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THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN RUGBY: INTRUDERS IN A SPORT THAT THEY LOVE

By

Mbalentle Feliti

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by Coursework and Research Report in the field of
Masters in Community-based Counselling Psychology In
The Faculty of Humanities

Supervised

by

Prof. Malose Langa (PhD)

Date: February 2025

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signature:  February 2025

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'Yaye ndiqinisekile ngale ndawo yokuba lo msebenzi mhle awuqalileyo uThixo kuni, uya kude awuqabelise ngeMini kaKrestu uYesu. ' - KWABASEFILIPI 1:6

"Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." – Philippians 1:6

- First and foremost, I would like to say, "Thank you to God, El-Shaddai, El Roi, Emmanuel for carrying me through what has been the most stretching two years of my life". His presence has preserved me, and I will spend the rest of my life singing of His faithfulness. "Thank you Lord for seeing the good work in me through to this point. It is all for Your glory!"
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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Black South African women in rugby, thus contributing to the limited literature on their engagement in this historically male-dominated and racially exclusive sport. The qualitative research approach was adopted, with semi-structured interviews having been conducted with eight purposively sampled and selected participants. The participants included current players, former professionals and rugby administrators, each cohort offering unique insights into their journeys in the sport. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, uncovering thirteen nuanced themes that highlighted the complexity of their journeys. Key themes include: Reflections on identity: The dual struggle of Black Women in rugby; Overcoming institutional bias, resource disparities, and Limited sponsorships; and Defying gender norms. Participants discussed their efforts to navigate systemic challenges while grappling with intersecting identities as Black women in a traditionally male-dominated sport. Additional themes such as: Unseen no more; The visibility challenge in women's rugby and representation and the quota system: A question of merit, highlighted the barriers to representation and the tensions between inclusion and perceived meritocracy. The study also highlighted the transformative impact of rugby on participants and self-perception and confidence, as captured in themes like; The impact of rugby on self and defying stereotypes; Motivation and fortitude. Despite facing prejudice and systemic exclusion, participants demonstrated resilience and a deep sense of community, as captured in themes such as Beyond the field: The role of community and support in empowering the Women's Game. The final themes, including, what does the future hold for Black female rugby players, emphasise the hope and advocacy for systemic change and greater inclusion in the sport. These findings contribute to the understanding of the intersectionality of race, gender, and sport, offering valuable insights into the social, institutional, and personal dimensions of rugby. Implications for promoting equity and representation in rugby and recommendations for future research are discussed, underlining the importance of fostering inclusivity in South African sports.

Keywords: *Male-dominated sport, Racial exclusivity, Identity, Institutional bias, Resource disparities, Limited sponsorships, Defying gender norms, Transformative impact, Systemic exclusion, Advocacy for change, Intersectionality*

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Rugby has historically been considered a predominantly male sport (Mweli, 2015). In South Africa, however, the sport has not only been predominantly male but also predominantly White and Afrikaans (Nauright, 1997). It is difficult to discuss South African rugby without unpacking the gender and racial politics surrounding it. Despite being largely male and Afrikaans, the sport used gender and race as exclusionary tools, excluding people of colour and anyone who fell outside of the 'male' gender category (Nauright, 1997). The question that then remains is: How do Black women in rugby go about placing themselves and taking up space in a sport that is known for its being 'the White man's game'? (Collins, 2009; Spracklen, 2001)

This research aims to investigate the identity Black women hold within the rugby sport. Torres at al. (2009) describe identity as being constructed by the perceptions an individual has of themselves; it is socially constructed, as it is influenced by an individual's interactions with others in a particular social context. Precisely, identity is how individuals see themselves. It is how individuals see their experiences as forming a part of their identity and who they are (Torres et al., 2009). That is the reason this research endeavours to look at how the Black women in this study have navigated their identity formation and how this has translated to their negotiation of identity and space in rugby.

This chapter engages with these different elements further by, firstly, speaking to the focus of this study. This is followed by a reflexive preface. Here, the researcher speaks to her positionality as a researcher commencing this study. In order to adequately clarify the intentions of the study, a section on the aims of the study is included and this is then followed by the rationale which speaks to the importance of this study. Finally, the chapter provides the layout structure of the research report, explaining and outlining each respective chapter.

1.2 Focus of this study

The study focused on for the experiences of Black women in rugby.

1.3 Research aim(s)

The two primary aims of this research study are: first, to delve into the experiences of Black women within the realm of rugby, a sport historically dominated by both the male gender and the White race. Specifically, the research study seeks to understand the intricate dynamics of identity formation for Black women who have chosen to participate in rugby. Second, the study aims to explore the role of race within the broader context of rugby, examining how racial dynamics influence and shape the experiences of Black female rugby players. The research study further aims to unravel the complex intersectionality of race and gender, examining how these factors converge, thus impacting the lived experiences of Black women within the rugby community. By shedding light on these dimensions, the study aspires to contribute insights into a more comprehensive understanding of women's rugby, fostering increased awareness and support at all levels of the sport, that is, from grassroots rugby to the national teams. Ultimately, the goal of the study is to cultivate a broader societal embrace of women's rugby in South Africa, which is parallel to the passionate support enjoyed by men's teams, thereby advancing the cause of gender equality in sports.

1.4 Research rationale

This interest to undertake this research study stems from a notable gap within the existing literature on the experiences of Black women engaged in rugby. Although there has been a rise in literature on women in sports, particularly in disciplines such as soccer and cricket, there remains a considerable deficiency in terms of studies exploring South African women's rugby (Duncan, 2013; Pelak, 2010; Hong, 2003; Odendaal, 2011). Mweli's (2015) contributions towards the masculine and racial identities of rugby players are significant, yet the unique challenges faced by Black women in rugby warrant a dedicated examination and acknowledgment of the distinctive complexities inherent in their own experiences.

The lack of knowledge production may be due to the fact that women's rugby is still in its infancy stage in South Africa. Thus, the lack of literature on the experiences of Black South African women in rugby reflects the broader gap existing in the documentation of women's narratives in rugby. Notably, statistics from the Bok Rugby Website reveal that Black women constitute the majority of the national women's rugby team (SA Rugby, 2025), underscoring the urgency of the need to provide a platform for these women to articulate their stories (Spencer, 2019). This research seeks to unravel the narratives of Black women in rugby, illuminating their role in a sport traditionally dominated by both Whites and males along racial and masculine lines. Furthermore, it aims to shed light on how Black women negotiate the multifaceted aspects of their identity within the context of rugby, including gender, sexuality, athleticism, and personal roles.

It is the researcher's hope and vision that this research study extends beyond academia, seeking to drive tangible change within the rugby space. By amplifying the experiences of Black women in rugby, this study strives to influence a cultural shift that better supports and structures the participation of young girls in the sport. In South Africa, where there is currently no uniform structure for girls' rugby, the research aims to advocate for the creation of equitable opportunities and pathways for female athletes, mirroring those available to their male counterparts. The research also actively contributes to the ongoing transformation in South African rugby, addressing both racial and gender dimensions. It aspires to redirect emphasis, pride, and passion toward women's teams at all levels, challenging the prevailing focus on the men's teams.

Through the narratives and perspectives characterising the making of this study, literature may contribute to on-going discussions around change in the rugby space. Thus, through hearing the experiences of these women, the culture of rugby for young girls may change, providing a better structure for these young female athletes, so that they are able to compete competitively and consistently at a higher level in rugby. It is public knowledge that in South Africa, there is no 'build up' for young girls starting off in the sport. As previously mentioned, there is currently no uniform structure for girls' rugby within South Africa. While their male counterparts start playing the sport from a young age, going through the different stages, such as school-level rugby, as well as border, provincial and national levels, the girls do not get the same opportunities. In addition to this fact, this research seeks to also actively contribute towards the transformation of rugby.

This research study hopes to contribute towards the sport's racial and gender transformation, as it focuses on the narrative of Black women. In South Africa, rugby places significant emphasis and pride on men's rugby team and this research study is undertaken with the hope of contributing towards steering the same emphasis, pride, and passion towards women's rugby teams at all levels. Lastly, this research hopes to contribute towards the creation of awareness around women's rugby in South Africa and the global context.

Moreover, this study endeavours to create awareness on women's rugby, not only within the national context, but also on a global scale. Its potential benefits extend beyond the realm of rugby, reaching out to athletes in various contact and non-contact sports, coaches at all levels, policymakers in sports, the South African Rugby Union (SARU), the general South African population, and the global community at large. At its core, this research study seeks to explore, in a nuanced way, the manner in which Black women navigate and make sense of their involvement in rugby, unveiling the toll of existing in a space traditionally tailored for the males and White. It also delves into questions around issues of belonging and support, adding a critical layer to the discourse on race and gender in the sporting landscape. Ultimately, this research study aims to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing conversations around inclusivity, representation, and support for Black women in rugby and beyond.

1.5 Conclusion

This research study embarks on a crucial journey towards the illumination of the intricate and often overlooked narratives of Black women in rugby in South Africa. The historical context of rugby, as a predominantly male, White, and Afrikaans sport, creates a challenging landscape for Black women seeking to redefine their identity and carve out a space for themselves within the rugby community. The reflexive preface, rooted in the women's personal experiences, adds authenticity to the study, emphasising the significance of acknowledging identity, race, and gender dynamics. With a focus on identity formation and the intersectionality of race and gender, the research study aims to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the transformation of the rugby landscape. The envisioned impacts range from fostering a cultural shift in the treatment of women in rugby to contributions towards global conversations centring on inclusivity, representation, and support in sports in general and rugby in particular. This study stands as a tribute to the strength

and resilience of Black women challenging societal expectations within the rugby sphere, inviting readers to join in the recognition of and advocacy for their rightful place in the sport.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The term "intersectionality," introduced by feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Bastia et al., 2022), emerged as a critical framework that can be used to highlight and illuminated the exclusion of Black women from the mainstream feminist discourse that centred on the experiences of White, middle-class women (Bowleg, 2012). This term was initially developed to examine the manner in which multiple aspects of identity, particularly race and gender, combine to create unique forms of discrimination that cannot be understood by looking at single categories in isolation (Crenshaw, 1991). Over time, intersectionality has evolved to encompass broader aspects of identity beyond race and gender, including class, sexuality, disability, and other social markers that collectively shape an individual's experience of privilege or oppression (Watson & Scraton, 2019). This expansion emphasises the versatility of intersectionality as a tool that effectively unpacks a range of intersecting identities and their impact on individuals' experiences of identity across various social contexts (Mweli, 2015).

Intersectionality has become a key framework underpinning the feminist theory, as it critiques traditional feminist approaches that have historically emphasised the perspectives and struggles of White, middle-class women (Bowleg, 2012). It broadens the feminist discourse by emphasising that gender-based oppression cannot be fully understood without considering the impact of other intersecting identities, such as race and socioeconomic status (Crenshaw, 1991). However, the concept of intersectionality has often been criticised for becoming overly broad and sometimes losing analytical clarity, particularly in research, where it can be challenging to operationalise multiple, overlapping categories (McCall, 2005). Additionally, critics suggest that intersectionality might sometimes overgeneralise people's experiences across their diverse groups, potentially obscuring the specific needs and struggles of different communities within the framework (Nash, 2008).

2.2 Intersectionality as a tool for addressing power dynamics

Intersectionality is also particularly useful in highlighting systems that are interconnected by privilege and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016). By examining these interlinking structures, researchers can reveal the manner in which factors like race, gender, and class collectively impact individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and representation (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This perspective is especially relevant in the contexts of sports, where disparities in power and privilege are often visible and influential (Adair & Stronach, 2011). For the Black women in rugby, intersectionality sheds light on how these identity factors intersect to shape their sense of belonging, opportunities for advancement, and support within the sport. Recognising these dynamics allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers Black women face and the resilience they demonstrate within these settings.

Applying intersectionality in the context of rugby offers insights into how inclusion and exclusion play out along gender, racial, and class lines. While gender and class may offer some levels of privilege within rugby, race can introduce additional barriers, often leading to marginalisation. This framework assists those engaging in this research to examine how Black women in rugby might experience discrimination or limited access to resources and professional advancement. Such dynamics do not only impact the players' entry-level experiences but also affect their overall journey toward recognition and success, showing how identity markers shape individuals' pathways and issues of access within the sport.

2.3 Intersectionality for the individual and the society

Intersectionality also allows researchers to examine power dynamics at both the micro (individual) and macro (societal) levels (Collins, 2000). At a personal level, Black women in rugby may face unique challenges as they interact with teammates and coaches, with stereotypes and biases influencing their experiences. At a broader societal level, systemic factors, such as representation in the media, disparities in funding, and policies implemented by institutions can reinforce the marginalisation of Black women in rugby. An understanding of both the micro-level and macro-level implications of intersectionality thus provides a more nuanced perspective of how individual

experiences intersect with larger societal forces, impacting everything from everyday interactions to broader recognition within the sport (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

2.4 Intersectionality and the perception of self

Intersectionality also offers a valuable framework that fosters an understanding of identity and self-perception (Collins, 2000). For Black women in rugby, these intersections of race, gender, and athletic identity may shape how they perceive themselves and experience the world around them. The self-perceptions of these players are often directly influenced by societal expectations and stereotypes that are related to race and gender, creating internalised pressures or shaping their confidence and enhancing their abilities. By recognising these intersections, intersectionality enables a deeper understanding of how Black women in rugby navigate these external pressures while forming their own identities within the sport discipline.

2.5 Intersectionality as a research framework

Intersectionality helps the researcher to analyse the complex relationships between race, gender, and class among Black women in rugby. This theoretical framework allows for an in-depth exploration of the manner in which these identity factors collectively influence experiences of power, privilege, and marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality ensures that a research study does not isolate one aspect of identity but considers the interconnected nature of all the relevant social markers, providing a holistic view of participants' lived experiences (Collins, 2000). This approach is essential for producing nuanced insights into and respecting the complexity of identity in research, thus strengthening the study's findings and relevance.

2.6 Development and significance of the Intersectionality Theory

The Intersectionality Theory is fundamental to this study, as it enables an examination of the experiences of Black women both in everyday life and the specific context of rugby. Historically, Black women have been facing various forms of compounded oppression, and the intersection of their identities, which are, race, gender, class, and so forth, is essential for fully understanding their lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). So, what exactly is it that intersectionality sets out to achieve?

This theory seeks to move beyond conventional race and gender binaries, challenging these overly simplistic frameworks and offering a more layered understanding of identity.

Intersectionality also provides vocabulary for addressing common critiques of identity politics. Critics, particularly from the liberal perspective, often argue that identity politics risks cementing divisions rather than bridging them. Crenshaw's intersectionality, however, suggests that the real problem lies in failing to recognise the diversity within the identity groups themselves. It exposes the differences within broad categories like "women" and "Black people," aiming to mediate the tensions between the claims of multiple identities and maintaining group solidarity (Crenshaw, 1991).

It should be noted also that intersectionality addresses the historical exclusion of multiple marginalised individuals from feminist and anti-racist discourse. Intersectionality highlights how individuals who face overlapping forms of marginalization, such as Black women and queer people of colour, have historically been excluded from both feminist and anti-racist discussions. Feminism often centred on the experiences of white women, while anti-racist movements typically focused on men of colour. By acknowledging these intersecting identities, intersectionality seeks to bridge this gap, ensuring the voices and experiences of multiply marginalized individuals are recognized and valued. By focusing on these often-side-lined perspectives, it confronts the legacies of essentialism and exclusion in both feminist and anti-racist scholarships. The Intersectionality Theory emphasises the importance of listening to those who have personally experienced multiple forms of discrimination, proposing that their insights are critical to building a more just and inclusive society (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Matsuda, 1987). While the theory has gained prominence as a scholarly concept, it essentially formalises and names a longstanding commitment within Black feminist scholarship. Even before the term 'intersectionality' gained prominence, feminist scholars had been challenging essentialist notions of 'womanhood,' emphasising the diversity of women's experiences. The Intersectionality Theory provides a framework for articulating these longstanding theoretical and political commitments (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981; Higginbotham, 1992; Moraga, 1983; Smith, 1983; Spelman, 1988).

Finally, despite its widespread acceptance, the Intersectionality Theory is still grappling with unresolved conflicts and questions. These tensions have significant implications for feminist and anti-racist theories, practice, and politics, thus negatively affecting conceptions of identity and oppression. As the theory continues to gain interdisciplinary traction, it becomes increasingly crucial to engage with its inherent contradictions, potential gaps, and complexities in order to refine its goals and applications (Zack, 2005).

2.7 Application of intersectionality in research

According to the Intersectionality Theory, several social categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation may cross at the micro level of a person's experience in order to reflect various intertwined systems of privilege and oppression existing at the macro and social-structural level. An example of this is the intersection of sexism and racism (Bowleg, 2012). The centrality of the Intersectionality Theory to this research study cannot be overemphasised, with a primary focus on gender and race. This critical theory views knowledge as situated, contextual, relational, and indicative of political and economic power (Atewologun, 2018). Intersectionality is not merely a theoretical lens but can also be integrated into the methodological approach of qualitative research, especially in techniques like focus groups, narrative interviews, action research, and observations. This helps in comprehending and evaluating the individual, as well as the combined effects of numerous categories (for example, the privileged and the disadvantaged) in each setting. As the Intersectionality Theory gains prominence, quantitative and statistical approaches are increasingly linked to it, allowing researchers to comprehend the combined effects of the various categories. However, managing its broad applicability while maintaining a focus on socio-political and emancipatory goals remains a challenge for the Intersectionality Theory and practice (Atewologun, 2018). Structural intersectionality acknowledges the vulnerability of certain groups, especially women, to abuse and the ineffective interventions that overlook structural dimensions (Cho et al., 2013; Cole, 2008).

2.8 Challenges and critiques of intersectionality

While the Intersectionality Theory is a valuable framework chosen for this research study, it is essential to acknowledge the critiques and limitations identified. Critically engaging with these

perspectives allows for a more balanced approach, particularly given that intersectionality often leads directly to an analysis of power structures (Cho et al., 2013). One common critique of the Intersectionality Theory is that it places too much emphasis on identity categories rather than focusing on the broader systems and structures of inequality. Shin (2013, p. 923) articulates this concern by noting that "intersectionality primarily concerns the way things work rather than who people are." This comment reflects the challenge associated with balancing the exploration of identities with the examination of how power operates across different social structures. From another perspective, this perceived focus on identity categories can make intersectionality appear static and rigid, potentially limiting its ability to address the shifting dynamics within the social power structures.

Another critique is that intersectionality can sometimes become so focused on identity markers that it risks disguising the complex, systemic forces that are at play. Nash (2008) critiques Intersectionality Theory, suggesting that its heightened focus on specific identity issues might limit its effectiveness in examining the broader societal structures that sustain inequality.This identity-centred focus may unconsciously depoliticise intersectionality by prioritising personal identity over collective power struggles.

However, supporters of the Intersectionality Theory, such as Tomlinson (2013), respond to these critiques by defining intersectionality as being inherently about an engagement with power, not merely a catalogue of identity markers. Tomlinson (2013) suggests that a nuanced analysis of power dynamics actually highlights the critical differences that matter in understanding social disparities. The supporters of the theory assert that intersectionality's examination of overlapping forms of discrimination and privilege can, in fact, reveal the deep-rooted structural inequalities rather than merely focusing on personal identities (Davis, 2008).

Lastly, there is a challenge associated with operationalising intersectionality in research. Some scholars point out that the theory's expansive nature, encompassing race, gender, class, and other social categories, can make it difficult to apply it systematically in experimental studies. Without clear guidelines, researchers may struggle to move beyond descriptive analyses of identity categories and toward examination of how these intersecting identities shape material and institutional realities (McCall, 2005). Engaging with these critiques is essential in refining

intersectionality as a tool used for understanding both individual experiences and the broader social forces, making it a more flexible and impactful framework for research.

2.9 Intersectionality and race

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Black women, particularly through the perspectives of race and gender. Manganyi (1973) emphasises that the impact of skin colour extends beyond its physical attributes, embodying deep psychological and sociological significance. He introduces the concept of *Black consciousness,* which underscores a shared sense of understanding within the Black community and promotes pride in Black identity, countering historical associations of Blackness with powerlessness (Fanon, 1967).

Manganyi (1973) also examines the complexity of racial and cultural identity, cautioning against the internalisation of White cultural norms, which may lead to a fractured or false sense of self. This perspective is especially relevant in contexts like rugby, traditionally perceived as a White-dominated sport. For Black women in rugby, this setting can present a unique challenge, as they may experience an internal tension between their racial identity and engagement in a sport that has historically been seen as incongruent with that identity. This tension reflects the broader challenge associated with navigating and reconciling seemingly contradictory identities.

2.10 Intersectionality and gender

In the realm of rugby, gender norms are increasingly coming under scrutiny, as female participation grows within a traditionally male-dominated sport. This rise in women's involvement in the sport challenges long-standing perceptions, breaking boundaries and redefining what it means participating in rugby. Segal (2010) argues that women's engagement in rugby not only disrupts societal expectations around feminine behaviours and body ideals but also signifies a push against conventional standards of femininity. Female rugby players often view their bodies differently, in comparison with what mainstream norms dictate, embracing strength and athleticism that diverges from traditional ideals of feminine appearance.

This shift also highlights a broader societal tension; while schools and communities are increasingly encouraging girls to participate in sports, certain contact sports like rugby remain controversial when they are perceived as overly masculine. Women's participation in such sports

is sometimes perceived as problematic, as it challenges entrenched notions of femininity. This emphasis on bodily appearance, particularly the idea that women in rugby risk appearing too masculine, emphasises a cultural resistance to the redefinition of femininity within athletic contexts. Women's engagement in rugby, therefore, not only signals a form of physical and social resilience but also reflects a broader resistance against restrictive gender roles, illustrating how female athletes reshape and expand the boundaries of womanhood in sport.

2.11 Rethinking intersectionality's foundation in Black women's experiences

Intersectionality is fundamentally rooted in the experiences of Black women, providing a framework that emphasises the complex subjectivities arising from overlapping social identities. By focusing on Black women's encounters with both racism and sexism, the framework encourages a critical examination of how multiple forms of marginalisation intersect, revealing the persistent effects of exclusion even within progressive feminist and anti-racist discourses (Crenshaw, 1989; Matsuda, 1987). However, this reliance on Black women's experiences as the "ideal" intersectional subjects raises two noteworthy challenges, as stated below.

Firstly, framing Black women as representative of intersectionality can unintentionally standardise their experiences, overlooking crucial variations like class, sexuality, and nationality. Crenshaw's (1989) foundational work, for example, while ground-breaking in exploring how race and gender meet, sometimes sidesteps other factors such as class, language, and ethnicity, which significantly shape individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). This limitation has the potential to squash the diversity within Black women's identities, potentially failing to capture the full spectrum of the intersecting oppressions experienced by women of colour. Secondly, while intersectionality is often celebrated as an innovative investigative tool, it largely reflects longstanding Black feminist thought rather than presenting distinctly new insights. Black feminist scholarship has long critiqued binary thinking, challenging simplistic race or gender frameworks by emphasising Black women's lived realities as a means of disrupting these binaries. Some scholars argue that intersectionality, while rebranding these efforts, has not yet demonstrated a clear theoretical progression beyond established contributions of Black feminism (Crenshaw, 1991). To advance

its theoretical scope, intersectionality must articulate its unique contribution, specifying how it meaningfully departs from or builds upon the insights of Black feminism.

Despite these critiques, intersectionality remains invaluable for analysing power dynamics across social identities. Tomlinson (2013) argues that intersectionality is, basically, an engagement with power, challenging the view that it solely focuses on identity. According to Tomlinson (2013), understanding which differences carry significance in specific contexts requires an analysis of power structures, not merely categorising identities. MacKinnon (2013) adds that while identities may appear static, they are the sharply defined outcomes of intersecting hierarchies, revealing how power shapes social dynamics rather than being the outcome of identity itself.

As this research study examines the experiences of Black women in rugby, its focus is on these power dynamics, seeking a deeper understanding of how race, gender, and other identities intersect and influence their lives. Through this framework, the study aims not only to highlight identity-based challenges but also to illustrate how power operates within and across these identities, inviting readers to recognise "which differences make a difference" (Tomlinson, 2013, p.1012). In exploring gender and racial disparities, this study sets out to contribute a nuanced perspective that respects the diversity existing within Black women's experiences, advocating for thoughtful engagement with both identity and power as intersecting forces.

2.3 Literature review

The surge in women's interest in terms of participation in sports, especially those that were traditionally dominated by men, has attracted significant attention in recent years (Tesnear & Surujlal, 2012). While studies like "Women's Rugby: A Qualitative Study of Female Players" shed light on this trend, Tesnear and Surujlal (2012) point out a notable gap, that is, the insufficient research on women's rugby in the South African context, particularly concerning the experiences of Black women in the sport. However, it is still important to emphasise that the experiences of being a Black woman in rugby is complex and multifaceted due to the intersecting identities. Essentially, Black women do not have the luxury of 'just' being rugby players. They must first deal with the intersections of existing as Black people in this space, then deal with the intersections

of being a woman in this space before they can deal with being Black women involved in this sport.

As noted by Crenshaw (1989), Black women possess multiple identities and roles, making their experiences nuanced and layered. They navigate not only the challenges of being women in a male-dominated sport but also the specific forms of discrimination faced by Black women, distinct from those encountered by Black men or White women. Thus, Black women in rugby must contend with the intersecting layers of their identity, as they face obstacles rooted in race, gender, and their intersection.

An examination of the literature on women's rugby reveals prevalent themes regarding women's performance in male-dominated environments (Howe, 2001; Tesnear & Surujlal, 2012). Additionally, a substantial body of research addresses the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the experiences of women being perceived as deviating from traditional gender norms. For instance, Russell (2004) discusses instances where female rugby players are labelled excessively masculine or categorised as lesbians, leading to experiences of violence and/or discrimination.

The exploration of women's rugby through the lenses of race and gender illuminates the complexities faced by Black female athletes. It underscores the need for conducting further research to comprehensively understand and address the intersecting challenges and experiences within this sporting context.

2.3.1 How rugby came into existence

The sport now fondly known as rugby came into existence when a schoolboy, William Webb Ellis, caught a ball during a football match and ran towards the opponents' goal posts (Smiles, 2012). Ellis put the ball down in what is now known as the try and that was the beginning of the sport under study (Smiles, 2012). In 1840, the first ever written rugby rules came into existence and in 1870 the Rugby Football Union (RFU) accepted these rules (Coetzee, 2016). In South Africa, the introduction of rugby to the country is attributed to a man named George Ogilvile, who was the principal of Diocesan school, also known as Bishops, in Cape Town from 1861 to 1885 (van der Berg, 2011). During the same time, rugby was being introduced in schools, and it is noted that the

British army started playing rugby in Cape Town as well. The first official rugby club in South Africa was formed in 1875 and was known as the Hamilton Rugby Club – it is officially regarded as the oldest rugby club in South Africa.

The first match between the Officers and the Civil Services occurred in Green Point, Cape Town, and was documented in the Cape Argus on 21 August 1862 (van der Berg, 2011). Rugby matches continued sporadically for a decade before a more organised structure emerged, leading to the establishment of the first rugby club in South Africa. The Hamilton Rugby Club was founded in 1875 and is recognised as the oldest rugby club in the country, followed by Villagers which came into existence in 1876. While this account of the inception of Black and Coloured rugby in South Africa does not claim to provide a comprehensive history of the sport, it serves to dispel the misconception that rugby was exclusively a White elitist sport until after 1994. It is widely believed that rugby was historically confined to White South Africans. The researcher aims to challenge this notion by delving into the historical background of South African rugby (Odendaal, 1995).

2.3.2 Rugby in coloured communities

As rugby spread throughout South Africa in the late 19th Century, it was embraced not only by the White population but also by Black and Brown communities. Rugby was undoubtedly the leading sport in the Cape. Nauright traces the beginning of Coloured rugby in Cape Town to 1886, when two unions were established in the city, each organising its own competition (Cupido, 2014). The Western Province Coloured Rugby Union (WPCRU) was formed in 1886, and the City and Suburban Rugby Union (CSRU) was established twelve years later, that is, in 1898. Rugby was promoted in Coloured schools because teachers believed it imparted valuable life skills, including physical and mental resilience as well as social cohesion. The sport quickly grew among the Coloured community in Cape Town, thus uniting the community (Bolligelo, 2006).

Coloured rugby expanded across South Africa, leading to the formation of the South African Coloured Rugby Football Board (SACRFB) in 1897 (Cupido, 2014). When the SACRFB was reconvened in 1898, it was attended by representatives from the Western Province, Eastern Province, Griqualand West, and Transvaal Coloured Unions. Today, Coloured rugby maintains a strong following in the Western Cape as well as other parts of the country, with significantly more

and more Coloured players representing the Springboks. In an interview conducted in June 2016, it was recounted the challenges the Coloured community faced in establishing their own rugby club in Cape Town. Motivated by their love for the game, they acquired land along the Liesbeek River through a loan from the Syfrets Trust, built their own facilities, and played there every Saturday. However, in the 1950s, the land was expropriated by the Apartheid Government under the guise of educational developments, and they received only seven thousand pounds. The community then relocated to the Cape Flats, Athlone, where they cleared bush land and created City Park, which is still in use today by the Western Province Rugby Union as an alternate playground to Newlands. This account highlights the historical passion Black and Brown communities have had for rugby and highlights that the apartheid system, not a lack of interest, was the primary barrier to their inclusion in the sport.

2.3.3 Rugby in Black communities

Rugby and cricket were the first sporting disciplines to be established among Black communities in South Africa's urban areas and were later followed by soccer and boxing (Nauright, 1997). This challenges the perception that soccer has always been the dominant sport among Black South Africans. Rugby played a vital role in the social life of Black communities, with strong club-based affiliations and passionate community support for players, who often continued playing into their 40s (Smiles, 2012).

The first Black teams emerged in Grahamstown, introduced by the Headmaster of St Andrews College, Reverend Mullins (Smiles, 2012). Stephan Katta formed the first Black rugby club in the then Port Elizabeth, now Gqeberha, in 1885 (Gary, 2004). Rugby historian Braber Ngozi, cited by Odendaal (19950, believes the first Black club was formed in KwaMpundu in 1887. Additional clubs like Orientals (1894), Morning Star, Rovers, Frontier, and Spring Rose followed (Odendaal, 1995).

The Eastern Cape became the hub of Black rugby, as evidenced by the 10 clubs that participated in the local competition, the Martin Cup, in 1934. This led to Black rugby also growing in the then-Transvaal, with clubs like Swallows and United coming on board, leading to the formation of the South African Bantu Rugby Board (SABRB) in 1935 (Odendaal, 1995). Despite differing

opinions on the first Black rugby club, it is clear that Black rugby has as long a history as that of White rugby in South Africa.

In the publication "Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa," Nauright (1997) claims Kimberley is the cradle of Black sport in South Africa, attracting diverse cultures during the1867 diamond rush. Blacks, Coloureds, and Whites flocked to Kimberley looking for opportunities in mining and auxiliary industries (Odendaal, 1995). The Griqualand West Colonial Rugby Football Union, formed in 1894, was likely South Africa's first non-racial sports organisation, including clubs of various ethnicities without discrimination based on colour, nationality, language, or religion. The term "Colonial" was deliberately used to include all Black groups in the Union (Odendaal, 1995). This introduction shows that not only did separate Coloured and Black rugby unions exist, but the first inclusive rugby union, the Griqualand West Colonial Rugby Football Union (GWCRFU), was formed as early as 1867. Eleven inter-racial test matches were played between teams such as the South African Coloureds and the South African Bantus, which were organised in response to the apartheid laws banning official tests for these federations (Bolligelo, 2006).

The facts cited above illustrate that, contrary to the prevailing opinion in the White rugby community that rugby's roots are predominantly in white communities, other ethnic groups in South Africa have a rich rugby heritage. This shows that transformation and development in South African rugby aim to revive the long-standing passion for the sport in Black and Coloured communities, which was momentarily suppressed during apartheid.

2.3.4 The 1995 Rugby World Cup

The story of the 1995 Rugby World Cup is one that is often portrayed as one that saw President Nelson Mandela using rugby as a vehicle towards meeting the challenge of balancing the aspirations of Black South Africans and the fears of White South Africans following the end of apartheid. The 1995 Rugby World Cup came less than a year into South Africa's transition to a democratic nation. Apartheid rule had loomed over South Africa for almost fifty years, and now the country had gone from being excluded from international rugby to be re-included therein, hosting and winning the Rugby World Cup (Vincent & Stevenson, 2010). This is reminiscent of

the imagery of Nelson Mandela, the newly elected president of democratic South Africa wearing the Number 6 Springbok jersey belonging to then Springbok Captain Francois Pienaar. The two would be seen celebrating together and taking in this victory on behalf of then 43 million South Africans. This moment symbolised more than just a rugby team winning a world cup, but rather, it represented a country that had successfully negotiated its transition from apartheid to democracy. It symbolised hope and the beginning of a new dawn for South Africa. Vincent and Stevenson (2010) wrote that the two sharing a platform embodied the symbolism of the new nation at its most optimistic moment, with Black and White citizens of South Africa coming together to triumph over adversity. The new nation would be successful, bold, and conquering. Moreover, it would be a 'rainbow' nation in which people of different skin colours would come together to produce something beautiful and inspiring.

2.3.5 The 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup

The 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup, held in New Zealand from October to November 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, showcased the growing prominence and competitiveness of women's rugby on the global stage. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the tournament successfully highlighted the resilience and skill characteristic of the participating teams. The South African women's team, also known as the Springbok Women, qualified for the rugby tournament, marking a significant achievement, and demonstrating the fast progress women's rugby is making in South Africa.

Although the Springbok Women did not advance past the pool stages, their participation was notable for several reasons. For instance, it provided invaluable experience and exposure for the players, contributing to the development of the sport within the country. The team's performance also highlighted areas for growth and improvement, which can be crucial for future training and strategic planning. Moreover, the tournament featured some historic moments and milestones for women's rugby, including increased media coverage, sponsorship, and fan engagement, which are essential for the growth of the sport. The Women's Rugby World Cup also emphasised the importance of support and investment in women's rugby, both at the grassroots and professional levels, thus ensuring sustainable development and competitive success on the international stage.

The 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup thus served as a pivotal event for evaluating the current state of women's rugby globally and within South Africa, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the sport. This context is critical for understanding the trajectory of women's rugby and the necessary steps towards the elevation of its status and performance in future international competitions.

2.3.6 Historical Development of Women's Rugby

Women's rugby has a relatively recent history compared in comparison with its male counterpart. The sport began to gain traction in the late 20th Century, and the first Women's Rugby World Cup was held in 1991. In South Africa, the development of women's rugby has been slow, facing numerous challenges. The Springbok Women's team played their first international test match only in 2004, and their first World Cup appearance was in 2006. Despite these late starts, the team has made significant strides, winning the Rugby Africa Women's Cup twice, that is, in 2019 and 2022, and they achieved their highest ranking of the eleventh place in September 2022 (SA Rugby, 2023).

While the historical development of rugby in South Africa is well-documented—particularly its origins in colonial schooling systems and its widespread uptake among men in Black and Coloured communities—there remains a notable absence of scholarship on the establishment and evolution of women's rugby teams. Unlike the relatively clear trajectory of school-based rugby structures for boys and men, the origins and formalisation of women's rugby remain under-researched. This lack of documentation limits a comprehensive understanding of how women's rugby has taken root in various communities and institutions, particularly for Black women. Acknowledging this gap is crucial, as it emphasizes the importance of this study's contribution to an emerging body of literature that seeks to centre the experiences of Black women in South African rugby, particularly in relation to belonging, advancement, and institutional support. The absence of a uniform development structure for women's rugby, especially in its early years, further emphasises the marginalisation of women in the sport and sets the foundation for the analysis presented in the closing chapter.

2.3.7 Media Representation of Women in Rugby

The media plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of female athletes. Studies have shown that female athletes often receive less coverage and are frequently portrayed in ways emphasising their femininity at the expense of their athleticism (Bruce, 2016). This often reinforces stereotypes and diminishes the recognition of their sporting achievements. Positive media representation is crucial for mitigating these stereotypes and promoting gender equality in sports (Fink, 2015). The increased visibility of women's rugby in the media can inspire young girls to participate in the sport, helping to normalise the presence of women in traditionally male-dominated sports.

2.3.8 Institutional support and policy impact

The growth of women's rugby is also heavily influenced by institutional support and the nature of policy framework. National and international rugby organisations play a pivotal role in promoting the sport among women through funding, development programmes, and inclusive policies. Initiatives such as the World Rugby's Women's Development Plan "Accelerating the Global Development" is a strategic initiative aimed at strengthening and expanding women's rugby worldwide. The plan focuses on increasing female participation, enhancing high-performance competitions, and promoting gender equity within the sport, aims to increase participation, improve competition structures, and enhance visibility (World Rugby, 2021). In South Africa, efforts to create a more standardised structure for girls' rugby and to develop grassroots programmes are essential for nurturing future talent and ensuring the sustainability of the sport (Posthumus, 2013).

2.3.9 Social and cultural impact

The participation of women in rugby also has broader social and cultural implications for society. Playing rugby can empower women, subverting traditional gender roles and providing them with a platform to express their strength and resilience (Chase, 2006). Moreover, the social bonds formed within rugby teams can offer significant emotional and social support, fostering a sense of community and belonging (Fields, 2005). The cultural acceptance of women in rugby can also promote gender equality and inclusivity in other areas of society. It challenges traditional gender stereotypes, encouraging workplace diversity and leadership opportunities for women (Eagly &

Carli, 2007). Increased media representation of women in sports also reshapes perceptions of femininity and capability (Cooky et al., 2013). Lastly, inclusive sports programs in schools empower young girls to defy gender norms (Hargreaves, 1994). These shifts can influence policy changes, such as equal pay advocacy (Brennan, 2021), and foster more equitable community attitudes (Coakley, 2009).

2.3.10 History of women's rugby in South Africa

The history of women's rugby in South Africa is reflective of a journey characterised by gradual development and growing recognition. There is currently no uniform structure for girls' rugby within South Africa, as there is no standardised format for the introduction of young girls to rugby and the development of their fundamental skills (Posthumus, 2013). This lack of structure poses significant challenges to the nurturing of young talent and the building of a strong foundation for the sport from an early age.

The South African national women's rugby team, the Springbok Women, played their first-ever international test match in 2004 (SA Rugby, 2025). Their debut in the Women's Rugby World Cup came into being in 2006, and they have participated in three World Cups. The team's performance in international competitions has shown a steady improvement, as highlighted by their victories in the Rugby Africa Women's Cup played in 2019 and 2022. These achievements underscore the team's growing competitiveness and potential on the continental stage.

In September 2022, the Springbok Women reached their highest-ever ranking, climbing to the eleventh place in the world rankings (SA Rugby, 2025). This milestone reflects the progress and development of women's rugby in South Africa, driven by increased support, better training facilities, and more competitive match opportunities. Despite these advancements, the path forward remains challenging for the Springbok Women. The absence of a standardised development structure for girls' rugby means that many potential players lack access to the resources and training opportunities needed for them to excel. Addressing this gap is crucial for the sustained growth and success of women's rugby in South Africa. Additionally, initiatives aimed at promoting women's rugby at the grassroots level, such as school and community programmes, are essential. Increased investment in coaching, facilities, and competitive

opportunities for young girls may help in cultivating a new generation of skilled players who can contribute immensely to the success of the national team. The history and current state of women's rugby in South Africa highlight both the progress made and the work that remains to be done. The achievements of the Springbok Women attest to a hopeful outlook for the future, emphasising the need for continued support and development to elevate the sport to greater heights.

2.3.11 Significance of rugby in South Africa

Sport has a massive impact not only on the lives of the participants, but also on communities and nations. This has been very evident in the post-2019 Rugby World Cup final that saw the Springbok Women lift the Webb Ellis Cup on 02 November 2019. Across the globe, sport has historically enforced the idea of racial segregation and power differences which always had White males coming out at the top of the power hierarchy. In the South African context, sport has historically and culturally been an embedded domain that has influenced developments and changes within the society (Nadvi et al., 2018).

Perhaps some of the most important contributions rugby has made to South Africa may include how the sport has been used to neutralise political tensions in the country and has acted as an instrument used to unite South Africans when apartheid ended (Wellings, 2011). President Nelson Mandela used rugby to raise the hopes of Black South Africans, easing the fears of White South Africans. The book titled 'Playing the Enemy; Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation,' written by John Carlin, describes how President Nelson Mandela needed something that would resonate and talked about around the 'braaivleis' throughout the Afrikaner community. The book describes how, during his time as a prisoner, Mandela came to realise the importance of rugby to the guards and the greater Afrikaans community. Mandela thus learned about rugby and used it to connect with his oppressors. He felt it would be easier for the Afrikaner to change their perceptions about him if they had something in common, such as the love of rugby. Mandela also felt that if he understood the Afrikaner better, the more conducive it would be to engage in a political debate with them (Hartley, 2009).

2.3.12 South Africa's racial history: Its influence on sport

South Africa's racial history is marked by a long and painful legacy of racial discrimination and segregation meted out to Black South Africans, particularly. For over 300 years, the country was

colonised and ruled by European powers, particularly the Dutch and the British, who established a system of racial segregation known as apartheid. Under apartheid, which lasted from 1948 to 1994, South Africa's White minority government implemented strict laws propagating racial segregation, effectively denying Black South Africans equal rights and opportunities in all areas of society, including education, employment, and sport. Black South Africans were not allowed to compete in mainstream sporting events and were forced to create their own leagues and teams (Black & Nauright, 1998).

During this time, sport became a battleground for racial equality and justice in South Africa. Black South African athletes were excluded from mainstream sporting events, forming their own leagues and teams, which were often under-resourced and under-supported. Despite these challenges, Black South African athletes persevered and continued to excel in football, rugby, and cricket. The 1995 Rugby World Cup exemplifies this milestone.

Today, South African sport remains heavily influenced by the country's racial history, with many sporting disciplines still reflecting the lingering effects of apartheid. While efforts have been made to promote greater racial equality and diversity in sport, there is need to ensure that all South Africans have equal opportunities to participate and excel in their chosen sports, regardless of their race or ethnicity (Black & Nauright, 1998).

2.3.13 Being a woman in sport: The influence of gender in sport

Being a woman in sport can be a complex experience shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. Women have been facing significant barriers to participation and success in many sports, including limited opportunities for training and competition, lower levels of funding and support, and persistent gender stereotypes and biases. Gender itself has a significant influence on female athletes, which can negatively impact how they are perceived, treated, and valued in the sporting world. Women may be judged more harshly on the basis of their appearance, behaviour, and performance, and may face greater scrutiny and criticism than their male counterparts. Women may also be subjected to sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination, both on and off the sporting field, which can significantly impact their mental health and well-being (Gregg & Gregg, 2017). Gender, however, can also be a source of empowerment and inspiration for female athletes,

who are often motivated by a desire to challenge gender norms and stereotypes and push for that which is possible for them in sport. Women athletes have achieved incredible feats of strength, skill, and endurance, and have become role models and trailblazers for future generations of female athletes (Pfister, 2010).

Ultimately, the influence of gender on sport is complex and multifaceted and requires ongoing attention and action to ensure that women have equal opportunities and support for them to participate and succeed in all areas of sport. This includes addressing gender-based barriers and biases, promoting gender diversity and inclusion, and celebrating the achievements and contributions of female athletes at all levels of sport.

2.3.14 The feminine identity or gender expression of women in sport

Sport greatly symbolises the construction of masculinity, heterosexuality and male identities (Lindsey et al., 2008). Despite their increased level of participation in the sporting world, female athletes have been put into traditional, sexualised discourses of femininity, which they display through their actions, appearance, and attitudes when competing in the sports. Their body language, haircuts, cosmetics, and wardrobe choices, as well as their interaction with other athletes and coaches, can all be a part of this expression (Henrichs-Beck & Szymanski, 2017).

In historically male-dominated sports, many female athletes find it difficult to express their femininity. Women could experience the pressure to live up to stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman, including the pressure to be nurturing, attractive, and emotional while displaying strength, ability, and competition on the field. There is no one "proper" manner for women to display their femininity in sports. Female athletes should be allowed to express themselves whatever they feel most comfortable and most fitting, whether that means embracing stereotypically feminine characteristics or rejecting them in favour of more gender-neutral or masculine ones. Each individual female athlete should decide how she wants to show herself on and off the field because the feminine identity or gender expression of women in sport is a complicated and varied concept.

2.3.15 Body and identity politics in rugby

Unfortunately, rather than reducing female stereotyping, the rise in women's participation has heightened awareness and concern about female athletes' sexuality, necessitating the negotiation of discourses surrounding the traditional ideals of femininity, size, and attractiveness (Caudwell, 1999). In rugby, a sport traditionally associated with physical toughness and aggression, female players often face additional scrutiny regarding their bodies and identities. The pressure to conform to societal norms of femininity can conflict with the physical demands and aesthetics of the sport. This tension can lead to a range of identity issues for female athletes, who must navigate expectations around body size, strength, and appearance, while also striving for athletic excellence (Scraton et al., 1999).

Moreover, female rugby players often contend with stereotypes that label them as less feminine or even question their sexuality. These stereotypes are rooted in broader societal attitudes that struggle to reconcile the image of women as both strong athletes and traditionally feminine individuals. Resultantly, female rugby players may experience a form of identity policing that challenges their legitimacy and acceptance within both the sport and society at large (Krane, 2001). The representation of female athletes in the media further complicates these issues. Media coverage frequently emphasises traditional feminine qualities such as beauty and grace, often at the expense of recognising athletic skill and achievement. This portrayal of female athletes reinforces narrow and often unrealistic standards of attractiveness, marginalising those who do not conform to these ideals (Knight & Giuliano, 2001).

Despite these challenges, many female rugby players embrace their identities as strong, capable athletes, thus challenging and redefining traditional gender norms. Their participation in rugby often typifies resistance against restrictive societal expectations, promoting a more inclusive and diverse understanding of femininity and athleticism (Chase, 2006). Addressing the body and identity politics in women's rugby requires challenging and dismantling stereotypes, promoting diverse representations of female athletes, and creating supportive environments that celebrate all aspects of their identities. This includes advocating for equitable media coverage, encouraging body positivity, and fostering inclusive team cultures that prioritise athletic performance over adherence to traditional gender norms, ideals of femininity, size, and attractiveness (Caudwell, 1999).

2.3.16 Women in sports and body image

The paradoxical characteristics of sportswomen's dual identities as females and athletes are well known to them. Female athletes experience a paradox in which they are proud of their powerful, muscled bodies while also being acutely aware that "their large bodies defy socially sanctioned femininity" (Krane et al., 2004, p. 329). With this context in mind, Krane et al. (2010) used a social identity perspective to investigate how female athletes negotiate their power and agency in the face of strict social norms that control their conduct and outward appearance. In their study, female college athletes were asked to participate in a photo session and select how they wanted to be portrayed. The findings showed that when given the option to describe themselves, the athletes stressed their physical prowess, strength, and athleticism. This finding contrasts with earlier research findings, which suggest that athletes are often acutely aware of the need to balance and compromise their athletic identities with their conventionally feminine ones (Krane et al., 2004). Krane et al. (2010) argue that when sport is contextualised within a male-dominated structure, traditional ideals of femininity take precedence. Yet, when expectations of femininity are lessened, female athletes might feel freer to choose how they want to be portrayed. Several survey participants emphasised the existence of additional (or dual) identities alongside their athletic selves.

The tension between athleticism and femininity is further complicated by the media's portrayal of female athletes, which often emphasise traditional feminine qualities such as beauty and grace, overshadowing the athletes' physical capabilities and accomplishments. This can lead to internal conflicts, as the female athletes may feel pressured to conform to societal expectations of femininity while also striving to excel in their sport (Daniels, 2009). Societal standards oblige female athletes to maintain a certain level of attractiveness, contradicting the physical demands and body types associated with high-level athletic performance. This pressure can lead to body image issues and eating disorders, as the athletes attempt to navigate the conflicting demands of athletic success and societal expectations of beauty (Thompson & Sherman, 2010).

Support systems, such as coaches, peers, and family, help female athletes manage societal pressures. Positive reinforcement and an emphasis on health and performance over appearance significantly mitigate the negative effects of these pressures (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). The cultural

acceptance of women in rugby challenges entrenched perceptions, such as the belief that women lack the physical strength and competitiveness required for contact sports (Hargreaves, 1994), or that sports leadership and media visibility are exclusively male domains (Cooky et al., 2013). By showcasing women's athletic capabilities and leadership, rugby promotes more inclusive attitudes toward women's roles in sports and society (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

2.3.17 The rugby body and its susceptibility to violence: Aggression and violence in sport

Aggression is the act of inflicting an unpleasant stimulus, whether physical, verbal or gestural, on another person. It is a behaviour, not an attitude, and, most importantly, it manifests itself in acts intentionally done to hurt someone (Leunes & Nation, 1989). Aggression has been a part of the sporting area for a very long time. Apart from wars, sports have been the only settings where acts of aggression were not only accepted but also welcomed and enthusiastically applauded in society.

Contrary, the term ‘violence’ specifically refers to the physical aspect of aggressiveness and "harmful behaviour that has no clear relevance to the competitive goals of sport and consequently pertains to occurrences of unrestrained violence outside the bounds of sport rules, rather than highly competitive behaviour within those boundaries" (Terry & Jackson, 1985, p. 27). Further, illegal and hostile bodily actions of aggression are considered violence. The athlete is considered assertive rather than aggressive if they do not desire to hurt the opponent and if they are utilising legal means to accomplish their objectives. Being assertive differs from being aggressive in that the goal is to create dominance rather than cause harm to the opponent (Thirer, 1994). Therefore, acts such as tackling on rugby are seen as assertive not aggressive as long as they are performed legally as part of the contest and without any malice. If the athlete’s intention was to inflict an injury on another, however, these same acts would represent aggression (Anshel, 1990).

In his book *Rethinking Aggression and Violence in Sport*, John Kerr (2005) recounts his personal experiences with aggression in sport, notably, during his time as a rugby player. He says that his main reason for playing rugby was that he enjoyed the sport; the thrill of running with the ball in hand and chasing the opposition, including the physical contact and competitiveness that the game requires in scrums and lineouts and the aggression and drive needed to knock the opposition over during play. He speaks on the satisfaction that came with being able to survive the intensity of a rugby game, where one needed to have some level of aggressiveness and violent contact due to

the intense physicality of the game. Kerr (2005) expressed that he found greater enjoyment in matches that were tougher and involved stronger opponents. Kerr (2005) illustrates that not all aggression in sport was inherently bad. In contact sports, especially, aggression and violence are intrinsic and positive elements that can be a tremendous source of pleasure for the participants.

2.3.18 Women, aggression, and violence

Violent or physically aggressive women are one of the most stigmatised groups in society (Gill, 2007). Women's ability to actively engage in physical violence or aggression and become antagonists in aggressive social contexts disrupts existing gender norms, which contributes to social instability by defying perceptions of femininity as passive, fragile, and disembodied. The women who are often categorised under these groups are those that participate in contact or combat sports, such as rugby. Gill (2007) suggests that violence can play an important role in the development of feminine identities. By examining the Jesters, a women's rugby team in Bordertown, on the border of England and Scotland, Gill (2007) examines the role of violence in the development of feminine identities within the team.

The relationship between gender formation and violence commonly features in many sporting contexts. Female athletes in contact sports often face the paradox of embracing aggression and physicality, while challenging traditional feminine norms. The acceptance and performance of aggression in rugby allow women to develop a sense of empowerment and agency, countering stereotypes that portray them as inherently non-violent and submissive (Liston et al., 2017). Additionally, the inclusion of women in aggressive sports settings challenges the historical exclusion of women from these domains, thus broadening the scope of what is considered acceptable female behaviour. This inclusion fosters a sense of solidarity and identity among female athletes, who find in their teams a space to express aspects of their identities that are often suppressed in broader society (Mennesson, 2000).

The prevalence of sexual violence within sports, including the sexual harassment and abuse of both male and female players has become topical. The dynamics of power and aggression in sports can create environments where such abuses occur, often perpetrated by coaches, teammates, or authority figures (Fasting & Sand, 2015). The culture of silence and victim-blaming within sports can exacerbate these issues, making it difficult for victims to come forward and seek justice. Sexual

assaults perpetrated by male sports teams have received considerable attention. The aggressive masculinity often celebrated in the male sports culture contributes to a permissive environment for sexual violence, reinforcing harmful gender norms and power imbalances (Messner, 1992). Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that include education, strict enforcement of policies against harassment and abuse, and fostering a culture of respect and equality within sports organisations (Brackenridge, 2001). By exploring the intersection of gender, aggression, and violence, researchers can better understand the complexities of female athletic identity and their broader implications for gender norms in society. It is essential to examine how these dynamics affect female athletes' experiences, thus creating safer and more inclusive sports environments.

2.4 Research questions

1. What are the experiences of Black female rugby players?
2. How do Black women negotiate their feminine and racial identities while playing rugby, a historically White and male-dominated sport?
3. What does it mean to be a Black woman who is a rugby player?
4. What is the role that race plays in rugby?
5. How does race and gender intersect through rugby?

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed review of the literature and theoretical framework relevant to this study, with a particular focus on the concept of intersectionality. The exploration of intersectionality as a tool for analysing power dynamics, societal influences, self-perception, and research methodology underscores its central role in understanding the lived experiences of Black women in rugby. The chapter also highlighted how intersectionality is deeply rooted in the experiences of Black women, serving as a critical lens through which race, gender, and social positioning intersect. The literature review traced the historical development of rugby, emphasizing its significance within different communities and its evolution into a platform for both inclusion and exclusion in South Africa. The gendered and racialised dynamics of the sport were critically examined, alongside the media's representation of women in rugby, institutional support structures, and the social and cultural impacts of rugby on women athletes. Themes such as body politics, violence, and gender expression further illuminated the complex experiences of

women in the sport. By combining theoretical insights with historical and contextual analyses, this chapter has laid the groundwork for the research inquiry. It highlights the gaps in literature concerning Black women in rugby and emphasizes the importance of intersectionality as a guiding framework. This foundation supports the methodological approach outlined in the next chapter and sets the stage for analysing the participants' narratives in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter describes the qualitative study approach adopted in exploring the experiences of Black South African women in rugby. It details the data collection techniques, sampling strategy, study design, data analysis methods and ethical considerations involved in the study. The qualitative approach was utilised to understand the participants' lived experiences, capturing the essence of their engagement with rugby.

3.2 Research design

This study was conducted within a qualitative research approach, emphasising the exploration of participants' personal experiences and perceptions. Qualitative research is particularly suited to uncovering the complexity and depth of lived experiences, fostering a rich understanding of how

individuals navigate significant life events (Gill, 2020). This approach was ideal for examining the intricate and deeply personal experiences of Black South African women in rugby, a context shaped by intersections of gender, race, and sport. The study aimed to uncover the essence of these experiences. The qualitative research design prioritises the lived experiences of individuals, particularly how they interpret and make sense of their worlds (Burdine et al., 2021). The qualitative research methods enabled the study to highlight the unique and shared aspects of participants' journeys, offering insights into their challenges, achievements, and negotiations within the sport.

The qualitative framework adopted for this study allowed for a nuanced and contextualised understanding of participants' narratives. By focusing on their subjective accounts, the study explicitly and implicitly explored the meanings within their stories, ensuring a deeper comprehension of their lived realities (Veling & McGinn, 2021). The qualitative approach is adaptable, which was instrumental in examining the complex socio-cultural and historical dimensions influencing participants' experiences. By considering the broader contexts in which their stories were embedded, this study illuminated how these women navigated their roles and identities within rugby, a space often shaped by systemic challenges and structural inequalities.

Qualitative research emphasises reflexivity and acknowledges the researcher's interpretive role. The researcher closely engaged with the participants' narratives, maintaining a reflexive stance to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' experiences, while recognising the influence of the researcher's own perspectives and preconceptions (Priya, 2021). This iterative process of interpretation, moving between individual narratives and broader themes, allowed for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, enabling participants to share their stories authentically and flexibly. This approach ensured that all relevant aspects of their experiences were captured, while allowing the researcher to explore contextual and relational elements in depth. Rooted in qualitative methodology, this research design offered a strong framework for investigating the lived experiences of Black South African women in rugby. By focusing on subjective experiences, interpretation, and context, the qualitative approach provided

valuable insights into their unique challenges and achievements within the sport (Gill, 2020; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021; Veling & McGinn, 2021).

3.3 Data collection method

The primary data collection method used was semi-structured interviews, which gave the participants the freedom to thoroughly reflect on their experiences, while maintaining a structured approach to ensure that all the relevant topics were covered (Groenland & Dana, 2020). This approach proved particularly effective in qualitative research, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into participants' responses thus obtaining richer, more detailed data (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The interview questions were carefully developed through a thorough review of the existing literature. This preparation ensured the questions covered a wide range of topics relevant to participants' experiences, including motivations, challenges, and perceptions related to their participation in rugby.

The interviews were semi-structured, enabling participants to express their thoughts and feelings while following predefined questions guiding the dialogue. The first interview was in person in Auckland Park, Johannesburg and the remaining seven interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Teams due to logistical and scheduling constraints. This adaptability was essential, as it allowed new themes and insights to emerge unexpectedly (Taherdoost, 2021). The conversational nature of the interviews aimed to make participants feel comfortable sharing their stories and experiences, aligning with the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework's focus on understanding personal, subjective experiences (Gill, 2020). This approach fostered the establishment of rapport and trust between the researcher and participants.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked a set of brief socio-demographic questions to gather background information such as their hometown, age or stage of life, educational background, and perceived socioeconomic status. In some instances, additional contextual details about their upbringing or schooling emerged organically during the interview and were included as part of the thematic analysis. All interviews were audio recorded—with participants' consent—and transcribed verbatim. Online interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording function, and the in-person interview was recorded using a mobile recording device.

Transcriptions were produced manually, with the aid of transcription software for initial drafts, followed by thorough review and editing to ensure accuracy and contextual fidelity.

Eight participants were selected for the study; the sample size was manageable, yet sufficient enough to allow for in-depth exploration of qualitative data (Campbell et al., 2020). A strategic, purposive sampling method was used, where participants were chosen on the basis of specific characteristics and the relevance of their experiences to the research questions (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). Being a Black South African woman actively involved in rugby, whether as a player, coach, or administrator, determined eligibility for participation in the study. This sampling approach ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences within the target population.

Purposive sampling was selected, as it ensured that the participants would provide rich, relevant, and varied perspectives on the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). This method enabled the selection of individuals most likely to offer rich and detailed information that highlights the phenomenon under investigation (Taherdoost, 2021). Women particularly involved in rugby were crucial to this research, as their experiences offered valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities they faced. This method ensured that the findings were rooted in the authentic experiences of those best informed about the subject, enhancing the depth and richness of the collected data.

Data collection and preliminary analysis processes took place concurrently through an iterative interview process, therefore enabling the researcher to refine the interview guide towards exploration of emerging themes and insights in subsequent interviews (Mezmir, 2020). For example, questions related to body image were added after they had come up as themes in the first two interviews. This process aligned with IPA principles, emphasising continuous interaction between data collection and analysis processes to deepen understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Groenland & Dana, 2020). By consistently reflecting on the data and incorporating new insights into the interview process, the researcher gained a thorough and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences.

Purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews provided a strong foundation for exploring the experiences of Black South African women in rugby. These methods aligned with the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Gill, 2020; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021), allowing for a deep and sophisticated understanding of participants' individual journeys. This methodological rigidity ensured that the research findings were rooted in the participants' real experiences.

3.4 Sampling strategy

The study's sample size involved eight participants, as guided by the concept of data saturation, a point at which additional data collection yields no new insights or information relevant to the research question (Thompson Burdine et al.,2021). In qualitative research, data saturation determines a study's sample size, ensuring the researcher gathers sufficient information on the events under investigation without unnecessary repetition (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). This approach prioritised depth over breadth to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the selected participants would bring rich, relevant experiences to the study. Participants for this non-probability sampling approach are chosen depending on certain characteristics and the relevance of their experiences to the research question (Campbell et al., 2020). For this study, the participants were Black South African women actively involved in rugby, whether as players, coaches, or administrators. This targeted strategy ensured that the collected data was both informative and representative of the population under study (Taherdoost, 2021).

In qualitative research, purposive sampling is highly effective, as it emphasises data depth and quality over quantity. The researcher selected individuals most likely to provide insightful and meaningful data relevant to aims of the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher could gather detailed and nuanced data reflecting the complexity of the participants' experiences. This approach aligned with the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework, which explores personal, lived experiences in depth (Gill, 2020). The rationale for selecting a small sample size stemmed from the nature of qualitative research, which prioritises detailed exploration over generalisability. The goal was not to produce statistically generalisable findings (Vignato et al., 2022), but to gain a thorough understanding of participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

This focus on depth allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of the data, illuminating the unique and varied experiences of Black South African women in rugby. Limiting the sample size to eight participants allowed the researcher closer engagement with each individual (Groenland & Dana, 2020).

Beyond purposive sampling, the iterative nature of the qualitative data collection process also contributed to data saturation. As themes and insights emerged, they guided the ongoing data collection process, ensuring that all relevant aspects of the phenomenon were thoroughly investigated (Mezmir, 2020). This iterative approach allowed the researcher to refine inquiries based on the initial findings, ensuring that the gathered data were both comprehensive and relevant. By continuously engaging with the data and integrating new insights into the research process, the researcher ensured that data saturation was achieved and that the conclusions were strong and relevant (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). By carefully selecting individuals with pertinent experiences and engaging closely with their narratives, this study provided a thorough and nuanced understanding of the experiences of Black South African women in rugby.

3.5 Participants

This study included eight participants, all Black women actively engaged in rugby, offering diverse perspectives on their experiences within the sport.

Participant 1 (Flora) is a 24-year-old woman raised by a single mother in Johannesburg. She is pursuing a higher certificate in Human Resource Development at the University of Johannesburg and engages in part-time coaching for the under-18 Golden Lions provincial rugby team, focusing on the development of rugby for young girls.

Participant 2 (Entle) attended all-girls schools, including Collegiate Junior School for Girls and Victoria Girls' High, where she exclusively played netball. She transitioned into rugby while she was pursuing her law studies at Nelson Mandela University (NMU). Her passion for the sport emerged after a friend introduced her to it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant 3 (Buhlebendalo) was born and raised in the Eastern Cape, spending her formative years in Queenstown, Kokstad, and Cradock. She later moved to KwaZulu-Natal in 2002 to pursue a degree in Sports Science. Her journey in rugby began at age 20, and by 2005, she was playing for the Sevens rugby team in KwaZulu-Natal. Buhlebendalo has represented South Africa as a Springbok, playing at the national level until her retirement in 2016. Currently, Buhlebendalo serves as a women's rugby administrator for a KwaZulu-Natal rugby union. Between December 2021 and February 2023, she also managed a Currie Cup team. She holds bachelor's degrees in Sports Science and Marketing and is pursuing an honours degree in Marketing.

Participant 4 (Kuhle), who has always enjoyed sports balancing netball, basketball and mini-cricket growing up, began playing rugby in matric. She qualified for SA Schools (The SA Schools team is a team chosen annually following the Under-18 Craven Week. Their debut match was in 1974, and in recent years they have participated in a locally-hosted international tournament, competing against teams from nations like England, Wales, France, and Italy (SA Rugby, 2025)) in her matric year; however, she was unable to participate as she had to repeat matric. She now plays provincial rugby. She holds an N6 qualification in Automotive Engineering.

Participant 5 (Lindelwa), born in Mount Frere, Eastern Cape, transitioned from soccer to rugby due to limited opportunities for women in soccer. She is completing her undergraduate degree in Microbiology and Entomology at the University of Fort Hare and plays as a utility back, balancing academics and athletics.

Participant 6 (Kelly), grew up in Bloemfontein, excelled in hockey at provincial and national levels before shifting to rugby. She graduated with a degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of the Free State and currently plays for the Cheetahs women's rugby team.

Participant 7 (Nomthandazo), from Tsholomnqa, rural area in the Eastern Cape, is completing her BSc in Human Movement Science online, while playing professionally for the Blue Bulls.

Participant 8 (Inaye), originally from the Free State, is pursuing an honours degree in Human Movement Sciences. She has been playing rugby since 2017, combining her academic aspirations with her passion for the sport.

3.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis, a flexible approach that allowed for identifying patterns and themes across participants' experiences, was used to analyse data. Thematic analysis is particularly effective in qualitative research because it provides a structured yet adaptable method of examining subjective perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process enabled an exploration of the nuanced, intersecting identities and experiences of Black South African women in rugby.

The data analysis process followed a series of phases. The initial stage involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' responses. During this familiarisation phase, early impressions of key themes, such as identity struggles and institutional bias emerged. For example, the repeated notion of "fighting for one's place twice" emphasised the dual struggles faced by Black women in rugby, allowing this phrase to serve as an initial code. One participant's comment, "Being a black woman in rugby means you have to fight for your place twice—once as a woman and again as a Black person," illustrated the compounding marginalisation these women encounter due to their intersecting identities.

Upon familiarisation with the data, open coding was applied, where significant portions of text were labelled with descriptive codes. In the example above, "fighting for one's place twice" was coded to represent themes of "intersectional identity struggle" and "compounded marginalisation." Such codes were essential for capturing the layered challenges facing Black women, encompassing both gender-based and race-based obstacles within the traditionally and predominantly male and White domain of rugby. As codes accumulated, the researcher organised them into broader themes. For instance, the recurring theme of "institutional bias" was evident in statements such as, "We practice on fields that don't even have lights; so, while the men's team is training with top-notch facilities, we're often left practicing in semi-darkness." This comment does not only highlight resource disparities but also points to systemic neglect of teams from Black institutions.

The researcher continuously refined themes to ensure coherence and relevance to the research question. For example, the theme, "Overcoming: Resource Disparities and Lack of Sponsorships" captured the financial and logistical challenges Black female rugby players face, particularly in securing adequate resources. This theme included specific codes such as “training in poor conditions” and “self-funding for equipment,” illustrating how financial strain affected the rugby players’ ability to fully participate in the sport. One participant explained, “It’s hard to focus on being a professional athlete when you’re worrying about how you will pay your bills,” emphasising the double burden these athletes carry owing to inadequate support.

Reflexivity played a key role throughout this thematic analysis process. As the researcher’s perspectives could influence theme development, the researcher engaged in regular reflection in order to minimise bias, debriefing sessions with the researchers’ supervisor helped maintain objectivity (Nowell et al., 2017). This reflexive approach was crucial within the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework, which emphasises understanding participants’ lived experiences within a structured, yet subjective, analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This was evident in examining the theme "Reflections on Identity," reflexive debriefing helped in ensuring that participants’ narratives about race and gender were interpreted authentically and were aligned with their intended meanings.

The theme "Reflections on Identity" emerged as a significant finding, reflecting the layered nature of the participants' experiences and the compounded marginalisation they face. Statements like, “You enter a room, and people already have two strikes against you: you’re Black and a woman,” highlighted the double bias encountered by these athletes. The theme "Overcoming: Perceptions of Professionalism" similarly emphasised the higher standards these women are expected to meet to gain recognition as professional athletes. One participant noted, “There’s a lot of pressure to always be perfect, to never have an off day. Making one mistake feels like it’s a reflection on all Black women in rugby, not only me.” This reflection was coded under “pressure of professionalism” and later integrated into the theme, illustrating the intersecting pressures these women face as both Black individuals and female athletes in a predominantly White, male sport.

By systematically coding and categorising these elements, thematic analysis allowed for an in-depth understanding of how Black women navigate institutional biases, resource inequalities, and perceptions of professionalism in rugby. The themes and examples extracted from the data highlighted the resilience of these athletes and the complex and multifaceted nature of their experiences, shedding light on the need for a more inclusive sporting environment that respects and supports Black female athletes. The thematic analysis approach allowed for a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. By identifying and exploring recurring themes in their narratives, this study provided rich, detailed insights into the lives of Black South African women in rugby. These themes not only highlighted individual experiences but also emphasised shared challenges and triumphs, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their unique journeys within the sport.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The sensitive nature of exploring personal experiences within a minority population made ethical considerations central to this research, protecting participants' dignity, rights, and well-being. Informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure they were fully aware of the study's purpose, their rights, and how safely their data would be handled (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The participants received comprehensive information about the research, including its objectives, methodology, potential risks, and benefits. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and reassured they could withdraw at any time without facing adverse consequences.

Throughout the study, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained to protect participants' personal information and identities. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and all identifying details were removed from the data (Zakharovskyi & Németh, 2021). Maintaining confidentiality was not only a moral obligation but was also used as a way of fostering trust, allowing participants to share their experiences openly and honestly. Data were securely stored, ensuring additional protection for participants' privacy (Kostere & Kostere, 2021).These confidentiality measures were clearly communicated to participants during the informed consent process.

Any research involving human participants must first go through this ethical clearance procedure, as it offers an unbiased evaluation of the research project's adherence to ethical values and criteria. This research was approved unconditionally by the university's human research ethics committee (non-medical). This ethical clearance was essential, confirming that the research was conducted responsibly and ethically, safeguarding participant's rights and welfare.

Use of Racial Terminology

In this thesis, racialised identifiers such as "Black," "Coloured," and "Brown" are capitalised to reflect their significance as socially constructed categories rooted in South Africa's apartheid and colonial histories, and their continued relevance in shaping lived experiences in the post-apartheid era. The capitalisation of these terms is intended to acknowledge their role not only as markers of racial classification, but as shared sociopolitical, cultural, and historical identities that inform the subjectivities of the participants in this study. This approach aligns with conventions in critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1988) and with guidelines such as those outlined by the Gunda Werner Institute (2019), which recommend capitalisation when such terms signify collective identity and political consciousness. In contrast, the term "white" is rendered in lowercase to reflect critical scholarship that interrogates the normative positioning of whiteness as the unmarked or invisible racial standard (see also Crenshaw, 1988). By clarifying these choices, I aim to ensure consistency and transparency in how racial categories are deployed throughout this research, particularly given the study's focus on the identity formation of Black women in South African rugby.

3.8 Credibility and trustworthiness

The significance of rigour was emphasised through the careful selection of a conceptual framework and the alignment of all research methods within that framework (Johnson et al., 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Rigor is further defined by its measures of trustworthiness (Cope, 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). This study established trustworthiness by considering the five trustworthiness elements identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1994), as referenced by Cope (2014, p. 89), which are: "credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability," and the authenticity of the research.

Klopper (2008) elaborates on these elements of trustworthiness by outlining specific criteria, some of which were implemented in this study. Credibility was enhanced through extensive engagement with the research material and peer review of the data analysis. Although the study's transferability is somewhat limited due to its specific context, data saturation and thorough description of the context could aid in its applicability to similar settings. To ensure confirmability, all research decisions and interpretations were meticulously documented for audit purposes. Additionally, the inclusion of participants' quotations in the research report supports the authenticity of the findings (Cope, 2014).

3.8.1 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which participants' bias, rather than researcher's, impacts the results (Thompson Burdine et al., 2021). To increase confirmability, triangulation was used using many approaches and data sources to support the conclusions. To find consistency and differences, this included matching the interview data with theoretical models and already published data sources (Mezmir, 2020). Reflexivity was also used, in which the researcher constantly considered their own prejudices, presumptions, and impact on the outcome of the study (St. Pierre, 2021). The researcher evaluated their part and made sure the results remained consistent with the experiences of the subjects (Vignato et al., 2022).

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability in research refers to the degree to which results may be used in different groups or settings (Campbell et al., 2020). Although qualitative research usually concentrates on particular settings, giving a detailed, dense account of the participants and the environment helps others to evaluate the relevance of the conclusions to many scenarios (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). To fully grasp the research setting, readers were given thorough explanations of the participants' origins, the rugby environment, and South Africa's socio-political backdrop. This thorough contextual background enabled the applicability of the results to various environments (Groenland & Dana, 2020).

Using techniques to improve credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020; Thompson Burdine et al., 2021; Zakharovskyi & Németh, 2021) can help

to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. These steps provided a strong foundation for the qualitative study, therefore guaranteeing reliable and significant results. These criteria not only guarantee high ethical and scientific standards but also provide insightful analyses that may guide further studies and fieldwork on women's sports, especially rugby.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology employed in this study, covering the research design, data collection techniques, sampling strategy, data analysis approach, and ethical considerations. The use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) this study adopted offered a strong framework for exploring the lived experiences of Black South African women in rugby, ensuring that their voices and narratives were authentically represented. The next chapter presents the research findings, focusing on the key themes emerging from the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents thematic findings elicited from the interviews conducted with Black female rugby players in South Africa. The study mainly investigated the experiences of these women on the sport traditionally dominated by White men and how they negotiated their identities in this context. The chapter initially examines the participants' demographic information then develops themes. The following themes were discussed in this chapter: Reflections of identity, community and support; challenges and barriers; motivation and fortitude; perceptions of professionalism; impact on the intersection of race and gender; the role of cultural identity; the evolution of self-perception and advocacy; and future aspirations. These themes aim to offer up a more holistic picture of intersectionality of race, gender, and identity in women's rugby.

4.2 Identity markers

The basic component of this study is the identity markers gathered from the participants, providing a scope through which their experiences on the rugby field may be examined and comprehended.

Knowing who these women are, where they come from, their stage of life, educational background, and their socioeconomic level fosters appreciation of their lived experiences. As Ray and Fellow (2020) emphasise, in research that examines intersectional identities, the value of understanding participants' personal stories cannot be overstated. These stories not only present participants' backgrounds but also highlight the diverse experiences within this group of Black female rugby players in South Africa. Through these narratives, researchers can capture the complexities of their identities, which are shaped by various factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status, providing deeper insights into how these elements intersect and influence their experiences both on and off the field.

The participants interviewed for this study were all Black women aged between 22 and 35 years. These women likely grew up in post-apartheid South Africa, a period marked by the nation's struggle to redefine its identity, while striving for racial integration and equality across all sectors, including sports. Hargreaves (1997) noted that the post-apartheid era ushered in attempts to transform South African sport from being a predominantly White sport to be a more inclusive, racially integrated environment. This historical context is crucial in understanding the experiences and perspectives of these women, as they navigated a transforming landscape in both society and sports.

Most players started rugby in their late teenage years, suggesting that, instead of family or cultural traditions, which might have influenced them if they were introduced to the sport earlier, their involvement in rugby likely came through school or community programmes. Their having started later may also reflect societal expectations and historical barriers that prevented them from playing sports like rugby. This observation is consistent with the findings of Williams et al. (2020), who explored how access to resources and opportunities in various phases of life frequently crosses with the development of ethnic-racial identity. The participants' entrance into rugby during adolescence or early adulthood reflects a period of more independence and access to larger social networks, helping them engage in a sport that had not been widely accessible to them before.

Additionally, most of these women have either been enrolled in higher education or are currently pursuing it alongside their rugby careers. Out of the eight (n=8) participants, five (n=5) were studying at a tertiary institution, while the remaining three (n=3) had already completed their

degrees. Their fields of study were diverse, ranging from Sports Science, Law, and Automotive Engineering to Microbiology and Entomology, Humanities, Human Resources, and Human Movement Sciences. This suggests that the participants not only break stereotypes associated with gender and race in rugby but also challenge the assumption that athletes prioritise sports over academics. Their involvement in such varied academic fields highlights their commitment to education, broadening the scope of their personal and professional aspirations beyond the sports arena. This reflects the reality that these women do not have the privilege of focusing solely on sports careers, indicating a need to secure alternative opportunities in fields offering more stability and long-term security.

Carpenter et al. (2020) investigate the socioeconomic effects of gender identity, and the extra challenges underprivileged groups sometimes experience in higher education in addition to participating in extracurricular sports. These women's academic and athletic obligations reflect not only their own will but also more general societal expectations and the pressures of excelling in several fields.

A key factor in understanding the diverse challenges faced by the participants is the geographical variety characterising their backgrounds, which introduces a range of socioeconomic contexts into the study. Participants from rural areas, for instance, may have had less access to formal sports programmes than their urban counterparts, potentially delaying their exposure to rugby and limiting their opportunities for advancement in the sport. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022) highlighted how geographic location, access to resources, and socioeconomic status can create disparities, supporting the need for demographic data to identify and address these inequities. Recognising these differences is essential for interpreting the thematic findings, as the society's socioeconomic conditions and regional limitations these women face heighten the barriers to pursuing rugby as a career.

Participants' demographic information enables a more complex investigation of how female rugby players negotiate their identities at the intersection of class, gender, and race. Intersectionality is a necessary framework for comprehending how several social identities interact to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020). For these Black female rugby players, their socioeconomic status and geographic location play significant roles in shaping their

identities, alongside race and gender. This intersectionality influences how they experience rugby, whether as a source of empowerment, marginalisation, or a complex blend of both, and how they are perceived within the rugby community.

The demographic data provides a crucial foundation for thematic analysis, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences of the participants in the realm of rugby. The identity markers collected in this study are not merely background information against which these experiences can be examined but are also essential for grasping the full complexity of those experiences. By incorporating specific details regarding age, geographic origin, educational background, and socioeconomic status, this study facilitates an exploration of how these factors intersect with race and gender to shape the identities and experiences of Black female rugby players in South Africa. This demographic diversity is pivotal for understanding the broader themes emerging from the interviews, as it highlights the multifaceted and often challenging ways these women navigate their participation in a sport that historically excluded them.

4.3 Thematic findings

4.3.1 Theme 1: Reflections on identity: The dual struggle of Black women in rugby

This theme illustrates how identity complexities impact Black women in rugby. Their journey intertwines gender and race, as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989), revealing how these dual identities amplify the challenges they encounter within rugby and beyond. The complexity of identity and representation emerged as one of the most consistent themes in the interviews, reflecting the layered nature of the participants' experiences. The intersection of their gender and racial identities profoundly shaped their rugby journeys, magnifying the challenges they faced both within the sport and the broader society. These identities are not separate but rather intertwine in ways that intensify their struggles. Three participants fittingly remarked:

> *"Being a Black woman in rugby means you have to fight for your place twice, once as a woman and again as a Black person"* (Participant 1*).*

> *"You are always learning. You are always the underdog. You have to work twice as hard. The people exposed to grassroots rugby were fortunate enough to have been exposed to it*

much earlier in their lives. So, yeah, I think it's a kind of an ongoing transition" (Participant 2).

"Dissecting the women's Springbok games, the reason why this team is moving forward is because there are lots of White people in there. In order for me to get there, I had to work twice as hard. If I was White, but being mediocre, that would have been enough" (Participant 3).

These reflections capture the dual struggle the women endure as they strive to belong within rugby spaces, where longstanding racial and gender biases often impede their full inclusion. Their voices reveal that these obstacles are not simply surface-level challenges but point to deep-seated cultural norms that continue to question the presence of Black women in rugby.

The notion of "fighting for one's place twice" emphasises the reality that these women are not only contending with the historical exclusion of women in a male-dominated sport but also grappling with the racialised history of rugby in South Africa. Traditionally viewed as a sport for White men, particularly within Afrikaans communities, rugby has often sidelined Black women. This dual battle illustrates how race and gender converge, as argued by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (2015), to create distinct experiences of discrimination and exclusion. These women must contend with additional layers of complexity, challenging not only gendered norms but also racial biases that question their belonging in the rugby world.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the sense of double marginalisation stemming from the participants' intersecting identities. Their experiences reflected how being both Black and female often resulted in feeling doubly excluded or underestimated in the rugby environment. A participant said:

"You enter a room, and people already have two strikes against you: you're Black and a woman. They seem to have already decided you don't belong before you even speak" (Participant 1).

This comment highlights how the intersection of multiple identities generates persistent prejudices and stereotypes confronting these women. The pressure to prove themselves is two-fold: they must

challenge the perception that women are less capable in the sport while simultaneously defying racial stereotypes that question their presence in a space traditionally occupied by White athletes.

Despite these barriers, participation in rugby also offers a space for empowerment and healing. For many of the interviewed women, rugby serves not only as a battleground for overcoming discrimination but also as a sanctuary for personal growth. These women reclaim power and agency, forging new identities transcending societal limitations. Their resilience in the face of adversity highlights how sport can become a vehicle for healing, offering them a platform to redefine themselves on their own terms.

Playing rugby has given then confidence and permeated the various aspects of their lives. The discipline, teamwork, and resilience learned on the rugby field have translated into fearlessness in other areas. One participant noted:

> *"Rugby has taught me to be fearless. I now know how to face obstacles head-on both on and off the pitch"* (Participant 4).

> *"First of all, I had to get over some fears. I had to get over the fear of putting my head into someone, knowing what could result and just hoping for the best. So, that was a personal challenge for me. It was like really getting used to the physicality, the physical requirement of rugby"* (Participant 2).

This newfound confidence highlights rugby's broader influence, helping to build a strong self-identity extending far beyond the sport.

Rugby has played a key role in reshaping the self-perception and identity of these Black female players. Through their participation in the sport, they have redefined strength, challenged conventional gender roles, and integrated cultural identity into their athletic personas. These experiences emphasise the importance of creating inclusive environments where all athletes, regardless of gender or race, can thrive. In embracing their identities and challenging societal norms, these women are paving the way for future generations and contributing to the ongoing fight for equality in sports.

This study's main goal was to explore the lived experiences of Black female rugby players, especially looking at how their identities as Black people and women interact in a sport that is known to be dominated by White men. The results of the interviews exposed a complex intersection of race and gender. One participant said:

> *"You're always aware that you stand out, that you don't quite fit the image of what people expect when they think of a rugby player"* (Participant 5).

This attitude captures the more general problem of visibility and acceptance in rugby, where the conventional view of a rugby player is still essentially White and male.

Collins and Bilge (2020) discuss intersectionality, where race and gender identities cross, creates a compounded experience of marginalisation. Intersectionality emphasises how overlapping social identities, such as race and gender, create special forms of discrimination that are not entirely reflected when these identities are separate. This meant negotiating a rugby culture that frequently does not acknowledge or allow the dual identities of the study's participants, thus:

> *"You always have to work twice as hard for you to be seen and recognised. As a Black person as well as a woman, you seem to be always trying to prove you belong here. This constant need to over-perform captures the larger social demands Black women encounter in many spheres, including sports"* (Participant 1).

The experiences of Black female rugby players reveal deep frustration caused by both overt and subtle forms of bias, comprehending the whole range of their obstacles and achievements in the sport. This study emphasises the special circumstances of Black female rugby players in a sport still struggling with issues of inclusivity and diversity by considering both race and gender as entwined elements of identity. A participant noted:

> *"Rugby is for everyone, but the systems in place don't always reflect that"* (Participant 7).

Black women belong in this sport just as much as everyone else. This claim not only addresses the tenacity of these women but also their part as change agents in rugby. Black female rugby players traverse a terrain shaped by both adversity and fortitude. For these women, the intersection of race and gender generates special obstacles but also gives them a strong sense of identity and direction.

Participants' narratives emphasise the need for a more inclusive and fair rugby that honours the efforts of every player, regardless of race or gender. Drawing on intersectionality as a framework helps this study to better grasp the difficult reality Black female rugby players experience, emphasising the need to tackle these problems to produce a more inclusive sport.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Overcoming: Institutional bias, resource disparities and limited sponsorships

4.3.2.1 Institutional bias

The participants frequently emphasised the blatant disparity in resources allocated to women's rugby teams, in comparison with men's teams. This disparity is especially pronounced when examining the distribution of funding, training facilities, and access to coaching staff. This scarcity not only limits the Black female rugby players' opportunities to grow and succeed in the sport but also highlights a larger issue of institutional neglect and discrimination.

Despite global advancements, Women's Rugby in South Africa continues to encounter challenges at the local level, both on and off the field. Economically, the sport struggles to attract funding and resources (Limenyade, 2020). Racial discrimination further exacerbates the challenges these players face. The participants described instances of biased officiating and exclusionary policies imposed by coaches and managers, thus limiting their development, opportunities, and visibility.

A participant from the University of Fort Hare shared:

> *"We spent more time arguing calls than playing a game where the referee's bias was so clear-cut. We were obviously not measuring ourselves against the other team, and this infuriated us since it appeared as though we were destined to fail"* (Participant 7).

> *"We played an 80-minute game, and we spent 70 minutes arguing with the referee at Stellenbosch; so, can you imagine? We even cried by the first half because of the calls she was making. The calls were wrong if I may put it that way and nothing was done about it. Her game was a cause for our feud we heard nothing after the game"* (Participant 7).

> *"The year 2019 was my first time to play rugby there [Stellenbosch]. There was a problem with the referee where I remember we made a mistake; the ball was turned over. And when a different University made the same mistake, they were given multiple chances to retake*

the penalty. So, being a Black woman in the sport and being from a Black institution makes our experience quite difficult. We are playing the game and being the officials at the same time" (Participant 7).

These transcripts speak to the systemic and intersectional obstacles these players encounter, particularly racial discrimination and gender inequality. The players were not just competing against the opposing team but also fighting a battle against unfair officiating in a male-dominated sport. Race and gender intersect to create compounded layers of oppression for Black female athletes. Hankivsky (2022) emphasises that understanding these layered experiences requires an intersectional approach, one that recognises how various social identities, race, gender, and often class, interact to create unique challenges. In rugby, a sport traditionally dominated by men, Black women are often left battling marginalisation on multiple fronts, confronting both the sexism and racial bias ingrained in the sports culture.

Despite these systemic barriers, the participants also demonstrated remarkable fortitude and a strong sense of identity. Their perseverance is not just about overcoming obstacles but also about thriving and asserting their presence in spaces that have historically excluded them. Carpenter et al. (2020) note that individuals with marginalised identities often develop coping strategies to navigate institutional barriers. The resilience shown by these women is evident in their continued dedication to the sport, their determination to succeed against the odds, and their ability to draw strength from their cultural heritage.

This fortitude represents surviving adversity and an active process of reclaiming space and identity in a sport where they are underrepresented. For these Black female rugby players, fortitude is not just about pushing through challenges but carving out a place where they can define their identity and flourish, despite the systemic forces working against them.

4.3.2.2 Resource disparity

The struggle to secure adequate resources and sponsorships is a significant hurdle facing Black female rugby players, magnifying the financial and logistical challenges within women's rugby. Limited sponsorship opportunities and a general lack of financial support mean these athletes are often required to balance the demands of professional training with economic pressures their male counterparts are less likely to experience. Without the sponsorships and partnerships that sustain

many men's teams, these players frequently feel that they lack the resources to fully commit themselves to the game, as their time and energy are split between training and finding ways of covering personal and professional expenses.

Participants explained how their lack of resources led to their teams being left to work with outdated or poor-quality equipment, further setting them back. A participant reported:

> *"We practice on fields that don't even have lights. So, while the men's team is training with top-notch facilities, we're often left practicing in semi-darkness"* (Participant 8).

This narrative clearly depicts the unequal footing on which these players are expected to compete. These stories of scarcity and struggle reveal the resilience of Black women in rugby, as they continue pushing forward even when the system is stacked against them. Their efforts speak to a broader need for equitable resource distribution within sports, which would allow the female athletes to compete on a level playing field and would foster a more inclusive and fairer environment across rugby and other competitive sports. One participant reported:

> *"You can find yourself quite often in a position where the environment most of the times does not take women's rugby as seriously as men's. That conviction can filter through everything, from the quality of coaches we get to the quality of physiotherapy you get to you know if you're strapped on game day. So, you know it's challenging pulling your weight as a player and not have that rewarded or at least reciprocated by an organisation that takes you seriously They switched our coaches out mid-season. The one coach wasn't performing, now we're just shuffling all coaches that are available. So it's a challenge taking yourself seriously, only to get in a space where you are not taken seriously"* (Participant 2).

> *"This takes the oomph out of me. There's no room to be the best player that you can be in a situation like that. So, I guess that's a challenge and definitely it's a resource thing. I think with women's rugby it's a resource issue"* (Participant 2).

These reflections attest to the sincere frustration and exhaustion that arise when female athletes invest deeply in their sport, only to be systemically neglected by the institutions responsible for

their development and care. The participant's experience underlines a pervasive lack of commitment to women's rugby, resulting in compromised support that adversely impacts access to quality coaching and medical care on game days. These basic resources, often taken for granted in men's rugby, become substantiated privileges for women, signalling to players that their efforts and potential are undervalued.

When a team undergoes mid-season coaching changes due to subpar performance, the players are reminded that women's rugby is often treated as a low priority sport, with organisational gaps affecting the consistency and quality of their training. This systemic undervaluing of women's rugby becomes an ongoing psychological hurdle, making it difficult for players to fully commit to their identity as athletes in an environment that does not reciprocate their dedication.

This type of structural inequality reinforces a harmful cycle: without serious investment and a stable support structure, female athletes find it challenging to reach their potential, which then serves as a flawed justification for the limited support they receive. It is crucial that these disparities get addressed, not just for the morale of these athletes but to ensure that women's rugby is able to thrive at all levels. Investing in the holistic needs of female rugby players by acknowledging their dedication and providing consistent resources, sports organisations can foster an environment where all athletes are and feel truly valued, and where excellence becomes achievable across the board. It was reported:

> *"It's another catch-22 situation. You're damned if you don't; you're damned if you do. You can say you know as a union. Make sure you guys have a field and training bags. The players can be like okoko ninga yenziyonke lento ngokunifuna size egymini (you haven't been doing all of this before, now you want us to go to gym). One has to start consistently. The consistency part of it is the most difficult thing. So, I think with resources you know you can work a bit harder as a woman, get to practice and play at national level. There aren't as many women rugby players as men. So, the pool is a bit smaller because of selection, but you have to work to get that same opportunity to represent your country"* (Participant 2).

This transcript captures the cyclical challenge within women's rugby, where both players and unions grapple with the need for consistent commitment. It speaks to a broader issue in women's

sports, often caught in a "catch-22" situation: organisations are hesitant to invest fully without guaranteed participation, while athletes may hesitate to commit themselves without dependable support. This cycle not only hinders growth but can foster frustration on both sides, with each feeling the other lacks dedication. The athlete here articulates the disparity in the effort needed to reach the same opportunities as men, highlighting the reality that women in sports frequently must go the extra mile just to prove their worth.

The idea that "someone has to start consistently" highlights the need for both reliable support from governing bodies and consistent participation from the athletes. However, the strain of limited resources and inconsistent investment demands more from female athletes, not only in physical effort but in fortitude and dedication. This added pressure places an extra burden on sportswomen to demonstrate value “in more ways than one,” suggesting that, for them, the pathway to success is measured not only by skill but by a sustained effort to be seen, recognised, and valued within their field. A participant provided the insight that reflects a call for a balanced, consistent approach where commitment and resources can flow equally. When this is achieved, an environment is created where the best players, regardless of gender, can succeed. Another participant described the mental toll this creates, saying:

> *"It's hard to focus on being a professional athlete when you're worrying about how you pay your bills"* (Participant 3).

For many, this financial strain limits their ability to develop fully as athletes. It affects everything from their access to quality training facilities and coaching to essential medical and nutritional support. Unlike men’s teams, which often benefit from cutting-edge equipment, dedicated training staff, and even media exposure that attracts sponsorships, women’s teams are left to work with minimal resources. This lack of investment has resulted in disparities in the quality of training, medical care, and overall support. These elements are critical in ensuring high-level performance and longevity in a demanding sport like rugby. It was reported:

> *“As far as opportunities, say a team manager or a player or referee, the male referee will always get paid more than their female counterparts. So, because you're a female, you get paid less. As females, we don't get as much recognition as the male counterparts. And then for females as players, the Blue Bulls, for instance, are the only franchise that actually*

contracts females, whereas the rest in the country do not pay females. They get like a match fee, anything between R1, 000 and R2, 500. The Blue Bulls, they do get some [money], but I'm not sure exactly how much, but they do have contracts" (Participant 3).

"And even being a referee, let's say you're a provincial game referee as a female, you get paid a R1, 500 for a game. And then you find the male counterparts for, you know, an under 21 match, getting paid R3, 000, and then for just to run touch as an assistant referee for a, a Currie Cup game, you get R3, 000. And if you referee that game, you get R5, 000. Whereas a woman's game at provincial level, which is equivalent to curry cup should be the same. And you still run the same for the same duration" (Participant 3).

This reflection by Participant 3 highlights the blatant gender-based inequities that female rugby players, managers, and referees face in South Africa, with unequal compensation and access to resources being the recurrent themes. The participant's account highlights that even with equal workloads and responsibilities, women in rugby are remunerated significantly less than their male counterparts, which speaks to the systemic undervaluation of women's contributions in sports. This disparity reflects broader trends identified by researchers like Pape (2020), who maintain that women's sports are often marginalised in funding and resource allocation despite comparable levels of commitment and performance.

The issues of limited contracts, insufficient match fees, and lack of access to the necessary resources such as medical aid, nutrition, and gym facilities contrast sharply with what male players typically receive. Studies such as the one conducted by Kane (2013) indicate that the economic disadvantages faced by female athletes contribute to long-term effects on their careers and personal lives, making it difficult for them to sustain themselves in the sport. The struggle for adequate compensation and recognition in rugby, mirrors findings in other sports sectors, where women report needing to work additional jobs or rely on family support to cover expenses, circumstances rarely encountered by male athletes.

Attention is also drawn to the discrepancies in pay for refereeing at provincial levels, where male referees earn significantly more than females for equivalent games and responsibilities. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) explain that these disparities are often rooted in deep-seated gender biases that impact valuation, with men's athletic contributions being seen as more 'marketable' or 'worthy'

of investment. This persistent undervaluation not only limits women's professional prospects but also reinforces the idea that their work in sports is of little importance or value.

The disparity in funding and resources also influences the way society perceives women's rugby. The limited support from sponsors and institutions reflects a belief that women's rugby is somehow "less valuable" than men's, which reinforces gender biases and makes it harder for women athletes to be recognised and respected as professionals in their field. This perception perpetuates a cycle: with fewer sponsorships, women's teams struggle for visibility and feel undervalued, which in turn reduces the willingness of companies and media outlets to invest in or promote women's rugby.

The gap in support for Black female rugby players extends beyond fans and into the sport's institutional framework, affecting their experience at almost every level. Despite finding a sense of belonging within their teams, many participants noted the consistent underfunding and lack of resources provided by larger rugby organisations. A participant put it:

> *"We do not have the same access to facilities, coaching, or even fundamental resources, including appropriate equipment. We seem like an afterthought"* (Participant 8).

This systemic neglect hinders Black female rugby players' progress, making it challenging to refine their skills or compete effectively at higher levels. The lack of investment is part of a broader societal trend that often downplays the efforts of women and people of colour in sports, eventually perpetuating inequality. To further complicate matters, some Black female players take on additional jobs to afford equipment and cover travel expenses, while their male counterparts often receive fully funded training and resources. Balancing these extra responsibilities leaves them fatigued before practice sessions even begin. Nevertheless, their love for the game and their commitment to proving themselves keep them on the field, exemplifying resilience despite significant obstacles.

The impact of limited resources affects the very structure of the women's rugby teams and their ability to attract and retain talented players. Without a robust financial foundation, female athletes may be forced to seek alternative employment, thus straining their ability to train consistently and compete at a higher level. This situation is particularly acute for Black female players who are already navigating racial biases in the sport. The lack of financial support reinforces a message

that women's rugby, and by extension, the athletes themselves, are not worthy of investment. This disparity supports the belief that women's rugby is less appreciated or valuable in contrast to men's rugby, in doing so complicating their attempts to be acknowledged as professionals in their field.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Overcoming: Perceptions of professionalism

Throughout the interviews, the theme of professionalism kept coming up, stressing the particular difficulties Black female rugby players have negotiating expectations in their sport, often feeling they must surpass their male and White colleagues to get the same degree of recognition. The participants regularly underlined the great expectations they were expected to meet, thus:

> *"There's a lot of pressure to always be perfect, to never have an off day"* (Participant 6).

> *"Making one mistake feels like it's a reflection on all Black women in rugby, not only me"* (Participant 1).

This pressure goes beyond simply fulfilling performance criteria on the field to include how these athletes are seen in terms of professionalism off the field. The pressure to keep a perfect image is exacerbated by the fact that their gender and racial identities put the women under great scrutiny. The intersectionality of these women's identities means that they are constantly negotiating their presence in a space that has historically been dominated by White men, thus creating extra challenges inhibiting their path to professionalism (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

The clear discrepancy in visibility and respect between men's and women's rugby was one of the main irritations voiced by the participants. Though they were professional athletes, these women sometimes felt as though they were being treated differently in comparison with their male counterparts. One participant, expressing a shared complaint about the lack of media coverage, sponsorship possibilities, and general investment in women's rugby, said:

> *"We're professional athletes, but we are not treated as such"* (Participant 8).

The question of professionalism was closely entwined with the more general theme of intersectionality. The participants' experiences highlight how the intersecting pressures of gender and colour shape their professional possibilities and results. Collins (2020) and Hankivsky (2022) have both explored how intersectionality shapes professional experiences, particularly for those

with many marginalised identities. The intersectional issues mean that these Black female rugby players have to negotiate not only their gender's expectations but also the racial dynamics embedded in the sport.

The major first step towards real professionalism and equality in rugby is raising the profile of Black women in these roles. The participants also mentioned the psychological and internal demands connected with professionalism. Their mental health and well-being reportedly suffered from their continuous need to prove themselves on and off the pitch. One participant said:

> *"You are always aware that you are representing more than just yourself, but your race, gender, and entire community"* (Participant 8).

In an environment where Black female athletes sometimes lack support systems, this sense of accountability can be taxing. Achieving true professionalism and equality in rugby requires amplifying the visibility and recognition of Black women. Participants highlighted the psychological strain of continuously proving themselves in a sport where they face marginalisation, which adversely impacts their mental health and wellbeing. This pressure is intensified by the responsibility of representing their race and gender, often without adequate support systems. Addressing these challenges demands the development of both mental health resources and strong community networks (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hargreaves, 1994).

The theme of professionalism emphasises the difficult and multifarious obstacles Black female rugby players must overcome in order to negotiate their careers. Their expectations, combined with the lack of visibility, appreciation, and support, create major obstacles to the attainment of actual professionalism. These women are driven by great love for the sport and a dedication to the clearing of the path for next generations; nevertheless, these women keep ahead of these challenges. Their stories highlight the need to invest more in women's rugby as well as the need to tackle intersectional issues that affect their employment life. These athletes are not only advocating for their own recognition but also for the larger evolution of the sport by elevating their voices and supporting change. A participant said:

> *"I mean I personally am someone that does not mind asking for help. I think it's because of how I was raised"* (Participant 1).

"So, if I'm stuck somewhere or forgotten my course, I'm going to go to the expert and not to the guy that's looking down on me. I'm going to go to the person who taught me, who took me for the course. The coach is always at our sessions. So, I think there are men who respect the fact that there are female coaches. And then there are men who question every single thing that we do. And I think last year, because it was my first-year coaching, I was still coming out of my shell. So, this year, I'm able to stand my ground and say, no. I made this call and I own it" (Participant 1).

"So, there's really nothing you can do about it besides standing your ground as a woman and listen. I went for an interview to get this job. I went to the courses to get this coaching job. I have the requirements for this job. So, whatever I plan, I'm planning it around the fact that these are my kids and when they lose, it's not you they're going to be pointing at, but it's me (Participant 1).

"That's a tough one, honestly. I won't lie to you. And I think I don't speak alone when I speak like this. I think there are women, female coaches, even outside of rugby, that have experienced what I've experienced. Where people, they're second guessing. You know whether they're experts or not. But they're being second guessed because they're women, unfortunately. So, one must give a reason for doing this. Yeah. You know'' (Participant 1).

The player offers a nuanced narrative of how perceptions of professionalism among women in coaching are often shaped by deeply ingrained biases that lead to being frequently second-guessed. Her experience highlights a systemic challenge that transcends rugby, a challenge that highlights that despite qualifications, there remains an implicit need for women in these roles to repeatedly prove their expertise. This experience aligns with research that has found women in male-dominated fields like sports often facing what Ridgeway and Correll (2004), call a presumption of incompetence,where their decisions and qualifications are subjected to more scrutiny than their male counterparts. This phenomenon is not unique to sports; it affects various sectors, especially those tied to leadership and decision-making, where female authority is frequently questioned or diminished.

The player-coach account of Flora (Participant 1) approach to seeking mentorship, where respect is foundational, reflects the negotiation women coaches often have to make between seeking

support and asserting authority. A research study conducted by Norman (2014) on female coaches in traditionally male-dominated sports shows that female coaches often seek allies within their organisations to legitimise their roles. This approach allows them to reinforce their professional standing without undermining their autonomy. This is especially true when confronting individuals who may undermine their authority. The player's insistence on accountability and responsibility when addressing her team exemplifies her commitment to professionalism. It aligns with principles outlined by authors such as Burton and Leberman (2017), who emphasise that women in coaching roles often embody a heightened sense of professionalism to offset doubts about their competency.

Flora's experiences with second-guessing also illustrate the broader social expectations and additional pressures faced by women in these roles. The reflection indicates that, while she is open to constructive feedback, it is essential for her to assert her qualifications and the process that brought her to this position, highlighting her resilience in pushing against a culture that questions women's decision-making. This need to justify decisions and authority is a recurring theme in literature on sports sociology, underscoring the critical role of self-advocacy in helping female coaches in maintaining professional integrity and counteract-biased perceptions (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007).

The experiences of the Black women in this study demonstrate the importance of professionalism in rugby; they highlight how the intersection of race and gender shapes their pursuit of both representation and career development within the sport. For these athletes, professionalism goes beyond simple participation; it is about breaking into a field that has long been exclusionary and aligning with a broader vision of equity and growth in rugby. Their presence on the field, as well as their calls for roles in coaching, management, and leadership, are not only efforts to secure a place in rugby but to also achieve meaningful visibility that advances professional and athletic opportunities for Black women across the sport.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Unseen no more: The visibility challenge in women's rugby

In the context of Black female rugby players, "being seen" goes beyond physical presence on the field; it is about visibility, recognition, and legitimacy within a sport that has traditionally overlooked or undervalued them. This concept of "being seen" encompasses a broader desire for

acknowledgment, not just for their skills and achievements, but for their right to exist in the sport without constant scrutiny or questioning of their place.

For Black female rugby players, being seen often means pushing against multiple forms of invisibility. Historically, rugby has prioritised male athletes, and within that context, Black women are even marginalised further. Their underrepresentation in media coverage, sponsorships, and leadership roles within rugby clubs only reinforces this invisibility, thus:

> *"So, we had two warm-up games before the varsity camp. We had an analysis session where the analyst said "Precious, why weren't you sliding here? Precious, why did you run skew here?" It's the technical things that can move a team forward. In the next game, there was an improvement because people saw most of the forwards running skew. So, forwards, next game, let's try straight in and it made such a huge difference when we played TUKS"* (Participant 4).

> *"We don't care that it's being recorded, but we want the opportunity to look back and fix our mistakes, which brings us back to exposure. That's why we want the recording"* (Participant 7).

This reflection reveals the great value athletes place on opportunities to be seen, assessed, and guided through constructive feedback, a process made possible through resources like video analysis. In women's rugby, as with many female sports, access to such resources often lags behind men's programmes, affecting both personal growth and the team's success. The opportunity to review game footage and correct mistakes provides athletes with a sense of visibility and legitimacy, aligning with Norman's (2014) findings establishing that female athletes and coaches desire more visibility and access to quality feedback as part of their professional growth.

Through seeing their errors and refining skills, players not only improve but feel "seen" in a way that acknowledges their professionalism and potential. This process of being observed and analysed, especially in a resource-scarce sport, highlights a critical component of equality in athletics, that is, the chance to demonstrate improvement and be recognised on an objective basis. A research study done by Franks et al. (2001) indicates that video analysis empowers athletes by

enhancing their self-reflection and skill development, reinforcing the notion that being "seen" through objective data and professional feedback is integral to growth.

Access to exposure mechanisms, such as game recording, challenges traditional disparities in resource distribution. Without such visibility tools, female athletes face a system that fails to recognise or reciprocate their commitment, leading to unequal development opportunities (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The participant's reflection not only speaks to her own motivation but also to the broader issue of visibility in women's sports. With consistent, accessible exposure, players can prove their worth on and off the field, which again emphasises the importance of being "seen" in both technical development and professional validation.

Visibility is directly tied to the social and financial resources available to these female athletes. When Black female rugby players are seen by sponsors, media, and fans, they are more likely to receive the support and resources necessary to thrive professionally. Conversely, the lack of visibility can directly impact their financial security, sponsorship opportunities, and access to the infrastructure that supports a professional career.

Efforts to increase visibility and support for Black female rugby players in South Africa are gradually gaining traction. Springbok captain, Siyamthanda (Siya) Kolisi, has been a vocal advocate, emphasising the need for the recognition and support of women's rugby, particularly for those from underrepresented communities. He uses his platform to highlight their achievements and challenges, inspiring both fans and stakeholders to enhance these athletes' visibility. His endorsement helps change the narrative around women's rugby, encouraging investment and broader public support, which can be critical for both awareness and funding.

Rugby Africa's *#TryAndStopUs* campaign is another significant initiative that promotes women across the continent by featuring players with inspiring stories, including some from South Africa. By spotlighting their journeys and achievements, the campaign aims to reshape perceptions around women's rugby and foster greater support and recognition across African nations.

For Black female rugby players, "being seen" is both a demand and a declaration. It challenges the status quo by affirming their place in rugby, not only as athletes but as role models and leaders.

By striving to be seen, these athletes are asserting their right to exist and excel in rugby, carving out space for themselves and future generations.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Representation and the quota system: A question of merit

One of the recurring themes emerging from the interviews was the discussion around the representation of Black women within the rugby team. Despite their hard work and commitment to the sport, these players often feel that their presence in rugby is questioned due to the implementation of the quota system. South African identity has long been influenced by racial quotas, divisions, assignments, and allocations rooted in socially constructed concepts of race and difference. Both legal frameworks and societal customs established a hierarchy that separated the rulers from the ruled, dictating the distribution of resources, services, and privileges across all spheres of life, including sports (Merett, 2011).

The quota system, which was designed to promote racial inclusivity in South African sports, mandates the inclusion of athletes from underrepresented groups, including Blacks. However, this policy, while intended to advance equity, has also led to unintended consequences, such as the perception that Black female players are "quota players" rather than deserving athletes solely on the basis of their talent and merit. The perception outlined above has contributed to feelings of doubt and marginalisation within the rugby team. Many of these players, despite their skills and dedication, feel that their merit to play rugby is continually under scrutiny. Instead of being celebrated for their accomplishments, their achievements are often overshadowed by questions about whether they earned their place on the field through hard work or were simply there to fulfil a racial quota. Resultantly, they not only have to prove their capabilities as women in a traditionally male-dominated sport but also as Black athletes whose presence is often reduced to mere fulfilment of a policy requirement. This sentiment, however, is not shared by all players. A participant shared her experience, thus:

> *"In South Africa, there's a quota that they have to reach in terms of having Black players in the team. So, a team can't have White people and only two Black people. You know, there's a certain quota that the coach has to meet. That means the coach must always go from province to province, picking people that are enough of colour and talented"* (Kelly, participant 6).

> *"In my experience, I've never experienced racism in the sport, but I have experienced the inequality characteristic of the sport. But, specifically, I've never experienced racism. But, I think it's because of the laws that SARU has put in place to prevent that from happening. Unfortunately, there are teams that are predominantly White. That's the honest truth and we're not going to fault them if they are harder workers than us. At the same time, you also need to take accountability and I deserve to be in the team. But I think it's hard for us to, as women, experience the racism because most players that are playing right now are Black"* (Kelly, participant 6).

This narrative captures a complex picture of both opportunity and inequality in South African women's rugby. The quota system requiring Black players, though rooted in inclusivity goals, is a contentious tool in a landscape where racial and gender dynamics intersect with structural inequities. Participant P's acknowledgment of the efforts of the South African Rugby Union (SARU) to prevent racial exclusion by implementing this policy hints at the broader issues of transformation and representation. According to research by Anderson and McCormack (2018), while quotas in sport can foster diversity, they may also create unintended tensions around the perception of merit, particularly when Black athletes are sometimes seen as meeting quotas rather than being included merely for their skills.

Also, of significance was this participant's experience, expressing that she has not encountered explicit racism but has felt the inequality within the sport, echoes challenges documented in global studies on affirmative action and representation in sports (Coakley & Pike, 2014). These inequalities, from access to training facilities to professional recognition, often disproportionately affect Black women who already struggle against systemic barriers. However, her reflection on "hard work" illustrates how merit and representation in sport continue to be complexly interwoven. While some may attribute representation in teams purely to quota requirements, her point that Black player, particularly women, are rising on the basis of merit highlights the drive and talent of these players, which stand as evidence of their belonging and capability in the sport.

Her comment on Black women being the predominant players in women's rugby challenges the lingering stereotypes undervaluing Black women's roles in the sport. As suggested by Walker (2015), such narratives shift public perceptions of athletes and broadening the recognition of Black

women in rugby. This highlights the dual need for both representation policies and genuine structural support to ensure Black women are seen for their skills and hard work, rather than merely for fulfilling a quota. One participant said:

> *"Look, we live in a country where there's a quota system. I would have expected that they would take in a team, just what needs to be there. Then, when I got there, it's the total opposite. Literally, if you're good, you're good. And you're in and if you're not tough, we work on it, and we come back next time and we do it harder. But, I think it puts you at ease when you can identify with someone. And then you don't feel like an outsider. The reason is that if they can be that comfortable in their skin doing this, it empowers me to do the same"* (Inaye, participant 8).

The above transcript speaks to the transformative potential of sport environments where selection is truly based on merit rather than quota requirements. Despite South Africa's quota system, which aims to enhance diversity in sport, Inaye''s experience reveals that in practice, the priority on skill can overshadow demographic targets, placing emphasis on performance and personal drive. This merit-based structure has allowed her to see her value on the team as independent of any representational expectations, which supports the development of a more authentic sense of belonging. It reinforces what Chen and Mason (2019) describe as "earned inclusion," where athletes feel empowered by meritocratic systems that recognise and reward talent.

It is noteworthy that the presence of role models in the team who are "comfortable in their skin" has offered Participant R not only a sense of acceptance but a vision of possibility within the space. Collins and Kay (2014) have argued that when female athletes can relate to and identify with their teammates, it fosters a sense of community and shared identity, which reinforces confidence and self-efficacy in individual athletes. This peer support model echoes the findings of Kane (2013), which suggest that representation among peers can dismantle feelings of exclusion, particularly for women in historically male-dominated sports. The ability to see others navigating the same challenges, whether structural or interpersonal, can indeed foster a powerful "can-do" mentality within these athletes.

Inaye's observations ultimately reveal the profound psychological impact of merit-based systems and representative role models, suggesting that inclusivity in sports can fundamentally change how

athletes perceive their potential. This dual effect of “belonging” and “inspiration” highlights the need for diverse yet genuinely inclusive environments that transcend tokenism, truly celebrating the capabilities of each athlete and individual.

The tension created by this dual burden, a struggle to be seen as legitimate athletes and not merely quota fillers, complicates their experiences of identity within the rugby environment. The sense that their merit is constantly questioned can erode their confidence and prevent them from fully integrating into the team or feeling empowered by their accomplishments. These players must work twice as hard to gain the same recognition as their White or male counterparts, further magnifying their fight for equality both within the sport and the society.

Moreover, this dual struggle reveals the broader societal issue of representation, where efforts to increase diversity in historically exclusive spaces are met with resistance or suspicion. The players' experiences reflect not just the difficulties of representation in rugby but also highlight the complexities of navigating a system that promotes inclusivity yet often undermines the legitimacy of those it aims to empower. As suggested by Crenshaw’s (2013) Intersectionality Theory, these women are not only battling sexism or racism in isolation but also facing the compounded effects of both, as their identities as Black women position them at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

This ongoing tension between representation through the quota system and the questioning of merit brings reveals the difficult realities confronting these women as they strive for equal recognition in rugby. It also raises larger questions about how policies of inclusivity can be implemented in ways that support rather than undermine the legitimacy of marginalised groups within sports and other fields.

4.3.6 Theme 6: Defying gender norms

The interview data reveals the profound impact rugby has had on the self-perception and identity of Black female players, demonstrating how the sport has been a transformative force in their lives. Rugby has redefined their understanding of strength and ability, both physically and emotionally. For many, it has provided a space to challenge conventional gender roles and societal expectations. By embracing a sport that celebrates strength, these Black women could redefine their own

femininity and challenges the limitations society often imposes on women's physicality. One participant stated:

> *"Rugby has changed the way I see myself. It has helped me to realise that, both physically and psychologically, I am stronger than I ever would have imagined"* (Kuhle, participant 4).

This highlights how rugby has not only altered their self-perception but also empowered them to recognise their mental and physical resilience, both on and off the field. This change in perspective redefined how they viewed their bodies and cultivated a newfound confidence in their physical capabilities and presence.

This shift in self-perception is especially significant in the context of broader societal norms, with physicality in rugby challenging the traditional notions of femininity often associated with softness and passivity. Several participants confirmed that rugby allowed them to embrace their bodies for their strength and functionality, rather than conformity to conventional beauty standards. One participant shared:

> *"I always felt I had to fit into a certain mould of what a woman should look like before playing rugby. Rugby, however, has helped me to value my body for its ability rather than merely for its appearance"* (Participant 5).

This shift in the women's perspective enabled them to redefine their identities on their own terms, transcending externally imposed gender stereotypes and norms (Diamond, 2020).

Additionally, rugby has provided these women with a means to inspire others and become role models. In breaking stereotypes, they have paved the way for other women, particularly Black women, to pursue their interests freely, regardless of societal expectations. They epitomise strength, resilience, and coexistence of femininity and physical power. For younger generations, this visibility is crucial, as it shows that women can excel in any field, including those traditionally dominated by men.

This personal victory is a step toward the reshaping of societal narratives around gender and strength. By participating in rugby, these women are actively contributing to a broader cultural

shift, challenging stereotypes and expanding the accepted definitions of a woman. Their experiences highlight the importance of inclusive spaces in sports, where all individuals, regardless of gender, can redefine their identities and experience the empowering impact of physicality and resilience.

4.3.6.1: Defying gender norms:Athleticism redefined

Participants' experiences reveal how rugby has reshaped their body image and perception, creating a unique relationship between athleticism and self-identity. Many of these women navigate significant pressures surrounding their appearance, stemming from both societal expectations and the demands of the sport. One participant expressed:

> *"You always feel under pressure to look like an athlete. You start feeling like an athlete because you will be eliminating the pressure"* (Participant 5).

The expectation to maintain a lean, toned physique is often tied to confidence on the field, creating a layered relationship with a physical form and self-esteem. For some individuals, this pressure leads to conflicts around food or exercise. One player shared her experience, trying to manage her body image concerns. She said:

> *"Sometimes, you develop a bad relationship with food as you will be trying so hard to avoid gaining weight"* (Participant 1).

This struggle reveals the complexity of body image within a physically intense sport like rugby, as players strive to balance their health, performance, and sense of femininity. In contrast, other participants described rugby as a freeing experience. One participant noted:

> *"Rugby is part of why I love my body so much...I started appreciating even having legs"* (Participant 6).

This sentiment underscores the liberating aspect of rugby, with many female players finding a sense of self-acceptance that transcends the conventional standards of beauty.

Additionally, some athletes take pride in the muscle and strength they gain through training, even if it challenges societal norms around femininity. One other participant intimated:

> *"I just want to look more physically fit. I love seeing myself having biceps"* (Participant 6).

The participant emphasised how rugby not only demands but also celebrates physical strength. Rugby, therefore, is seen by these women as a space where they can redefine athleticism, embracing diverse body types and capacities that defy traditional feminine expectations.

Many of the women indicated how playing rugby has helped them accept parts of who they are that they may have previously had trouble with, especially when it came to societal expectations of femininity. One participant said:

> *"Before playing rugby, I always felt like I had to fit into a certain mould of what a woman should look like"* (Participant 6)…
>
> *"But rugby has taught me to appreciate my body for what it can do, not just how it looks"* (Participant 6).

Many women feel obligated to follow traditional beauty standards, but this new perception is very different. Through rugby, these women have learnt to value their bodies not for how they look but for how strong, quick, and able they are. Some participants honestly said:

> *"Rugby has changed the way I see myself"* (Participant 7).
>
> *"It made me realise that I'm stronger, both physically and mentally, than I ever thought I could be* (Participant 7).

Rugby has changed the way the participants see themselves in ways that go beyond the physical demands of the sport. The quote cited above sums up those changes. Rugby has been a place where people have found strengths and skills that they did not know they had. Because the sport is so physical and requires a lot of mental toughness, it has pushed these women to find and embrace new parts of who they are.

The mental and physical challenges of rugby have a lot to do with how people see themselves changing over time. Another participant said:

> *"Out there on the pitch, you have to dig deep and find the strength you didn't know you had. It's not just about the physical game; it's about pushing through mental barriers and proving to yourself that you can do it"* (Participant 2).

Rugby is both a physical and mental battleground. For these women, each game is a chance to push themselves past their supposed limits and mental blocks, coming out stronger and surer of themselves.

This new definition of beauty and femininity gives the respondents more power because it lets them set their own standards on their own terms. Rugby has given many the freedom to contradict what society says is right and accept their bodies without feeling bad about it or doubting themselves. One participant said:

> *"Rugby has given me the courage to be myself without worrying about what other people think"* (Participant 3).

These women's newfound confidence affects several areas of their lives besides rugby. It has changed how they handle their jobs, relationships, and personal goals.

This exploration of body image and confidence in rugby highlights how these athletes are not just challenging stereotypes but also shaping new narratives around what it means to be a female athlete, especially a Black woman in a largely male-dominated sport. Through participation, they are broadening definitions of athleticism and making space for a diverse range of experiences and expressions, creating a more inclusive model of what it means to embody strength and resilience.

4.3.7 Theme 7: Beyond the field: The role of community and support in empowering the women's game

The great sense of community and support these women discover within their rugby teams became another major topic that surfaced from the interviews. Reflecting on the strong emotional and social ties created by their shared experiences and challenges, many participants described their

teams as "a second family" or "a sisterhood," and not only as a group of people engaging in a sport. One participant underlined this aspect of community, saying:

> *"Rugby gives me a sense of belonging that I don't always find elsewhere* (Participant 5).

This comment emphasises the important part these groups play in creating a welcoming environment where women may feel appreciated and accepted.

Given the unique challenges faced by Black female rugby players, the concept of sisterhood within the sport takes on special importance; it goes beyond sport, forming a close-knit community where shared experiences create deep social and emotional bonds and serves as a 'second family' or 'sisterhood' where they feel valued and understood. Their intersecting identities of race and gender often lead to exclusion or marginalisation in broader social groups, such as predominantly male rugby circles, racially homogenous teams, or even wider community spaces where traditional gender roles are emphasised. This sisterhood becomes a vital support system that allows them to navigate the complexities of being both Black and female in environments that may not fully accept or acknowledge their presence and contributions. However, inside of the environment created by being a part of their rugby teams, they find a place where they might freely express their identities and find support among others with similar lived experiences. Helping them negotiate the sometimes-difficult reality of being a Black woman in a male-dominated sport, this internal community becomes an essential source of emotional and psychological support. One participant briefly stated:

> *"When we're on the pitch together, it doesn't matter what the world outside thinks of us. We keep strong because we are here for one another"* (Participant 7).

This feeling of sisterhood and community within the teams speaks to the concept of ethnic-racial identity development developed by Williams et al. (2020).

Williams et al. (2020) emphasise how individuals' sense of self is shaped through the intersection of race, ethnicity, and cultural experiences. Their research contends that ethnic-racial identity is not static but develops over time and is influenced by personal experiences, social context, and exposure to racial and ethnic dynamics. This process is particularly important for marginalised groups, as they often face unique challenges navigating societal expectations, stereotypes, and

systemic inequalities. For Black female rugby players, this development is especially relevant, as their identities are shaped by both racial and gendered experiences within a historically exclusionary sport like rugby. These challenges often intensify as they reconcile their personal sense of identity with the broader societal perceptions and prejudices they encounter.

This highlights the opportunity these players have in terms of developing a positive and affirming identity through their involvement in rugby, an identity that may be challenged or undermined in other areas of their lives. Within their teams, they often find camaraderie and mutual support which help them build resilience against the social pressures and stereotypes that seek to diminish their confidence and self-worth.

One participant fondly described her experience of being in a team in this way:

> *"If feels like you have a lot of siblings, there's a lot of fun. It feels like sometimes you have a big and little sister. I feel like a kid and coach. It's just good times. It's being part of a family that isn't necessarily your family. It's going to teach you other things that are not related to school or it's going to distract you from other things that may be bothering you"* (Participant 8).

However, this sense of unity is complex. While the team environment may offer a reprieve from overt discrimination, the does not suggest that the challenges of race and gender are entirely absent. The unity within the team is not always complete or entirely free of underlying tensions, reflecting broader societal dynamics that are capable of influencing relationships and experiences, even in this more supportive space.

Though many participants noted the clear discrepancy in the degree of support they receive from the larger community, especially in relation to the support given to male rugby teams, the internal support within their teams was reportedly strong. Among the participants, this discrepancy caused regular annoyance and disappointment. One participant said:

> *"When the men play, the stands are full, but when it's us, it's like nobody cares"* (Participant 5).

Many other participants echoed the same feeling, having also experienced playing in front of small audiences and getting little media or public attention. This lack of external support not only diminishes the appreciation of their efforts but also props up the racial and gender inequalities that are associated with rugby. Simply because they are women, especially Black women, the participants felt underappreciated and disregarded. One participant said:

> *"It's disheartening"* (Participant 5).

Another participant remarked:

> *"We have more to prove, thus we work, if not more than the men. But the stadium is practically vacant when it comes time for people to show up and help us"* (Participant 5).

This lack of visibility and support from the larger community sharply contrasts with the overwhelming support that male rugby teams are getting, which frequently translates into better funding, more resources, and more chances for advancement.

The intersectionality of the players' identities adds another level of complexity to this fight for acceptance and support. Women in male-dominated sports often face extra difficulties related to their gender and, as Skyba and Tkachenko (2021) pointed out, these difficulties become especially more noticeable when combined with racial identity. Along with advocating racial equality, which frequently puts the participants in a position of having to defend their presence and prove their worthiness in ways that their male or White counterparts would not, the participants were also fighting for gender equality in rugby.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the strong internal community and support within their teams provide a necessary counterpoint. Their colleagues' solidarity enables them to keep on demanding more respect and equality in the sport, thus overcoming obstacles. One participant considered this, saying:

> *"We support each other even though the outer world doesn't always support us. We are kept going by that. We play for each other just as much as we play for ourselves"* (Participant 4).

This mutual support goes beyond just being teammates, as it appears to be a friendship. It is an act of resistance against the forces bent on marginalising them. It is about asserting their place within a sport that has traditionally excluded them and a community that supports their aspirations and experiences. It was reported:

> *"Well, starting off with my family, I feel like playing rugby and telling them I play rugby. I think that is rooted in the fact that both my parents used to play sport. My dad played soccer up until he was 25, and my mom used to play netball up until she gave birth to my siblings. I feel like being part of them. I feel Black people have never been given the opportunity to actually use sport as a career"* (Participant 4).

> *"When it comes to women being supported in sports and specifically women in rugby (**sighs**), it's been a touch phase because here at school we do not get much support at all. The only support we get is from half of the boys' team, and not the whole team and for the provincial team, Border Rugby, it's still the same. The support we get is from the people that we know, the people that have seen us play. I feel that if women's rugby was supported, then so many talented people would actually make a difference on the national team, moving on to the international level. I feel it's really not fair on the part of women. I feel like this is not only an experience when it comes to women's rugby, but also to any women's team or sports that has been "masculinized"* (Participant 4).

Understanding the experiences of Black women in rugby hugely depends on the community and the available support system. Although the junction of their racial and gender identities presents major difficulties, the internal support within their teams offers a vital source of strength and belonging. Still, the lack of more general institutional and community support emphasises the continuous fight for equality and respect in the sport. These women are pioneer participants questioning the status quo and advocating a more inclusive and fair future in rugby. Their narratives highlight the need for the community to preserve their involvement in the sport and to confront the institutional obstacles still restricting their chances.

4.3.8 Theme 8: Between passion and prejudice: The struggles of Black women in rugby

Despite the supportive team environment, Black female rugby players encounter numerous challenges stemming from racial and gender discrimination. One of the most consistent issues the

participants mentioned was resource inequality between women's and men's rugby teams. The interviews revealed a wide range of difficulties and obstacles they faced, many of which are strongly rooted in both racial and gender discrimination. These obstacles not only impact their performance on the pitch but also their general experience and development inside the sport. One of the most commonly mentioned problems was the clear difference in infrastructure and resources between the two teams. This comment captures a recurrent theme of unequal access to resources, which greatly hinders these women's capacity to compete and grow their abilities at the same level as their male counterparts.

The lack of sufficient resources is still a major challenge. The participants reported inadequate training facilities, insufficient medical support and limited access to professional coaching. A participant noted:

> *"We receive less medical attention than the men when we are hurt. We have to make do with what we have, and occasionally, that's just not enough"* (Participant 8).

Apart from their physical condition, the insufficient support compromises their confidence and sense of value within the sport. One of the gender prejudices permeating rugby at all levels is the sense of being treated as "less than" their male counterparts. While these resource disparities are not exclusive to Black female rugby players, the racial dynamics in the sport aggravate the differences evident in resource allocation. Many participants related stories of overt racism, not only perpetrated by rivals but also by those who should be objective, including officials and referees. One participant related:

> *"We spent more time in arguing calls than playing in a game where the referee's bias was so clear"* (Participant 8).

This encounter reflects the larger difficulties Black women in rugby encounter where their legitimacy and abilities are sometimes questioned or discounted due to their race. This scrutiny often stems from unconscious or entrenched racial biases, where Black women's physical abilities and sportsmanship are doubted or diminished because of assumptions rooted in societal stereotypes. The referees' or officials' biases imply that Black women are perceived as "out of place" in rugby, a traditionally male-dominated and often racially homogeneous sport. These

perceptions can lead to unfair calls, harsher penalties, and overall stricter judgment against Black female players, suggesting that they must constantly prove themselves worthy of fair treatment. This climate of doubt creates additional psychological strain on players, who have to divert their mental and emotional energy from the game direct it towards contesting discriminatory calls, defending their place on the field, or avoiding penalties stemming from biased judgments.

These encounters with bias also reflect the broader structural and cultural challenges Black women face in sports, as their abilities are often devalued due to intersecting racial and gender stereotypes. Such prejudice is not limited to isolated incidents but points to deeper systemic issues within a sport that questions the worth of Black women as serious athletes. Consequently, these biases reinforce the erosion of the sense of meritocracy within rugby, thus making it harder for female rugby players to gain the same recognition and respect as their White or male counterparts. Racism in the sport serves as a sobering reminder of the systematic problems Black female rugby players have to negotiate. These encounters are not singular but rather fit into a larger pattern of racial discrimination that penetrates many facets of the sport. One participant clarified:

> *"It's about who gets to play and who gets to be seen as worthy of playing, not just about the game"* (Participant 4).

This statement depicts the double standards Black female athletes often face. Although their love for and commitment to rugby may equal or exceed that of their peers, they continually face barriers on the basis of racial bias rather than their talent or dedication. A participant indicated:

> *"We know it's not easy, but we're paving the way for those who will come after us"* (Participant 2).

> *"If I had the opportunity to play rugby full time, I would genuinely just do that but since there's no security in just playing the sport as a woman in general and just playing it as a profession, I have to study. I literally have to have something. Kufuneka ubenentoyowela ukhubone ezazinto (you have to have something to fall back on)"* (Participant 2).

For Black female players, racism in rugby goes beyond being simply excluded from teams or leagues; it permeates the ways they are viewed and treated in every aspect of the sport. Decisions on who is selected, who is given leadership roles, and who is supported and promoted often reflect

underlying racial biases, impacting the players' sense of belonging and opportunity. While all players may be expected to show skill, resilience, and teamwork, Black female rugby players face an additional burden: they must prove their "worthiness" to be on the field, as though their presence in the sport must be justified.

This "worthiness" judgment implies that for Black women, playing rugby is not just about excelling at playing the game; they are also constantly contesting biases that question their right to participate in the first place. In doing so, they carry an extra emotional and psychological burden, having to overcome racial barriers that are invisible to many of their peers. It reflects a systemic issue in which racial discrimination is embedded in the sport's culture, policies, and daily practices, making it harder for Black women to experience rugby as a level playing field. This dynamic diminishes their contributions and reinforces the perception that rugby is a space where Black women must fight for belonging, regardless of their passion, dedication, or skill level.

Apart from the problems of racism and resource allocation, the interviews exposed the social pressures these women encounter, especially in connection with the conventional roles for women. Many of the participants discussed the expectations that family, friends, and society at large have for them to fit into the accepted ideas of femininity. One participant shared:

> *"People don't understand why a woman would want to play such a 'men's game"* (Participant 1).

The longstanding gender stereotypes that define the appropriate behaviour for women drive the society's cynicism of women in rugby. These preconceptions not only call into doubt their involvement in the sport but also devalue their successes.

These results show that these difficulties are firmly ingrained in both racial and gender discrimination, which interact to form a complex web of challenges these athletes must negotiate. These standards deter women from engaging in the sport and also stigmatise and isolating Black female rugby players from their peers and communities.

The absence of structural support and the predominance of racial bias also relate to the more general problem of systematic racism in sports, where Black athletes are sometimes expected to prove themselves in ways that White athletes are not. This expectation is consistent with

intersectionality, which contends that overlapping social identities, such as race and gender, cause particular and compounded kinds of discrimination (Collins & Bilge, 2020). The participants' experiences show that Black female rugby players are expected, more than their counterparts, to negotiate not only the physical challenges of the sport but also the extra weight of racial and gender bias.

According to the findings, the participants' struggle to strike a balance between personal passion and societal expectations ran across often. Many talked of the difficulties they had encountered participating in rugby. One participant averred:

> *"There are still people back home who don't understand why I'm doing this"* (Participant 8).

The participant stressed the continuous struggle for acceptance within the rugby community and their own cultural groupings. Black female rugby players, who must constantly defend their decisions in the face of social rejection, may feel isolated owing to societal expectations and personal identity. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the findings reveal the participants' high degree of resilience and drive. Despite major obstacles, their love for rugby and their aim to open the path for the next generations of Black female athletes drove them to hold on to the sport. Their determination to overcome systematic challenges underpins this resilience, a quality usually developed by those capable of negotiating several marginalised identities (Carpenter et al., 2020). One participant eloquently said:

> *"I do this for my family and the little girls who look up to me"* (Participant 7).

This highlights the wider influence the participants' rugby-playing has on their own hometowns and next generations. This participant's fortitude goes beyond simply overcoming adversity to include actively questioning the rugby status quo. These women are redefining the attributes of a rugby player by holding on to a sport that has historically excluded them, consequently challenging the racial and gender stereotypes strongly ingrained in the game. Their stories highlight the need to establish more inclusive and encouraging environments in rugby, where Black female athletes can flourish freely without continually proving their value.

4.3.9 Theme 9: Existing as a female rugby player

For the participants, pursuing rugby involves navigating unique challenges that women face in this predominantly male sport. The culture in rugby has traditionally emphasised strength and aggression, traits often classified as masculine, making it difficult for women to reconcile their passion for the sport with societal expectations encapsulated in femininity. Many female athletes feel pressured to choose between their athletic ambitions and adherence to the traditional roles associated with femininity. This ongoing tension means that, even beyond skill and performance, these women feel they must constantly validate their right to play. One player captured this sentiment, thus:

> *"It's like you constantly have to prove yourself, not just as a player but also as a woman who has the right to be here"* (Participant 1).

This ongoing need for the female rugby players' validation and acceptance in the sport is more than just a sporting issue, as it reflects broader societal struggles with rigid gender roles and expectations. The strain of challenging these norms often creates internal conflicts that affect the players' self-perception and confidence. For instance, one athlete admitted:

> *"There are days when I wonder if it's all worth it, when I feel like I'm constantly fighting against what people expect me to be"* (Participant 4).

This narrative underscores how the pressure to fit within the societal ideals of femininity can lead to self-doubt, as female rugby players grapple with their questionable place in the sport. External expectations begin to take a heavy toll internally, resulting in them questioning whether the joy they derive from playing rugby is worth the weight of public scrutiny and disapproval. Additionally, the limited representation of women in decision-making positions within rugby clubs exacerbates women's challenges. Even for those who excel on the field, many find themselves underrepresented in leadership roles and this absence restricts women's influence in shaping a more supportive, inclusive rugby culture for the female athletes. Without women in decision-making positions, the needs and voices of female rugby players often go unheard, leading to policies and practices that may unintentionally reinforce gender inequities in resource allocation, facilities, and general support.

4.3.10 Theme 10: Existing as a Black female rugby player

For Black female rugby players, race amplifies the challenges already present for them in the sport. Society's expectations that women, especially Black women, should conform to specific roles and behaviours produce a unique burden: they are defying gender norms by participating in a traditionally male sport, but they are also subjected to racial stereotypes that magnificently scrutinise their presence and abilities. This means that Black female rugby players often feel "too visible," which male or even non-Black female players may not experience. One participant noted:

> *"It's like I constantly have to prove myself, not just as a player but also as a woman who has the right to be here"* (Participant 7).

This need for validation becomes even more intense when it intersects with racial prejudice, where the athletes' skills and intentions are questioned not solely on the basis of gender but also on race-related assumptions. These social barriers also have deep internal impacts. This scrutiny further influences Black female players' self-worth, sometimes compelling them to question their place in the sport. This struggle with self-doubt mirrors broader issues of internalised bias, with societal stereotypes about race and gender possibly leading individuals into questioning their worth, even when they excel.

Furthermore, the lack of Black women in leadership roles within rugby compounds result in these challenges. One participant observed:

> *"We need more Black women in leadership roles within rugby. We must be seen making decisions as well; it is not sufficient to have us on the pitch"* (Participant 3).

Without representation in decision-making positions, the voices and unique needs of Black female athletes remain side-lined, resulting in their concerns receiving less attention, and barriers to their success not being addressed. The absence of Black women in leadership positions reinforces their invisibility, both on and off the field, diminishing their influence on the structures and policies affecting them.

The journey of Black female rugby players is shaped by an intersection of gender, race, and societal expectations that present a complex array of obstacles. As they navigate both overt sexism and racism, along with systemic inequalities in resource allocation and support, these athletes remain motivated by their love for the game and a desire to create a more accessible rugby environment for future generations. Their resilience serves as a powerful call for a more inclusive and equitable approach in rugby that not only acknowledges but actively addresses their unique challenges. Through their passion and determination, these athletes challenge the institutional barriers that persist in the sport today, redefining what it means to be both a woman and a person of colour in rugby.

4.3.11 Theme 11: Defying the stereotypes: Motivation and fortitude

The interviewed Black female rugby players showed an amazing degree of drive and fortitude despite all the difficulties they had been experiencing. Their dedication to rugby continues in spite of institutional, racial and gender discrimination. Most participants talked enthusiastically about the personal satisfaction they were getting from rugby, stressing how the game has been crucial in forming their identities and providing direction. One participant said:

> *"Rugby has taught me so much about myself, about pushing through even when things get tough"* (Participant 6).

This comment captures a more general theme, that is, rugby is a means of personal development and self-discovery rather than only a game for these women.

Beyond only overcoming adversity, the resilience these women show is about actively seeking ways of flourishing in an environment that is sometimes hostile or indifferent to their presence. What is especially relevant here is the idea of resilience as defined by Carpenter et al. (2020). It implies that people with marginalised identities, Black female rugby players, for example, often grow resilient as a coping mechanism in reaction to the institutional obstacles they encounter. The players' resilience is clearly shown in their capacity to excel and find delight in their involvement as well as in their capacity to continue in the sport in the face of major obstacles. Another participant underlined the great sense of personal accomplishment that comes with every game, indicating:

> *"Every time I step onto the field, I feel like I'm proving something, to myself, my community, and everyone who doubted me"* (Participant 7).

This can be understood as "carrying the burden of Blackness and femaleness" and this speaks to the unique and intersecting challenges Black female rugby players face owing to both their race and gender. In this context, the "burden" is multifaceted: it involves not only overcoming the inherent challenges of a demanding, traditionally male-dominated sport but also navigating a world that often views them through the lenses of both racial and gender bias. As Black women, these athletes confront societal stereotypes that perceive Blackness and femaleness in conflicting, and sometimes demeaning, ways. Society's ingrained expectations often portray women as physically fragile or not suited for high-contact sports like rugby, while also framing Black women through racialised stereotypes that can exaggerate or diminish their athletic capabilities.

This dual burden can create a cycle of both hyper-visibility and marginalisation. The Black female rugby players may be seen as "outsiders" in rugby spaces, where racial homogeneity and male dominance are the dominant norms. As a result, they frequently feel obliged to prove their worth on multiple fronts: to be seen as legitimate athletes, as women who belong in this arena, and as Black individuals defying stereotypes. One player described this as "constantly having to prove yourself," reflecting the relentless pressure to justify their presence and skill in a sport that does not always fully recognise or value their contributions.

Moreover, this burden manifests in the internalisation of these biases, where the weight of needing to be "enough", enough of an athlete, enough of a woman, enough of a representation for their race, can lead to self-doubt and emotional strain. Black female rugby players are often forced to play a balancing act, demonstrating their strength and resilience on the field, while shielding themselves from the stereotypes that reduce them to racial or gendered caricatures. This extra layer of emotional and psychological work drains the energy that could otherwise be focused on their performance, development, and enjoyment of the sport.

Beyond the personal cost, the burden of Blackness and femaleness highlights a larger issue within the sports culture: systemic inequities that perpetuate unequal access to resources, mentorship, and leadership positions. When Black women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, with their unique perspectives and needs being overlooked, thus perpetuating the cycle of exclusion and

reinforcing the burden they carry. The challenges Black female athletes face point to the need for structural changes in rugby. Acknowledging and actively working to alleviate this burden would not only empower these athletes but also create a more inclusive and dynamic sports culture that values all athletes, regardless of race or gender.

The sense of solidarity and support these women discover within their teams is also quite closely related to this fortitude. Their close relationships with their colleagues provide great strength and inspiration. One player said:

> *"It is a group of women who understand the struggle, who are there for each other no matter whatever"* (Participant 7).

This friendship supports their will to succeed and helps them manage the external demands they encounter. The team's mutual support fosters a caring environment where members may collectively develop resilience and confidence, consequently reassuring them that they are not travelling alone. The interviews also clearly indicated that maintaining these women's participation in rugby depends critically on personal drive. Many participants alluded to the wider effects their sporting involvement has on their homes and families.

Reflecting on the great feeling of responsibility and a wish to be a role model for next generations, one participant said:

> *"I do this for my family and the little girls who look up to me"* (Participant 4).

Even when confronted with insurmountable challenges, the drive to inspire others keeps people dedicated to the sport. For many, rugby is not only a personal goal but also a means of opening doors for others who might be successors.

Another participant underlined the need for representation and visibility in motivating others to follow their aspirations:

> *"I want to show the younger girls that they can do it too, that they can break barriers just like we are"* (Participant 5).

One participant shared view, her voice taut with frustration:

> *"Someone back home still doesn't understand why I'm doing this… They think rugby isn't for girls, especially Black girls. But for me, it's a way of breaking down barriers and showing that we can do anything"* (Participant 7).

This quote captures the tension existing between personal ambition and societal expectations. For these women, rugby is more than a passion or pastime; it is an act of resistance that reshapes views about what Black women are capable of doing within their communities and beyond. Playing rugby enables them to challenge and expand the roles traditionally assigned to them, redefining people's perceptions and inspiring change both on and off the field.

A larger story of empowerment also connects with the need to be role models and improve their local environments. In their communities, as much as in the realm of sports, these players consider themselves change agents. Their determination to question societal expectations and increase the opportunities for Black women in historically male-dominated environments drives their resiliency and motivation. One player said:

> *"It's not just about winning games; it's about changing minds, changing how people see us, and how we see ourselves"* (Participant 1).

So, capturing the core of their work, this point of view fits into the idea of intersectionality, which emphasises how several social identities interact to define experiences of marginalisation and emancipation (Collins & Bilge, 2020). For these Black women whose resolve is to create a place for themselves in a sport that has traditionally excluded them, their resilience is profoundly entwined with their identity.

Apart from the external incentives, many of the participants mentioned their inner drive that sustained them. Whether in terms of their socioeconomic background, gender, or race, the personal difficulties they have encountered have developed strong inner will and determination. Another participant said:

> *"I've been through a lot in my life, and rugby has taught me that I can handle whatever comes my way"* (Participant 8).

So, highlighting how rugby has evolved into a tool for empowerment and self-assurance, their navigation of the challenging dynamics of being Black women in a sport dominated by men depends significantly on this internal drive.

The importance of the resilience and drive in the daily life of these rugby players cannot be overemphasised. Strong evidence of their character is their capacity to keep going in the face of hardship. Their stories inspire not only other Black women but anyone else who encounters similar difficulties as they keep tearing down obstacles and questioning societal expectations. One participant summed up the great sense of accomplishment and resiliency that defines their path, thus:

> *"We might not always win on the scoreboard, but every time we step onto that pitch, we're winning in life"* (Participant 1).

Black female rugby players' experiences revolve mostly on the theme of resilience and drive. Driven by both personal satisfaction and a greater goal to inspire and empower others, these women show an unflinching dedication to the sport despite all the obstacles they face. Their tenacity evinces their will and strength since they keep on past obstacles and flourish in exclusionary surroundings. Their tales underline the need for a stronger drive and perseverance in conquering difficulties and the possibility of sports to be a strong weapon for both individual and group emancipation.

4.3.12 Theme 12: The impact of rugby on self

The interviews conducted with Black female rugby players underscore the profound influence rugby has on their personal lives, highlighting the complex relationship between their athletic commitments and their evolving self-identities. Many participants narrated how the physical demands of rugby have reshaped their self-perception, particularly regarding body image and femininity. As one player put it:

> *"Playing rugby has made me stronger, but it also means I don't fit the typical image of what a woman 'should' look like"* (Participant 2).

The sentiment expressed above reflects the common struggle female athletes experience as they reconcile their physical power with societal expectations of femininity, often shaped by the limited standards of beauty that exclude strong or muscular physiques. Social norms that frequently value a limited definition of female beauty, which can marginalise women who deviate from these expectations, exacerbate this conflict (Diamond, 2020).

The inherently physical nature of rugby, a sport traditionally associated with masculinity, often brings these women face-to-face with stereotypes. Some participants noted the assumption that, because they play rugby, they must be aggressive or unconcerned about their appearance. This stereotype creates tension between their self-image and how others perceive them, fostering a complex negotiation of identity. While rugby challenges them to redefine traditional views of femininity, it also empowers them to take pride in their physical strength. As one participant proudly shared:

> *"Rugby has given me a body that I'm happy with. I'm strong, and that strength is beautiful, even though I may not fit the conventional mould"* (Participant 6).

In a physically demanding sport like rugby, which is typically connected with masculinity, the participants narrated how their participation in the sport has questioned society's accepted ideas of femininity. One participant pointed out the preconceptions that female rugby players frequently run across, thus:

> *"People often assume that because I play rugby, I must be aggressive or uncaring about my appearance"* (Participant 5).

These preconceptions can cause a conflict between how these women view themselves and how others view them, thus facilitating a complicated negotiation of their identities. Rugby's physicality sometimes produces a muscular body which, as some participants noted, does not always fit society's expectations of a feminine body.

This theme also looked at the wider ramifications of juggling rugby with other obligations, including family commitments, employment, and education. Many participants candidly expressed the difficulties associated with juggling these conflicting demands, especially in a situation where

those close to them may not always understand or encourage their love for rugby. One participant, stressing the often-great sacrifices these women make to follow their sport, said:

> *"It's hard to juggle everything, especially when people don't understand why rugby is so important to me"* (Participant 4).

The difficulty cited above is not exclusive to rugby; rather, female athletes often have to negotiate the extra pressures of societal expectations about gender roles (Caridade et al., 2022).

The battle to strike a balance between rugby and other obligations results in notable personal sacrifices. One participant said:

> *"I have to show up for my family or stay late to finish an assignment even though I'm tired from training. It's like two completely different lives"* (Participant 1).

Flora described it as 'living two complete lives navigating the demanding requirements of high-level rugby, while meeting academic or professional responsibilities. The women often faced emotional exhaustion, especially when friends and family did not fully understand their commitment to rugby.

The participants were often left with little time for personal leisure or rest, owing to this dual existence juggling the demanding requirements of a high-level sport with academic, or employment obligations. Although the participants admitted that this juggling could be taxing, they also mentioned that they were dedicated to the sport as a motivating factor that helped them overcome obstacles.

The data from the interviews also highlighted the emotional toll this juggling act takes, especially in cases where there is lack support from friends, relatives, or even society. Most participants indicated the emotional toll that participating in a sport had, particularly in relation to men's rugby. Some participants said:

> *"Sometimes, I feel like I'm fighting a battle on my own"* (Participant 8).

> *"It's difficult when the people closest to you don't understand why you're so committed to something that doesn't always pay off in the way they expect"* (Participant 5).

As these women negotiate the complexity of their identities as athletes, students, professionals, and family members without the adequate support or recognition they deserve, this can cause feelings of isolation.

For these Black female athletes, rugby has a significant influence on their personal life. In connection to body image and gender identity, the sport has greatly changed their self-perception by forcing them to balance their athleticism with societal expectations of femininity. Apart from the demands of juggling rugby with other obligations, a lack of external help and knowledge aggravates the difficulties. Notwithstanding these challenges, the resiliency and dedication shown by these women highlight the personal fulfilment they get from rugby as well as its significant influence on their identities and ways of life. The stories of these athletes draw attention to the need of more awareness of the particular difficulties Black female athletes experience as they negotiate the junction of their personal and professional lives as well as the need for more respect for women's rugby.

The lack of support can heighten feelings of isolation, intensifying the toll of juggling these commitments. Yet, these women remain dedicated, resilient and unwavering to the sport. For many, rugby is more than just a game. A participant put it:

> *"Rugby transcends mere game-play. It's part of who I am; I find a way to make it work"* (Participant 6).

This sense of purpose and identity often pushes the women to overcome the social and personal challenges they face. Cultural identity plays a pivotal role in how these women perceive themselves and their place in rugby. Many see the sport as an opportunity to assert their cultural pride and redefine narratives around Black women's capabilities. Rugby becomes a vehicle for broader social change, as one participant asserted that by being on the pitch, she was showing that they belonged there, that their culture belonged there, too. Through their presence in the sport, these women not only challenge prevailing narratives but also inspire future generations of Black female rugby players.

The experiences of Black female rugby players illustrate the transformative power of sport in redefining self-perception and empowering athletes to challenge stereotypes. Rugby provides a

space where the women can discover and embrace their own strength, transcending conventional gender norms and societal expectations. These stories emphasise the need for greater inclusivity within sports to ensure that all athletes can explore and express their identities without limitations, fostering a future where their resilience and achievements are fully recognised and celebrated.

Self-perception came up recurrently in the interviews, showing how rugby has changed the way the female athletes perceive themselves. For many of these women, getting on the rugby pitch was the beginning of a deep journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Rugby, a sport usually played by men and often seen as not consistent with the traditional ideas of femininity, has offered these women a unique chance to change their identity and question societal norms.

The common theme coming from the interviews was self-discovery and empowerment. Most participants said that rugby made them feel fearless. Another participant said:

> "*Rugby has taught me to be fearless. I've learnt to take on challenges head-on, both on and off the pitch"* (Participant 1).

Rugby has affected the participants. The lessons learnt on the field, including remaining resilient, determined, and working as a team, have made them more confident and assertive when facing real-life problems. The women's confidence has given them the strength to pursue their goals more courageously and with conviction.

The participants narrated that rugby has been a powerful force for personal progression and change. These women have not only changed how they perceive themselves through sports but have also interrogated societal norms and expectations. Rugby has enabled them to explore and accept their identity in real and empowering ways.

Precisely, the way Black female rugby players have changed their perception of themselves shows how sports can change people. Rugby has changed these women's identities, challenged social norms, and given them a sense of empowerment. The participants' stories show how important it is to play sports more open and accepting so that women can explore and express their identities without being limited by traditionally sanctioned gender roles. These women have not only found new strengths through rugby, but they have also become role models for others on and off the rugby pitch.

4.3.13 Theme 13: What does the future hold for Black female rugby players

The demand for having more Black women in leadership is closely related to the notion that representation relates to the capacity to influence change in the narrative around who belongs in rugby and not only numbers. This attitude is consistent with the claims made by Appiah (2020), who holds that empowerment essentially relates to racial identification and representation, which obligates marginalised groups to not only be included but also positioned so they may influence change within institutions. This implies that the participants' presence should reach into the administrative and decision-making domains of rugby, off the field of play. The lack of Black women in these positions feeds into a cycle of exclusion whereby the rules and systems controlling the sport do not represent the variety of those engaging in it.

Moreover, the absence of Black women in leadership roles influences the visibility of Black women in rugby. In this context, visibility goes beyond mere sight, as it includes being seen as legitimate and strong within the sport. One participant observed:

> "*When young girls look at the sport, they need to see people who look like them in all areas, not just playing but also coaching, managing, and even occupying the commentary box"* (Participant 3).

This comment emphasises the need for role models and the effect of seeing oneself in several spheres of the activity. Black women's presence in rugby is normalised by representation in leadership and visibility in public roles, thus subverting the prevailing narratives that have traditionally been excluding them.

> *"People would say 'Ayontoyenu nidlala inetball nidlala ihockey nina' [this is not your thing; you guys play netball and hockey]. I definitely think if there was a chance and I was exposed to it, we'd be having a very different conversation now. I think that's the things people in my generation need. We had people before us who opened the doors that we entered. So, I think our kind of responsibility is to open those doors and make sure it's institutionalised. As soon as you can institutionalise it and you have institutions backing it, we're taking new steps in the right direction"* (Participant 2).

The interviews reveal a strong commitment to making rugby more accessible to future generations. Many participants expressed their desire to open up the sport, particularly for young Black girls who may have previously been denied the chance to participate. Their efforts are not just about playing rugby today but about creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for future players. A participant said:

> *"I want to see more young Black girls playing rugby, not just as a hobby but as a real opportunity for them to grow and succeed"* (Participant 2).

The participants felt they knew they were breaking new ground in a sport that had previously been closed to women. They knew that being on the pitch is more than just a personal victory; it is also a step towards breaking down barriers and making things fairer for people coming after them.

The participants were very aware of the systemic problems that continue to make it hard for women, especially Black women, to make progress in rugby because they have been through them themselves. Another participant said:

> *"We've had to fight for every inch of recognition, and I don't want the next generation to have to go through the same struggles"* (Participant 3).

This transcript shows how determined the participants were in using their experiences to make things better by advocating for more support, resources, and attention for women in rugby.

The participants also had hopes for the future when it comes to the effects of rugby on society as a whole. The participants indicated how rugby could be used to make the world a better place, especially in terms of fighting stereotypes and promoting equality between men and women. A participant indicated:

> *"Rugby has the power to change minds, to show that women, Black women, can excel in spaces that weren't originally designed for them"* (Participant 4).

The fact that the participants believed rugby could change things shows that they saw the sport as more than just a game. They saw it as a way of empowering people and making society better.

The participants had a strong sense of responsibility, which was shown by the theme of advocacy and future goals. Most of them reported how important it is to help their communities and use their fame to inspire younger people. One of the participants noted:

> *"I want to be someone that young girls can look up to, someone who shows them that they can do anything they set their minds to"* (Participant 7).

It is this sense of duty that drives the participants' dedication to the sport and their drive to make rugby a more welcoming and supportive place for all women.

The theme of advocacy and future goals shows participants' dedication not only to achieving success in their own right, but also to making the future of women's rugby better and more open to everyone. Their experiences have made them want to make a difference, which is why they are fighting for more female players to be represented, given resources, and given support. These women are still pushing the limits of what is possible in rugby. They are also preparing the way for the next generation of players who will benefit from the progress they have made. Their stories show the importance of being heard and how powerful persistence is, and how sports can bring about social change.

4.4 Reflexive preface

As a Black South African woman embarking on this research journey, the researcher is acutely aware of the multifaceted nature of this study, the intersection of race, gender, and sport within the context of rugby in South Africa. The researcher's personal experiences as a Black woman in a society that has historically been grappling with deep-seated racial and gender inequalities contribute to her commitment and passion for shedding light on the narratives of Black women in rugby.

Growing up in an environment where rugby has been ingrained in the country's cultural fabric, the researcher had first-hand witnesses of the disparities and challenges faced by those daring to challenge the norm within the sport. Rugby, often deemed a defender of masculinity and whiteness, presents a complex environment for Black women seeking to carve out their identity and space.

The tone of this struggle echoes not only in historical accounts but also in contemporary dialogues that persistently question the inclusivity of a sport considered by many as a 'White man's game.'

The researcher's decision to delve into this research stems from a desire to amplify the voices and experiences of Black women who have navigated the intricate landscape of South African rugby. The researcher is cognisant of the nuances involved in identity formation, recognising that it is an intricate dance between personal perception and the social constructs that shape it. Undertaking this study, the researcher was inherently positioned within this context, a researcher with a lived experience that joins with the very narratives the study seeks to unravel.

It is essential for the researcher to acknowledge that her own identity as a Black South African woman inherently influences her perspective and interpretation of the unfolding stories. The researcher recognised the importance of reflexivity in this research, acknowledging the interplay between the researcher and the researched. The researcher's background, experiences, and cultural context have undoubtedly shaped the lens through which she has approached, understood, and conveyed the narratives of Black women in South African rugby. In exploring the aims of this study, the researcher's intention is to contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges, triumphs, and nuances faced by Black women in a sport entrenched in historical biases. This research study is not merely an academic pursuit; it is also a testament to the resilience and persistence of Black women who, against societal expectations, have chosen to redefine the narrative within the rugby sphere. This study has been an exploration, a conversation, and a tribute to the strength of those challenging the status quo and navigating the field of rugby with unyielding grace.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the lived experiences of Black women in rugby through a thematic analysis of participants' narratives. The findings illuminated how identity markers such as race, gender, and athleticism intersect to shape the unique challenges and triumphs faced by these women. Participants reflected on their dual struggle as Black women navigating a predominantly male and racially exclusive sport, revealing the complexities of identity negotiation in this space.

Key themes highlighted institutional barriers, including resource disparities, limited sponsorships, and professional recognition challenges, all of which require ongoing efforts to overcome. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated resilience by redefining professionalism and challenging traditional gender norms in rugby.

Themes related to representation and visibility further emphasized the tension between the desire for inclusion and the challenges of navigating systems perceived as meritocratic yet exclusive. The participants' accounts underscored the transformative impact of rugby on self-perception, motivation, and fortitude, revealing how sport can foster confidence and personal growth.

The role of community and support emerged as vital factors in empowering Black women in rugby, offering a sense of belonging and collective strength. As captured in discussions on the future of Black female rugby players, participants expressed hope and advocacy for systemic change and increased inclusivity.

This chapter provides valuable insights into the complex intersection of race, gender, and sport, contributing to a deeper understanding of the social and institutional dynamics influencing women's rugby. The findings underscore the need for continued advocacy and policy changes to promote equity and representation in rugby, paving the way for a more inclusive sporting landscape.

Additionally, the reflective preface included here provides a personal perspective on the research process, highlighting the reflective nature of this study and offering deeper insights into the development of the analysis and findings. The next chapter is reflects on conclusion and recommendation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study's main goals define the framework of the analysis, which provides an understanding of how Black female rugby players negotiate their identities, overcome obstacles, and show sport-related resilience. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study, advocating for an increase in the inclusiveness of and support for Black women in rugby. It further identifies areas for the next investigation. The reviewed literature and the findings streamed the conclusions into the larger debate on sports, gender, and race.

5.2 Conclusion of the findings

Both race and gender play a significant part in determining the experiences of Black female rugby players within a sport that has been historically dominated by White men. This study provides deep and sophisticated insights into the complicated realities faced by Black female rugby players in South Africa. The participants eloquently showed the compounded difficulties they face navigating the junction of their racial and gender identities, both of which determine their opportunities, recognition, and general experiences in rugby.

The women have had to continually fight for visibility and acceptance within a sport that has historically excluded them, which is among the research's most remarkable features. Their fight targets institutionalised obstacles, including racial discrimination, lack of resources, and societal

expectations that marginalise them. The participants, who underline the strongly rooted inequalities in rugby, often expressed the need to "work twice as hard" so as to reach the same degree of recognition as their male or White colleagues. This constant need to prove oneself emphasises the widespread presence of both racial and gender prejudices underpinning the sport.

The study also clarifies the more general cultural and social factors influencing the experiences of Black female rugby players. The way the participants discuss their cultural identities, and the importance of family and community, exposes the extra level of complexity these sportswomen have to negotiate. Rugby is not only a game but also a platform through which they can question preconceptions and redefine what it means to be a Black woman in South Africa. Their success in rugby is a potent statement of their agency and autonomy; their participation in the sport is an act of resistance against society's conventions limiting them to traditional roles.

The study has also revealed the way rugby has changed Black female rugby players' self-perception and identity. Many of the participants have seen notable personal development, confidence, strength, and a fresh perspective of their capabilities through participation in rugby. Rugby has enabled them to redefine their femininity and welcome their physicality in ways that subvert conventional gender expectations. This redefinition of self affects not only their rugby pitch but also other spheres of their life, thus impacting their attitude to their jobs, relationships, and personal aspirations.

The women displayed fortitude against social pressure and institutionalised discrimination. The participants showed great dedication to rugby and great will to pave way for next generations of Black female rugby players despite all the obstacles they encounter. This resilience goes beyond mere survival in hostile surroundings, as it entails leveraging their position to thrive and bring about change. The participants showed the need for more inclusiveness and support within the sport.

Black female rugby players experience problems of inequality and exclusion still afflicting rugby. These results highlight the need for coordinated efforts targeting the removal of these institutional obstacles, thus fostering a more inclusive environment that acknowledges and supports the contributions of every player, regardless of their gender or colour. The experiences of the participants provide an insightful analysis of how rugby might develop into a fairer and more

varied game that really reflects the multicultural and dynamic character of the South African society.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Although this study contributes immensely to knowledge on the experiences of Black female rugby players in South Africa, it is important to acknowledge the restrictions influencing the applicability and extent of the conclusions. The small sample size used in this study remains one of the main constraints. Although the in-depth interviews yielded rich qualitative data, the small sample size means that the results might not be fully reflective of the variety of experiences among all Black female rugby players across many areas, age groups, or degrees of competitiveness. Ray and Fellow (2020) advise that a larger sample size can increase the generalisability of the study's conclusions and make the data more representative.

Though it helped in investigating the complex and subjective experiences of the participants, the qualitative approach used in this research study has certain restrictions. Since qualitative data is context-specific, it can be difficult to apply the results generally across various settings or populations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study's emphasis on thorough personal stories offers great insights into the participants' lived experiences, though this might not be fully reflective of the range of difficulties Black female rugby players encounter in different environments. Rural-based players, for example, might have different difficulties from those in cities; similarly, those competing at an elite level might have events very different from those playing at a community level. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022) underline the need for gathering a broad spectrum of demographic data to grasp the whole complexity of social identities, which could be a field for development by future research studies.

The possibility for bias in self-reported data presents still another restriction on the study. Although the participants gave sincere and perceptive analyses of their experiences, self-reporting may have occasionally been swayed by memory recall, social desirability, or personal prejudices. Consequently, the data might not have always fairly depicted the experiences of the participants or might have excluded some elements they felt unsuitable for disclosing. Although based on the participants' stories, the researcher's interpretation of the data was biased since qualitative research

usually entails some degree of subjectivity in data analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although the study's emphasis on qualitative techniques produced rich, detailed data, the conclusions might not be readily measurable. Lack of quantitative data limits the researcher's capacity to estimate the frequency or intensity of particular events over a larger population. By offering a more complete picture of the problems Black female rugby players experience, quantitative methods, including surveys or statistical analyses could have enhanced the qualitative results. A mixed-methods approach, for instance, could have enabled a stronger analysis through helping researchers to find trends and correlations concealed in qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, the main data collecting technique used in the study, particularly interviews, may have left out other important sources of data that could have strengthened the conclusions. For example, longitudinal studies following players' experiences over time or observational data could have offered a more understanding of the changes in their views and difficulties. Diamond (2020) emphasises the need to delve into many data sources in order to gain better insights into complicated social events, such as identity development and its effects on underprivileged groups.

Lastly, the study's geographical concentration on South Africa indicates that the results are contextually specific and might not be immediately relevant to Black female rugby players elsewhere. Although some of the themes, such as the junction of race and gender, may appeal to like populations elsewhere, the particular social, cultural, and historical background of South Africa is absolutely essential in determining the experiences of the participants. Future studies could investigate related problems in many national or cultural settings to ascertain whether the results of this study apply elsewhere or other elements are involved.

Although this study offers an insightful analysis of Black female rugby players' experiences in South Africa, its limitations should be noted. The rather limited sample size and the emphasis on qualitative data might restrict the generalisability and range of the results. Future studies could overcome these constraints by using a bigger and more varied sample, adopting mixed-methods approaches that are inclusive of quantitative data, and investigating related concerns in several environments. By tackling these constraints, prospective research could offer a more complete and

representative knowledge of the difficulties and experiences of Black female athletes in rugby and other sports.

5.4 Recommendations

The results of this study demonstrate the need for adopting several strategic interventions to enhance the inclusion of and support for Black female rugby players in South Africa. These suggestions seek to solve the immediate problems these athletes encounter and also to foster a fairer and encouraging environment that would help them to continue succeeding and getting involved in their sport.

The participants noted the significant differences in facilities and resources between men's and women's rugby teams. This calls for a coordinated effort meant to raise investments in women's rugby at all levels. This does not only cover the financial outlay but also speaks to the provision of suitable training facilities, access to top-notch coaching, and chances for competitive play. Rugby can start solving the systematic inequalities marginalising female athletes by ensuring women's rugby teams have access to the same degree of support as their male colleagues.

Investment should also concentrate on grassroots development so that young girls begin playing rugby from a young age using the same routes for development as those open to boys. This includes starting rugby teams in universities, especially in underprivileged areas, and providing funding and scholarships for gifted young athletes. Building a strong base for women's rugby can help the sport produce a new generation of athletes who are more likely to succeed at higher degrees of competition due to being better supported.

The results of the study exposed the widespread racial bias inherent in rugby, as it influences everything, including refereeing, on-field treatment and player selection. Comprehensive diversity and inclusion training should thus be required of every person engaged in the sport, including coaches, officials, managers, and support personnel. Emphasising cultural sensitivity, identifying and overcoming unconscious prejudices, and guaranteeing that every player receives fair treatment should be the main priorities in the new dispensation.

Rugby governing authorities should also enforce rigorous guidelines for handling racial discrimination in events and reporting. This could entail setting up independent review boards to

consider allegations, build anonymous reporting systems, and punish those found guilty of engaging in discriminatory activities. By opposing racism, the sport can make it abundantly evident that such behaviour will not be accepted and that inclusiveness is its first priority.

The creation of mentoring and leadership initiatives, specifically meant to assist Black women in administrative roles within rugby and coaching, is another important form of advice. To empower the upcoming generation of players, the participants underlined the need to have Black female role models in leadership roles. Mentoring programmes can match newly hired administrators and coaches with seasoned mentors who can offer chances for professional development, direction, and encouragement.

Apart from mentoring, initiatives for leadership development should be launched to provide Black women with the tools and knowledge required to assume major roles in rugby. These initiatives can cover areas that include management, team building, strategic planning, and advocacy, thus ensuring that Black women are ready to affect the course of rugby at both local and national levels. Rugby can become more mirror-like, reflecting the larger society by aggressively supporting diversity in leadership.

In terms of dispelling preconceptions regarding who can and should participate in rugby, public opinion relating to women's rugby remains a major obstacle impeding the sport's expansion. Public awareness campaigns should thus be started to increase support for female athletes and make them more visible. These campaigns might call for media alliances designed to boost coverage of women's rugby events as well as efforts to spotlight Black female athletes' accomplishments.

Furthermore, these initiatives should aggressively destroy negative preconceptions that suggest rugby as just a "men's game." Emphasising that rugby is a game for everyone, regardless of gender or colour, could include highlighting the strength, talent, and tenacity of female athletes. Changing the story around women's rugby may enable these campaigns to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and motivating environment that supports more general involvement with the sport.

Rugby governing bodies should examine and change their policies and procedures to support inclusivity and fairness, thus guaranteeing a long-term transformation. This could include establishing goals for diversity in team selections, leadership roles, and administrative positions as

well as carrying out policies meant to actively help Black female players be hired and kept on staff. Furthermore, the creation of inclusive policies for media coverage, marketing, and sponsorship could help guarantee that women's rugby gets the respect and funding it so merits.

These suggestions offer a road map for overcoming obstacles experienced by Black female rugby players and fostering a fairer and more inclusive scene within the sport. Rugby can become a more inclusive and empowering venue for all athletes through raising investment, tackling racial prejudices, creating mentorship and leadership programmes, starting public awareness campaigns, and putting inclusive policies into effect. These developments will not only help the rugby players personally but will also enhance the sport by supporting diversity, equality, and excellence.

5.5 Future studies

The results of this study emphasise the need for wider investigation on the experiences of Black female rugby players, especially in more general and more varied settings. Although this study concentrated on the experiences of these athletes within the South African context, there is need to broaden the scope of research to include Black female rugby players from other nations and cultural environments. Comparative studies could enable better knowledge of the worldwide issues and opportunities these sportswomen encounter as well as assist in the identification of universal trends and culturally particular obstacles.

Future studies ought to investigate Black female rugby players' experiences in professional leagues outside of South Africa and in international events, including the Women's Rugby World Cup. These foreign settings sometimes provide different difficulties, including cultural adaptation, exposure to different degrees of racial and gender prejudices, and variations in institutional support. Knowing how Black female athletes negotiate these international venues helps in fostering a better understanding of the worldwide dynamics of race, gender, and sport. Furthermore, it would be interesting to find out how these sportswomen view and are treated in nations where rugby might have different cultural meanings or where the game is less known, thus contrasting their experiences in South Africa.

Future research should also explore, in several contexts, the intersectionality of race, gender, and culture. Black female rugby players' experiences and identities are greatly shaped by their cultural

background. Studies could examine how cultural identity affects the participation of Black women in rugby, including their contacts with coaches and peers, and their interactions with the larger sports community. This would be pertinent, especially in areas where rugby is not customarily connected with Black populations or in multicultural settings. Comparing the experiences of Black female rugby players in various cultural environments helps researchers to better grasp how cultural values and standards affect the inclusiveness and acceptance of women in the sport.

Another crucial path for next investigation could be longitudinal studies. Following Black female rugby players over a protracted period allows researchers to track changes in their experiences, challenges, and identities over time. This could include following players from their early involvement in sport through to their peak athletic years and beyond, thus offering a whole picture of the long-term effects of rugby on their lives. Longitudinal studies could also look at how changes in the larger scene of women's rugby, such as more visibility, policy changes, and changes in society’s attitudes affect these athletes' experiences. Such studies would shed important light on the success of different interventions meant to support inclusivity and this could guide next policies and activities in the sport.

Although this study mostly used qualitative techniques to investigate the lived experiences of Black female rugby players, future studies might profit from including quantitative techniques as well. Quantitative research could be roped in to evaluate how particular interventions, such as diversity and inclusion training, more funding, or improved coaching tools, might affect the inclusiveness and success of Black female rugby players. Researchers might track, for example, changes in Black female rugby participants' access to resources, representation in leadership roles, or number over time. Surveys could also help compile opinions on diversity in rugby among players, coaches, and supporters. Analysing this information might then help researchers to find relationships between treatments and increases in inclusivity, thus strengthening the evidence base for the next policy decisions.

Investigating the wider socioeconomic effects of rugby on Black female athletes and their communities is yet another possible area for future study. Like many sports, rugby offers chances for community development, education, and social mobility. Future research might consider how Black women's participation in rugby affects their educational results, job prospects, and financial

empowerment. This can include looking at how community-based rugby projects, mentoring programmes, and rugby scholarships help Black female athletes grow. Knowing these effects could underline the larger social advantages associated with supporting diversity in rugby and supporting the need for ongoing support for the sport by means of investments.

Ultimately, future studies might evaluate how media portrayal shapes Black female rugby players' experiences and viewpoints. Public opinion on women's sports is much influenced by media coverage, or lack thereof. Studies could examine how Black female rugby players are represented in the media, how these representations affect public perceptions, and how media coverage affects the players' visibility and possibilities within the sport. Research could also examine whether or not media campaigns meant to support diversity and inclusivity in rugby have any real impact on the way Black female athletes are treated and supported.

Future studies could find a great variety of possible sites, building on the results of this study and helping to provide more thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the experiences of Black female rugby players by broadening the scope of inquiry to include various cultural settings, longitudinal perspectives, quantitative assessments, and larger societal impacts. These studies will be vital in guiding the agenda for inclusivity and equality in rugby and in ensuring the game turns into friendly and encouraging places for all athletes, regardless of gender or colour.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the results of the research with respect to the main goals, consequently stressing the intricate interaction among race, gender, and identity in the lives of Black female rugby players. The chapter also discussed the limitations of the study, offered suggestions for bettering the support being made available to Black female athletes, and pointed out areas and direction for future research. The results highlight the need for the establishment of a more inclusive and fairer rugby environment where every player, regardless of colour or gender, has the chance to flourish and succeed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/23/03**
PROJECT TITLE:	The experiences of black South African women in rugby: intruders in a sport that they love.
INVESTIGATOR	Feliti Mbalentle (2201970)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	16 May 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2025
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 23 May 2023	**CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Prof. Malose Langa (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

_____ **Signature**

30/05/2023 **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX 2: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Mbalentle Feliti I am a master's student in Community-based Counselling at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my research report, I have to conduct a research project and I am exploring the experiences of black South African women in rugby . This research aims to study experiences of black South African women who play or have played the sport of rugby. The research will consist of a sample of between 12 and 15 participants.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to participate in a audio recorded interview. This activity will involve participating in a recorded interview session where you will be talking about your experiences as a black woman in this sport. The interview session will take about an hour and half to two hours maximum. For participants living outside of Johannesburg, alternative means of communication such as video calls using Microsoft Teams, Zoom or WhatsApp call will be used. These alternative means of data collection are also in line with The World Health Organization's regulations on the prevention of the spread of the Coronavirus.

There are no direct benefits related to participation in this research. In addition, no penalties or disadvantages are related to non-participation into the study. In other words, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point when and as you see fit. You will also be free to refuse to share certain information if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any of your identifying information, and the information you give to me will be kept safely and not revealed to anyone else. I will be using a false name to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort during the interview, we will stop the interview and continue another day when you are able to do so. There will be psychological support for you, in case you need counselling services after the interview. These services are free of charge. The services can be accessed by contacting the following number 011 234 4837 or email zane@sadag.org available from Monday to Sunday 8am-8pm (The South African Depression and Anxiety Group) or 011 728 1347 lifeline@lifelinejhb.org.za (Life line)

This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. A summary of the study will be shared with you if you wish to receive a copy of it. You are welcome to contact the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), in case you have questions or complaints related to the ethical procedures of this

research. You may do so using the following contact details: telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408; email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

If you have questions and need clarification on this research, please contact me or my supervisor, using contact details included below:

Mbalentle Feliti- 081 328 2213 / mbalifeliti@gmail.com
Malose Langa- (011) 717 4536/ Malose.Langa@wits.ac.za

Your permission and assistance would be greatly appreciated.
Yours sincerely,
Mbalentle Feliti

Consent for Participation

I, _____ (full name), consent to participate in an interview that will require me to provide information on my experiences as a single father raising children on my own.

Following are my contact details in case the researcher intends to contact me to schedule an interview.
Cell phone number: _____
Email Address: _____
If you are interested in participating in this interview, kindly fill in the information above and return the form to me in person or using the following email address: mbalifeliti@gmail.com
I, _____, have read and understood the information provided to me on the nature and process of the research project on my experiences as a black women in the sport of rugby. I understand that I will be participating in this study voluntarily and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if I wish to do so. I understand that I will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing to withdraw from the study if I choose to do so. I also understand that the information I will provide to the researcher will be kept confidential and not disclosed to any third party without my written consent. I give permission to the researcher to use extracts of my own words into the final report of the study. By crossing the boxes below, I give consent to:

- Participate in this study ☐
- To have the content of my interviews included in the final report ☐
- To have data from my interview archived for further use by other researchers ☐

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Informed Consent to Participate in a Recorded Interview

I, _____, give consent for my interview to be audio recorded. I understand that contents of the interviews will be transcribed for further analysis and that my name will be kept anonymous. I also understand that my identity will not be revealed in the final report, and that access to the contents of the interview will be kept in a password protected file. I understand that the contents of my interview will be archived once the research project is completed. By crossing the boxes below, I give consent to:

- Have my interview recorded ☐

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3: DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Interview Guide

Primary Question

As a black South African woman, what are your experiences of playing rugby in this country?

Secondary Questions

1. When did you start playing rugby? What made you start?
2. What is it like being a black woman playing rugby?
3. How has this influenced your identity, as a black person playing a sport historically associated with white people?
4. How has this influenced your identity as a black woman playing a historically predominantly male sport?
5. What are the challenges that black women face in this sport?
6. How are you received by your communities? Do you feel supported?
7. What is the interaction between class, gender and race and the sport of rugby?
8. Has playing rugby influenced the relationship you have with your body in any anyway?

APPENDIX 4: CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN RUGBY



HI THERE!

My name is Mbalentle. I am currently completing my Masters in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. I am in need of participants to join my research study. The study aims to explore what it means to be a black woman in rugby and the experiences that come with existing in this space.
It's more than 'just rugby' and I would love to hear your story!

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

Being a black South African woman, over the age of 18, who is a current or past rugby player.

Please share this post with anyone you think might be interested in the study and who meets the criteria for participation.

Interested? Get in touch:

Cell: 081 328 2213 | Email: mbalifeliti@gmail.com

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

APPENDIX 5: EDITOR'S LETTER

KEMIST SHUMBA

LANGUAGE EDITOR

CONTACT

Researcher
University of KwaZulu-Natal

+27 78 315 6186

shumbak@ukzn.ac.za or
kemishumba@gmail.com

05 February 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

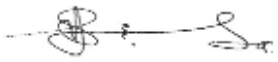
Re: THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN RUGBY: INTRUDERS IN A SPORT THAT THEY LOVE

I write to confirm that language editing was performed on the above dissertation.

Technical changes on spellings, grammatical expression and scientific writing were made.

The editor shall not be held liable for errors imported in later versions of the dissertation.

Sincerely,



Kemist Shumba (PhD)

PhD in Health Promotion: University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN]
Master of Social Science in Health Promotion (*cum laude*): UKZN
Bachelor of Social Science Honours in Cultural & Media Studies: UKZN
Postgraduate Certificate in Education: Great Zimbabwe University
Bachelor of Arts (English): University of Zimbabwe