little consideration of what Longhurst (2008) suggests must surely be “one of, if not *the*, most important of all bodies—bodies that conceive, give birth, and nurture other bodies—that is, maternal bodies” (p. 2, emphasis in original).

Much of the existing research on sport and pregnancy is physiological or clinical and thus, detached from women’s embodied and lived experiences, such that little is known about the everyday participation of pregnant women in sporting spaces, and more particularly, about how pregnant women negotiate their involvement in sports such as netball. Further, whilst Jette’s (2006, 2009, 2011) work explores the discursive representation of the pregnant body and the relationship between pregnancy and fitness, it does not examine the lived

experiences of pregnant female athletes nor the ways in which women's bodies can be made to feel 'out of place' in sporting spaces such as netball.

Importantly, Lefebvre (1988) recognized that various social relations and structures work to disempower and dominate individuals through alienation, which he defined as an individual being unable to determine the conditions of his or her own existence "by the action of will and desire" (as cited in Friedman & van Ingen, 2011, p. 89). He also recognized that these relations of power, which are produced in and through space, can limit an individual's "full, lived engagement in daily life" (van Ingen, 2004, p. 259). The following analysis, therefore, aims to examine the idea of the contemporary maternal sporting body, and more particularly, the ways spaces of netball in New Zealand, which are saturated with discourses of sport, health and ideal female sporting bodies, can be sites of marginalization, regulation and control for pregnant women who desire to play—and importantly, who occupy bodies 'other' than those typically prioritized in this space. Put differently, I aim to explore the embodied experiences of pregnant women in netball, whilst also paying attention to the ways in which discourses of pregnancy rub up against and clash with netball space.

### ***Not fit for two! Pregnant women's experiences of netball***

Of the 16 women interviewed for this project, ten have children and of those ten, five discussed how they played competitive netball into one or more of their pregnancies. Some of the women chose to participate in netball only into the early stages of their pregnancy. Paige and Jess, however, made the decision, following the advice of medical and/or health professionals, to continue their involvement in both training sessions and competitive games up until as late as the sixth (Paige) and seventh (Jess) month of their pregnancy.

Today, Netball New Zealand, the national governing body of netball in the country, has a clear policy on playing during pregnancy. In particular, this organization considers prohibiting pregnant women's involvement in netball to be a form of discrimination. They suggest:

Pregnancy is a state of health, not an illness...The key principle to note is that a pregnant player has the right to participate in her chosen sport and it may be considered discriminatory and

prohibited by the Human Rights Act 1993 to use pregnancy as a basis for discrimination (Netball New Zealand, 2009, p. 1).

Certainly, in New Zealand, it is considered unfair and unjust to exclude a woman because of an issue related to her gender (Dekker, 2001). Thus, it is expected that all pregnant women in New Zealand should have the right and opportunity to continue their netball participation and to receive the same levels of “respect and support...as any other participant” (Netball New Zealand, 2009, p. 3).

Notwithstanding clear Netball New Zealand guidelines and each woman’s desire to continue her participation, however, many of the women interviewed for this project described the ways their pregnant bodies were made to feel ‘out of place’ or that they don’t belong in netball space. In particular, they discussed the ways their bodies were intensely regulated and surveyed in this space and how their rights to participate were, despite their continued desire to play, eventually removed.

As Longhurst (2008) notes, hegemonic discourses operate to keep in place certain spatial arrangements and to discourage and/or exclude specific bodies from particular spaces. For pregnant women in particular, the discourse of becoming less physically fit, weak, clumsy and prone to falling and injury during pregnancy sits in tension with representations of the physically capable netballer and thus, can be particularly limiting, especially for those who wish to continue their engagement in this sport. Further, it is widely believed that a pregnant woman’s priority ought be for her unborn child and “to this child she must sacrifice all, and risk nothing” (Longhurst, 1995, p. 15). Of those women who spoke about their pregnancies in the interview space, all acknowledged these discourses and thus, the perceptions that pregnant women are unsuited to participation in sports. The following exchange between Cara, who was 22 weeks pregnant at the time of interviewing, and myself illustrates these ideas:

**Amy:** What do you think the perceptions of pregnancy and the pregnant body are? How do people view a pregnant woman?

**Cara:** Fragile! Like nature’s letting you take your course kind of thing. You’re not on a pedestal but you’re definitely on a different level [to others, particularly women who are not pregnant]. You’re just waiting to have a baby (laughs). That’s all you’re doing, or capable of doing, in your life right now.

**Amy:** Why do you think pregnant women are viewed as fragile? What is it about a pregnant woman that makes people understand her this way?

**Cara:** Because there's a human being growing inside of you and it is a fragile thing, you know. And it's a really beautiful thing. But people know that each day and each month it [the fetus] gets bigger and bigger and there's limbs that are growing, you know, a human is taking form, which apparently means you've got to be extra careful (laughs). I feel like people look at me like I'm fragile and like I can't do the things I used to do.

As these comments suggest, pregnancy is often viewed as “a perilous journey that requires constant vigilance” (Dubriwny, 2012, p. 30), such that pregnant women's bodies are “constructed as doubly at risk and [women themselves] are portrayed as doubly responsible” (Lupton, 1999, p. 63). Further, pregnancy is understood to represent “feminine excess at its most extreme” (Ussher, 2006, p. 151). Pregnant women are viewed as boundless, mysterious, unruly and bulging (Ussher, 2006) rather than as embodying the careful balance between femininity and athleticism that is valued in this social space. In this way, therefore, the pregnant netballer, who is in a constant state of flux—with enlarged breasts, a swollen stomach, threatening to leak fluids and split herself into two (Longhurst, 2001b)—and who is prone to injury and less agile, not only troubles netball space, but also the discursive representation of the trim, toned, strong and athletically capable netball player. Not surprisingly, this has important implications for the ways in which women are able to occupy and participate in this space.

As Lupton (1999) notes, pregnant women are surrounded by a network of discourses aimed at the regulation of their bodies. In this way, pregnant women are increasingly watched. They are placed within complex discourses of surveillance that work to police their behaviours in relation to perceived risk (Dubriwny, 2012; Lupton, 1999). No longer a single body, but one that is responsible for nurturing the potentiality of another human being, a pregnant body is increasingly subjected to the advice and appraisal of others (Lupton, 1999; Longhurst, 1999; 2008). As these women's pregnancies progressed and they became visibly larger, their participation in netball, and other sports, became increasingly surveyed by friends, family members, coaches and even strangers.

For Katie, it was her husband who expressed concern regarding her choice to continue playing netball:

I played [netball] until I was probably, five months pregnant. It was kind of funny, I wasn't bothered by it, but my husband was. I felt like I could judge whether it was safe for me to play myself and I knew that I would back off if somebody was doing something that may put me in danger. Even though it has become a really physical game, I didn't feel as though there would be any damage caused by me playing. But my husband was concerned that I would be pushed over and end up on the ground.

Whilst Katie's husband's concerns did not prompt her to remove herself from netball, she did admit that it caused her some doubt regarding whether or not she should be playing, that is, whether her pregnant body belonged in this space: "although I didn't necessarily listen to his concerns, they did make me wonder sometimes whether this was the right choice and whether or not I should be participating [pregnant]".

Cara also encountered advice from family members, particularly her sister, regarding the risks of playing netball and participating in recreational forms of boxing during her second pregnancy. When asked whether she thought pregnant women are ever perceived negatively for their continued participation in sport, she replied:

I know my sister thinks like that (laughs). My sister was quite disgusted that I decided to keep playing and have kept playing netball. She was like '*oh what are you doing! Why do you keep doing this?*' And when I kept going to boxing for a little while after I found out I was pregnant she wanted me to stop straight away. She sort of perceived me as being selfish and just not caring about the baby's development. (Cara's emphasis)

Interestingly, some of these women not only reported coming under scrutiny from those close to them, such as their family and friends, but also from their teammates and even complete strangers. Cara, for example, described being treated differently than the other women in her team because of her pregnancy, that is, because her body no longer conformed to the type of body prioritized and celebrated in this space. In particular, she suggested some of the other players on

her team frequently question her judgment, check up on her and attempt to restrict the activities in which she partakes:

Some of my teammates talk to me like I'm a child, like '*hi, how are you today?*' [said in a patronizing tone] and one of them tells me not to run so much and to do so much and says stuff like '*do you think you should be playing?*' and I'm like '*shut up!*' (laughs). Coming from someone so young [who doesn't have children and who hasn't been pregnant] it can be pretty frustrating...People are just like '*oh, you're a Mum, you're having a baby, so you might not know [what's good for you]*'. (Cara's emphasis)

Pregnant women are often perceived to be “naturally anarchic and disordered in their thinking” (Longhurst, 1999, p. 78), that is, lacking in good judgment about the capabilities of their bodies during pregnancy and of the risks associated with particular behaviours. In this sense, pregnant women's rights to bodily autonomy are typically considered questionable (Longhurst, 2001b).

Indeed, from the moment women realize they are pregnant, they are bombarded with messages, including about how to be a 'good' mother such that each and every decision they make “carries a moral weight” (Longhurst, 2008, p. 117). For Jess, in particular, her decision to continue playing netball during her pregnancy sat in tension with discourses of good motherhood, prompting some to react negatively to her participation and to question her abilities to mother:

I had a few comments like, oh you know, '*you're a shocking mum*', but I had made an informed decision and was told by a health professional that I was doing nothing wrong so I was ok with the decision. I received comments from other teams and just women in passing really, not people within my own network because we all did it [played pregnant] (laughs). A lot of older women would look at us like '*what are you doing?*' and probably because I was a young mum too, that didn't help. They just thought I was making ignorant and ill-informed decisions and basically being careless. (Jess' emphasis)

Representations of the pregnant body as in need of guidance and advice and of sport as a dangerous pursuit for expectant mothers help to explain why pregnant women are so often made to feel as though they do not belong in and/or should not actively occupy netball space. Although, Jess, felt she was “the best judge of [her] own body” and considered her netball participation unproblematic after

seeking extensive medical advice, other women at the courts were certainly troubled by her decision to combine pregnancy and sport such that her decision to continue her netball involvement was considered morally wrong. In this way, whilst the stares and comments of strangers did not force her to discontinue her participation, they did work to reinforce the idea that Jess was a 'bad' mother for continuing to play netball and that her body did not belong in this space.

Importantly, although not successful in displacing these women from netball space, the comments of others can be read as attempts to regulate and subvert the bodies of less dominant 'users' and to "empty out the spaces" (Allen, 2003, p. 164) of netball of those who represent an 'other'. As Lefebvre (1991) points out, those who are likely to be excluded from space are those whose rhythms, embodiments and movements do not correspond with dominant representations (see also Allen, 2003). In this sense, as a pregnant netballer's belly grows and she appears less athletically 'ideal' she is more likely to encounter the closing down of possibilities and regulatory and exclusionary practices. Thus, whilst these women continued to occupy netball space despite their pregnancies, the perceptions of others meant they often did so in what can be considered "a contradictory, often uneasy manner" (Allen, 2003, p. 166).

In addition to expressing concern for pregnant players, some netballers also exhibit resistance to pregnant netball bodies. Although none of the interviewees talked directly about their opposition or teammates expressing any negativity or having any obvious issues with them participating in netball whilst pregnant, there appears to be some evidence of tensions between those women who decide to play netball into their pregnancies, and those women who play and train against them. For example, at one netball tournament I attended with my teammates, we observed a heavily pregnant woman playing. As we watched her move around the shooting circle with her large and bulging belly, my teammates began to engage in conversation about their feelings regarding playing netball against a pregnant woman. Interestingly, whilst the welfare of the pregnant woman and her unborn child were indeed concerns for my teammates, so too was the opposing team's potential disadvantage. In particular, one of my teammates was especially concerned about the ethics of a woman playing pregnant in a game where body-to-body contact is considered part and parcel of competitive

contemporary versions of this sport. In particular, she expressed fear about the prospect of defending a pregnant woman, suggested she would feel compelled to “back right off her and not even really defend her” and claimed that she didn’t think it was particularly fair for the other players that she partake (research notes, 2013).

Similar conversations between players can be found on netball-related discussion forums and blogs. When members of ‘*Netball Scoop*’, an online netball community, were asked their opinions about a woman who was 32 weeks pregnant and playing netball, one member replied:

**Corry:** I think 32 weeks is getting ridiculous! Her ‘right to play’ is impinging on the other team’s ‘right to compete’ (that’s what they are paying for!) and her baby’s ‘right to be safe’ (Netball Scoop, 2013)

As internationally recognized New Zealand squash player, Dame Susan Devoy, points out, “playing against someone who is pregnant can be difficult” (as cited in Carter & Ash, 2001, p. 4). However, as my observations demonstrate, some players find it frustrating and potentially frightening. The above comments reveal that there are some issues surrounding the rights of those who play with/against pregnant women and their opportunities to engage in sports without the need to worry about causing a pregnant woman harm. Whether misguided or not, it is perhaps for these reasons that some women are particularly concerned by and challenge the pregnant body in sporting spaces such as netball. In other words, pregnant bodies may be made to feel they ‘out of place’ not only because of the potential harm caused to pregnant women and unborn children or because their bodies are ‘other’, but also in order to maintain and ensure what some women consider to be fair and equal (at least as much as possible) physical competition. Importantly, such opinions also reinforce the dominant presence of the ‘ideal’ sporting body and provide evidence of efforts to smother, exclude and regulate difference and the “traces of others” (Allen, 2003, p. 160) from netball space.

For some women, their participation in netball whilst pregnant not only prompted their body to be intensely surveyed, but also lead to it being controlled and dominated by others. More particularly, whilst some women were made to feel as though they should not be engaging their pregnant bodies physically in

netball, others were deliberately excluded from this context. During my interview with Cara she discussed how she has been removed from the court, or ‘benched’ because of pregnancy. She recalled the ways in which her time on court was significantly cut back during her first pregnancy once her coach was informed:

During my last pregnancy I found out I was three months pregnant before the last three games of the season. And when I told them [my coach and teammates] I got benched. Instead of playing full games or half games [as I usually did], I only got like a quarter.

Since moving regions and becoming pregnant during the netball season once more, Cara has found that the restrictions placed on her pregnant sporting body have changed little, if at all. Despite continuing to train and considering herself fit to play some 20 weeks into her pregnancy, she has once again found herself being “molly-coddled”, constantly asked “how [her] puku<sup>34</sup> is” and sitting on the sideline. In the below extract from our discussion, Cara explains how the capabilities of her body and her rights to continue playing despite being pregnant have once again been ignored:

Last Saturday, physically, because I had a week off, I was sweet and I know I was sweet. I did the warm up really well, you know, I did drop a few balls but we lost our lead by eight goals [because we were playing a far less capable player] and I was thinking ‘*well why don’t you put me on?*’ like to the goal shoot position. But my coach was just like ‘*no*’. Like, not at all...because I’m pregnant. The fact that I physically thought I was still okay to play, didn’t matter...I feel like I could have been in that [playing] position for longer, but it was my coach who really wanted me out of there. (Cara’s emphasis).

As Cara’s comments reveal, she was excluded from the court even though she appears to be continuing to train and play well. Due to her pregnancy, she was alienated from her team by being positioned as a non-player. Her participation is valued less than those in her team with much weaker or developed physical skills/abilities, despite her positive performances in trainings and warm-ups. Further, her coach’s concerns regarding the health of her pregnancy seem to outweigh Cara’s desire to play. Although Netball New Zealand clearly emphasize

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<sup>34</sup> Puku is the Māori term for stomach.

Cara's right to participate in all facets of netball, her coach has effectively taken away her opportunity to participate in competition and to be fully involved in this space. Just as some employers in Longhurst's (2008) study of pregnant workers attempted to terminate their employee's contracts unjustly on the basis of pregnancy, Cara's coach dismissed her participation based solely on the premise that she is carrying a child. In a Lefebvrian sense, Cara's presence within this space as a body that is 'other' has been "effectively smothered by a more *dominant* presence" (Allen, 2003, p. 160, emphasis in original) that is, by those who inhabit more conventional, typical and 'ideal' netball bodies.

As the experiences of these women demonstrate, pregnant women are often made to feel like what Douglas (1966) refers to as "matter out of place" (as cited in Longhurst, 2001b, p. 33) and thus, as though they do not belong in particular contexts such as sport. Pregnant women's exclusion from netball spaces, therefore, "often has little to do with corporeal limitations" or medical evidence, "but rather is socially constructed" (Longhurst, 1995, p. 14). The notion of the "vulnerable, precious and permeable unborn baby as placed 'at risk' by the actions of the pregnant women in whose body it is developing" (Lupton, 2013, p. 95) largely affects the ways in which pregnant netballers are understood, viewed, treated, and often, their opportunities to participate. Further, the athletic-looking and physically capable female body prioritized and (re)produced in this space sits in tension with images of the pregnant body and understandings of the sporting capabilities of expectant mothers. Women's participation in netball whilst pregnant, therefore, is shaped by the entanglement of power, ideologies and discourse that work to impose strict spatial boundaries and limitations on their bodies, lived experiences and sporting opportunities. In this sense, pregnancy and netball become entangled, yet they also remain far apart. Indeed, the very ways in which netball spaces are imagined and produced, that is, how they are perceived and conceived, also has important implications for how, and by whom, they are embodied and lived (Allen, 2003).

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have focused on Lefebvre's notion of lived space to discuss netball as a space of marginalization, exclusion, alienation and regulation for

some New Zealand women. More particularly, I demonstrate how some female subjectivities and bodies, particularly those of tomboys, lesbians and pregnant women, can be made to feel ‘out of place’ or excluded from netball space. According to Gaventa (2006), power relations work to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces: “what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests” (p. 26). Drawing on this perspective, I have shed new and important light on the ways the representation of netball spaces and bodies and the spatial practices of this sport work to influence and shape women’s everyday lived experiences, to limit their opportunities for engagement and particular sporting pleasures, and ultimately, to regulate who occupies this space and who does not. Put differently, I have examined how the coding of space not only suggests that certain individuals and groups who occupy particular subject positions are present, but how this coding can work to marginalize, exclude, displace and smother those who embody difference (Allen, 2003). In so doing, I have begun to challenge the longstanding and romantic notion that netball is ‘the national sport for *all* New Zealand women’ (Hawes & Barker, 1999) and “a game eminently suitable for *every* girl” (*Otago Daily Times*, 1926, as cited in Nauright & Broomhall, 1994, p. 394, emphasis added). I have also acknowledged the idea that when paying attention to what and who is included in particular spaces, we must also be careful to consider who is excluded from social space and the broader social forces that have produced those patterns (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011).

Although netball can function as an oppressive space for some women and at particular stages of women’s lives, it can also be a space of liberation, empowerment, agency and resistance: a space for the enactment of oppositional politics. Lefebvre’s spatial approach highlights the capacities and creativities of the human body and the ways individuals can transform the circumstances in which power operates (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Simonsen, 2005). More specifically, Lefebvre believes that the dialectic between everyday life and operations of power can be transcended by creative bodily acts (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003). In the following chapter, therefore, I draw further inspiration from Lefebvre’s spatial triad and his concept of lived space to explore the ways in which spaces of netball enable some New Zealand women to resist normative and normalizing discourses, to challenge the social limitations placed on their bodies,

and to experience particular sporting pleasures in and through their participation in this sport. In other words, I demonstrate that the lived space of netball in New Zealand is simultaneously a space of “perils” *and* “possibilities” (Soja, 1996, p. 68) for women’s active, moving bodies.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **‘I Think it’s Bigger Than Just the Game’: Netball as a Space of Resistance**

[Netball] is [about] more than just being a Silver Fern or playing for your region, it’s actually about what it will teach you in your life and it’s about the opportunities you can have [via your participation in this sport]...[whether that is] being healthy and confident in your body, [or] confident in being a female and what that represents. (Natasha)

As Lefebvre suggests, and as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, spaces of representation (lived space) can be the spaces of discrimination, marginalization, alienation and oppression (van Ingen, 2003). They are “vitaly filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination and subjection” (Soja, 1996, p. 68). Importantly, however, as the above quote highlights, lived spaces are not solely spaces of domination and exclusion: they also contain “potentialities” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 349) for bodies. Indeed, lived space is a politically complex space. It is not only “the space of all inclusive simultaneities [and] perils” but *also* of “possibilities: the space of radical openness, [and] the space of social struggle” (Soja, 1996, p. 68). In other words, whilst lived space can be constituted by dominance, regulation, subordination and control, importantly, it is also a space in which individuals are able to experience feelings of pleasure and to struggle against and resist operations of power. Thus, as Lefebvre (1991) points out, all individuals and groups “are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify” (p. 35).

Taking inspiration from Lefebvre’s view that lived space is both oppressive *and* enabling, in this chapter I change tack from thinking about the ways the space of netball in New Zealand can work to marginalize particular female bodies and subjectivities, to an exploration of the ‘potentialities’ and ‘possibilities’ of netball space. More particularly, I explore how some New

Zealand women use spaces of netball and their participation in this sport to challenge particular discourses and relations of power and to engage in practices of resistance, freedom and agency. It is important to note, that whilst the construct of resistance has become popular in recent years, particularly among sociologists, this concept is “a complex social construction” (Spewart, Hughson & Shaw, 2008, p. 202, see also Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). As Hollander and Einwohner (2004) have rightly pointed out, “even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place” (p. 549) such that a single act may simultaneously represent both resistance and accommodation to varying dimensions of power or control.

In light of the ambiguities of resistance, therefore, I feel it important to explain that I do not consider resistance to be necessarily characterized by particular ‘acts’, but also by an individual’s everyday negotiation of space and their ability to “create new meanings out of imposed meanings [and] to re-work and divert space to other ends” (Pile, 1997, p. 16). I also identify this term with the practice of individuals and groups “seeking out, creating, occupying and nurturing alternative spatialities” (van Ingen, 2002, p. 103) within the spaces of the everyday, mundane and banal. Moreover, I understand freedom as not only the right to participate in a particular space, but also the right and ability to define, give meaning to and shape that space (Gaventa, 2006).

In this manner, I explore further the meanings netball has in the everyday lives of New Zealand women and how this social space creates opportunities for women to challenge and disrupt, or ‘fight back’ against, normative and normalizing discourses and regulatory regimes that operate on women’s bodies within both netball and broader society. In particular, I consider the ways some women resist the involvement of men in this sport and how the negotiation and creative appropriation of netball space by mothers and ‘transgressive’ female sporting bodies, particularly pregnant, ‘fat’ and older bodies, can enable them to challenge, disrupt and resist prevailing notions of female, sporting and/or netball bodies and to experience particular forms of (temporary) freedom. In so doing, I not only focus on the contradictory, conflictual and, ultimately, contestatory character of netball space but also on how resistant practices can occur when

existing spaces are remade and/or occupied “in contrary ways” (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 64).

### **Protecting the women-onlyness of netball**

Sport has traditionally been considered a cultural space that has contributed to male privilege and female disadvantage (Hargreaves, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Accordingly, a plethora of feminist-inspired critiques of sport have highlighted the role sport plays in the “structural and ideological domination of women by men” (Messner & Sabo, 1990, p. 2). As noted in Chapter Four, however, netball is a sporting space that privileges the participation of women and thus, exists largely outside of the dominance, control and interests of most New Zealand men. In this sense, netball is typically regarded as a space of women-onlyness: a physical culture that is organized within and enables women to participate together in the broader masculine dominated and oriented sphere of New Zealand sports (Donnelly, 2011).

Not surprisingly then, men’s involvement in netball is often met with skepticism and resistance from women. Despite many participants suggesting they value having their partners at the courts to watch them play, for example Katie says “I enjoy my netball more when my husband is there to watch” and Jess claims ‘having [her husband] there [pushes her] to go harder’, there was evidence of resistance to the idea of active male participation in netball. Although the women-onlyness of this sport typically works to keep men out of netball spaces in a playing sense (see Tagg, 2008a, 2008b), the increasing popularity of mixed-gender netball and to an extent, the growth of men’s competitions and tournaments has facilitated a rise in the number of male players. This prompted strong emotional responses among a number of participants.

For example, Jess, a competitive netballer and coach in her thirties, describes tension among Hamilton’s female netball playing community at the possibility of the introduction of a men’s 7-a-side outdoor league. She recalls:

I know when there was talk of bringing in a *men’s* competition in Hamilton some women were like ‘*well why should there be a special competition set up for men?*’ There were definitely some attitudes that suggested that we shouldn’t be catering to *that* group. (Jess’ emphasis)

Whilst some women revealed their dislike of male players, others discussed how they strongly oppose male netball officials—particularly male umpires. For example, Debbie admits feelings of resentment towards men having and exerting power and control over what she feels should remain a women-only sporting space:

You couldn't say netball is women-only anymore, even that's changing now. And you know it annoys me when I see men umpiring netball (laughs). It's not ruining it, but...(trails off).

In what she leaves unsaid, Debbie seems to suggest that the participation of males is detrimental to her experiences of this sport. Rachel demonstrates similar feelings when asked about her opinions of, and reactions to, men taking up umpiring positions:

I hate having male umpires! I don't understand why they'd even want to be involved? Surely they can just leave us women to it? If I'm honest, I should admit that I tend to give them a bit of a hard time. I don't like being told what to do by a male on court.

Importantly, Rachel not only challenges the involvement of male umpires in the interview space, but also when playing this sport. Her confession that she gives male umpires “a hard time” is evidence of a deliberate and purposeful challenge towards male involvement in netball. Although women cannot control or subvert the involvement of male players or umpires in netball per se, they *can* (and clearly they do) demonstrate their aversion.

Thus, just as the women softball players from Birrell and Richter's (1987) study resisted male sporting authority in all-women playing spaces, these women clearly take issue with and voice concern regarding men's active participation in netball. Not entirely dissimilar to the ways in which men protect the maleness of sport, some women netballers appear to engage in practices that reinforce that netball space is for women. Indeed, from the standpoint of these women, aside from spectatorship, men who become involved in netball, in whatever capacity, are invariably seen as encroaching on women's space and as “antithetical to the production of [women's] meaningful sport experiences” (Birrell & Richter, 1987, p. 399). Viewing netball space as key for developing women's confidence, self-esteem and psychological empowerment, some participants described netball as a type of ‘feminist movement’. During an interview with Stacey and Jess, both

talked candidly about the ways netball encourages a type of feminist politics.

They muse:

I think netball is something that we can hold as our own as women. You know, this is our sport kind of thing. So yeah, even though men are getting into indoor netball it's still predominantly a women's sport and it has kind of united women I guess—a kind of feminist movement (laughs). (Stacey)

[Netball] definitely is [like a form of feminism] (laughs)...in a way it is very feminist and strongly female driven and owned...it was started by women [and] has been led by women. (Jess)

Although not all women made explicit connections between netball and feminism or identified as feminist, the idea that netball is, and should be, a woman-centred and female-only space that promotes the interests and participation of New Zealand women is an opinion held by most of the women I interviewed. Most participants conceptualized netball as a site for women's everyday resistance, particularly with regards to the male dominance of sport. Interestingly, this view also has profound effects on the ways women understand their involvement in this sport. For example, Rachel explains the ways her participation in netball can be viewed as “showing support for a female sporting culture in New Zealand” and is an example of “a kind of raising of the middle finger to the male culture of sport” whilst Debbie claims “netball is important for showing men we can be just as good as them”.

Importantly, these comments, serve not only as examples of women's resistance towards men's participation in netball, but also of their attempts to nurture and preserve an alternative sporting geography. Put differently, their comments reveal how women's interactions with each other, as well as with men, work to “[re]produce women-onlyness, and [to] maintain or ‘police’ it in particular [and important] ways” (Donnelly, 2011, p. 128). What is more, the source of their critiques can be understood as grounded in their (conscious and unconscious) feminist sensibilities, that is, their own ideas and understandings about “what it is like to be women in a world constrained by patriarchal pressures” (Birrell & Richter, 1987, p. 398). Thus, whilst netball spaces can be problematic for some New Zealand women (see Chapter Five), in a Lefebvrian (1968, 1991) sense, they also contain potentialities for bodies as women realize their potential

and live meaningful lives in the conditions they help to generate (see also Elden, 2004; Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Merrifield, 2006; Shields, 1999).

In the remainder of this chapter, I continue to highlight the potentialities and possibilities of this sporting milieu for New Zealand women. However, instead of simply examining how social action takes place *in space*, following Lefebvre (1991) I consider the ways some women *use* spaces of netball to challenge normative and regulatory discourses and to engage in practices of resistance, freedom and agency (Gothum & Brumley, 2002). In so doing, I focus on the experiences of more particular groups of women such as mothers and pregnant, fat and older netball players to reveal the ways in which individuals “use their own autonomous identities and challenge externally stigmatized identities” (Gothum & Brumley, 2002, p. 268) by “fashion[ing] a spatial presence and practice outside the norms” (Shields, 1999, p. 164) of this sport and of everyday life.

### **‘Netball Mums’: Resisting traditional discourses of mothering**

In her influential analyses of New Zealand women’s experiences of and opportunities for leisure, Shona Thompson (1990, 1995, 1999) observed the ways women’s invariably greater responsibility for domestic labour and childcare circumscribes their participation in sport. Thompson claims that women’s involvement in sport has traditionally been to facilitate the participation of others (husbands/partners and children) at the expense of their own. Indeed, irrespective of women’s needs, attitudes and preferences to mothering and domestic duties, the idealized role of the ‘good’ mother is typically one of sacrifice and availability to her family around the clock (Chase & Rogers, 2001; Spowart et al., 2008).

Whilst these arguments still hold weight, there are now new expectations placed on mothers to include bodywork into their lives and regimes. As Dworkin and Wachs (2004) put it, today mothers are not only considered primarily responsible for a “first shift of work and the second shift of household labour and childcare” (p. 616) but also “a new [third] shift of bodily labour and fitness practices” (p. 610). As such, there are now clear warnings that ‘letting oneself go’ not only signals failed womanhood, but failed motherhood also (Dworkin &

Wachs, 2004). Indeed, discourses of motherhood have begun to shift to encourage women to embody ideals of 'fit' motherhood and to regain their pre-pregnancy bodies via highly disciplined regimes of exercise and physical activity (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004; Parkes, 2013; Taylor, 2008).

Importantly, however, these discourses very rarely extend to participation in recreational or social forms of sport and leisure, which typically take place outside of a mother's home (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004). Instead, women are expected to use their household responsibilities and childcare to get fit. Thus, expectations placed on mothers to prioritize the needs of their families over and above their own remain and ensure that "the notion of leaving a child for pleasure, self-gratification or even self-enrichment", all of which are obtained through participation in sport, "is represented as the most unacceptable form of maternal practice" (Maher & Lindsay, 2005, p. 4; see also Currie, 2004; Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1990; Spowart, Burroughs & Shaw, 2010). From this perspective, women's sport and leisure opportunities can be considered to be hampered by an 'ethic of care', that is, the cultural expectation that as primary caregiver within the family women sacrifice their own needs, instead, placing those of their family at the fore (McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Spowart, et al., 2008). Discourses surrounding motherhood, fitness, physical activity, sport and leisure, therefore, are complex, competing and conflicting.

Since the concepts of sport and leisure carry with them some sense of the notion of freedom (Wearing & Wearing, 1988), it is little surprise that women's choice to take time out of their day away from their families and household responsibilities for participation sits in tension with, and direct contrast to, traditional and enduring discourses of motherhood "which portray mothers as selfless, caring and having prime responsibility for their children" (Spowart et al., 2010, p. 1186). In the contemporary context, however, there are increasing numbers of mothers negotiating time and space to engage in sport and physical activity (Leberman & Palmer, 2007). In fact, some women are making this their priority. For example, as former New Zealand women's rugby representative, Farah Palmer (2013) argues in an article in the *Otago Daily Times*, motherhood "is so much a part of netball culture" that "no-one blinks an eye now when players make a comeback after having a baby" (para. 7). There are even burgeoning

week-nightly competitive and social netball leagues dedicated to accommodating the busy schedules of mothers and working women who struggle to attend Saturday games. Taking note of this shift, some scholars have argued that despite the pervasiveness of dominant discourses of mothering, women can and do resist particular social expectations concerning motherhood to participate in various forms of sport and physical culture (see e.g. Leberman & Palmer, 2007; Roster, 2007; Shaw, 1994, 2001; Spowart et al., 2008; Spowart, et al., 2010; Wearing, 1990, 1998; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). For Shaw (1994), the fact that leisure is a situation of choice, control and self-determination lends itself to the idea that mothers are demonstrating resistance when they choose to engage, particularly when they do so ahead of their responsibilities as caregivers of the family.

Thus, physical cultural settings have been described as providing “spaces for rewriting the script of what it is to be a woman, beyond definitions provided by powerful males and the discourses propagated as truth in contemporary societies” (Wearing, 1998, p. 147). What is more, mothers are portrayed as “agentic women who are not only challenging existing social expectations by engaging in [and prioritizing] leisure, physical activity or sport but are also creating counter discourse in the process” (Spowart et al., 2010, p. 1189). In the following section, therefore, I argue that netball, as both a competitive sport and a serious form of leisure, can be understood in much the same way, that is, as not only providing a (counter)space for women’s embodied pleasures but also “for a re-storying of lives in ways that do, at times, rub up against traditional discourses of both femininity and motherhood, if not utterly dismantling them” (Spowart et al., 2010, p. 1199).

***‘He watches the kids and I sit in the clubrooms’: Netball as (temporary) respite***

Of the 16 women netballers who participated in this project, ten are mothers and of those ten, nine have at least one dependent<sup>35</sup> child. In addition to motherhood, one of these ten women is enrolled in higher education, five work outside the home in some form of full or part-time paid employment, one is a solo parent and

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<sup>35</sup> I use the term ‘dependent’ to refer to those children aged from infant to 18 years who are still living in their parents’ home.

*all* the women juggle busy lives with primary responsibility for childcare and domestic duties. For some of these mothers, netball has been something they have returned to after making the decision to have, and then raising, their infant children. For others, netball has been a constant throughout their mothering experiences (e.g. during pregnancy, soon after birth and throughout their children's infant, pre-teen and teenage lives). For all mothers, nonetheless, netball is considered central in their efforts to claim time and space for leisure.

An overwhelming theme that emerged during discussions with the mothers in this study was the importance of time away from domestic and familial responsibilities. In the interview space, six mothers described their daily activities as repetitive and suggested their roles as wives/partners and mothers often restrict them from engaging in exciting and new activities. Netball, however, is something that offers respite from feelings of being trapped in what Heather termed "Groundhog Day".<sup>36</sup> Thus, for these women, netball not only serves as an outlet for their physical and social needs, but also importantly, functions as an 'escape' from the everyday (and often monotonous) physical and psychological demands of work and family obligations. Heather explains:

[Netball is] a break from picking up the kids from school, from preparing meals, from doing housework...it's nice just to have something different to go to, rather than home, work, to have a different interest, different friends. It's quite good! I think netball provides women with a lot of things. An escape from the daily drudgery of life (laughs).

Young Mum, Amber, similarly discusses how her participation in netball adds another dimension to her busy life and the ways she looks forward to the 'break' it provides her:

I think netball balances my life out because I'm either at home or I work, so sometimes it feels like home, work, home, work but netball gives me a bit of a break you know, even though it's an hour or two or four (laughs). And sometimes I really look forward to that.

Although some mothers reported bringing their children with them to

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<sup>36</sup> The term 'Groundhog Day', which is derived from the 1993 film of the same name, is usually used to refer to a situation in which a series of tedious events appear to be occurring in a similar and repetitive manner each day.

Saturday games, most suggested that if given the choice they preferred to attend netball without the kids ‘in tow’. Thus, netball is not only valued by participants for providing time away from expectations of managing the home, but also from their roles as primary caregivers. In fact, for many of these women, this is significant motivation for their involvement in this sport. For solo parent, Sarah, netball is an important part of her life and provides occasional respite from highly stressful and emotionally and mentally draining sole-parenting responsibilities. Simultaneously, her involvement also enables her to escape the home. She suggests:

As a solo parent I needed time away so netball tournaments were mean [fantastic]. Actually it was great just getting out of the house and playing netball. I’m that sort of person who needs a release, someone who just needs to get out and do something physical. Netball is definitely an escape.

There are certainly pleasures in the perceived sense of freedom netball provides women from their role as mothers and from time spent catering to children’s demands. For Jane, the ways netball facilitates a gender role shift in her relationship that allows her to prioritize her participation in sport and her social needs, and importantly, to take a ‘back seat’ to parenting while doing so, is especially valuable:

Back in the day when I met my husband, you know when he was playing rugby we’d go to the rugby club for what *he* does and his social thing, but now he comes to the club for *my* social things—he watches the kids and I sit in the clubrooms and have a drink with *my* girl friends (laughs). (Jane’s emphasis)

Similarly, according to Katie, who has two children under five, the main reason she “got back into netball since having kids was because of that ‘away from children time’”. Amber also suggested she eagerly anticipates her netball games and trainings and part of that is “definitely” because it allows her the opportunity to “get away from [her] kids”. Thus, with respect to a Lefebvrian understanding of space, netball can act as a (counter)space of resistance to cultural expectations of femininity and motherhood that not only place women in the home but also suggest they take primary care of the children.

Although the topic of gender resistance has become increasingly popular in critical scholarship, it is important to note that it suffers from many of the same

conceptual tensions that accompany the construct of resistance more broadly: primarily, whether resistance must be characterized by a conscious and deliberate choice to draw attention to social inequities, whether it is individual or collective, whether it can be achieved through personal empowerment or must elicit social change, and whether acts of resistance necessarily need to be fruitful to create social change (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Roster, 2007; Shaw, 2001). According to Roster (2007), one way to approach the notion of intent behind acts of resistance and their outcomes is to look at things from the perspective of the individual. Thus, the meaning of leisure in women's lives and its potential as an act of resistance can be better understood by acknowledging the context of the activity within individual circumstances and amidst understandings of gender roles and relations in broader society (Henderson, 1996; Roster, 2007). This idea has been demonstrated by Henderson and Bialeschki (1991, 1994) who examined women's subjective understandings of leisure and in so doing, revealed that women's empowerment is achieved by balancing a desire to address particular personal needs with maintaining various social role obligations. More specifically, they highlight the ways that women negotiate their participation in physical recreation consciously and unconsciously around significant others in their lives, often requiring support from family and friends to facilitate their participation (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1994, see also McGannon & Schinke, 2013).

Certainly, in the context of netball, women's freedom to engage in leisure is "somewhat tempered by social role constraints that require careful negotiation before a woman is truly free to indulge" (Roster, 2007, p. 445). In other words, whilst women are able to experience time and space away from the roles and expectations of the home and family, this often involves complex negotiations (e.g. making childcare arrangements with partners or family members and making sure household obligations are taken care of before or after participation) and is almost always only temporary. Although all of her children had grown up, moved out of the family home and had children of their own, Nikki vividly recalls the ways netball was only ever a fleeting form of escape. She suggests contemporary 'netball Mums' face a similar situation:

Women obviously play [netball] because they love it and so just to be out there for an hour or a couple of hours on a Saturday just to be by themselves and do something they enjoy. And then go home

and dust themselves off and go back to the housework or whatever (laughs).

Two young netballers I overheard talking at the HCNC also reinforced this idea when one turned to the other and lamented, “great game...but back to the housework it is” (research notes, 2013). Thus, as these quotes demonstrate, there are certainly conflicting issues surrounding women’s choice to engage in individual forms of leisure. More specifically, women’s participation is not at the expense of their roles as wives and mothers but tangled up in and mediated by these complex and conflicting demands. What is more, it appears women’s resistance to household and familial obligations via their participation in netball rarely elicits broad-scale, or even any, social change.

Nevertheless, in negotiating temporary respite from work, domestic and childcare responsibilities, these women report experiencing precious time and space for themselves. In so doing, they discuss the ways they use and actively seek out netball as a moment to resist expectations to place others’ needs first, and instead, use this space to prioritize their own. According to Paige, her participation in netball can be considered a reward for all of the effort she puts into other avenues of her life:

You dedicate yourself as a mother, as a partner, as a student and an employee but netball is *my* time, you know, this is about *me*.  
(Paige’s emphasis)

Numerous scholars have linked women’s empowerment with the belief in the right to claim personal leisure time (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Roster, 2007). For many of the participants, netball is one of the rare opportunities they have to think solely about themselves and to do something that benefits them and that they enjoy. When asked about the value of netball in the lives of mothers, all of the women discussed the ways their participation enables them to put their domestic duties and what seems like the constant needs of others to the back of their minds. Netball was described as *their* time, *their* claim to leisure space. Heather’s comments summarize the general consensus of the group:

There’s something about it, whether it’s the camaraderie, the social, the physical and all of that combined with the freedom of thinking about yourself. You’re not thinking about getting the car rego

[registration] done, kids, this and that. It all goes out the window...you can be on the court and it's actually just about you, you're doing your own thing as opposed to dealing with everybody else. I think a lot of women just enjoy the fact that they can get out and do something for themselves...you kind of have a chance to put yourself first. You're not actually having to think about anyone else, like you're thinking about your teammates and stuff but you're not thinking about what the kids need or your husband needs or...yeah, it's more about you.

Women's participation in netball was also described as affording the possibility to address particular physical, social and emotional needs that are otherwise left unmet because of women's busy lives, responsibilities and selfless existence.

Katie explains:

Netball is something that you freely choose to do and it often satisfies very different needs that the regular and routine things [women] do in life can't. I think with where my life is at now—so busy with work and children—most of what I do on a daily basis is for the family, whereas netball is something for me, I choose to play it for me.

As these narratives reveal, these women place great value on their individual need to engage in netball and actively negotiate time out from their busy lives to ensure this need is met (Spowart et al., 2008).

Whilst some analyses of mothers' experiences of leisure have identified feelings of guilt associated with women's negotiation of time and space away from their families, and particularly their children (McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Spowart et al., 2008), the women in this study exhibited no such feelings during the interview. Instead, the mothers justified their participation in netball in ways that appeared to enable them to subvert any potential feelings of guilt. According to Katie, her feelings of guilt about the time spent away as a result of her netball participation are absolved by the fact that in playing she acts as an important role model of health and well-being for her children:

There are a lot of social things like turning down a party invitation that I do because I feel guilty spending time away from the kids. Whereas [with] netball I don't have that guilty conscience when I am away from the children. I suppose them seeing me play netball is like me being a role model to them - being active and healthy. I like my children to know that '*Mum likes to play with her friends too*'. (Katie's emphasis)

In addition to demonstrating a healthy and well-rounded lifestyle, the participants' involvement in netball and having time out for themselves is considered valuable for their relationships with their partners whilst also affording "possibilities for becoming a better 'Mum'" (Spowart et al., 2010, p. 1195). During our discussion Paige explained how her netball participation makes her "become a better person at home". She suggests:

If I don't go to netball for a week because it's rained off you don't want to be at home with me (laughs). It's all about balance—and men get to do it, they go to training two times a week and a game and they don't come home until sometimes Sunday. I think netball just helps balance it out and helps me to enjoy life a bit more.

Katie also tabled the idea that her engagement with other adults on a social level in and through netball is "such a blessing in disguise for being a better parent". It makes her "feel emotionally stronger" and enables her to have "more patience and understanding with [her] children".

Like the mothers in Roster's (2007) analysis of the experiences of female Harley riders, the women in this study also described netball as a 'release' and an important and powerful stress reliever. In individual interviews, Katie, Jess and Sarah all justified their participation in netball and subsequent time away from their children on this basis:

Even after a training, I know that my week with the kids will be better. I don't know, I just feel like I've released something—got it out of my system. I have more patience and I'm calmer. It definitely does release endorphins and it does make you feel better. I also feel better because I've had that time away from the kids, time that's just mine where I can think about me and what I want to do. (Katie)

[Playing netball is] a self-care thing, I'm looking after myself by being involved in netball—emotionally, physically, socially, psychologically, in every way possible. It's almost an essential thing for me, something that I have to be involved in because it does fulfill me. (Jess)

[Playing netball is] great because it's with my mates so I can have a bit of a moan about what's happening [in my life] and then come home energized to be a mother again. (Sarah)

Instead of exhibiting feelings of guilt about spending time away from their families, these women described their participation as important for helping them to ‘perform’ their roles as mothers more effectively and efficiently. Drawing on dominant discourses of mothers as nurturing and giving and as responsible for their own health and well-being, these women appear to reframe their subjectivities as ‘netball Mums’ so that they are, via their participation in netball, contributing to rather than detracting from their ability to meet criterion of the ‘good’ wife and mother (see Spowart et al., 2010 for similar findings). In a Lefebvorean sense, these women can be understood to be using netball space to create counter-discourses to those that suggest that in order to be ‘good’ and ‘caring’ mothers women should sacrifice their own needs. Importantly, from this perspective, doing something that they enjoy not only helps these women to achieve a general sense of well-being, but also to (re)appreciate their positions as wives/partners and mothers (Spowart et al., 2008).

It is important to note, however, that these responses can also be read less as resistance and more as a strategy to ‘explain away’ underlying feelings of guilt and to justify time spent away from children and the family for netball. According to Spowart et al. (2008), the notion of guilt is often associated with motherhood, especially when mothers are away from their children. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that none of the mothers described any feelings of guilt or demonstrated sentiments linked to this emotion when they discussed leaving their children to pursue their participation in netball. It is possible that these women have become accustomed to having their choices to make time and space for their own leisure and recreation needs challenged and questioned, and thus, have become practiced in justifying their involvement in netball and how it adds to, rather than detracts from, their abilities to fulfill the role of a ‘good’ mother. Although it is impossible to know for sure which interpretation is most accurate, it is interesting to consider the ways in which women’s participation occurs alongside the “interplay of a potentially contradictory and competing range of discourses” (Spowart et al., 2010) that influence how women perceive, understand and explain their choices to be involved.

Whilst the literature pertaining to New Zealand women’s experiences of and opportunities for leisure has tended to paint a particularly dismal picture

(Thompson, 1990, 1995, 1999), there is increasing evidence that many women and mothers, both locally and globally, are claiming time and space to engage in the practices of sport and physical activity (Leberman & Palmer, 2007; Roster, 2007; Spowart et al., 2008; Spowart et al., 2010). For the mothers in this study, netball was described as essential in their lives and as an important space for them to experience the physical, social and psychological benefits and pleasures of movement. Like the women in Spowart et al.'s (2010) research, netball was "regularly articulated as a specific strategy, as a medium for achievement of emotional and relational states that add value to the interviewees' lives" (p. 1198). What is more, netball appears to act as temporary respite from expectations to prioritize the needs of the family ahead of one's own: "an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real' space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 349). Via their participation and appropriation of netball space, therefore, these women can be understood to challenge and reframe some of the traditional and enduring discourses and regulatory regimes of motherhood that constrain women's time. Thus, analysed via a Lefebvrian lens, 'netball Mums' are using this space to resist particular relations of power that constrain their rights to prioritize their leisure and are creating a counter-discourse and counterspace in the process. Some pregnant, 'fat' and older players are using netball in much the same way.

### **Transgressive bodies in netball space: Pregnant, 'fat' and older players**

In netball, like many other sports, the young, healthy, athletic-looking, strong and able-bodied participant is highly revered (see Chapter Four). At first glance then, it would seem obvious that some female bodies, particularly pregnant, fat and older bodies, stand in contradistinction to the hegemonic feminine athletic ideal celebrated in this space. As Longhurst (1995) suggests, and as I demonstrated in Chapter Five, pregnant bodies are often viewed as 'in a condition', that is, as fragile, fearful, 'ugly' and incapable of the routine practices of sport such as running, reaching, lifting and stretching (see also Jette, 2006, 2011). Similarly, 'fat' bodies are perceived as weak-willed, self-indulgent, lazy, unattractive, clumsy, stupid, undisciplined and worthless (Blaine & McElroy, 2002; Bordo, 1993; Duncan, 2007; Murray, 2005; Rice, 2007; Longhurst, 2005) whilst ideas about ageing and older bodies conjure up images of ill health, frailty, loss,

disability, disengagement and dependency (Dionigi, 2002, 2006; Grant, 2001)—none of which sit comfortably alongside discourses of the capable or successful athlete.

Indeed, there have been numerous discussions and debates regarding the participation of pregnant, fat and older netball bodies that have drawn upon these problematic discourses to substantiate claims that these particular women are unsuited to success (or even participation) in this sport. For example, the Australian governing body of netball placed a blanket ban on pregnant players for fear of physical risk and injury (see White, 2002; also see Chapter Five), social media has been abuzz with hurtful and defamatory remarks regarding Northern Mystics and Silver Fern shooter Catherine Latu's weight (Johannsen, 2011) and veteran New Zealand netball icon Irene van Dyk's age has been a popular and contentious topic in both public and private forums as she has continued to play at national and international levels into her early 40s (Bidwell, 2014). Thus, there is clearly a particular type of netball body heralded above the rest and used as "a yardstick" (Promis, Erevelles & Matthews, 2001, p. 39) to measure and marginalize 'other' bodies that deviate from this relatively narrow norm.

Nevertheless, from a Lefebvrian perspective it is possible for the marginalized to resist the dominant order of society (including sport) and to create alternative forms of 'space'. Put differently, it is imaginable "for women to transgress cultural norms regarding the appearance and performance of the female [sporting] body" (Peluso, 2011, p. 37) in and through their participation in netball. Following my discussions with women netballers of various ages, abilities, shapes, sizes and backgrounds, I contend there is evidence of transgressive netball bodies—those that deviate from social norms and defy social expectations (Duncan, 2007)—occupying, enjoying and living netball space. More specifically, there are pregnant, fat and older women taking pride in their participation and exhibiting resistance to the normalization (and exclusion) of particular bodies in this space and in sport more broadly. In so doing, they are resisting and creating counter-discourses to "cultural mandates" (Peluso, 2011, p. 42) that operate within netball and other sporting spaces, particularly those that prioritize the athletic-looking body and position pregnant, fat and older sporting bodies as dysfunctional, incapable and physically inferior. Additionally, by moving into

seemingly prohibited realms, these women “begin to confuse the lines and take ever more control over [their] socio-cultural experiences” (Pronger, 1998, p. 285) whilst participating on their own terms.

In the following sections I provide examples of the ways some women have and continue to challenge both dominant representations of netball(ers) and discourses of pregnancy, fatness and/or growing older in and through their everyday participation in this sport. I also explore how the material conditions of netball create performative and discursive opportunities for women to engage in such resistance, to experience feelings of pleasure and to exceed socio-spatial boundaries.

### ***Bibs, balls and ‘baby bumps’: Playing netball as a mode of resistance***

As Longhurst (2008) suggests, and as I have demonstrated in Chapter Five, pregnant women in public spaces such as netball, are typically constructed as being ‘out of place’. Nevertheless, the representation of specific bodies by particular discourses is complex and contested. As such, it is possible for pregnant women to engage in practices to resist their exclusion and to “strategically and deliberately use their embodiment during pregnancy” (Longhurst, 2001a, p. 91) to (re)construct their bodies and experiences in ways that challenge dominant ideas about what it is (and is not) to be pregnant. In other words, a pregnant body should be considered “a site of both acquiescence and dissent” (Longhurst, 2001a, p. 91) in relation to its social construction. Indeed, despite being made to feel ‘out of place’ in netball space, some pregnant players reported resisting their exclusion and importantly, those discourses that place(d) them at the margins of this social context. In so doing, Cara, Katie and Paige discuss the ways they (have) use(d) and appropriate(d) netball space to challenge dominant and pervasive perceptions of expectant mothers as fragile and physically incapable, to disrupt notions that pregnancy should be confined to private space and to (re)gain and/or maintain control over their bodies and lives.

Throughout my discussions with those women who have participated in netball during their pregnancies, all recognized dominant discourses of pregnancy that position expectant mothers as fragile, clumsy and ‘in a condition’ (Jette, 2006;

Longhurst, 1995, 1999, 2008; Westfall, 2012). When asked to describe the ways society views a pregnant woman, ‘fragile’ was the most cited social assumption and was typically followed by discussions of how pregnant women are understood as ‘not up to’ the physical and even mental demands of competitive netball or the ways it is assumed they should be treated differently to other players because they are pregnant (see Chapter Five). For example, some participants discussed the ways pregnant players are not expected to train as hard or for as long and how they are spoken to softly and not yelled at or made accountable for their actions like missing shots or throwing poor passes in the same ways as other team members. For women like Cara, such discourses are particularly frustrating such that she is highly motivated to continue her participation to prove that she isn’t fragile or less physically capable than her teammates. She explains:

I try to push myself to be anything other than fragile (laughs). For me, I think to myself that if I can still be as good as some of the best people in our team or even just below, then I’m proving that okay, people can still play while they’re pregnant.

Proving her physical ‘worth’ was an important and deliberate strategy used by Cara to resist assumptions that due to her pregnancy she is less athletically capable than her fellow (non-pregnant) teammates. She rejected assumptions that her body is physically inferior and reported “push[ing herself physically] to ensure [she’s] not dragging the team down” in ways that “prove that [she] should still be out there [on the court]”.

For other women, hiding their pregnancies from their coaches and teammates was used as a strategy to resist discourses that position(ed) their bodies as physically inferior. In his book *Closet Space*, Michael Brown (2000) draws on the concept of the closet, which he suggests, “is not just a metaphor for the concealment, erasure, or ignorance of gays’ sexualities, but also materially as a spatial practice of power/knowledge” (p. i). Calling upon this idea, Longhurst (2008) suggests the metaphor of ‘coming out of the closet’ can be useful for understanding the anxieties women may have about disclosing their pregnancies and the choices they make to conceal these in particular spaces. Building on this, I argue that staying in the closet can help pregnant women to resist the exclusion of their bodies in particular spaces. Certainly, as avid competitive netballers, both Katie and Paige worried that their pregnancies would impact on their

opportunities for involvement in this sport. More specifically, they were concerned that regardless of their actual abilities, being pregnant would cause others to perceive their bodies as less capable of the physical demands of the game. When asked about the choices they made in regards to informing their teammates and coaches about their pregnancies, they replied:

I chose not to tell them because I didn't want them to be cautious. I didn't want them to treat me differently—you know, *'don't throw [Katie] that pass because she's pregnant, she'll get hurt'*. (Katie's emphasis)

I wouldn't mention it [my pregnancy] until I knew I was [physically] limited. So as soon as my game started to be affected by my pregnancy then I knew I needed to tell whoever was in charge, whether that was a coach, manager or senior player. Once you tell someone then you're quite limited, so you then put yourself at risk of being treated differently. (Paige)

According to Longhurst (2008), when a woman tells others she is pregnant her identity becomes fractured: she is no longer one, but two (or more). In this case, both Katie and Paige perceived an inevitable fracturing of their athletic identities as a result of their pregnancies, that is, they believed they would no longer be considered female athletes, but rather as pregnant women who happened to be engaged in sport. Therefore, remaining closeted about their pregnancies for as long as possible was an important strategy that enabled these women to maintain their athletic identities, to sustain a sense of belonging in a discursive space that prioritizes a fit, strong, toned and athletic-looking (e.g. non-pregnant) female body and to challenge the perceived binary between pregnancy and athleticism: all of the women who closeted their pregnancies discussed how their teammates and coaches were shocked to find out they were pregnant since they had been performing so well. In this sense, space and spatial politics can be considered an important component in the construction of these women's embodied and bodily performances (Longhurst, 2008).

As the above quote highlights, these women resisted being treated differently or with more care by their teammates, coaches and opposition because of their pregnancies. Cara in particular, placed a significant emphasis on the importance of being 'strong', and in so doing, used her netball participation to

reframe her pregnant body as capable of the physical demands of competitive sport. During the interview she recalled a time where she fell heavily during a netball game but was reluctant to be removed from the court following concerned questioning from her coach. She also described an instance where she shrugged off an apology for rough and physical play from her opposition following the revelation Cara was pregnant. These moments were certainly significant for Cara in terms of her desire to prove her athletic capability and to resist discourses of the pregnant body as fragile, in need of special care and as less capable of the demands of this sport. As a pregnant woman who describes herself as “very active”, it makes Cara “feel good” to “play against someone who is pretty physical” and to come out of the game unscathed and having demonstrated she is capable of “taking knocks” just like anyone else. Thus, Cara not only used netball space to maintain a physically active lifestyle, but also to destabilize notions that pregnant women are weak, awkward and physically timid (see Jette, 2011; Longhurst, 2001c).

Importantly, all participants who have played pregnant viewed netball as a ‘safe’ sporting space for their pregnant bodies, despite some attitudes that suggested otherwise. Unlike sports such as rugby or boxing, which are premised on physical contact, the spatial practices of netball are understood by many of the women in this study as suitable and “less risky” (Cara) for expecting mothers. Sports like boxing were considered “brutal” and “unpredictable” (Cara) and therefore, significantly less appropriate for ensuring the health and well-being of pregnant bodies and unborn children. Thus, whilst women’s participation in some physical pursuits ceased soon after they realized they were pregnant, women’s participation in netball was often continued and typically considered “okay as it doesn’t rely on physical contact” (Paige). According to Cara, when pregnant “you can still run [and] catch”, therefore, netball is something that pregnant women can play with only minimal risk to themselves and the fetus. What is more, most participants genuinely believe they can manage the physical risks associated with contemporary netball (e.g. moving their bodies to ensure their stomachs are protected or switching to less physical and confrontational positions) while pregnant in ways that are not possible in contact-based sports. Subsequently, netball appears to offer women a space in which they are able to contest “the boundaries of what is considered ‘appropriate’ behaviour for pregnant women”

without engaging in what might be considered ‘high risk’ sporting pursuits (Longhurst, 1995, p. 14).

During my discussion with those women who had participated in netball pregnant, the idea that women should ‘retire’ to the privacy of their homes and away from public space was identified as a popular discourse of pregnancy. Being pregnant was discussed as a time of dramatic adjustment where women lack control over many of the changes in their lives. Whilst most women happily ceased their working hours (at least temporarily and albeit, at various stages of their pregnancies) and readily spent more time at home, some were, however, unhappy about retreating completely and resisted giving up their right to occupy public space. In this way, Cara suggested netball is a means for her to avoid the situation where during pregnancy “things just tend to stop” for women. She also claimed that her participation gives her something meaningful to do aside from “sitting around at home” and “just waiting to have a baby”. She rejected feeling “lazy” and “sluggish” due to being cooped up indoors and instead used netball to get her “off her butt” and “outside into the world”. Similarly, for Paige, netball not only enabled her to fulfill her needs for physical activity during pregnancy, but to maintain a connection to public and social space. She states:

I still wanted to be active, and you know, being with the girls. Because when you get pregnant you kind of hibernate and go away—you go off the radar and no one wants to talk to you, you’re off the grid (laughs). I think just staying active and wanting to be involved was the reason, it wasn’t about netball specifically, more about being active and being with the girls.

Pregnant women’s participation in netball is often considered important for enabling them to “keep in touch” (Paige) with the outside world and to maintain a public identity. Furthermore, as these comments reveal, netball can be considered an important space that helps women to subvert the confinement of pregnancy and the social exclusion of pregnant bodies (see Longhurst, 2001b, 2008).

As well as aiding pregnant women to (re)claim public space, netball also appears to help some expectant mothers to (re)gain a sense of autonomy. For some women, pregnancy can prompt a loss of identity—a sense of not being oneself or feeling ‘out of sorts’ (see popular parenting titles such as Kerton’s (2001) *Fab Dad: A Man’s Guide to Fathering* or Adams and Justak’s (2004)

*'Absolute Beginners Guide to Pregnancy'* for a discussion of this 'symptom'). Similarly, Longhurst (2008) suggests that during pregnancy a woman's identity is 'fractured'—"her corporeal boundaries are radically reconfigured" (p. 22) at the same time as she is expected to give in to the demands of maternity (e.g. slowing down, eating well, getting enough rest). This can certainly be a daunting part of pregnancy as women struggle to maintain a sense of control over their ever-changing bodies and lives. During our conversation Katie discussed being perturbed by some of the physical and psychological transformations of pregnancy but finding solace in her netball participation. She says:

It was like I wasn't ready for my life to change in a way, maybe? So it was like, 'this is what I do and I enjoy it so I'm going to keep doing it!' I don't know, I guess I thought 'why should I let this one thing [pregnancy] that's happening in my life control *everything* else?' (Katie's emphasis)

As Katie explains, she was hesitant to accept the curtailing or control that her pregnancy was having over her life and choices. She rejected the idea that she should change her life completely simply because she was pregnant. Playing netball assisted Katie in taking her pregnancy "in [her] stride" and in achieving a sense of power and self-satisfaction. Ultimately, her continued participation functioned to enable Katie to resist feelings of disempowerment and to maintain a feeling of being "in control" of her body and experiences. Staying involved in netball was also a significant source of pleasure.

Thus, despite often being made to feel they don't belong in netball space by partners, friends, teammates, coaches and even strangers (see Chapter Five), it is possible for pregnant women to resist their exclusion. As the comments of Cara, Katie and Paige reveal, playing netball has been an important part of their pregnancies. Importantly, however, their participation has not only enabled them to address their needs for physical activity and social interaction, but also to challenge ideas of pregnant bodies as fragile, clumsy and in need of special care, to resist discourses of confinement and to (re)claim a sense of power and autonomy. It appears then that some women use netball and the spaces in which it is constituted to challenge social constructions of pregnancy and of the 'ideal' netball body. Thus, from a Lefebvrian perspective it is important to note that "space and the political organisation of space reflect social relationships, but also

react back on them” (do Mar Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2006, p. 243). In this sense, netball space must not be understood as simply a construction, but also as a project: a site for enacting oppositional politics and creating alternative forms and understandings of space and bodies.

***‘I can still run, I can bump you off the ball’: Disrupting discourses of fatness***

Duncan (2007) suggests the fat body is the best example of a transgressive body, for “an individual who is not ashamed of his or her girth is a true social outlaw” (p. 60). Within dominant scientific and biomedical discourse, ‘fatness’ is considered “a threat of epidemic proportions to health and well-being” (Throsby, 2015, p. 769) and a condition against which immediate action must be taken. Fat bodies are typically seen as unfit, lazy, unhealthy and lacking in motivation, self-discipline and control. According to this discourse, fat bodies can never be sporting bodies and are instead considered the antithesis to the socially revered contemporary athletic body (Scott-Dixon, 2008; Throsby, 2015). As Sykes (2011) puts it, “fatness is all too readily equated with being unfit” (p. 3) such that those who embody this trait are considered ill suited to participation in sport and physical culture and the trim, toned and taut body remains the socio-culturally privileged sporting form whilst fat is considered something to be worked on and eradicated completely at all costs (Markula, 1995).

As a self-identified ‘bigger’ woman, Heather is acutely aware that her netball body is often seen as less than ‘ideal’ and that it differs markedly from those glorified in the media and broader society. During our discussion she jovially described herself as “larger than the average netballer” and someone “with squishy bits” who is “carrying a little extra weight”. Heather explained feeling comfortable and content with her body and suggested she is in no immediate rush to attempt to shed excess kilograms despite social and medical discourse that suggests she should. Yet, she also recognized that her physical size could be, and probably often is, associated with a perceived lack of sporting ability and prowess. She remarks:

I do think people underestimate my abilities because of my size...  
It’s interesting, but I try not to let those attitudes get in my head. I  
just like to focus on what I’m doing...they kind of think ‘*she can’t*

*run far*'. I've had a teammate say to me '*actually, you do quite well*', they almost seem a bit surprised... Yeah, people do underestimate me...but that doesn't stop me playing. (Heather's emphasis)

While dominant discourses about fat as unsightly, unhealthy and unfit have been and still are evident in Heather's sporting experiences, she has nevertheless negotiated space in netball to resist, or to use Butler's (1997) term, resignify, pervasive and problematic understandings of fat. Importantly, according to Heather, the spatial practices of netball, and particularly, of the goal shooter position,<sup>37</sup> enable the 'bigger' sporting body to hold value within the typically "lean meritocracy" (Schwartz, 1986, p. 331) of netball in New Zealand:

I'm not the fittest but for me as a [goal] shooter I don't have to do a lot of running and I just hold so there's no real expectation as such. So long as you can last a game you're fine. Because I'm not playing a mid-court position and doing a lot of running, the expectation for me is to get that ball through the hoop.

As such, Heather feels comfortable engaging her body in netball space. Unlike other physical cultural contexts such as the gym, in which she feels her body is "put on display" amongst the many 'other' tight, toned, hard and muscular bodies, Heather perceives more of an acceptance of 'bigger' and less physically disciplined figures in netball:

I definitely don't feel okay about going to the gym, just based on my size. I kind of feel like people are judging me a little bit. Don't get me wrong, I've been, but I don't necessarily enjoy it. Netball's a bit different though. There are lots of bigger women playing, and playing well, such that I don't think anyone really gives it much of a second thought.

Heather described netball as a space accommodating of the participation of larger bodies: "you can be bigger and still play successfully". Thus, whilst public perceptions and dominant representations of netball(ers) suggest this game is suited to trim, athletic-looking and well-toned female bodies, in providing a variety of positions that require different types and levels of athleticism, netball

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<sup>37</sup> The goal shooter position holds primary responsibility for goal scoring in netball. Unlike most other positions (except its opposite, goal keep) goal shooters occupy only a third of the court. In the contemporary game, some shooters are 'holding' players who use their bodies in a semi-stationary position to keep the defense away from the goal whilst allowing themselves ample room to receive the ball under the goal post.

itself can be understood as challenging hegemonic body norms “that demand female athletes ‘discipline’ themselves into slenderness” (Peluso, 2011, p. 43). In so doing, recreational netball appears to provide larger women with a safe physical and cultural space in which to be “transgressively embodied” (Peluso, 2011, p. 43). Further, netball appears to enable bigger bodies to subvert the codes of dominant netball space “by representing an alternative way of inhabiting it” (Allen, 2003, p. 165).

In a similar way to some of the participants in Sykes’ (2011) research, however, Heather has not only resisted “fat-phobic representations” (p. 68) of her body as unfit and incapable by simply participating, but also by excelling physically and demonstrating superiority over her (usually much slimmer) opposition. Whilst assumptions of fatness that equate body size with physical disability limit some individuals’ participation in sports and physical activity, Heather enjoys playing netball to disrupt the assumptions people make about her athletic ability based on their visual association with fatness and a perceived lack of physical proficiency. She says:

I know that because there’s more for them to get around it’s good luck to them (laughs). I have really good Centres who can feed, they end up swapping all their positions around because they’re like ‘*right, we’ve got to get the ball off her!*’ All I do is stand there...I catch it, shoot and it goes in—hopefully (laughs). I had a partner the other day actually who was like ‘*right, I’m going to get one of these!*’ she goes ‘*yep, I’m determined*’, a couple more come in and she goes ‘*shit, I’m going to have to rethink that because I don’t think I can get them*’ (laughs). I was like ‘*many have tried, many have failed, good luck!*’...It is a buzz to get the better of people like that though, those people who think I can’t do it because of my size (laughs). (Heather’s emphasis)

Indeed, through her participation, Heather has found pleasure in the “solidity of her heavier body” and “its occupation of space” (Throsby, 2015, p. 779) on the court.

Importantly, Heather has also “found creative strategies to contest received meanings and improvise unique identities” (Rice, 2007, p. 170) of fatness. In particular, she has reversed the cliché of the ‘fat girl’ as clumsy, physically incapable and inferior by using her size to her own and her team’s advantage on court:

I guess I use it [my weight] against my opposition in a way. I mean, I can still run, I can move, I can bump you off the ball (laughs). Bring it on! It's like a secret weapon in a way.

Similar comments were also made about the benefits of being 'larger' in interviews with a number of other participants, none of who identified as exceeding cultural and social expectations of appropriate weight. For example, Sarah suggested "being a bigger person can be an advantage" especially if that player knows "how to use their body and stand like a wall and keep [their opposition] in one place and away from the ball". Jess also reported seeing "lots of different shapes and sizes [of women playing netball] who have got mad [amazing] abilities". In fact, most women agreed that bigger and heavier women generally "perform like the rest of the girls on the court", (Stacey), if not better, and emphasized the idea that "if a larger woman walks onto the court' they wouldn't "automatically look down on them or assume that they won't have the skills required for the game" (Katie). "Bloody good on them!" exclaimed Sarah. In other words, 'fat' netball bodies are largely (re)articulated in positive ways in netball and (re)framed as capable, useful and sometimes even physically dominant.

Heather's narrative and the opinions of a number of other participants in this study show support for the notion that "women of all shapes and sizes, including those with bodies deemed culturally 'undesirable'" (Peluso, 2011, p. 43) can find their place in recreational and competitive contemporary netball. What is more, Heather's experiences also provide evidence that within netball specifically, "fatness [can be] worth something when imagined as 'strong fat'" (Sykes, 2011, p. 70) enabling shooters to hold their position under the post or to physically dominate their opposition. Thus, whilst discourses of the fit, physically capable and toned netballer with visible (but not extreme) musculature can work to regulate women's bodies and exclude them from netball space (see Chapter Five), netball also provides an important space for some women to challenge and usurp the dominant and negative meanings surrounding fat embodiment (Lupton, 2012) and the 'ideal' netball body. In short, it is possible that bigger women can, as Sedgwick (1994) puts it, begin to renegotiate the "representational contract between one's body and one's world" (as cited in Murray, 2005, p. 153) via their (often successful) participation in this sport.

***‘Age is not a barrier for me’: Dodging ideas about growing old***

In a similar way to those who identify and are perceived as ‘bigger’, older women are also claiming space in contemporary netball and in so doing, challenging negative discourses of ageing. Descriptions of older individuals are not typically associated with terms such as athletic, energetic, independent or competitive, and thus, older people are not expected to engage or do well in sports (Dionigi, 2002; Spirduso, 1995). As Dionigi (2002) argues, it has traditionally been agreed that as individuals age there is social pressure placed on them to slow down and rest, rather than to ‘speed up’ or to maintain a steady pace by engaging in pursuits such as sports. Indeed, sports have traditionally been considered activities for the young and perceived as potentially harmful, even dangerous, for older adults (Dionigi, 2006; Dionigi & O’Flynn, 2007) such that gentle leisure activities like lawn bowls, gardening, bingo, crafts and bridge have been stereotyped as suitable forms of leisure for older individuals (Grant, 2001, 2002; Dionigi, 2006; Vertinsky, 1995).

According to Wearing (1995), however, the inconsistencies that exist between negative discourses of ageing and the liberatory potential of leisure makes room for older people to resist ageism and dominant ideas about what it means to grow old in and through their participation. Put differently, the perceived freedom of leisure makes it an important context for “various resistances to the dominant discourses on ageing” (Wearing, 1995, p. 263) and provides opportunities for older people’s personal empowerment (Dionigi, 2002; Shaw, 2001). Similarly, Dionigi (2002) suggests that competitive sport has the power to operate as a site of resistance for the older population. Reiterating this point, Hargreaves (1994) argues that it is possible for older women to resist discourses of growing old via their participation in “untypical activities” (p. 267) like Masters and Veterans sporting competitions. In the remainder of this section, I argue that competitive recreational netball is an ‘untypical activity’ for the older female body that allows New Zealand women to engage in a process of “actively redefining” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 266) the “passive, disabled and dependent depiction [of older individuals] that is prevalent in western society” (Dionigi, 2006, p. 186).

Sixty-four year old interviewee Nikki has only very recently retired from

regular and competitive open-grade 7-a-side netball competition. However, she still fills in on occasions when her previous team is short of players and competes in the Masters grade of the annual Kurungaituku tournament in Rotorua. When asked, she umpires at the HCNC during the ‘Thursday Night League’ competition and is a regular participant at her local indoor netball venue, often playing back-to-back games. She is by far (by at least 20 years) older than all of the other players interviewed for this project and her participation spans over more than four decades. During this time, netball has been an important and meaningful part of her life, enabling her time and space away from domestic responsibilities, opportunities to develop strength, health, body-image confidence and physical fitness, and to build friendships among her teammates, coaches and netball-playing peers. Importantly, Nikki is not the only older New Zealand woman playing netball. In fact during my participation I frequently came across (and played against) women who considered themselves to be ‘old’ (generally in their 40s and 50s) in the competitive grades at the HCNC and heard numerous stories of inspirational older players. Nikki was, however, the oldest and only woman player aged over 60 years who I met during the course of this research. Thus, her experiences are particularly insightful.

Some players in their early-mid 40s recognized that their participation in netball was beginning to challenge ideas about the ‘ideal’ athlete and netballer: “God, I’m what, 41, and people are going ‘*are you still playing?*’” (Heather, her emphasis). Nikki was, however, less aware of the ways her involvement in netball challenges dominant discourses of both sport and growing old and was coy about the topic of resistance. She did not discuss her participation specifically in relation to challenging (mis)conceptions about the relationship between ageing and sport nor the social relations produced in and through netball which position a type of female body as dominant and valued. Although Nikki is particularly modest, she did acknowledge that her continued participation in netball is rather exceptional and understands that the ageing process can have detrimental effects on people’s opportunities for participation in sports and physical culture. She considers herself extremely “lucky” to be able to participate physically but she also insists that unlike for others “age is not a barrier for [her]” and that she doesn’t “think about her age” when she gets on the court. Instead, for Nikki, playing is about getting out there and doing something she enjoys. As such, she suggests her prolonged

participation is due to a “love” of the game and is “something that just happened” rather than something she has planned. Thus, her participation can be considered an incidental as opposed to an intentional form of resistance.

According to Nikki, her participation is not only facilitated by an attitude that insists “age is just a number”, but also by the spatial practices of this sport. Like Heather, Nikki has managed to find positions suited to her particular sporting body—a body she admits is not only older, but generally less fit than most of her netball-playing counterparts. As Nikki explains, transitioning to positions of less cardio-vascular intensity and requiring fewer short, sharp bursts of speed has made it possible for her to continue her participation for this length of time:

I play mostly in circle defense or on the wing but sometimes centre or wing attack if they want me to. As I’ve got older, I’ve moved to positions that require a bit less running around though (laughs). This has probably kept me in the game, the fact that I don’t have to do as much...I’m definitely not as fast as I used to be, I’m a bit slower. And I admit that to some people (laughs)...Physically—I’m fit...But for an intercept I’m not as fast as I used to be.

As this comment suggests, despite accepting the limitations of the older body, particularly a decrease in physical fitness and speed, netball has provided room for Nikki to adapt positively to the changes of growing older and to continue her participation in this sport.

Although admittedly slower than some of her (younger) teammates and opposition, Nikki’s participation still works to challenge discourses of sedentary and immobile older bodies (Grant, 2001). Whilst Nikki did not explicitly acknowledge that her participation is a form of resistance or set out to resist such ideas via her involvement in this sport, she does recognize the ways her “behaviour challenge[s] age-appropriate norms” (Dionigi, 2006, p. 185). Thus, my discussion with Nikki unearthed the idea that her participation in netball typically exceeds people’s expectations regarding ageing and the ideal sports participant. According to Nikki, netball is not something the general population would expect of a woman her age:

I don’t think people expect me to be this age and still playing netball. Maybe they think I should be at home knitting or something (laughs). Gardening, I don’t know? I guess I’m a bit different.

Indeed, during the interview Nikki spoke animatedly and often about the ways most people, particularly her teammates and family friends, are surprised to hear of both her age and her continued participation in this sport. When asked about how people react when they find out how old she is and that she still plays netball competitively, Nikki explains:

They freak [out]! (laughs)...a lot of the other players don't know I'm 64. A lot of them don't realize. Even when I play indoor netball in a mixed team, the guys freaked out when they found out I was in my 60s. They really did, because I didn't know them...It always comes as a bit of a shock to them when they find out. But even family friends that I haven't seen for a little while they just say '*hi, how are you going –still playing netball?*' and I go '*yeah!*' (laughs). It can be quite a conversation starter...People are just amazed that I'm still playing. (Nikki's emphasis)

As the above narratives demonstrate, Nikki's participation in netball works to challenge common beliefs about what older people can and cannot and should and should not do, such that the revelation of her age typically causes shock and bewilderment. People are not only surprised that she continues to participate into her mid 60s, but they are also suitably impressed.

Although Nikki participates on her own terms and for the sheer enjoyment of the game, people's reactions to her participation nonetheless prompt feelings of satisfaction and achievement. There is certainly a sense of pride and empowerment in exceeding social and public perceptions regarding the physical abilities of the older (female) body (Dionigi, 2002, 2006). When asked how she feels about the fact that she is much older than most other players Nikki exclaims:

I'm playing in teams and realizing that I'm 15 years older than some of the people I'm playing with, if not more...I guess it does make me feel good, that I'm exceeding people's expectations. And I get it so often, you know, and I always have. Even my daughter, when we were planning my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and her and I were shopping and talking and she told someone '*oh we're just getting this for my mum's 60<sup>th</sup>*' and people said '*what, your mum's 60?*' and she said '*yes, AND SHE'S STILL PLAYING NETBALL!*' (laughs). My kids are pretty proud. (Nikki's emphasis—capital letters represent a raised voice)

Playing netball makes Nikki feel “good” both physically and psychologically. On the one hand, she enjoys the physical and emotional release this sport provides her

and the ways she is able to stay fit and healthy via her participation. On the other hand, she experiences a sense of pride and happiness from remaining “in touch” with the game in a playing sense despite a proliferation of younger, fitter bodies entering her team environment.

Like many of the participants in Dionigi’s (2002) study, Nikki receives substantial recognition for her prolonged participation. In the relatively small netball community in which she plays, Nikki is quite well known. In fact, she was referred to me by one of the other interviewees during our discussion about the ‘ideal’ netball body and the ways this is being challenged in contemporary netball. Others typically recognize Nikki as someone who is challenging ideas about growing older, even if Nikki is often reluctant to admit this herself, and she is therefore, afforded status as an example of the possibilities of the older sporting body. Most of her teammates think “it’s awesome [they’ve] got [a] lady in her 60s that’s playing”. Some have even suggested to Nikki that “they want to be like [her]...still playing in their blimmen 60s”. Whilst Nikki does not consider herself a role model to *all* female players, she is happy to inspire those close to her. What is more, she experiences pleasure in demonstrating to her younger teammates that it is possible to maintain fitness and physical ability throughout later life.

Ultimately, as Gandee et al. (1989) note, myths concerning growing older can be put to rest if opportunities are provided for older individuals to demonstrate the benefits of their independent and physically active lifestyle. Participation in sports such as netball, then, provides important and meaningful opportunities not only for older female bodies to demonstrate their physical fitness and competence, but also to challenge ideologies associated with growing older. Arguably, netball makes room for those who choose to play sport in later life to resist social attitudes that paint pictures of older bodies as frail, poorly and dependent and to begin to challenge “power structures that construct older people as inferior to the young” (Dionigi, 2002, p. 321). In and through their participation, older women demonstrate the possibilities of netball space for opening up liberated zones in the fields of regulation and order” (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 64) that operate on women’s bodies in netball and society more broadly. Thus, as women like Nikki continue their netball into later life, they are not only participating in a game that they ‘love’, but they are also, importantly, challenging “the limiting

stereotypes of the older female body” and “disrupting the cultural storyline of loss and decline that has constrained [the older body] in the past” (Vertinsky, 2002, p.62).

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed netball as a source of women’s sporting pleasure and as a site of multiple resistances and the production of alternative discourses and meanings. In so doing, I have shifted the analysis from thinking about the ways some women’s bodies and subjectivities are marginalized in and by netball space, to exploring the potential and possibilities of netball for some New Zealand women.

Drawing on the third strand of Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial dialectic, lived space, this chapter has explored the ways in which spaces of netball contain ‘potentialities’ for bodies, that is, how they enable resistant practices and oppositional politics. Importantly, what this perspective has offered is a way to conceptualize space, in all its forms and “tangled presences” (Allen, 2003, p. 186) as implicated in and facilitating particular pleasures, experiences and practices of resistance. In this way, space becomes much more than a stage, backdrop or venue against which life is played out and opposition enacted, but instead, is understood as an active and dynamic part of it (Allen, 2003; Gothum & Brumley, 2002). Further, the ability to appropriate and mobilize one’s surroundings and “to fashion them in such a way that they reflect an alternative set of codes and attachments” becomes itself “an enabling act” (Allen, 2003, p. 186-187) even if this is more about inhabiting space in a positive vein than it is about countering a dominant presence or meaning of space. A Lefebvrian understanding of the production of social space, therefore, emphasizes the idea that there can be alternative spatialities and ways of using and living space, and importantly, that the negotiations and experiences of those actively seeking to create and appropriate alternative and existing spatialities are important in our understandings of the ways space can facilitate both positive and negative experiences. That is, how social space can simultaneously be experienced by bodies as pleasurable, marginalizing and offering opportunities for various types of resistance. Importantly, such an analysis not only demonstrates “the fluidity rather than fixity

of space” (Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 11) but also the importance of the social geography of this sport in the everyday lives and experiences of women participants in New Zealand.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusion

In the final chapter of this thesis, I discuss the main findings, conclusions and theoretical insights that have emerged from the previous chapters and consider their implications with regards to existing literature on netball and geographically-infused sociological analyses of sport and female physical culture. In this thesis, I have explored women's experiences of the social space of recreational netball in New Zealand. More than this, however, I have furthered understanding of the relationships between netball bodies, space and social relations by examining how women's everyday lived experiences of this sport are shaped by the relations of power operating on and through bodies in this space. In doing so, I examined the spatialized dimensions of New Zealand women's netball participation via a focus on the ways in which the social geography of this sport materializes in the lives and everyday experiences of those women who choose to play.

From a Lefebvrian perspective, it is vital to pay attention to the concept of space in order to understand the operations of power that exist within everyday life. For Lefebvre, space is a social product that is produced and reproduced and made up of three intersecting elements (perceived space, conceived space and lived space). This is the cornerstone of a Lefebvrian approach to theorizing space. Yet, very few sociologists of sport have deployed a Lefebvrian production-oriented theoretical approach (a notable exception is van Ingen, 2002). Whilst a number of critical scholars have incorporated a focus on space into their analyses of physical culture and drawn broadly from Lefebvre's understanding of space as socially produced, Lefebvre's three-pronged theory of the production of social space has remained strikingly absent. A small group of Physical Cultural Studies scholars have, however, established and emphasized the relevance of Lefebvre's theory for examining the intersections between moving bodies, space and dimensions of power (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Silk, 2004; van Ingen, 2002, 2003). Like these scholars, I have drawn inspiration from Lefebvre's unique (re)conceptualization of space, which has not only allowed me to explore the relations between netball bodies and spaces, but to gain a new perspective on

women's experiences of sport and physical culture and the ways these are always and inevitably mediated by and through the spaces in which they are constituted.

My reading of Lefebvre was pivotal in developing a focus on the social geography of this sport and the mutual constitution of bodies, spaces and social relations in netball. But, it was my critical engagement with his theory of the production of space, and particularly his three dialectically interconnected dimensions of space, that enabled me to push Lefebvre's spatio-geography further with respect to analyses of women's sport. Blending Lefebvre's theoretical ideas about space and bodies with the work of feminist geographers and sociologists was key in helping me to advance understandings of the dynamics of power operating on and through bodies in netball—specifically the ways in which gender, sexuality and corporeality are produced in and through this space and how they inflect netballers' interactions with and connections to this physical and cultural context. Importantly, the interweaving of these theoretical perspectives also aided me in extending the reach of Lefebvre's work and its application with regard to a broader feminist project. Subsequently, I began this research with a general interest in the relationships between netball, bodies, spaces, places, subjectivities and power. However, it was following my entry into the field, my initial interpretations of data collected via my own participation, interviews and media analysis, and the reading of these insights through a lens inspired by a feminist engagement with Lefebvre's spatial theory that I refined my research questions to ask:

- Are relations of femininity and heteronormativity (re)produced within and across the social space of contemporary netball in New Zealand, and if so, in what ways?
- What effects, positive and exclusionary, do the socio-spatial relations of netball have on women's bodies and subjectivities?
- What opportunities, if any, for resistance does the social space of netball offer women players?

These questions have guided and driven data collection and analysis, the production of this thesis and the key findings presented here and within.

### **Key research findings**

I addressed the first research question in Chapter Four by analyzing the social production of netball space. Engaging Lefebvre's (1991) first two spatial moments, representations of space and spatial practices, and his ideas about their role in the production, reproduction and regulation of space and bodies, I examined the ongoing and complex relationship between netball and a dominant type of femininity in New Zealand. Drawing from these key concepts and insights gathered via historical sources, media analysis, participant-observations and interviews I illustrated how netball has been and continues to be (re)produced as feminized and heterosexualized space. In so doing, I paid close attention to how netball spaces and bodies are (re)produced via ideologies, discourse and knowledge perpetuated in the media, the physical landscape of netball, and the everyday practices and behaviours that occur within this sporting space and thus, function to characterize women's participation within this physical and cultural context. Taking into account Lefebvre's emphasis on the relationship between the body and space, I considered the ways in which netballers' subjectivities and identities are formed, influenced and shaped in and through this particular sporting geography and vice versa, the ways in which women's bodies shape and structure netball space.

In Chapter Four I argued that netball is more than just 'a game for girls' or a context of women-onlyness. Drawing upon Lefebvre's concepts I revealed how the social space of netball (re)produces and celebrates particular gendered and sexualized identities and bodies, and thus, privileges a relatively narrow but culturally valued heteronormative feminine athletic 'ideal'. In this sense, I contend that netball is a space that produces and reproduces relations of power along lines of gender, (hetero)sexuality and corporeality. I reveal that whilst netball functions as an alternative sporting geography, or counterspace, to most other popular mainstream team sports (e.g. rugby, soccer, hockey, cricket, basketball) which are typically dominated, organized and characterized by the interests and participation of men, it does not exist outside of or escape normative

and regulatory orderings of space and society more broadly. I argue that netball is a space that is, at the same time, bound up with both hegemonic and counterhegemonic values and thus, reproduces social hierarchies and hegemonic power relations that privilege heteronormative femininity as the norm. Ultimately, therefore, this chapter reveals that in a similar way to other sports, netball is where cultural ideas about the desirability and normalization of bodies and identities are produced and particular physical characteristics and subjectivities are prioritized and celebrated over ‘others’. Put simply, I understand and conceptualize netball as much more than a physical pursuit or activity in which women partake, but also as a social space imbedded within, and involved in the reproduction of, normative and normalizing discourse.

Woven throughout this thesis is a focus on the interactions between the social relations operating on and through netball spaces and bodies, and women’s experiences of and relationships to this sport. In Chapters Five and Six, therefore, I drew from Lefebvre’s (1991) third moment in the production of space—spaces of representation, or lived space—to explore how the link between netball and the (re)production of a dominant type of feminine embodiment materializes in the lives and experiences of women players in New Zealand. Further, I took note of Lefebvre’s (1991) insistence that lived space is both oppressive and enabling and the space of constraints and possibilities to examine how netball is experienced differently by different female bodies and the ways in which it takes on very diverse meanings in the lives of New Zealand women. In other words, these two chapters focused on the relations between perceived, conceived and lived space, that is, the ways in which these three elements of space intersect with one another and the various ways they influence and shape women’s everyday participation in this sport.

Chapter Five was organized around Lefebvre’s (1991) understanding that lived space is where marginalization occurs and is reinforced to consider how particular women’s bodies can be made to feel that they do not belong, or are ‘out of place’, in netball space. Reflecting on the concerns of my second research question and the findings from the previous chapter, I re-emphasized the existence of a link between netball and a narrowly defined but socially valued feminine athletic ‘ideal’. I demonstrated its prevalence with regard to the ongoing

normalization and acceptance of netball as the ‘best’ sport for New Zealand girls and women. In light of such an ideal, however, I also considered how the celebration of a particular type of femininity and corporeality might function to exclude, restrict and displace some women. Subsequently, I offered three specific cases of women who have felt excluded from the heteronormative feminine netball space: 1) a woman who, from a very young age, did not consider herself ‘girly’ enough to play netball, 2) a woman who came to realize that she did not identify as heterosexual, and 3) women who are pregnant, to highlight how women understand, occupy, negotiate and experience netball from subject positions and/or in bodies alternative to or ‘other’ than those typically prioritized in this space.

Whilst Chapter Five explored the ways in which some women experience netball as a space of marginalization and exclusion, it also, importantly, revealed how social relations work to regulate social space, to shape its boundaries and to set limitations on the types of bodies and identities who occupy it. In and through this discussion, I demonstrated the ways in which the celebration of a hegemonic type of femininity and the strong, fit and physically capable body in netball functions to draw “a boundary line in the sand so to speak, which produces a clear limit to the movement [and involvement] of ‘others’” (Allen, 2003, 172). In this sense, I concluded that those who are often excluded from ‘membership’ within the geography of netball are those whose identities, subjectivities and bodies do not align with the dominant representations of this space. I contend that even though these ‘other’ bodies are not excluded by the institution of netball itself (e.g. Netball New Zealand or local governing bodies of netball and their legislation), their presence in this space is effectively smothered by a “dominant coding of space” (Allen, 2003, p. 172) that suggests whose bodies and which identities are valued. In short, I argue that the power relations operating on and through bodies in this space have significant implications for who plays netball and who does not.

In Chapter Six, I turned my attention to my third and final research question and thus, to a discussion of the opportunities for resistance, freedom and agency offered by netball spaces and practices. Taking inspiration from Lefebvre’s (1991) understanding of the relationship between bodies, space and resistance, I examined the ways in which netball, as a specific spatial context,

enables particular forms of social action and behaviours and the transformative capabilities of bodies. Importantly, I did not consider resistance to be necessarily characterized by particular or explicit 'acts', but rather by women's ability to (re)conceptualize and divert netball space to other ends and means and/or to occupy it in alternative and unexpected ways (Pile, 1997; Tonkiss, 2005). In this sense, I considered the ways some women resist the involvement of men in this sport and how the negotiation and creative appropriation of netball space by mothers and those whose bodies are considered to be 'transgressive' (e.g. pregnant women, those whose bodies are 'bigger' or occupy more physical space, and/or are older) enables them to disrupt and resist prevailing notions of female, sporting and/or netball bodies and to experience particular forms of (temporary) freedom.

What emerged as a key finding in this chapter was that a number of women, whether they intend to or not, are resisting dominant understandings of particular 'types' of bodies and identities and creating alternative discourses to the ones that set limits on them by participating in this sport. Mothers, for example, challenge understandings of maternity by actively making time and space away from their family and domestic responsibilities to play. Some pregnant women resist their exclusion from netball space and discourses of fragility, clumsiness and being less physically fit as they continue to play into their pregnancy, whilst 'fat' and older players disrupt notions of sporting embodiment by participating (often successfully) even though their bodies are typically not deemed to be appropriate or 'fit' for netball and sport more generally. In other words, these women challenge the normative script of netball which prioritizes the young, strong, athletic, aerobically fit, nimble and toned but not too muscular body. To this end, I conclude that some women are subverting the dominant coding or representation of netball space and sporting bodies by participating in this physical culture in their own particular ways and on their own unique terms (Allen, 2003).

Ultimately, by considering the social production of netball space and how the relations of power operating on and through netball spaces and bodies influence women's everyday experiences of this sport, this research has revealed that there are multiple and different spatialities that exist within the social space of

recreational netball in New Zealand. Netball is a dynamic and multi-faceted social space that provides a site for very different sporting experiences for New Zealand women: many women enjoy the social and material conditions of netball as they are, some feel their bodies and identities are marginalized, excluded and regulated in undesirable ways within this context, and some use this space and the practices of this sport to resist, challenge, disrupt and subvert the normative ‘order’ of sports and society more broadly. Indeed, as Lefebvre (1991) points out, there are always “beneficiaries of space, just as there are those excluded from it, those ‘deprived of space’” (p. 289). This, he suggests, is “ascribed to the ‘properties’ of space, to its ‘norms’” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 289).

From this perspective, the social space of netball in New Zealand is not benign, neutral or value-free, but rather it (re)produces particular and important relations of power and material practices that work to define, regulate and shape women’s opportunities not only for enjoyment, but also for access and ‘membership’. Consequently, in netball there are always and inevitably bodies and identities that are valued, those that are marginalized and positioned as ‘out of place’, and those whose presence “push[es back] against oppressive boundaries” (hooks, 1990, as cited in McDowell & Sharp, 1997, p. 3) such that netball can, and should, be conceptualized as a space of tension and conflict *as well as* a space of enjoyment, pleasure, resistance and agency. In short, this research reveals that women’s experiences of netball space are mediated by the body and subjectivities they occupy (Ranade, 2007). Further, it highlights that netball is created through the relationships between different types of space and the different understandings, occupations and uses of that space (Hubbard & Sanders, 2003).

### **Reflecting on implications and contributions**

This research makes an original and valuable contribution to both the existing scholarship on netball and the spatialized dimensions of women’s participation in sport and physical culture. As is pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, there is an interesting and informative body of literature that exists in relation to netball. There are, however, gaps in this literature—gaps this thesis has filled. The multiple, diverse and everyday lived experiences of New Zealand women players

and the gendered power relations produced and reproduced through contemporary netball spaces and bodies have not yet been explored in great depth. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, was to reveal the multiple, diverse, and sometimes contradictory, ways in which New Zealand women experience this sport.

In this thesis, I illustrate some of the complexity of New Zealand women's embodied experiences of netball and explore the ways these experiences are constructed, negotiated and mediated by the entanglement of power operating on and through bodies in this space. The aim of this project was to move research past historical analyses of the game and the representation of netball in the New Zealand media towards understandings of the relations of power operating within netball and the significance of this sport, that is, its meanings, value and place, in the everyday lives of contemporary women players. I also aimed to contribute to this literature by offering a spatialized or socio-geographical perspective. In each of the substantive chapters, therefore, I have engaged in on-going dialogue between Lefebvre's key concepts, the work of feminist geographers, netball and netball bodies with the intention of understanding more about the intersections between bodies, space and power, and more particularly, how netball bodies and spaces construct and are constructed by one another. Importantly, however, this thesis was not written with the intention of offering an exhaustive account of netball or the experiences of women players. Alternatively, its aim has been to offer insights and perspectives, or as Longhurst (2008) puts it, "a series of windows" (p. 1) into this culture that prompt new ways of thinking about this sport, its relationship to the (re)production of a dominant feminine athletic 'ideal' in New Zealand, and how this relationship affects the understandings, opportunities and experiences of a range of women players.

Importantly, no research to date has offered such an extensive investigation into women's embodied, subjective and emplaced netball experiences. Research has not looked so closely and critically at the relations of gender, sexuality, heteronormativity and corporeality that operate on bodies in and through contemporary spaces of netball. Nor has it considered how these operations of power might shape, both positively and negatively, the sporting experiences of New Zealand women players. I contend, therefore, that this research project comprises and represents a significant effort to complicate and

nuance understandings of netball, that is, to think about netball and women's experiences of this sport in new ways. Drawing upon a socio-spatial perspective that prioritizes the analysis of the interrelations between space, power and the body, this project moves beyond and challenges the often routine and uncritical acceptance of this sport in New Zealand whilst also working to unsettle the romanticized discourse that proclaims netball to be 'relevant and accessible to all' (Netball New Zealand, 2015). In so doing, this research demonstrates some of the subtleties and intricacies of netball space, specifically how the gendered, sexualized and corporeal relations of power operating on and through bodies in this context intersect with the experiences of a range of women players in a variety and multitude of ways.

The second major contribution of this study stems from the interdisciplinary socio-spatial approach adopted throughout. Space and embodiment and the relationship between the moving body, space and social relations is an interdisciplinary problematic that is attracting the attention of a number of critical scholars of sport (Friedman, 2010; Fusco, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Newman & Giardina, 2008; Silk, 2004; Stoddart, 2010; van Ingen, 2002, 2004; Waitt, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008; Waitt & Warren, 2008) including those whose focus rests upon the experiences of females in physical culture (Caudwell, 2007; Ravel & Rail, 2007). When theorizing about space, however, it is often the case that space is not considered, simultaneously, in its physical, psychological and social forms (van Ingen, 2003). Furthermore, the dialectical relationship between the body and space, that is, the ways in which space is produced and thus (re)produces the bodies and identities of its inhabitants, is rarely excavated in depth or explored extensively amongst this work.

Throughout this research I deployed Lefebvre's (1991) three-part categorization of space in order to understand and theorize space from a more interdisciplinary perspective, that is, as it is constructed by culture, knowledge and representation, in its concrete and material forms, and as it is experienced, negotiated and lived by bodies. As many scholars working across disciplines acknowledge, such interdisciplinarity is not a simple task. Adopting this approach, however, offered a way of understanding more fully some of the complexities that surround a political geography of netball and women's everyday lived and

embodied participation in this sport. In discussing the social space of netball and its relationship to women's embodiment I simultaneously asserted that geography matters—that bodies and experiences cannot be removed or thought about separately from the spaces in which they are situated—and that the body is central to the production, reproduction and maintenance of social space. Whilst insisting on space as the starting point for my investigation, I explored some of the ways in which the relations of power circulating within spaces of netball in New Zealand work to produce, inscribe, construct and regulate the bodies of the women in this research. As such, this Lefebvrian-inspired project represents a sophisticated and nuanced approach to the analysis of space and women's experiences of sport in that it deals extensively with the (re)production and implications of lived spatialities. In short, I argue that the spaces women netballers occupy, whether these are discursive, material or psychological, construct their very embodiment, whilst, at the same time, their bodies and practices construct netball space. I also give further weight to the argument that “the spatial and social aspects of a [phenomenon] are inseparable” (Spain, 1992, p. 5) and inextricably intertwined.

Of course, all social theories have their strengths and limitations. Some aspects of empirical evidence are explained adequately by a particular theory or concept whilst others are not. However, no one theory can explain all aspects of a particular phenomenon (Thorpe, 2011). Some have argued that theoretical synthesis holds potential for acknowledging and extending upon the limitations of particular theories, and thus facilitating new insights into multidimensional social and cultural phenomena such as sport (Thorpe, 2011). An area where this has been particularly evident is in feminist scholars engagement, and extension upon, the work of theorists such as Marx, Foucault and Bourdieu.

As is made clear in Chapter Two, Lefebvre's original work was not particularly focused on issues related to the gendering, sexing and sexualizing of space and thus, it contains significant gaps with respect to the aims and focus of this research project. Yet, rather than “throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater” (McCann, 1999, p. 164) I have engaged in productive conversations with Lefebvre and feminism to reveal the spatial dimensions of netball spaces and the relationship between this sport and the (re)production of a particular type of femininity. Indeed, in recognizing the strengths as well as the limitations and

oversights of Lefebvre's theory, I do not draw solely on his philosophical perspective, but instead, I blend, thread and weave his ideas with those who have focused on the gendered, sexed and sexualized aspects of space and women's (and sometimes men's) experiences of it. In many ways, therefore, this thesis reflects Lefebvre's approach to 'thinking trialectically' in that it draws together Lefebvre's philosophical and theoretical viewpoints about the production of space, poststructural feminist theory, as well as numerous insights from feminist scholars working within the areas of sport sociology and social and cultural geography. In short, this project draws elements of these theoretical perspectives together in order to "build a new, [arguably] more robust whole" (Allan, 2011, p. 23).

Theoretical synthesis between feminism and the work of Lefebvre proved particularly insightful for understanding the interrelationships between and issues related to space, active bodies and embodiment, identities, power and resistance in netball culture. Despite a general lack of engagement with Lefebvre's key concepts among feminist work, I argue that his spatiology does lend itself to a discussion of the production and regulation of identity and embodiment through its attention to the central role of representation and practice in producing space. I suggest that Lefebvre's conceptual framework is particularly instructive when used to understand how discourses of gender, sex and sexuality are produced, reproduced and maintained in and through space, and thus, function to regulate the identities and bodies of those who inhabit particular geographies.

It is my contention that syntheses between feminism and Lefebvre hold exciting possibilities for future analyses of sport and female physical culture in that they offer strengths in relation to multiple key concepts of particular relevance to women's involvement in sport and movement-related cultures, including gender, sexuality, the body and embodiment, space, power, marginalization, resistance and agency. A strength of synthesizing feminism with Lefebvre's relational concepts of spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation is that this approach not only has the potential to demonstrate "that particular definitions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in particular places" (Spain, 1992, p. 7) but also to systematically unpack *how* these relations of power are produced, reproduced, maintained, negotiated and/or contested. More particularly, Lefebvre's work offers feminist

scholars, including those interested in sport, an important means to investigate space as “both relational *and* processual” (Fullwood, 2015, p. 24, emphasis added) that is, as connected to and implicated in the (re)production of bodies, identities and social relations. In this manner, I argue that there is potential in theoretical syntheses between feminism and Lefebvre for offering new and productive ways to think about and theorize the interrelationships between active bodies, identities, space, power and resistance in sport and female physical culture.

### **Future research directions**

In bringing this thesis to a close—demonstrating how each research question has been addressed, rearticulating the key points of each substantive chapter and discussing my findings—what becomes apparent are not only the valuable contributions this research has made, but also the ‘stories’ that have not yet been told and the future research required to build further on understandings of netball and women’s participation in this sport. In this sense, it is recognized that despite my very best attempts to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of netball and New Zealand women’s experiences of this sport, this research remains limited in a number of ways. In this section, therefore, two suggestions are offered for future research on netball and women’s experiences of their moving bodies in this sport. These suggestions relate specifically to 1) the importance of considering further the experiences of ‘other’ netballers and 2) the need to theorize experiences of sporting pleasure and how Lefebvre may contribute to this.

### ***Investigating the experiences of ‘other’ netballers***

Although this research has shed significant light on the ways in which a particular type of feminine identity and body is celebrated in netball, and how, in turn, this works to marginalize and even erase particular subjectivities, I am mindful of the work that still needs to be done to bring forth the experiences of ‘other’ bodies in netball. For the purposes of this project, which focuses largely on netball as it is related to the construct of femininity, I chose to discuss the experiences of those women who are either not feminine enough (‘tomboys’ and lesbians) or too feminine (pregnant women) to illustrate my points about the narrow normative

ideal prioritized in this space and the ways this can work to marginalize, ‘other’ and/or displace particular women. However, what has been made glaringly apparent to me throughout this research project is the invisibility of other ‘types’ of bodies in this sport—primarily women of Asian and Indian decent and Muslim women. Considering the increasingly multi-ethnic population of New Zealand, I suggest that this raises some important questions for future research on this sport, not only in terms of the experiences of these women should they choose to play, but also in terms of more focused investigations of the social and spatial barriers that may work to prevent these women from participating in the first place. Of course, as researchers we simply cannot capture all of the stories that might be told about a particular culture and thus, we can only hope to offer a partial view. Nevertheless, I suggest that future research would do well to reveal the ways in which the discursive construction of netball(ers) and the spatial practices of this sport continue to limit the involvement of women from minority racial/ethnic and religious groups. With such understanding, efforts can be made to develop more inclusive netball spaces. Comparisons of women’s netball participation across nations could also be an interesting direction for future research. For instance, studies that explore the significance of netball in the lives of women from countries in which netball is a minority sport and/or where the link between netball and the (re)production of dominant gender relations is not as strong could yield interesting insights into the role of culture in the construction of women’s sporting experiences, identities and aspects of embodiment.

### ***Theorizing pleasure in critical sport research***

As Pringle, Rinehart and Caudwell (2015) point out, the pleasures individuals derive from their participation in sport and physical culture are numerous and they are “productive in constituting subjectivities, social belongings, nationalistic fervor, and, for some, even reasons for living” (p. 1; see also Booth, 2009). Indeed, as Rinehart (2015) observes, sport is understood to be a pleasurable experience, otherwise, why would so many individuals choose to partake in it? Yet, despite the somewhat obvious link between sport and pleasure, the analysis of pleasure has not been a central topic within sociological analyses of sport, such that there is what some have termed “a deafening silence around the subject” (Booth, 2009, p.

133; see also Pringle et al., 2015) in the literature pertaining to physical culture. In light of these comments, I agree with Booth (2009) and Pringle et al., (2015) when they suggest that we need to find ways to integrate pleasure, more explicitly and critically, into our research projects.

During my investigation of the social and material conditions of netball and the writing of this thesis, I tried not to reproduce the “‘pessimistic’ picture of the sports world” (Maguire, 2011, p. 933) that sociologists so often paint and to keep in mind that for many New Zealand women netball is a space of immense joy and insurmountable pleasure. When asked why they play netball, many of the participants in this study cited reasons intimately linked to the concept of pleasure and the positive feelings, emotions and affects that ensue from their engagement in and consumption of this sport and culture. As I have pointed out, some women gain great pleasure from the women-onlyness of netball and the subsequent opportunities this sport provides for homosocial bonding. Others enjoy the sense of authority and control that participating in a women-dominated sporting space and culture offers them. Others still, find a sense of pleasure in participating in netball in ways that challenge socio-cultural expectations and/or the perceived capabilities of their discursive and material bodies. And numerous women experience pleasure in the sensuality and movement of their active bodies in netball: the building of muscle, increases in fitness, shooting a long-range goal, executing a well-timed feed and/or pulling in a spectacular game-saving intercept. Of course, this is just a small sample of the broad range of pleasures New Zealand women can and do derive from their involvement in recreational netball.

Whilst I did not ignore the multiple physical, socio-psychological and sensual pleasures women experience in and through their participation in this sport, these experiences do remain a rather under-theorized aspect of this thesis. This is somewhat regrettable, as I believe that a Lefebvrian theoretical approach could offer much in the way of theorizing the social and spatial construction of sporting pleasures and their embodiment. As Pringle (2015) notes, the production and experience of pleasure occurs by way of an interplay between the body, psychology, and the social and cultural context of an activity. Yet, dominant discursive conceptualizations of pleasure position it as either “‘primarily an inherent human phenomenon...tied to the biological workings of the body’” or as

socially constructed—“a view [that] tends to suggest that pleasures *materialize* via discursive practices of diverse decent” (Pringle, 2015, p. 43, emphasis in original). Indeed, interdisciplinary analyses of the concept of pleasure among sport studies scholars are rare, and this is perhaps because of the difficulty of the task. Nevertheless, Pringle (2015) asserts that if sociology of sport scholars are to produce the kind of accounts that take into consideration the complexities of pleasure—its relationship to the body, mind and relations of power—it is especially necessary to look to theories that, at the very least, “acknowledge the possibilities of the interweaving of biology and the socio-cultural” (p. 54; see also Booth, 2009) that is, of the interplay between the physical, mental and social.

Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space—which when looked upon critically, could be said to double as a theory of the production of embodiment—may be particularly useful in this enterprise. Interdisciplinary in nature, Lefebvorean theory attempts to (re)unite and give equal weighting to the physical, mental and socio-cultural dimensions of human experience, and in so doing, to overcome dualisms between body/mind and nature/culture. Lefebvre argues that the discursive, material and psychological characteristics of spaces and bodies matter: that spaces play an active role in shaping social performances, interactions, identities and feelings and vice versa. With respect to netball and the concept of pleasure, therefore, Lefebvorean theory offers a potentially fruitful way to understand pleasure as inherently embodied: as lived, felt and sensed, but also as always and inevitably mediated by socio-cultural and physical context. For example, this approach provides a lens through which to theorize how the gendered representation of netball and the spatial practices of this sport (primarily the rules of the game) function to limit and control women’s opportunities for particular physical pleasures, and/or the ways in which playing netball functions to (re)produce and maintain pleasurable feminine identities for women netballers (Caudwell, 2015). In short, I argue that Lefebvre’s interdisciplinary theoretical approach has the potential to make a valuable contribution to new understandings of sporting and movement pleasures—which like bodies cannot be removed from the contexts in which they occur—and thus, is worthy of further investigation.

## **Final words**

As is demonstrated in the introduction to this thesis, netball has been an ongoing and important part of my life since early childhood. However, since embarking on this project a little over three years ago, I now view netball in a very different light. I look upon this sport and my participation in this physical and cultural context with a heightened socio-spatial awareness. For example, no more do I see my uniform as merely an athletic garment. Rather, I conceptualize it as a symbol that reinforces a particular view and understanding of my own and others' active and moving bodies. I no longer recognize the places in which I participate in this sport as simply physical structures, but instead think of them as implicated in the production of my own and other players' identities. I do not pick up a magazine in the supermarket with a netballer on the cover and blindly flick through its contents. Rather, I ask critical questions about the representations and messages these media send—which now, seem to be leaping out at me from the pages. A focus on the socio-spatial relations of netball has also ignited a sense of intrigue and wondering about the ways in which I embody netball space: 'how might the things I say and do whilst participating in this sport work to reinforce/challenge dominant (and sometimes exclusionary) representations?'

Certainly, moving in, with and through the space in which I conducted this research and engaging my feminist sociological consciousness in conversation with Lefebvrian spatial theory has encouraged me to ask specific questions, to embody netball in particular (and sometimes different) ways, and to pay attention to details that may have previously escaped my attention. Thus, whilst the research questions I posed for this study reflect a number of concerns I had before I embarked on this project, they have also been driven by a particular set of interests that have developed throughout the progression of this project—principally my awareness of the geography of social relations and embodiment. Indeed, the title of this thesis draws attention to the centrality of both sociology and geography within my research project and the emphasis I have placed on understanding the social space of netball *and* women's embodied experiences within it. The aim of this study involved both an exploration of the social production of netball space and how the experiences of women players are mediated by the gendered, (hetero)sexualized and corporealized relations of power operating on and through bodies in this context. Utilizing a feminist

(re)reading of Lefebvre's spatial theory proved a challenging, thought-provoking and useful means through which to achieve these aims. Ultimately, therefore, this thesis not only provides a cultural critique of netball in New Zealand, but it also demonstrates the efficacy of syntheses between feminism and Lefebvre for explaining particular aspects of this sport and culture that have otherwise gone unnoticed, or at least unexplored to date. Further, this research reveals the potential of feminist engagement with Lefebvre's spatial theory— particularly his three dialectically interrelated moments of the production of space—for understanding women's embodied participation in sporting and physical cultural contexts.

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## **Appendices**

### **APPENDIX 1: AN OVERVIEW OF NETBALL**

Netball games are traditionally played on a rectangular court that is divided into three evenly spaced sections (thirds) and has raised goal rings with no backboards at each end. A netball court consists of two goal thirds and a centre third, which is where play begins (Netball New Zealand, 2015). Players are assigned specific positions (Goal Keep, Goal Defense, Wing Defense, Wing Attack, Centre, Goal Attack and Goal Shoot) which define their roles within the team and restrict their movement within particular playing areas. This means that each player is permitted to enter a specific area of the court (Netball New Zealand, 2015). Only two positions are permitted in the attacking shooting circle, and can therefore shoot for a goal. Similarly, only two positions are permitted in the defensive shooting circle in order to attempt to prevent the opposition from scoring points. Other players are restricted to two thirds of the court, with the exception of the Centre, who is permitted to move anywhere on the court except for within the two shooting circles. Generally speaking, each team defends one shooting circle and attacks the other. Thus, the aim of this sport is to score goals (worth one point each) by advancing a ball down the court between teammates and shooting it through your own team's hoop whilst preventing the opposition from scoring.

Perhaps the most obvious point of difference between netball and most other team sports is that once a player has caught and landed with the ball, they may not dribble or drop and re-gather it, nor may they move their grounded foot (the first foot to touch the ground after catching the ball) until the ball has been released. Players must, at all times, stay within their designated areas and may not throw or receive a pass outside of the demarcated boundaries of the court unless a 'throw in' is called. The ball must be touched by at least one player in each third before a goal is scored. During general play, a player with the ball can only hold on to it for a maximum of three seconds before shooting for a goal or passing to another player. Finally, no bodily contact is permitted, and thus, players must defend from three feet distance (0.9m) in order to turnover the ball, disrupt play or to force an error.

As the International Netball Federation (2013) points out, the rules of netball may be placed into two generic categories; those that infringe only a rule and are considered minor infringements, and those that infringe the rights of an opponent and are deemed major infringements. Rule infringements are typically punishable by either a short period of stand-down for the offending player (major infringements), a turnover of ball possession (minor infringements) or, in extreme circumstances, the advancing of play or removal of a player should the umpire deem this necessary (typically for repeat and deliberate offending/rule breaking). At the final whistle, the winning team is the one that has scored the most goals.

It is worth noting that whilst the rules of this sport remain the same, there are significant variations in the ways netball is played from social to elite levels. Elite, and even competitive level netball, is typically a physically demanding and spirited activity for which players often make significant personal, physical and financial sacrifices in order to continue playing (Johannsen, 2013). Players are expected to engage in regimented and regular training routines such as lifting weights, fitness testing, doing sprint training, agility and skill drills and court crafting. They are required to learn complex tactical strategies; most teams, develop game plans which all players must familiarize themselves with and be able to execute. Players' diets, fluid intakes and work-rates are also frequently monitored, especially during tournaments or important matches, and they devote a significant amount of time to warming up, cooling down and to injury prevention and management (e.g. hot and cold treatments post-game, regular physiotherapy).

In contrast, social teams typically approach netball with a much more laissez-faire attitude. Levels of commitment, skill, competitiveness and fitness vary significantly and there are generally no scheduled or organized weekly team trainings. General game play is typically somewhat slower and much less physically aggressive. Further, among social grades, having fun is often emphasized and attempts to develop tactics intended to optimize the team's chances of winning might be forfeited in favor of involving every player equally. In this way, social team members will often play 'out of position'—having a turn at shooting when they are really a defensive player, for example.

## **APPENDIX 2: ORGANIZER INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Understanding New Zealand Women's Netball Experiences**

#### **Brief Outline of the Research Project**

Since the 1920s netball has been known as the 'national sport for New Zealand women' (Hawes & Barker, 1999). Today, there are over 135,000 registered participants of different skill levels (social, competitive, elite), ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds involved in netball in New Zealand (Netball New Zealand, 2012). Netball is, therefore, arguably, an important part of the lives of many girls and women in this country. Yet, you may be surprised to know, that little research has focused on the importance of netball in the lives of New Zealand women. In the field of sport sociology, very few researchers have looked at the experiences of women who play this sport. My project seeks to fill this gap in the research.

As a doctoral student at the University of Waikato, I am interested to investigate New Zealand women's experiences of netball. I am interested in the many facets of women's participation in this space including, but not limited to: physicality (e.g. aggression, strength, competition); physiology (e.g. the development of musculature, fitness/health); sociality (e.g. camaraderie, relationships, interaction and teamwork); and sensuality (e.g. the feelings experienced through the body in movement). I am also interested in the multiple struggles, challenges and difficulties faced by female players. Furthermore, I am interested to contextualize these experiences within broader power dimensions surrounding women's opportunities in sport and netball more particularly.

#### **What this study will involve**

Due to the impossible nature of obtaining individual consent from all players involved in this competition, I am seeking your consent to be present as a researcher and to conduct participant observations during this event. My presence at the courts would involve me watching players participating in netball to help me better understand some of the enjoyment women experience in and through their moving bodies in this space. My observations would be non-invasive and with your support, I would request that all teams/coaches be informed of my presence as a researcher via email, and over the announcer's microphone during the season. It is my hope that my presence as a researcher at the courts will enable me to make contact with potential interviewees for this project. All participants recruited via my presence at the courts will be thoroughly informed of my study, the research process and their rights as participants. I also hope that players who are keen to share their experiences of netball will approach me to participate in this study if informed of my presence. No participants under the age of 18 will be included in this project.

#### **Confidentiality**

All participants and teams will remain anonymous via the use of pseudonyms. However, all participants will be given the option to be partially identified (e.g. age, ethnicity/nationality, occupation, household arrangements, level of participation). This information is helpful to allow me to contextualize the insights

provided during the interviews. The data collected from this study will be used to write a research report for the fulfillment of my doctoral research and will mainly be read by university students, researchers and academics. It is likely that this information will also be used within journal publications and conference presentations.

### **Requirements of the Researcher**

If you agree to support this project, I will need your assistance with some things in order to meet the ethical requirements of this research:

- All teams/coaches will need to be informed of my presence at the courts/stadium as a researcher and the intentions of this study via email at the beginning of the competition.
- In order to ensure that players/coaches are reminded of my presence I will request that this be communicated via the announcer during each day of competition.
- If there should be any coach/team information evenings prior to the commencement of the competition/event, I would like to be present and to communicate the intentions of this study to ensure information about this study and myself, the researcher, are widely available.

### **Records**

All records from the observations and any interview discussions generated via my presence at this event will be kept under the strictest of confidence. They will be archived for at least five years according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. Any other use of this data will not occur without participant consent.

### **Contacting the Researcher**

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either myself the researcher, or my chief supervisor, Prof. Robyn Longhurst for clarification.

#### **Researcher: Amy Marfell**

University of Waikato Doctoral Candidate

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#### **Chief Supervisor: Prof. Robyn Longhurst**

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### APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM FOR ORGANIZER

#### Understanding New Zealand Women's Netball Experiences

I have read the **Organizer Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I support Amy Marfell's project under the conditions below:

- 1) Amy Marfell will conduct non-invasive observations of women participants during the duration of the netball competition/tournament.
- 2) I understand that in supporting Amy Marfell's project I will be relied upon to assist her in ensuring that all teams/coaches are notified and informed of this study and Amy Marfell's presence as a researcher at the courts/stadium.
- 3) Amy Marfell will approach women players during these observations, introducing herself and this study to recruit participants for interviews. All of the women approached will be provided with accurate and comprehensive information about this study in order to make an informed choice regarding their participation and will have the right to refuse to participate in this project. No players under the age of 18 will be included in this study.
- 4) The data collected by Amy Marfell will be used to write her Doctoral thesis and is likely to be included in journal articles and conference presentations. I consent to any observations made during Amy Marfell's presence as a researcher during the 2013/2014 season/at this event being used for publication and academic purposes.
- 5) I understand that if I have any ethical concerns or further questions about this study I can contact the primary researcher, Amy Marfell (email: [aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz)) or her chief supervisor, Prof. Robyn Longhurst (email: [robynl@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:robynl@waikato.ac.nz)) using the contact details listed here and on the **Organizer Information Sheet**.

I agree to support the researcher under the conditions set out above:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 4: TEAMMATE INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Understanding New Zealand Women's Netball Experiences**

#### **Brief Outline of the Research Project**

Since the 1920s netball has been known as the 'national sport for New Zealand women' (Hawes & Barker, 1999). Today, there are over 135,000 registered participants of different skill levels (social, competitive, elite), ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds involved in netball in New Zealand (Netball New Zealand, 2012). Netball is, therefore, arguably, an important part of the lives of many girls and women in this country. Yet, you may be surprised to know, that little research has focused on the importance of netball in the lives of New Zealand women. In the field of sport sociology, very few researchers have looked at the experiences of women who play this sport. My project seeks to fill this gap in the research.

As a doctoral student at the University of Waikato, I am interested to investigate New Zealand women's experiences of their netball participation. I am interested in the many facets of women's participation in this space including, but not limited to: physicality (e.g. aggression, strength, competition); physiology (e.g. the development of musculature, fitness/health); sociality (e.g. camaraderie, relationships, interaction and teamwork); and sensuality (e.g. the feelings experienced through the body in movement). I am also interested in the multiple struggles, challenges and difficulties faced by female players. Furthermore, I am interested to contextualize these experiences within broader power dimensions surrounding women's opportunities in sport and netball more particularly.

#### **What does this study involve?**

In order to understand the diversity of women's netball experiences in contemporary New Zealand society, I am using an array of methods including; self reflection on my own netball experiences, participant observations, and face-to-face interviews with a selection of players I meet during my fieldwork and participation. To assist with my thinking, questioning and theorizing of the experiences of contemporary women players I will be reflecting on my own experiences as a netballer within this team. It is important to note that I will not be focusing on or examining the team's experiences or the experiences of any other individual. Rather, my own experiences of my moving body in this space will become a site of analysis and reflection. In particular I am interested to reflect on the various ways I feel pleasure and enjoyment through my body in netball. This may include, but is not limited to: physicality (e.g. aggression, strength and competition), physiology/biological changes (e.g. the development of musculature, fitness/health), sociality (e.g. the formation of friendships, feelings of belonging, identity formation) and sensuality (e.g. the feelings of my body through movement). It is my hope that via understanding and reflecting upon my own body in this space that I will be better enabled to understand the diverse and multiple ways that other players experience pleasure in and through their moving bodies in netball.

To gather diverse perspectives on the multiple pleasures and joys experienced by contemporary woman players I will also be conducting

observations and interviews. Observations will take place at the Hamilton City Netball Courts before and after the team's games. In no way will these observations be conducted in ways or at times that will disrupt my participation in this team. I also hope to conduct some observations at regional/provincial tournaments if possible.

Interviews will be conducted with 15-20 women. To recruit participants for these interviews I plan to rely on contacts made in the 'field', the organizers of the Hamilton City Netball Competition/tournament organizers and snowball sampling. However, if any of my teammates would like to participate in an interview I will certainly provide room in this project for this to happen. All interviews conducted for the purposes of this project should last no more than one hour and I am hopeful that teammate interviews can be conducted after trainings and/or games. Alternatively, however, these interviews can be conducted at times and in places of convenience to any willing teammate. I am also open to conducting a group interview should some of you wish to participate with others. It is important to note that as my teammate, you are in no way expected to participate in an interview for the purposes of this research. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and should you be invited to participate you have every right to decline the invitation. However, should you be interested in contributing to this project please let me know so that I can issue you with an **Interview Participant Information Sheet** and **Consent Form**, which details this study, the research process and your rights as a participant in more depth.

If you have any further questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either myself the researcher, or my chief supervisor, Prof. Robyn Longhurst for clarification.

**Researcher: Amy Marfell**

University of Waikato Doctoral Candidate

Email: [aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz)

**Chief Supervisor: Prof. Robyn Longhurst**

Geography Programme

School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

*University of Waikato*

Email: [robynl@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:robynl@waikato.ac.nz)

## **APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Understanding New Zealand Women's Netball Experiences**

#### **Brief Outline of the Research Project**

Since the 1920s netball has been known as the 'national sport for New Zealand women' (Hawes & Barker, 1999). Today, there are over 135,000 registered participants of different skill levels (social, competitive, elite), ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds involved in netball in New Zealand (Netball New Zealand, 2012). Netball is, therefore, arguably, an important part of the lives of many girls and women in this country. Yet, you may be surprised to know, that little research in New Zealand, or further afield, has been afforded to unraveling the complexities of the everyday, lived experiences of women participants.

As a doctoral student at the University of Waikato, I am interested to investigate the experiences of New Zealand women netballers. In particular, I am interested in the multiple aspects of enjoyment experienced in and through women's moving bodies in netball including, but not limited to; physicality (e.g. satisfaction experienced through aggression, strength, competition), physiology (e.g. the development of musculature, fitness/health), sociality (e.g. camaraderie, relationships, interaction and teamwork), and sensuality (e.g. the joys experienced through the body in movement). I am also interested in the multiple struggles, challenges and difficulties faced by female players. Furthermore, I am interested to contextualize these experiences within broader power dimensions surrounding women's opportunities in sport and netball more particularly.

#### **Your involvement**

To canvas the diversity of women's netball experiences in contemporary New Zealand society I would like to invite you to participate in an interview. The interview would be at a time and in a setting of your choosing and is expected to last no more than one hour, but may take more (or less) time depending on the willingness of each participant. Questions will focus on your experiences as a contemporary woman netballer in New Zealand and the aspects of your participation that you find most rewarding. You may be asked to answer some follow-up questions post-interview, these can be asked and answered via email or phone. I know that for many women the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge on netball and women's experiences in this distinct New Zealand sporting culture is exciting, so I invite you to pass my information and contact details onto netball playing friends/family/colleagues for potential interviewing.

#### **Confidentiality**

As a participant, you will remain anonymous via the use of a pseudonym. However, please let me know if you are happy to be partially identified (e.g. age, ethnicity/nationality, occupation, marital status, level of participation). This information is helpful to allow me to contextualize the insights you provide during the interviews. The data collected from this study will be used to write a research report for the fulfillment of my doctoral research and will mainly be read by

university students, researchers and academics. It is likely that this information will also be used within journal publications and conference presentations.

### **Participants' Rights**

If you take part in this research project, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer whole or part of any particular question asked of you during the interview process
- Seek further information about the study or voice any concerns you may have during the course of your participation to either myself, or my chief supervisor.
- Be given access to your individual transcript and to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.
- **Withdraw from the study before November 1, 2013**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide a physical address on the **Participant Details** form so that I can send you a copy of your interview transcript. You are encouraged to read over the transcript and amend, delete or add any comments you see fit.

### **Records**

All records from the interviews will be kept under the strictest of confidence. They will be archived indefinitely according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. The audio recordings of the interviews will be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research process. Any other use of these recordings will not occur without your consent.

### **Contacting the Researcher**

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either myself the researcher, or my chief supervisor, Prof. Robyn Longhurst for clarification.

#### **Researcher: Amy Marfell**

University of Waikato Doctoral Candidate

Email: [aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz)

#### **Chief Supervisor: Prof. Robyn Longhurst**

Geography Programme

School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

University of Waikato

Email: [robynl@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:robynl@waikato.ac.nz)

## APPENDIX 6: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

### Understanding New Zealand Women's Netball Experiences

I have read the **Participant Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I agree to participate under the conditions below:

- 1) Amy Marfell will conduct a face-to-face interview with me regarding my netball experiences. This interview will be audio-recorded and is likely to take no more than one hour. I, the participant have the right to refuse to answer any questions either in whole or part and may request that certain discussions not be recorded. Having read the interview transcript, I have the right to request any comments be added, changed or removed. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time prior to November 1, 2013.
- 2) I understand Amy Marfell will keep all records from the interview confidential. The audio recording will also be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research. I understand that all written information will be archived indefinitely according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations.
- 3) The transcribed audio or written data collected by Amy Marfell will be used to write her doctoral thesis and is likely to be included in journal articles and conference presentations. I consent to the data being used for publication and academic purposes.
- 4) I understand the implications of choosing full confidentiality or partial disclosure, as conditions of confidentiality.
- 5) I understand that if I have any ethical concerns or further questions about this study I can contact the primary researcher, Amy Marfell (email: [aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz)) or her chief supervisor, Prof. Robyn Longhurst (email: [robynl@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:robynl@waikato.ac.nz)) using the contact details listed here and on the **Participant Information Sheet**.

I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions set out above:

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 7: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Name (Pseudonym): \_\_\_\_\_

Age:	18-20	<input type="checkbox"/>	46-50	<input type="checkbox"/>
	20-24	<input type="checkbox"/>	50+	<input type="checkbox"/>
	25-30	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	31-35	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	36-40	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	41-45	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Current Contact details:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ph: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity/Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you played netball?: \_\_\_\_\_

Level(s) of netball participation (e.g. social, competitive, elite/representative):

\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions at any point during this research please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and for being an integral part of this research.

**Amy Marfell**  
**PhD Candidate**  
**Department of Sport & Leisure Studies**  
**University of Waikato**  
**Email: [aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:aem19@students.waikato.ac.nz)**