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Exploring discourses of masculinity within women track athletes' lives in South Africa

Masters Research Dissertation (AXL5100W)

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Declaration

I, Regine Françoise Eva Gabrielle Sauzier, hereby declare on the **13th of February 2022** that all of the work enclosed in this master's dissertation is my own original work unless demonstrated otherwise.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

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Abstract

This research dissertation explores discourses of masculinity among university-level women track athletes across South Africa. Many scholars have delved into the narratives of racialization and masculinity among black women athletes, muscularity as a premise of athleticism, 'tomboyism' and gender fluidities, as well as the policing and disciplining of women athletes' bodies in accordance with gender ideals. Nonetheless, as it stands, literature on women's masculinities within sports in South African contexts, along with the idea of meshing masculinities and women's experiences together remains scarce. Interviews were conducted with women sprinters attending universities across South Africa on the online platforms, Microsoft Teams and Zoom, due to the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions in place at the time. An analysis of their narratives surrounding experiences and discourses of masculinity as cisgendered heterosexual women athletes was carried out. The research concludes that upon reaching adulthood and maturation, the gender binary recloses around the women track athletes so that a "temporary boyhood" is no longer granted to them, and they must negotiate their performative proximity to discourses of masculinity without the safety of the "tomboy" label. Rigid power structures continue to dominate, leaving little to no room for the women track athletes within South Africa to explore a heteronormative female masculinity as part of their gender identities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Participation in physical activity and sports generates benefits, physiologically, psychologically, and socially. To this day, the sporting terrain remains dominated by men, and women actively participating within and navigating these spaces challenge gender norms. Heteronormative ideologies continuously structure the gender gap within sports and reinforce narratives supporting femininity and athleticism as mutually exclusive entities. Women athletes participating in sports still find themselves facing discrepancies of opportunity, status, and recognition, all embedded within sociocultural beliefs about the meaning of “women” as bodies, sports practitioners, and indeed as “human” (Capranica et al., 2013; Pieper, 2014).

In earlier research, I have previously explored how such beliefs have manifested through surveillance over women athletes’ bodies, particularly those participating in the ‘male-identified’ sports of football and rugby at the University of Cape Town. This exploration focused on how questions of regulation operated within women athletes’ experiences, under the surveillance of heteronormative expectations of femininity. My findings revealed that the emphasis on imposing the gender binary within sports resulted in creating restrictions and controls over women’s athletic bodies. I argued that women athletes’ femininity, as opposed to their fitness and skill within their chosen sport was scrutinized through their diets, training regimens and uniforms worn whilst participating in their respective sports. My research complemented that of scholars who have observed how intensive physical training is defiant of patriarchal concepts of the ‘feminine’ body (Channon and Phipps, 2017; Cooky, Dycus and Dworkin, 2013; Engh, 2010). I argued that while implementing training regimens is imperative to women athletes’ participation and commitment to sports, heteronormative narratives of femininity continue to regulate these through ongoing negotiation with notion of “an appropriate” muscularity for women athletes.

Studies have shown that weightlifting is a crucial component to many women athletes’ training outside of their sports, but many of them choose to restrain from doing it out of fear that they fail to conform to conventional ideas of femininity. Hegemonic discourses continuously promote women athletes embodying a healthy and athletic look, on the condition that they conform to set ideas of heterosexual desirability and femininity (Engh and Potgieter, 2015). My own research argues that sportswomen participating in football and rugby at the University of Cape Town adhere to stringent training regimens in order to keep up fitness levels and a

healthy lifestyle, despite hegemonic proscriptions about women's bodies' physical strength and bulk. They see implanting training regimens simultaneously as part of compliance to athleticism and as 'submission' to systems of power as cultivated by hegemonic structures. My own analysis also highlighted their negotiation with the meaning of 'staying feminine' and I argued that their dedication to training regimens and their sports protests narratives supporting femininity and athleticism as mutually exclusive.

Sportswomen from the University of Cape Town resisted conforming to heteronormative discourses of femininity as they actively continue to participate in their respective sports. Notions of heterosexuality remain interrogated for several of them as they choose to resist labels, which also suggests they are blurring the lines of what it means to be a woman and an athlete. They pointed out how they are criticized for not being 'heterosexual enough' due to possessing more physically 'masculine' traits or simply due to their involvement in sports. It is evident that such an assumption is constructed through heteronormative narratives of femininity. This places these women athletes in constant negotiation with the idea of same-sex desire, regardless of their own narratives of sexual preference. Engh and Potgieter (2018) argue that women soccer athletes' maintenance of credible femininity interlocks with battles against external and internalized homophobia. Such assumptions are embedded within heteronormative constructions of desire where a show of masculinity must entail heterosexual desire.

This research dissertation is an ode to my passion for sports and empowering women as they leave their mark within a realm that has been dominated by men for far too long. My hope is that this dissertation provides an enriching academic journey into the depths of feminist scholarship, given the current circumstances we had found ourselves in for the last two years. These trying times throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have certainly taught me that research is malleable and attainable to us if we are to allow creativity and change to take place. This research dissertation comprises of eight chapters, starting with this introduction where I share past findings surrounding women athletes' experiences of surveillance within male-dominated sports as a stepping-stone and support of my current interests. Chapter two comprises of a literature review where I explore four crucial themes as a means of foregrounding my ideas and epistemological instincts. Moreover, in chapter three, I provide my own background as a researcher, along with the research questions guiding this project. Chapter four examines the methodological framework, methods, limitations, reflexivity, ethical concerns and

considerations that were essential to be addressed before moving forward within the research process.

The fifth chapter provides a presentation of the findings emerging from discussions with the women track athletes. Four major themes, along with their sub-themes are identified in relation to the research focus of this dissertation. The first theme, 'Projections of Masculinity' and its sub-themes, 'Baggy clothes', 'Bullying and the trauma within tomboyism' and 'Assumptions of same-sex desire' take us to the start of the women track athletes' stories through an exploration of masculinity as part of their gender identity within track running. Discussions of the embodiment of a temporary 'boyhood' with the tomboy label are highlighted. The second theme, 'Self-recognitions' and its sub-themes, 'God's Plan and dealing with defeat', 'Constructing masculinity through notions of embodiment', 'Scrutinizing blackness' and 'Masculinity as a 'danger' to integrity and womanhood' explore the element of recognition and more specifically, self-recognition as the women track athletes vocalize on their experiences as tomboys, athletes, and the meaning of this identity within the track running space. The concepts of surveillance, pressure, and the policing of bodies emerge and are experienced to an even greater extent among black women track athletes and women track athletes of color. The third theme, 'Negotiating masculinity' and its sub-themes, 'Exes, situationships and boyfriends: policing bodies within intimate relationships' and 'Taking on masculinity' uncover discourses of gendering along with masculinity in connection with heterosexuality and the intimate relationships that have been and are currently present within the track women athletes' lives.

The fourth and final theme, 'Owning masculinity' and its sub-themes, 'Representations of strong black women' and 'Advice for young track athletes' probe contemporary issues surrounding black women athletes and women athletes of color, with particular reference to track stars Caster Semenya and Sha'Carri Richardson. Furthermore, the discussions reveal feelings of pride as symbolic of an 'ownership' of masculinity as part of one's gender identity without the constraints or fear of conforming to traditional versions of girlhood. Chapter six consists of a discussion of the study's findings in accordance with the research focus, established ideas within the consulted literature and theoretical framework of intersectionality theory. The seventh chapter proposes conclusions, reflections of the research process and some general recommendations about the research itself. Subsequently, chapter eight comprises of a bibliography inscribing the scholarly works cited throughout this research dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review is a pivotal component of the following master's research dissertation aiming to investigate how cisgendered women athletes participating in track running negotiate discourses of masculinity within their lives in South Africa. The reality is that women athletes' experiences within sports continue to be overlooked and shunned (Engh, 2010). Existing research on gender and sports emphasizes the rigidity of the binary and as such, femininities are put into play around women athletes and the term 'masculinity' is only explored in relation to men athletes. Moreover, literature on women's masculinities in sports is scarce, particularly within South African contexts, and this suggests that there is no place for gender fluidities within women athletes' lives. Meshing masculinities and women's experiences in sport into a single area of research has shown me that research on masculinities within women's experiences of becoming athletes barely exists. I argue that this absence of literature makes it necessary for research to be undertaken in order to address this theoretical blindness.

I aim to pursue this research trajectory by tracing theoretical routes of masculinity for young women athletes through an intersectional lens to explore these discourses of masculinity. This review discusses the following areas: *narratives of racialization and masculinity among black women athletes*; *muscularity as a premise of athleticism*; *women athletes' narratives and discourses of 'tomboyism' and gender fluidities*; and *disciplining and interrogating gender ideals*. These four conceptual themes have been drawn up as italicized sub-headings in order to underline and engage with the various specific notions and discourses. Furthermore, I note that this literature review opens by foregrounding questions of intersectionality within the first theme, yet the other three ignore these altogether due to the nature of the literature.

2.1. Narratives of racialization and masculinity among black women athletes

Traditional narratives surrounding femininity enforce the belief that women athletes' acceptability is dependent on their exhibition of aspects of heteronormative femininity (Adams, Shmitke and Franklin, 2005:18; Burnett, 2001:73; Kidd, 2013:559). It is critical to recognize that such scripts always include questions of racialization, and as Carty (2005:133) outlines, "race and sexuality intersect with gender in complex ways, and the characteristics deemed

“appropriately feminine” vary for white and minority athletes.” Narratives of white femininity continue to be celebrated as the aspirational ideal for all women athletes. Black women athletes and women athletes of color are positioned in relation to an ideal they cannot attain on the basis of their racialization and must therefore seek in other ways. These include tropes of exoticization and racialization of the black female body, and especially the black athlete’s body, which Fanon (1952, as quoted by Brown, 2015:15) describes as, “the most ‘eroticized’ form of blackness within the white imaginary.” Historically and still to this day, black women’s bodies and particular attributes are subject to much scrutiny.

In South African contexts, colonial discourses influence representations of black femininity as a symbol of promiscuity and continue to hypersexualize black women (Abrahams, 1998; Cahn, 1993; McKay and Johnson, 2008). The exhibition of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoisan woman from the Eastern Cape, in nineteenth century Britain prevails as a critical instance of these processes of exoticization and racialization. Baartman’s body was displayed in ‘freak’ shows where much attention was drawn to her rear, which the British middle-class viewed as ‘deviant’ to traditional Victorian womanhood (Abrahams, 1998; Karkazis and Jordan-Young, 2018; McKay and Johnson, 2008). These racist discourses, and particularly the Baartman analogy, continue to be translated into the lives of many black women athletes. To enumerate, African American tennis star, Serena Williams’ body and kit on the courts have been subject to extreme criticism. Hobson (2003:91, as quoted by McKay and Johnson, 2008:494) writes that the criticism that Williams experiences relates directly to colonial discourses exhibiting black womanhood as “grotesque, strange, unfeminine, lascivious and obscene”.

Scholars highlight how the theorization of black women athletes is portrayed by hyper-masculine, hypersexual and animalistic images (Brown, 2015; McKay and Johnson, 2008). A prominent example came when American track and field star, Jackie Joyner-Kersey was compared to a gorilla at the 1988 Olympic Games, while being exposed to racist and sexualized criticism that characterizes her sexuality and body as deviant (Cahn, 1994; Douglas, 2002, as quoted by Heineken, 2016; McKay and Johnson, 2008). By the same token, American sprinters Wilma Rudolph and Florence Griffith-Joyner were both called the “black gazelle” and “la tigresse noire” (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998:550-551, as quoted by McKay and Johnson, 2008:494). This suggests how black women athletes’ bodies are relentlessly exoticized and framed as barbaric, devious, and untamed according to colonial ideals. McKay and Johnson (2008) add that the connection between black women athletes and primitive animals is most

apparent in jumping and running sports, as the various cases of these athletes have demonstrated.

Intersectional research suggests that black women athletes and women athletes of color face much pressure and go to great lengths in needing to be ‘feminized’ and silencing their ‘malignant’ identities (Adjepong and Carrington, 2010; Douglas, 2012, as quoted by Engh and Potgieter, 2018; Heinecken, 2016 Walker and Melton, 2015, as quoted by Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon, 2017). They face much pressure to conform to notions of excessive feminization through dress and decoration in order to avoid the many discrepancies they face from resisting the status quo. In *She Got Game: My Personal Odyssey* (Cooper, 2000:54), American basketball player, Cynthia Cooper recalls combing and styling her hair, as well as modifying her speech in order to appear more feminine. She reflects further on her experiences as a black woman athlete playing basketball in Europe, learning Italian and engaging with the culture as being transformative and allowing her to become a more ‘sophisticated’ and confident woman (Heinecken, 2016).

In Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon (2017)’s study exploring Canadian women boxers identities, a black woman boxer on the Women’s Canadian National Boxing Team, disclosed that she made great effort to avoid employing colloquial expressions in her speech to appear more ‘educated’. Likewise, in a case study conducted by Clark and Burnett (2010) in South Africa, Lundi, a student athlete from Johannesburg received a scholarship for her footballing talent to attend a sporting institution providing her with an ‘opportunity’ to obtain an English-medium education and expand her world views and perspectives. While these experiences and opportunities may seem intriguing at surface-level, I assert that each of these cases reveal an element of ‘class re-orientation’ endured by each of these black women athletes in the interest of appearing more cultivated. Each of these cases offer insight to the oppression that black women athletes experience as a result of the intersection between their racial and linguistic identities (Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon, 2017). This suggests how conservative standards of white femininity continue to interrogate black women’s femininity and diminish it as unruly to the norm. It perpetuates the idea that whiteness is synonymous with desirability in relation to discourses of socioeconomic class and language. However, it is important to note that research on language, as part of sporting identities is scarce in comparison to sports scholarship investigating gender, race, class, and other sociocultural identities (Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon, 2017).

Brown (2015) suggests how hegemonic ideals perpetuate the notion of a racial spectrum where whiteness is located on the one end as representative of the 'standard' and blackness is placed on the opposite end. The white, heteronormative paradigm depicts these bodies as inferior to it (Holliday and Hassard, 2001, as quoted by Krane et al., 2004). Black bodies and bodies of color are deemed as 'unconventional' because they do not fit into the 'standard' end of this spectrum and thus, are rendered and treated differently. African American tennis players, Serena and Venus Williams continue to be criticized for their bodies being viewed as 'non-normative' and 'undesirable' in comparison to white players such as Maria Sharapova and Justine Henin-Hardenne (Douglas, 2005; Withycombe, 2011 as quoted by Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon, 2017). Marginalization of these 'unconventional' bodies occurs as a result of such a process due to gender, race, and other intersectional identity classifications, which do not adhere to the heteronormative ideal (Washington and Economides, 2015). Black women athletes and their 'non-conforming' bodies place them at the forefront of 'deviant' womanhood (Jakubowska, 2013; Pieper, 2016, as quoted by Channon and Phipps, 2017).

Scholars draw attention to how prevailing ideologies surrounding race construct black women athletes as muscular and 'masculine', in comparison with white women athletes, whilst also intertwining 'masculinity' with the meaning of being a 'natural' athlete (Collins, 2005; Davis, 1981, as quoted by Brown, 2015; Birrell and McDonald, 2000; Carrington, 2013; Carter-Francique and Flowers, 2013, as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016). This suggests how athleticism invokes masculinity, but also that black bodies and masculinity within sport are wrapped into notions of black women athletes' 'alien' identities. Racist discourses create the illusion of a black woman athlete as a "mythical" being, a "heroine" and her sporting success as one that is embedded in a world of fantasy and cliché (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998). This suggests a conflation surrounding terms, which render black women's athletic bodies as possibly 'super-human' or even 'strange', a vocabulary that instills awe, but simultaneously fear and aversion. Despite showcasing excellence and athletic domination within many athletic disciplines such as track and field, black women athletes are subject to stigmatizing images of masculinity as sport serves to magnify these and label black women athletes as 'sporting space invaders' (Hardin et al., 2004; Vertinsky and Captain, 1998, as quoted by Brown, 2015; Pieper, 2014). The term 'space invaders' coined by Nirmal Puwar (2004, as quoted by Adjepong, 2019) suggests that the existence of particular bodies within a space impends those other bodies

proclaiming to exist and thus, ‘space invaders’ are closely controlled in order to restrain any form of threat.

Adjepong and Carrington (2014, as quoted by Adjepong, 2019) discuss how this concept extends into sports to demonstrate the ways in which black women athletes have to navigate specific structural restraints, which tends to dramatize their place as ‘space invaders.’ This is particularly evident within elite sporting environments where black women athletes are accepted and celebrated on the condition that they present themselves and act in a manner which matches white heteronormative notions of femininity (Adjepong and Carrington, 2014:175, as quoted by Engh and Potgieter, 2015). Consequently, black women athletes ‘take up’ space by both fitting in and not fitting in (Adjepong and Carrington, 2014; Cooky et al., 2010; Vertinsky and Captain, 1998, as quoted by Engh and Potgieter, 2018). Carrington (2010, as quoted by Adjepong, 2019) notes the recognition of black women athletes as ‘space invaders’ signifies working out conflicts surrounding black athletes being framed as ‘masculine’ in spite of gender. Black women athletes find themselves within racialized and gendered circumstances that require the reevaluation of beliefs regarding female masculinities within sports (Adjepong, 2019).

Characterizing black women athletes as ‘masculine others’ in comparison to white women athletes contributes to maintaining and substantiating notions of race to keep up the gender order (Carrington, 2013; Collins, 1991; Schippers, 2007 as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016). Drawing on Fanon’s theorization of black women athletes, Carrington (2010, as quoted by Brown, 2015) and Adjepong (2019) dispute that prevailing constructions of black men athletes have been complied with the framing of black women athletes. Moreover, constructions of black women athletes are argued to be more detrimental to black women as outdated colonial discourses assert that they are “mannish amazons” (Carrington, 2010, as quoted by Brown, 2015). Extensive amounts of writing have shown how black women have been excluded from open and equitable sporting opportunities and remain marginalized, exoticized and stigmatized within dominant ideals of athletic femininity. For instance, during her career as a successful black track and field athlete, Joyner-Kersey remembers experiencing racial slurs and takes it upon herself in her autobiography; *A Kind of Grace* (Joyner-Kersey and Steptoe, 1997) to profess her belief that athleticism is refined, while disputing the idea of it being ‘unfeminine.’ She states, “I see beauty, elegance and grace in every female athlete”

(Joyner-Kersee and Steptoe, 1997:221). Correspondingly, Brazilian bodybuilder Renné Toney is often criticized for her ‘masculine’ appearance (Boyle, 2005). Heinecken (2016) notes how these statements are particularly prominent in trying to portray black women’s athleticism as being inconsistent with conceptions of traditional femininity. These prevailing conceptions construct an athlete such as Joyner-Kersee, among other black women athletes and women athletes of color, as ‘resistant’ because of their perceived disparity to whiteness and femininity.

From a historical standpoint, black women athletes and women athletes of color have been and are still inadequately represented within sport literature. Bruening (2005) writes how African American women have been belittled or entirely ruled out from sport scholarship established on the basis of sociocultural intersecting identities of gender and race. With that said, black feminist scholars recognize this as being located “on the margin” (hooks, 1984) or operating as “outsiders within” (Hill Collins, 1990). This suggests that black sportswomen and sportswomen of color do not fully hold space as credible athletes and their experiences are either silenced or completely overlooked from sports research and scholarship. While black women and women of color may share similar experiences to each other, it is important to emphasize that they also have experiences deemed as unique to them. I argue that disregarding their unique experiences by assimilating them to those of white women or black men further propagates marginalization and the erasure of their voices into a generalized experience. Hill Collins (1990) describes this as being “defined by others”, in relation to the generalization of African American women’s experiences and dictating them to follow a general consensus that is rooted deeply within racist ideologies. A significant shortcoming within sports research and literature is that it sustains these ideologies through the continued universalization of experiences and fails to acknowledge the various intersections existing within society.

Research and sports literature have systemically failed to understand that there is not a single black woman’s experience embodying gender, race, class, and the experiences that these categories affect (Bruening, 2005). Moreover, sports scholarship and research overlooks Africa, with very few studies generally directed in South Africa (Hargreaves and Anderson, 2014; Hong and Mangan, 2004, as quoted by Adjepong, 2020). The consequence is that black women and other women of color are repeatedly left out of sport. Likewise, Engh and Potgieter (2018) note that disregarding LGBTQI sporting identities, together with race and sexuality intersections in women’s sports constitute as a crucial defect of sports research and literature within the South African context. This is evident in the sports literature I have been consulting,

which has shown to validate this particular sentiment of neglecting non-heteronormative identities and persist in centering the focal point on white women's experiences in sport. South African table tennis player and sports activist, Cheryl Roberts attempts to challenge these discourses at the forefront of sports media and social media platforms with regards to empowering and advancing women and particularly, black women in sport. The exploration of sexuality within South African sports research and scholarship tends to be examined separately and rarely as overlapping with race and racism, and therefore, further restricts black queer women's perceptions in and out of the sporting realm (Engh and Potgieter, 2018).

In summary, proclamations of white womanhood continue to isolate black women, and particularly black women athletes, as they are unable to reach this 'ideal'. They remain under the scope of much scrutiny and are required to find other ways to meet this ideal, through tropes and images of the exoticized and racialized black female body. The Baartman analogy prevails in discourses of exoticization and racialization, translating to the harsh criticism that African American tennis star, Serena Williams continues to experience on and off the court. Moreover, racist ideologies employ animalistic discourses to highlight images of hyper-masculinity and hyper-sexuality among black track athletes Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Wilma Rudolph, and Florence Griffith-Joyner. Black women athletes and women athletes of color experience much pressure to appear more 'feminine' in order to 'discipline' these so-called 'deviant' identities according to heteronormative notions. This is evident in the example of Lundi, a young South African footballer, who received a scholarship for athletic talents, to attend a 'prestigious' sporting institution where she would be given the 'chance' to obtain an English-medium education in order to help her 'broaden' her views. These women athletes' blackness positions them at the center of deviant femininity. Their bodies are treated as 'atypical' and even 'bizarre' because they do not comply with the norms dictated by notions of whiteness.

Black women athletes are often framed as 'masculine' and they have been confounded with alien-like, foreign identities, creating an illusion of fantasy. This conveys an element of conflation where black women athletes' bodies are said to go beyond the ordinary and enter the realm of the supernatural, instilling admiration, as well as horror and revulsion. Navigating their positions as sportswomen remains a tedious task, as they are perceived as sporting space invaders. Such a label is withdrawn when black women athletes meet the norms and are celebrated for it. Research in sports scholarship largely excludes black women athletes' experiences. Black women athletes and women athletes of color undergo experiences that are

unique, yet sports literature fails to acknowledge this by universalizing them and ignoring the intersections existing among sportswomen that render them each as different. Furthermore, current sports research and scholarship neglects African contexts, particularly South African contexts where this research is taking place, and as a result, black women athletes and women athletes of color remain ‘absent’ from this realm.

2.2. Muscularity as a premise of athleticism

Early research suggests that women athletes’ muscular bodies, sporting interests and characteristics have been noted as palpable depictions of same-sex desire and an aversion to gender norms (Cahn, 1993; Cox and Thompson, 2001; Engh, 2011; Davis-Delano et al., 2009; Kane et al., 2013; Schultz, 2014, as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016; Blinde and Taub, 1992; Brownsworth, 1991; Kauer and Krane, 2006; Veri, 1999, as quoted by Sartore and Cunningham, 2009; Waldron, 2007). Much of this research is not attuned to questions of race, or class, but concentrates on the way heteronormative ideals of femininity suggest that the athletic woman disrupts these through her participation in sport and particularly so if she also embodies a lesbian identity. Moreover, Heinecken (2016) discusses how women athletes’ bodies tend to be regarded as freak-like and abnormal, which adds to the interrogation of their gender and sexuality. This supports the premise contending that sport is a masculine domain where women athletes’ bodies are scrutinized because they are demonstrative of masculine qualities and thus, they must fall along the spectrum of same-sex desire. Likewise, Schilling and Bunsell (2009:146, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2016:147) note, “When a woman displays muscular aesthetics, it impinges on most people’s sense of normality in relation to gender and sexuality”. The image of the ‘mannish’ lesbian athlete often derives from these impressions to confirm the masculine nature of sport and its juxtaposition to women’s ‘deviance’ (Cahn, 1993; Cox and Thompson, 2000, as quoted by Grundlingh, 2010).

Adams, Schmitke and Franklin (2005), and St Martin and Gavey (1996, as quoted by Grogan et al., 2004) contend that sport works as an integral arena for women athletes to challenge stereotypical and belittling images suggesting a weak and passive feminine body. With that being said, Hargreaves (2004, as quoted by Ogunniyi, 2015) argues that their bodies may resist these images of weakness by reshaping prevailing power structures within sporting spaces where alternate gender identities are conceived, exhibited, and performed. To reshape and resist

these structures means that women athletes refuse to assimilate to hegemonic discourses of femininity and instead, embrace the power and freedom attained within sporting terrains. Choi (2000, as quoted by Krane et al., 2004) proposes that narratives of resistance are more consistent with athletic identities than narratives of femininity. Athletic performance requires women athletes to be powerful in terms of their strength and build, and consequently, display these attributes which heteronormative ideas claim to be masculine or within the realm of same-sex desire, as well as outside of sporting spaces (George, 2005). To illustrate, a South African woman footballer from the Banyana Banyana team revealed, “the thing is they associate muscle with men, so as soon as a woman is muscular, or eh . . . built, then she is seen as masculine” (Engh, 2011) and as a result, heteronormative ideals implore women athletes to embody a “heterosexy-fit” identity (Ezzel, 2009, as quoted by Engh, 2011).

Speed, stamina, and form constitute the core of the athletic discipline of track running (Cahn, 1994, as quoted by Miller, 2015; Mewett, 2003:342). Mosewich et al’s (2009) study revealed that along with these core elements, ego and strength are conspicuous to track running athletes. Embodying these traits are salient as these athletes encounter much pressure in having to aesthetically look a particular way because of the musculature associated with the identity of not only track athletes, but women athletes in general. As part of track running, both sprinters and distance runners are expected to be muscular, but with their variations in muscle size and tone (Mosewich et al., 2009). Musculature forms an integral part of women athletes’ experiences, which is why they may experience conflict with regards to their own bodies. This conflict stems from their need and desires to be strong and develop muscular physiques for athletic performance, but also fear standing out and be seen as ‘manly’ (Greenleaf, 2002, as quoted by Mosewich et al., 2009; Choi, 2003; Grogan et al., 2004; Gruber, 2007, as quoted by Steinfeldt et al., 2011). Meanings of being a gender ‘bandit’ arise for muscular or lean women showing barely or no curvature at all as they are seen to be overlooking society’s idea of what is ‘respectable’, on an aesthetic and physical level, by the gender order of socialization (Goffman, 1983; Schilling and Bunsell, 2009:156, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2016).

The skills, musculature and traits linked to athleticism are markers of masculinity, which Heggie (2010, as quoted by Wells and Darnell, 2014:47) contends, creates “a natural-seeming equivalence between sports performance, “masculine” physiology and maleness itself that renders female athletes (especially muscular, powerful, and elite performers) suspicious as

women”. Similarly, Cole (2003, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2015) writes that the evident masculinization of women athletes’ bodies makes them unusual and questionable as they threaten standardized ideas of womanhood and edge towards the masculine frame. Women athletes’ sporting abilities tend to be viewed as ‘unusual’ or as a male-like trait (Lenskij, 1986 as quoted by Harry, 1995:110; Richman and Schaffer, 2000; Ross and Shinen, 2008; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009) and thus, rigid power structures are preserved through the promotion of highly feminized and sexualized athletes. These rigid structures do not permit the possibility for women athletes, particularly those identifying as heterosexual, to embody more fluid gender identities, as well as those encompassing masculinity without being prone to much criticism.

Women athletes require these toned bodies in order to perform within their sports, yet they must refrain from developing excessively ‘masculine’ bodies (Dworkin, 2001; Engh, 2010; Engh and Potgieter, 2015; George, 2005; Karkazis and Jordan-Young, 2018; Krane et al., 2004; Mosewich et al., 2009; Ross and Shinen, 2008). I argue that this conflict prevails as the dominant discourse for women track athletes as they continue to negotiate degrees of ‘acceptable’ muscularity whilst complying with heteronormative ideals of femininity and desire. Developing muscle for women athletes, thus, creates a dilemma where the toned and athletic body is favored, but muscularity embodies power and masculinity (Bordo, 1993, as quoted by Krane et al., 2004; Dworkin, 2001; Krane, 2001; Ross and Shinen, 2008) and to which, may strain performances of femininity.

More recently, social trends have shown to favor an athletic and muscular body as the ‘new’ feminine ideal to be desired (George, 2005; Mosewich et al., 2009; Choi, 2000, as quoted by Steinfeldt et al., 2011), especially within discourses of ideal ‘white femininity’. These trends have been shown to promote slogans such as “Strong is the new sexy” as a way of celebrating the ‘ideal’ body connoted through the ‘heterosexy-fit’ frame. A ‘heterosexy-fit’ frame in particular is seen as desirable, although somewhat contradictory as it encompasses strength, muscularity, femininity, and heterosexuality together (Griffin, 1992, as quoted by Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005; Ezzel, 2009, as quoted by Engh, 2011; Krane et al., 2001, as quoted by Steinfeldt et al., 2011). By embracing a ‘heterosexy-fit’ frame, women athletes actively show that muscularity no longer threatens femininity (Gruber, 2007, as quoted by Steinfeldt et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Grogan et al., (2004, as quoted by Steinfeldt et

al., 2011), British women bodybuilders revealed having high levels of self-esteem, feeling confident of their bodies and generally more sensual than previously.

Likewise, an American woman athlete situated shared, “I want to be muscular to be the best I can be at my sport. It’s something I tend to play down when I’m at class or out with my friends. I’ve learned over time that it’s now something that’s usually attractive to men” (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). I note that both of these studies suggest that many women athletes located within western contexts experience more confidence and perhaps, ‘freedom’ to, simultaneously, embody a muscular frame while feeling more desirable than other women athletes. However, there is not enough evidence within this area to confirm these claims and requires research to be undertaken to provide consistent results. As more women enter the sports and fitness realm striving to achieve a more ‘suppressed’ muscular frame as the ‘heterosexy-fit’ norm, questions arise as to whether a ‘new and improved’ womanhood emerges or whether it is restoring ‘real’ womanhood (Dworkin, 2001; Ross and Shiner, 2008).

All in all, masculinity poses as a ‘risk’ for women athletes. Despite this, sport, and fitness function as a space for women athletes to resist conventional ideas of the ‘weak’ feminine body. Narratives of resistance are generated through athleticism’s need for a strong and fit body. Track runners are required to maintain a strong and muscular physique, although variations do exist between sprinters and distance runners. Along with their wish to develop muscular bodies, track athletes also experience feelings of conflict, as they do not want to attract attention to the idea of appearing overly masculine. Processes of masculinization leave women athletes as strange and suspicious, while simultaneously threatening heteronormative ideas of femininity and nearing towards a masculine build. The severity of such a system forbids women athletes, particularly those identifying as heterosexual, to demonstrate gender identities that are more fluid, in addition to displaying masculine traits clear of any criticism or scrutiny. Muscle growth and development creates certain predicaments for women athletes, as standardized ideas continue to favor a toned and slim body, while muscularity is connected to masculinity and power.

Contemporary discourses within social trends celebrate the muscular and athletic body as the ideal for women to aspire to. The ‘heterosexy-fit’ physique is viewed as particularly attractive, in spite of some seemingly contradictory elements of muscularity, power, femininity and heterosexuality when placed together. Studies conducted in western contexts have shown that

many women athletes feel more confident and freer to maintain a muscular and fit physique while also feeling seductive, more so than sportswomen located in different contexts. Today, there are certainly more women entering sporting spaces with the aim of attaining a more ‘restrained’ muscular physique such as the ‘heterosexy-fit’ build. This raises questions relating to whether this is reinforcing ‘true’ femininity or allowing for a newer and enhanced femininity to emerge.

2.3. Women athletes’ narratives and discourses of ‘tomboyism’ and gender fluidities

A ‘tomboy’ can be described as a girl who is active, enjoys physical activity and is good at sports (Caudwell, 2002; Kidd, 2013) and the term, ‘tomboy’ refers to girls displaying characteristics or behaviors condemned as ‘masculine’ (Bailey et al., 2002; Green, Williams, and Goodman, 1982; Jones, 1999; Martin, 1995, as quoted by Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Carr, 1998; Halim et al., 2011). Abate (2008, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011) suggests how meanings of the ‘tomboy’ identity have substantially differed and developed across cultural and historical contexts; from being celebrated as a normal and healthy entity to the extreme of being obscured and criticized. The label tends to be considered ‘temporary’ as studies have shown that it is given to girls during childhood, as they embody these more ‘masculine’ traits that defy ideas of femininity and girlhood (Carr, 1998, Craig and LaCroix, 2011; Halim et al., 2011; Quimby, 2003). There is a resistance to socialization and gender norms as young women embody traits and behaviors considered to be challenging heteronormative discourses of femininity. An exploration of South African women footballers’ lives revealed that the ‘tomboy’ identity allowed these women some leeway during their youth from gendered societal expectations. ‘Tomboyism’ is a critical area of research considering its pervasiveness and the ways in which it shows compelling transformations within gender development and growth (Halim et al., 2011).

As it stands, there is very little research and knowledge on ‘tomboy’ culture, and even more so on the negotiation and embodiment of the label within sporting domains in South Africa. The literature that I have been consulting on ‘tomboy’ culture focuses on both heteronormative and queer experiences of embodiment within Western contexts such as the United States of America (Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Carr, 1998). Evidently, ‘tomboy’ culture is much more visible in research and writing about white girls and young women, than in research about black

women and women of color. Since its early beginnings in nineteenth century American literature, women scholars have used the ‘tomboy’ as a prominent figure to examine and critique issues surrounding gender and race within American contexts, with the hopes of presenting different versions of the ‘tomboy’ identity among girls (Llacer, 2015). The novel, *The Bean Trees* by Barbara Kingsolver achieves this through the presentation of the protagonist, a Native American girl named Taylor Greer. The young girl embodies her ‘tomboy’ identity in a highly constrained space, resulting in her experiencing much exclusion as she refuses to conform to Southern American traditions of womanhood (Llacer, 2015).

Embodying a ‘tomboy’ identity is acceptable temporarily and provided that these women ‘grow out of it’, especially by adolescence as this phase prepares for ‘ascendance into appropriate femininity’ (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Burn, O’Neil and Nederend, 1996; Rekers, 1992; Thorne, 1993, as quoted by Carr, 1998; Engh, 2011). Quimby (2003) highlights that some ‘tomboys’ eventually shift their gender expression in an effort to act more feminine, usually to appease concerns of their family members and friends. In addition to proclaiming a sense of general masculinity, the term ‘tomboy’ also conveys a specific masculinity, which focuses on abilities in preference of physical appearance. Many ‘tomboys’ tend to wear clothing that presents as more masculine. Craig and LaCroix (2011) argue that this clothing choice relates more to purpose than fashion, such as the freedom obtained from wearing jeans or pants to participate in activities as opposed to the difficulties to replicate these actions in stiletto heels and skirts. By the same token, a woman’s dismissal to wearing high heels and skirts does not rely solely on the idea that these clothing items are restrictive to activity and motion, but that these items are representative of femininity and gesture to gender disparities (Craig and LaCroix, 2011). Thus, their rejection of typically feminine attire offers a way for girls and women to avoid any negative clichés. While some young women find themselves identifying as a ‘tomboy’, others may only identify with the label to a certain extent. They may occupy more male-identified spaces such as sports, as well as more female-identified ones such as maintaining friendships with other young women. All in all, many young and adult women simulate some form of masculinity aligned with ‘tomboyism’ without embodying the identity completely (Craig and LaCroix, 2011).

Given my interest in the ways in which women athletes encounter the ‘threat’ of masculinization as part of their negotiation with gender, I note that while the term ‘tomboy’ does encode temporary permission for girls’ or women’s pleasure in their athleticism, it

simultaneously opens up the idea of gender identity as fluid, even within a highly constrained space. There are debates on 'tomboyism' and around whether athletic girls and women are consciously rejecting aspects of femininity or whether they are simply embracing a gender fluidity which works to protect their identity (Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Carr, 2005, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011). This 'rejection' of aspects of femininity suggests a possible aversion to feminine-orientated activities in pursuit of accommodating a more fluid approach to their gendered identity and interests. Similarly, drawing on Fiedler's and Moon's critiques, Quimby (2003) adds that the 'tomboy' is perceived as rebelling against femininity as it renounces expressions of femininity and conveys expressions, prospects and desires associated with masculinity and queer identities, which in itself, demonstrates that such classifications are indistinct and ambiguous. Moreover, the 'tomboy' is a manifestation of a changeable and fluid gender identity, which Quimby (2003:1) defines as "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."

Scholars underline that the very nature of 'tomboyism' connotes gender-atypicality, and that hegemonic ideologies maintain it to be normative and socially acceptable to some extent of sheltering young women and girls from the risk of potential stigmatization (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Burn et al., 1996; Egan and Perry, 2001; Hyde, 1991; Morgan, 1998; Plumb and Cowan, 1984; Thorne, 1993, as quoted by Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Craig and LaCroix, 2011). Distancing from femininity may be an attempt for girls and young women to disperse negative stereotypes such as women being viewed weaker and less capable than men. However, some young women do, in fact, think that women are generally weaker and tend to alienate from femininity (Craig and LaCroix, 2011). For women athletes relating to a masculine identity, it is imperative for them to deal with the ramifications of challenging masculinity. This consists of being marked as masculine and as such, a lesbian (Hall, 1988, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008) and leading to ridicule, segregation, and invisibility (Griffin, 1992, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008) or forcing them to emulate prescribed ideas of heteronormative femininity (Butler, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008) and more 'delicate' versions of masculinity such as 'tomboyism' in order to be included (Caudwell, 1999, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008). In light of 'tomboyism' being considered normative due to the high prevalence of young women and girls identifying as 'tomboys,' Ahlqvist et al., (2013) and Halim et al., (2011) add that these girls and young women perhaps perceive themselves as gender nonconforming in comparison to conventional gender ideals.

Research in a wide array of contexts shows that the term, 'tomboy' can be used to indicate one's sexual orientation. In China, 'tomboy' describes a more 'masculine' presenting partner within a lesbian relationship (Chen and Chen, 2007, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011), whilst in the United States of America; studies revealed that the term is placed on a continuum of lesbian gender identities (Craig and LaCroix, 2011). It is clear that for research in these contexts, this term is highly racialized and typically used in the research surveyed by white people to describe young women's deviations from the status quo. However, this does not suggest that this term and its implications do not exist within other cultures and languages. For example, 'garçon manqué' in French has similar connotations to 'tomboy', while in Hong Kong; the term is correspondent to a lesbian identity (Tong, 2008, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011). On the other hand, in the Philippines, 'tomboy' refers to a 'masculine' presenting lesbian woman and is seen as a highly demeaning term because the expression of a fluid gender identity is synonymous with a fluid sexual identity in a context of poverty (Ceperiano, Santos Jr., Alonzo and Ofreneo, 2016).

Carr (2005, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011) underlines that many lesbian and bisexual women disclose their 'tomboy' identities as most correspondent to same-sex desire above anything else. Halberstam, a renowned theorist of queer time and space, explores the 'tomboy' as being defiant of girlhood femininities and exerting masculinity through the phenomenon of female masculinity. They argue that in American vocabularies, 'tomboy' indicates same-sex desire and may flag the possibility of queer 'being' (Halberstam, 1998). Moreover, these vocabularies have also reclaimed articulation of 'tomboy' into 'tomboi' to suggest a more masculine identity that aligns with "butch" and "sporty dyke" identities, as well as allowing more room for many lesbian women to claim a more masculine identity that surpasses the 'tomboy' (Craig and LaCroix, 2011).

A 'tomboy,' as Butler (1993, as quoted by Quimby, 2003) writes, is excluded from heterosexual structures. Drawing on Wittig's (1992, as quoted by Quimby, 2003) discussion of queer sexualities the gender order, the 'tomboy's' rejection of womanhood suggests, to some extent, that she refuses to comply with these structures and therefore, an element of queerness is to be considered within her gender performance. For women rejecting aspects of womanhood such as participating in 'male-identified' activities and refusing to 'grow out' of a 'tomboy' identity is viewed as challenging meanings of heteronormativity and points to same-sex desire

(Engh, 2011). Moreover, the interrogation of sexuality is fueled by expectations of women outgrowing the 'tomboy' identity. To demonstrate, a woman football player from the South African team, Banyana Banyana, disclosed that she felt compelled to grow out of the 'tomboy' identity by partaking in activities deemed as more appropriate for women, seeing as many young women footballers are regarded as defying boundaries of acceptability (Engh, 2011:145). Interestingly, other scholars argue that in fact, several heterosexual women who recall being 'tomboys' during their childhood perceive this social identity as separate to their sexual orientation (Craig and LaCroix, 2011). It is evident that the idea of sexual incoherence sustains the 'tomboy' account and that sexuality within this narrative cannot be presumed as conclusive (Quimby, 2003).

Abate (2008, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011) suggests that it is deemed acceptable, from a social standpoint, for a heterosexual tomboy to be exhibiting masculine traits, provided that she surpasses it and performs some form of femininity and maintains a 'heterosexy' aesthetic. Performing femininity demands more than just exhibiting feminine traits, but it also requires demonstrating indicators of heterosexuality. Interestingly, Craig and LaCroix (2011) illustrate that it is 'acceptable' for a tomboy to be considerably feminine, as long as she also exhibits masculine qualities that will ensure her success in 'male-dominated' activities such as sports. Likewise, Adams, Schmitke and Franklin (2005) found that demonstrating femininity was admissible, provided that an athlete excelled within her sport. If she does not succeed in applying such measures, she falls through at being a tomboy. Hence, Craig and LaCroix (2011:453) assert, "The tomboy athlete may be a special case in which the limits of tomboy as a protective identity become clear" because athleticism is deemed as enough for young women to embody the label. In a study conducted by Ross and Shiner (2007), several women athletes participating in gymnastics and softball identified as 'tomboys' and attributed their sporting accomplishments to this identity. Thus, participation, as a girl or woman in sporting activities, by definition, is implicated in the label of 'tomboy' (Craig and LaCroix, 2011; Halim et al., 2011).

Cox and Thompson (2001) draw on the experiences of women football players with regards to labeling and highlight that 'tomboy' translates into labels such as 'butch' and 'lesbian' as girls and young women enter adulthood. On the other hand, Cahn (1993) proposes the sporting discipline of athletics as a site of relocation for heterosexual 'tomboy' girls and young women. For girls and young women athletes, such a discipline incorporates 'masculine' activity

performed by their bodies, and therefore shifts traditional meanings of the expression of masculinity and femininity (Cahn, 1993). Craig and LaCroix (2011) contend that many heterosexual and lesbian women athletes try to navigate the masculinity involved in participating in sports added with tensions forcing them to recognize that they are women and not men. This is followed by debates regarding the idea that “tomboys aren’t real men,” yet the ‘tomboy’ identity temporarily allows for them to identify as both or neither feminine and masculine at the same time (Hemmer and Kleiber, 1981; Plumb and Cowan, 1984, as quoted by Carr, 1998; Craig and LaCroix, 2011). Sport may permit girls and young women, located in these spheres, to embody their identities unconventionally, contending to heteronormative discourses of femininity. These sporting spheres also serve as a site of protection from the presumptions and interrogation of their sexual identities that arise from ‘tomboy’ girls’ and young women’s participation and display of masculine behaviors (Craig and LaCroix, 2011).

Overall, it may be said that connotations of the ‘tomboy’ identity have shifted considerably and broadened across historical and cultural contexts. On the one hand, the ‘tomboy’ identity is proclaimed as ‘normal’, whilst on the other, it is heavily scrutinized and perhaps, frowned upon. Studies suggest that the label is ‘temporary’ for girls and young women during their childhood while they demonstrate masculine traits and behaviors challenging traditional notions of femininity and girlhood. By the time they reach adolescence, women are expected to distance themselves or completely let go of the ‘tomboy’ identity and conform to an ‘appropriate’ femininity to calm any worry or anxiety of family and friends. Research and knowledge on ‘tomboy’ culture remains very scarce, especially in relation to negotiating and embodying the label within South African sporting spaces. Existing literature on this phenomenon tends to focus on queer and heteronormative experiences of representation within the United States of America and other western contexts. Consequently, research and scholarship on ‘tomboy’ culture is more conspicuous among white girlhood than black girlhood. The ‘tomboy’ identity not only promotes a ‘general’ masculinity, but the term also suggests a particular masculinity that places the focal point on performance as opposed to physique. Many girls and young women embodying the ‘tomboy’ identity tend to wear more masculine clothes.

For the most part, many women, at some point in their lives, will replicate a form of masculinity that is connected to the notion of ‘tomboyism’ without embracing it entirely. Along with the ‘tomboy’ label granting permission temporarily for girls’ and young women’s enjoyment in

their fitness, it also invites the notion of a fluid gender identity, despite the sporting sphere's high constraints. There are continuous debates on 'tomboyism' that are fueled by interrogations of women and athletic girls' rejection of certain traits of femininity and perhaps their desire to embrace a fluid gender identity as a form of protection. Dissociating from traditional notions of femininity allows girls and young women to dissipate negative and sexist ideas such as women being weak and less accomplished than men. Research across different cultures and contexts suggests that the 'tomboy' label is indicative of one's sexuality.

It is evident that this particular research within these contexts is extremely racialized and generally investigated by white folk to discuss girls' and young women's diversion to heteronormative structures. Nevertheless, the term 'tomboy' and its meanings do indeed exist across other languages and cultural contexts. Many women identifying as lesbian and bisexual reveal that their 'tomboyism' is most parallel to same-sex desire. American vocabularies have claimed back articulations of the 'tomboy' label as a way of describing an identity that is more masculine and therefore, enabling more lesbian women to maintain a masculine identity exceeding the 'tomboy'. The 'tomboy' identity is one that is ruled out from constructions of heterosexuality. It is clear that notions of sexual confusion maintain the 'tomboy' identity and thus, a 'tomboy's' sexuality cannot be assumed as being exact or definite. Women footballers' experiences of labeling suggest that 'tomboyism' echoes identities of 'butchness' and same-sex desire upon girls' and young women's transition into adulthood. Contrarily, athletics as a sport offers girls and young women to relocate and move as heterosexual 'tomboys'. Sport can allow them to embrace the 'unconventional' identity of the 'tomboy' while resisting heteronormative notions of womanhood.

2.4. Disciplining and interrogating gender ideals

In spite of showcasing athletic excellence, women are perceived as transgressors (Heinecken, 2016; Ross and Shiness, 2008; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009) and sport remains a terrain dominated by men while continuing to expose prevalent gender inequalities. Women participating in sports experience reduced opportunities with regards to the availability and provision of opportunities, facilities, and resources (Capranica et al., 2013). Sporting codes continue to favor men by centering their experiences in contrast to women's (Ogunniyi, 2015; Williams and Hess, 2015), evidently suggesting that there is a preservation of male entitlement

and control perpetuated by heteronormative ideologies. As a social institution, sport conserves and reinforces the narrative of a gender binary asserting that men are naturally athletic and powerful, whilst women are naturally weaker and soft (Cahn, 1993; Engh and Potgieter, 2015; Heinecken, 2016; Knoppers, 1992, as quoted by Sartore and Cunningham, 2009). Moreover, the gender binary is further replicated within sporting domains as it separates ‘male’ and ‘female’ orientated sports. More ‘feminine’ sports such as swimming and gymnastics are believed to enhance these ‘feminine’ qualities in contrast to football and track (Richman and Schaffer, 2000; Ross and Shiness, 2008; Wiley, Shaw and Havitz, 2000).

With that being said, women’s experiences within sports differ from those of men (Hall, 1988). This is apparent given the intersections setting men and women apart, as well as women from other women. Hargreaves (1997) writes that in a large portion of the sporting domain, women feel a strong and direct sense of competition between themselves and men, whilst also reporting that they experience intimidation and hostility inflicted by men. Nelson (1994, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2015) observes, “girls are meant to learn that female strength is unappealing to men, that being attractive to men is important, and that competing with boys in sports risks having called into question one’s gender and sexuality”. This draws attention to the impact of misogynistic practices echoing from stringent systems of male domination, which women athletes encounter because they threaten hegemonic discourses upon navigating sporting spaces. Yet, some women athletes choose to ‘set aside’ their femininity, as they perceive their sporting success to be connected to masculinity (Heinecken, 2016). This suggests that certain women athletes do not align womanhood and athleticism as compatible identities and thus, their experiences as athletes are consistent with ideas of masculinity at the forefront of sporting excellence.

Past research has shown that women athletes experience adversity, a term coined by Wang and Gordon (1994, as quoted by Tamminen, Holt and Neely, 2013), pertaining to either psychological or physical stressors potentially impeding behavior and functioning. These stressors may include performance errors, performance expectations, training requirements, competitors and interpersonal demands causing distress to women athletes (Fletcher et al., 2010, as quoted by Tamminen, Holt and Neely, 2013; Killham et al., 2018). Distress as a repercussion of adversity may cause women athletes to interrogate their abilities and identities surrounding athleticism (Killham et al., 2018), which would severely impact their overall experiences as negative within their sporting areas. Added to this, heteronormative ideologies

dictate that women athletes should seek the ideal feminine body of being lean and toned (Dworkin, 2001; George, 2005; Krane et al., 2004; Mosewich et al., 2009; Musto and McGann, 2016; Ross and Shiness, 2008). These beliefs create much tension and influence women athletes to maintain strict measures within their sports in order to attain the 'ideal' body. Gill (2007:6, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2015) asserts, "women's bodies are presented simultaneously as [a] source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness".

With that said, scholars have found that many women athletes succumb to stress and engage in detrimental practices of over training, disordered eating, training whilst injured as well as limiting their time spent weight lifting (Beals and Manore, 1994 as quoted by Mosewich et al., 2009:100; Duquin, 1994; Johns, 1996; Krane, Greenleaf, & Snow, 1997 as quoted by Krane et al., 2004:315; George, 2005; Kilham et al., 2018; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009; Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Taub and Blinde, 1992). These behaviors are the result of women athletes submitting to the demands of rigid heteronormative orders preserving discourses of femininity. It is believed that these destructive behaviors are rooted in women athletes' need to break away from the pressures of having to conform to society's views of femininity (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009, as quoted by Heinecken, 2016). Bordo (1993, as quoted by Heinecken, 2016) explains that women embodying a 'tough' physique suggest an element of power over a 'stubborn' physique associated with femininity; and thus, engaging in eating disorders such as anorexia is a way for women to show control and domination, both of which flag masculinity. However, research in sport psychology has shown that engaging in these types of restrictive and detrimental behaviors has left many women athletes suffering from depression, low confidence, and suicide for some (Krane et al., 2005, as quoted by Sartore and Cunningham, 2009).

On the other hand, scholars discuss that women experience much empowerment and exhilaration from participating in sport. More recently, sports scholarship suggests that many women athletes match up physical strength and femininity as synonymous with female athleticism (Krane et al., 2004; Ross and Shiness, 2008; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009) as opposed to viewing these identities as contrasting to each other. Along with physiological wellness, sport participation has the potential to satisfy women athletes' psychological needs too. Many of them reveal experiencing feelings of confidence, fulfillment, and resilience, along

with developing valuable coping mechanisms such as self-compassion through their participation in sport (Hargreaves, 2000; Kauer and Krane, 2006, as quoted by Barber and Krane, 2007; Tamminen, Holt and Neely, 2013). Likewise, scholars assert that a tool such as self-compassion may nurture habits of wellbeing such as body appreciation and healthy eating (Ferguson et al., 2014, 2015; Killham, 2014, as quoted by Killham et al., 2018; DiNucci, Finkenberg, McCune and McCune, 1994; Rao and Overman, 1986; Snyder and Kivlin, 1975, as quoted by Richman and Schaffer, 2000) and thus, further positive experiences for women athletes in sport. This suggests how sport may act as an agent to attaining good health, wellbeing, and a platform of recognition for women as their participation continues to dismantle rigid power structures.

Heteronormative structures point to women's participation in sports as transgressing to discourses of femininity. Women athletes often come across 'masculine' assumptions about them and tend to emphasize their femininity both on and off sporting arenas (Krane et al., 2004; Ross and Shiness, 2008; Steinfeldt et al., 2011). To illustrate, women baseball players across American teams have been encouraged to attend 'charm' school (Williams, 2012). Correspondingly, the South African Football Association (SAFA) vice-president, Ria Ledwaba has suggested that the women football players of Banyana Banyana be more feminine by wearing tighter and more revealing uniforms, as well as attend 'etiquette' classes (Clark, 2011; Engh, 2010; Engh and Potgieter, 2015; Engh and Potgieter, 2018). Demonstrating femininity involves several markers and indicators exuding hegemonic femininity which women athletes are pressured to comply with. As demonstrated by the feminization of the American baseball players and Banyana Banyana players, a few traditional markers of femininity include women athletes wearing 'feminine' athletic attire such as skirts, long hair, make-up, and bows in their hair (Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005; Dworkin and Messner, 2002; Krane et al., 2004; Musto and McGann, 2016; Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Waldron, 2007) to the extent of overcompensation in an attempt to deflect the risk of marginalization and prejudice (Blinde and Taub 1992; Hargreaves 2000, 2001; Krane 2001; Lenskyj 1991, 1994; Rich 1980, as quoted by Ross and Shiness, 2008).

Imposing these markers on women athletes suggests there is a perceived sense of 'normalcy' maintained and the idea that femininity cannot be relegated during participation in sports. This 'normalcy' is constructed within white, heterosexual, class-based structures, which privilege and idealizes the white woman athlete's body as the universal femininity to aspire to. This is

why many women athletes show resistance to developing a muscular physique, in an attempt to overshadow the 'ideal', toned body, can be further translated as avoidance to potential deviant labeling as same-sex desire has pertained to be (George, 2005; Waldron, 2007). Whilst this privileges women adhering to these social categories, other women who do not fit into this particular mold are subject to being labeled as deviant or 'inferior' (Blinde and Taub, 1992; George, 2005; Krane, 2001; Krane et al., 2004) and fall victim to much discrepancy and as they 'resist' the 'ideal' body and femininity. Moreover, some women athletes are further subjected to stringent measures of verifying and affirming their femininity through relentless procedures such as sex testing (Adjepong, 2020; Brown, 2015; Cooky and Dworkin, 2013; Cooky, Dycus and Dworkin, 2013; Engh and Potgieter, 2015; Wackwitz, 2003).

Performing femininity demands more than just exhibiting feminine traits, but it also requires demonstrating heterosexuality. Traditional notions of femininity perpetuate the narrative that athleticism and femininity cannot be aligned and as such, women athletes' heterosexuality is often questioned. They often find themselves under much pressure and surveillance to preserve and exhibit traits of femininity conducive to maintaining their position as heterosexual women (Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005; Channon and Phipps, 2017; Cox and Thompson, 2001; Heinecken, 2016; Krane, 2001). Within sporting domains, femininity is usually synonymous with heterosexuality and as scholars have inferred, highlighting women athletes' appearance and personal relationships are unobvious ways of scrutinizing their sexuality (Cox and Thompson, 2001; Engh and Potgieter, 2015; Hall, 1996, as quoted by George, 2005; Washington and Economides, 2015). For instance, American track and field athlete, Jackie Joyner-Kersey asserts her heterosexual identity through discussions of her marriage, aspirations of motherhood and taking on the role of the 'homemakers' (Heinecken, 2016). Implications for women athletes failing to demonstrate or affirm heterosexuality are their susceptibility to deviant labeling (Cox and Thompson, 2001; Blinde and Taub, 1992) as well as resulting in more segregation, loss of status and marginalization (Sartore and Cunningham, 2009). For these reasons, many women athletes tend to comply with these performances of femininity to curb discrimination (Krane, 2001, as quoted by Sartore and Cunningham, 2009).

To sum up, sporting systems persistently prioritize men and their experiences by placing the focal point on them, which shows how ideas of a patriarchal society are being preserved. Sport, as a social structure, sustains and supports discourses of the gender binary. Certain sportswomen adhere to this by choosing to suppress their womanhood because they associate

their athletic accomplishments with masculinity, while femininity and athleticism remain incompatible. Past studies suggest that many women athletes encounter adversity, physically or psychologically and resulting in their behavior and functioning being hindered. Consequently, they encounter distress from this adversity, which in turn, results in many women athletes questioning themselves and their sporting talents and creates much negativity within their sporting spaces. Stringent heteronormative discourses continue to propagate a lean and toned athletic body as the ideal of femininity. This creates much pressure for many women athletes trying to achieve this ideal and leads to them engaging in harmful and destructive behaviors such as excessive training, unhealthy eating patterns, training when injured, and avoiding weight lifting. Women that incorporate a strong and firm figure exude power in comparison to a 'rigid' figure, which heteronormative discourses link with femininity. Women attempt to 'tame' this issue by engaging in destructive behaviors such as starvation, as a way of manifesting domination and power, which are elements of masculinity.

At the same time, women's participation in sports brings about much empowerment and joy. More recent studies and research in sports scholarship suggest that many sportswomen combine womanhood and muscularity as correspondent with female athleticism. They certainly challenge heteronormative views of these two entities being mutually exclusive. Participating in sports reaps many benefits for women athletes, both from physiological and psychological standpoints. Sportswomen frequently encounter beliefs of them being masculine, which is why; they aim to exaggerate their femininity in and out of sporting spaces. This can be seen through tighter fitting and scanty kits, along with attendance of etiquette classes. Normality is achieved when these markers of femininity are enforced and maintain the idea that womanhood cannot be discarded, even during sports participation. However, performing the 'ideal' femininity goes beyond simply displaying feminine traits, it also calls upon women athletes to demonstrate heterosexuality. Femininity within sporting spaces is usually associated with heterosexuality and emphasizing sportswomen's features and personal relationships are obvious ways of examining their sexual preference. Women athletes overlooking affirmations of heterosexuality may experience discrimination in several forms.

2.5. Conclusion

Finally, it can be concluded that this review is crucial to this master's research dissertation with the intention of exploring how heterosexual women track athletes in South Africa negotiate

discourses of masculinity within their lives. The review was organized into several italicized sub-headings that examined the following topics: *narratives of racialization and masculinity among black women athletes; muscularity as a premise of athleticism; women athletes' narratives and discourses of 'tomboyism' and gender fluidities; disciplining and interrogating gender ideals*. I intend to carry out this course of research by outlining theoretical avenues of masculinity for sportswomen while using an intersectional method. Contemporary research and scholarship on gender and sport tends to affirm the severity of the gender binary. By its very nature, ideas of womanhood are employed and enforced among women athletes, and 'masculinity' is reserved solely for the exploration of men athletes.

Moreover, research about women's masculinities within sporting spheres is extremely limited and this is especially true of South African contexts. Thus, implying that gender fluidities do not belong within sportswomen's lives. Interlocking women athletes' experiences with masculinity into an individual area of research is rare, and intersectional research on women athletes is just as rare, despite black feminist activism in this area. Hence, I assert that the unavailability of knowledge renders it as imperative for research to be conducted for the sake of addressing this theoretical blindness, while also contributing to the process of knowledge creation. It is evident that the sports scholarship consulted in this review consistently homogenizes women athletes. This review opened with questions of intersectionality at the forefront, to then overlook them suddenly. It is for this reason that thus research aims to challenge this issue by remaining attuned to questions of race and intersectionality. Furthermore, this research intends to explore the need for theorization of women's masculinity in sport, along with surveillance as a form of regulation in determining women's access to successful athleticism.

Chapter 3: Researcher's own background experience

As a researcher within the social sciences field at the University of Cape Town, I have been exposed to the research process and been granted several opportunities to conduct my own research too. During my honors degree in 2019, my dissertation consisted of exploring women athletes' bodies participating in male-identified sports at the University of Cape Town. This particular master's dissertation remains within the sporting sphere by tracing theoretical routes of masculinity for cis-gendered track women athletes within South African contexts. Evidently, researching the realm of sports and women athletes is an area that is not unfamiliar or foreign to me. Along with my exposure to the research process previously and own attempt at conducting a study, I have acquired certain skills and expertise required that have greatly benefitted me in undertaking this research project. Needless to say, there is always room for improvement and I certainly resonate with this sentiment upon reflection of the research process during the COVID-19 pandemic; these skills were most certainly fine-tuned by my supervisor in order to accommodate the research process, whilst bearing in mind the unusualness and uncertainties imposed by the pandemic. Adopting the title of both sportswoman and researcher while navigating a sporting community remains as a familiar experience for me, with the exception of entering a community outside of the University of Cape Town as novelty. I believe that venturing out and conducting research beyond the community of the University of Cape Town is beneficial in terms of the quality of findings collected, as well as encouraging me, the researcher to step out of my comfort zone and embrace new experiences within the process of knowledge creation. Being granted permission to enter these spaces that do not belong to me are enriching and eye-opening into the livelihoods of women that find themselves in different social locations and positionalities to me.

I have previously shed light on the importance of exercise and sports in my life, from the considerable health benefits it has provided me with, to establishing my location and gender identity as a cis-gendered woman in sporting spaces as well as out of these spaces. To this day, this sentiment still resonates deeply with me as I continue to navigate these spaces where a heteronormative ideal consistently dictates the idea of athleticism and femininity as being incompatible. This does not permit women and young girl athletes to explore the possibility of a 'boyhood' without relying on the 'security' or 'safety' of a label such as 'tomboy' or having to abandon their identity as cis-gendered women. I am confident in the suitability of this particular research topic, given my determination as both a sportswoman and researcher

exploring the lived realities of sportswomen who may and may not have gone through or share similar experiences to me or each other. Along with this personal drive, this research area is one that I feel deeply passionate and enthusiastic about. I aspire to gain more knowledge and create opportunities for women athletes to allow themselves to embrace masculinity as part of their gender identity, and doesn't conflate with heteronormative ideas of identity, in the hopes of dismantling the rigidity of such a structure. As it stands, literature on this topic is still very scarce and especially within South African contexts. It is for this reason; I highlight that there is a need for further research to be undertaken. This research dissertation will contribute to the process of knowledge creation, particularly with regards to ideas of masculinity among cis-gendered women track athletes, as well as the current knowledge realm on women athletes' narratives and lived realities navigating sporting spaces. I hope to use this research as a stepping-stone to defy any prejudice or discrepancies surrounding the idea of women's masculinity and enable them to navigate sporting spaces, as well as non-sporting spaces, constraint-free.

3.1. Research Questions

Primary Research Question: *Exploring discourses of masculinity within women track athletes' lives in Cape Town.*

Sub-Questions:

- (1) How do women track athletes experience masculinity?
- (2) What do discourses of masculinity consist of, for women track athletes?
- (3) How do women track athletes navigate ideas of masculinity in their lives?

These sub-questions serve as a way of aligning and helping in refining the primary research question of the dissertation. They are not to be confused as this project's main question, but rather aid in recentring towards the focus of the dissertation.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This section of the research dissertation serves to trace the various research methods and techniques employed as part of the process of qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to produce information established on the basis of people's experiences (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017; Sandelowski, 2004, as quoted by Nowell et al., 2017). As this approach continues to mark itself as essential in research spaces, it is crucial to administer it precisely and meticulously in order to produce a significant outcome (Attride-Stirling, 2001, as quoted by Nowell et al., 2017). With qualitative research displaying a trend of continuous growth, I argue that there is urgency for more exposure to this approach and resources favoring researchers in carrying out reliable and authentic work. As far as discourses of masculinity within athleticism are concerned, research tends to focus on the experiences of men and those of women identifying as lesbian. This is certainly limiting and exclusionary of the meanings and experiences of masculinity for women track athletes identifying as heterosexual and even more for these athletes located within African contexts such as South Africa, which is why a feminist scope is necessary in order to shed light on this phenomenon.

Through this research project, I aim to show how discourses of masculinity may have an impact on the lives of women track athletes and how they negotiate these discourses with regards to heteronormative ideals surrounding the meaning of being a woman and a track athlete. It is through an intersectional lens within feminist scholarship that I hope to trace and explore routes of masculinity for heterosexual women athletes. This section will delve into research methodology, along with the theoretical frameworks organizing this research project. I have devised this section into the following areas: *methodological framework*; *sample*; *research methods*; *possible limitations*; *reflexivity* and *ethics*. Given the COVID-19 pandemic that we have been experiencing for the last two years, I note that it was necessary to offer some discussion and thought regarding the solicited methods and possible alternatives should the situation have worsened and disrupt the research process entirely. With that being said, the preferred method of the in-depth interview was successfully undertaken and did not call for the implementation of another method of data collection. The current situation is one that is unique, not only to researchers, but to the world itself and thus, required additional planning towards an unknown outcome to ensure the continuity of this research project.

4.1. Methodological framework

There is insufficient research, particularly within feminist scholarship, in exploring women track runners' negotiation of discourses of masculinity. I argue that providing a feminist outlook within this area of research is crucial to investigating, understanding, and tracing meanings of masculinity, and its significance in women track athletes' lives. With that being said, Rayaprol (2016) contends that a feminist take on research illustrates the complexities and discrepancies grounded within research in the social sciences and increases overall reliability and validity of the information produced. Creating space to address these complexities permits women researchers to contribute to the process of knowledge creation in a unique manner, while challenging past research narratives of exclusion. Nash (2018) suggests that a critical element in attaining this consists of enabling women's experiences to produce knowledge on a specific occurrence which women demand and require understanding of. Thereby, positioning both the researcher and researched as equal in the process of knowledge creation.

Feminist epistemology centralizes the idea that particular attention needs to be paid to women's locations, understanding and perceptions of globalization, whilst confronting patriarchal structures (Narayan, 2004). It is by dismantling these male-centered structures and placing the focus on processes of knowledge creation within feminist research and epistemology that will bring about a more holistic overview. Hesse-Biber (2011:3) notes that such processes require, "taking steps from the "margins to the center" while eliminating boundaries that privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be the knower and what can be known." Integrating these features of knowledge creation is essential to achieving more comprehensive and varied accounts for both the locations of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' within research. With its roots in positivism, scholars argue that for the purposes of feminist research, objectivity should be changed into "feminist objectivity" (Bhavnani, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993, as quoted by Hesse-Biber, 2011). Haraway (1988, as quoted by Hesse-Biber, 2011:9) defines this as "'situated knowledges": knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, power imbued and relational". As people's behaviors and communication are constantly shifting through time, complete 'objectivity' in research can only be interrogated, as Bhavnani (1993) suggests that dismissing one's beliefs and prejudices is nonsensical and useless. Resonating with this sentiment, I underline that dismissing this project's convictions regarding track women athletes' negotiation of masculinity is certainly uncalled for and deceptive to my views as a sportswoman and researcher acquiring rich information.

Tracing and analyzing theoretical routes of masculinity for track women athletes within an intersectional lens allows me to investigate an area of study which remains unexplored and perhaps unusual, as I've previously mentioned how discourses of masculinity are reserved for men and women challenging the 'norm'. Yet, it is imperative to underline that there is no universal and discerning comprehension or experience of masculinity. Hesse-Biber (2011) writes that it is in situating the intersections that separate women from each other that has allowed few feminist scholars to investigate 'difference' worldwide and allow for their voices to be empowered. Moreover, as a theoretical means of feminist theory and application, intersectionality is effective, considering that it surmises 'difference' and acknowledges that categories such as gender, race and sexuality are connected in the ways they influence each other (Dill, 19787, as quoted by Hesse-Biber, 2011). This is particularly important for my research, has been set out to take these intersections into account when exploring women track athletes' identities and how this element of 'difference' influences their experiences and negotiations of discourses of masculinity.

4.2. Research sample

With the aim of conducting research in 'normal' circumstances having been achieved, participants were recruited using the purposive sampling method. Most researchers within qualitative research choose to rely on purposive sampling, as it steers towards gathering rich information, and shed light on the questions being interrogated within the study (Van Rijnsoever, 2017). Purposive sampling is a non-probability method where the research study's aim, along with the researcher's comprehension decides participant selection. According to Devers and Frankel (2000), purposive sampling as a method intends to reinforce individuals' and/or groups' perceptions and experiences, which in turn, allows for cultivation of beliefs and ideas. In relation to this research project, this means that participants will be chosen, actively, to share their experiences and insights on discourses of masculinity. This will allow me, the researcher, to maintain some control of the selection of participants and avoid issues of selection bias, which may be present in former groups (Barbour, 2001). I trust that this sampling method was most definitely a suitable choice in uncovering and exploring routes and meanings of masculinity for women track athletes, and as such, it was necessary to narrow down the selection pool for purposes of specificity. Additionally, purposive sampling is a

particularly timesaving and economical method, which was most certainly beneficial and convenient to both the researcher and researched.

For this research project, my aim was to recruit a sample of 12-15 women track athletes located within various athletics training facilities within Cape Town. While Patton (1990, as quoted by Van Rijnssoever, 2017) claims that there is usually no strict control on sample size in qualitative research, Lopez, and Whitehead (2020) recommend a range of 8-15 participants provided with the flexibility to work within and beyond it. This suggests that sample size guidelines in qualitative research are generally contained. Van Rijnssoever (2017:2) contends that the reason for containing sample sizes is because much of qualitative research is predominantly of, “an interpretivistic endeavor that requires flexible creative thinking, experience, and tacit knowledge”. This research project requires much flexibility, creativity, and knowledge in order to trace and produce theoretical routes of masculinity among women track athletes.

Initially, I had planned on reaching out to various athletics clubs, namely, *Ultra Athletics Club*; *UCT athletics*; *ATC Multisport* and *Western Province Athletics*, all of which are located in Cape Town via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. However, things do not always go to plan and having anticipated a potentially low response rate from direct messaging on Instagram and social media platforms in general, I decided to open up the selection pool to finding women track athletes across South Africa. This decision was made because of the lack of responses to my recruitment calls on Instagram among the women track athletes in Cape Town, along with an observable scarcity of women fitting this particular criteria. Furthermore, at the time, we also found ourselves in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This naturally fueled anxiety and concerns surrounding socializing and human contact, as local governments tightened the necessary safety measures and precautions. I was able to recruit a sample of 11 women track athletes across South Africa through Instagram and referrals by them. As soon as permission was granted, I scheduled a call with each of them individually and at their own convenience.

4.3. Research methods

Many researchers may find themselves experiencing difficulties in planning and mapping out ways to collect data cautiously during the COVID-19 pandemic, given the mandatory health and safety measures implemented while navigating somewhat uncharted territory. The

pandemic has brought on much distress and panic to us, while also restricting the ways in which we are able to conduct research. It is important that we acknowledge these difficulties both from a researcher and individual's perspective. I recognize that participants may have refused to meet with me for an in-person interview due to health and safety reasons, among the many changes from a behavioral and social point of view, that this pandemic has and continues to provoke in many individuals. Geographical location adds in to the inability of conducting in-person interviews, given the fact that many of the women track athletes live in provinces across South Africa and I, the researcher am located in Cape Town. I believe that some of these changes may certainly remain in a post-pandemic, virus-free world, and even become a determinant for individuals' compliance to participate in research. This forced me to find new and unconventional ways to engage with my research. For this reason, I am providing a discussion on two data collection methods, a preferred method, and an alternative method, subject to ever-changing circumstances. Although there was no need to implement the alternative method, as I was able to use my preferred method, I still deem it necessary to provide some insight into what could have been this research dissertation's data collection method during the peak of the pandemic. The preferred method of data collection for this research project consisted of the in-depth interview, which was conducted on the Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms, given the circumstances of the pandemic at the time of this research.

The in-depth interview approach allows the researcher to remain in control yet enabling flexibility to be prioritized on the basis of prompting from participants (Turner, 2010). This provides much versatility for both the researcher and participants in the ways in which questions may be composed and probed during the interview process. The in-depth interview is perceived as the most advantageous and favorable approach of data collection within feminist research and scholarship, seeing as the central focus comprises of a particular moment or area of one's life (Hesse-Biber, 2011). Similarly, this method of data collection aims to gather rich and significant information from the chosen participants' views surrounding a specific matter (Hesse-Biber, 2011). I believe that this approach was a good fit, overall, for my research project aiming to explore discourses of masculinity among women track athletes and thus, acquire rich and in-depth perspectives. This project's focus is to explore women track athletes' narratives and discover what happens when their identities reconcile with ideas of masculinity. Furthermore, the in-depth interview allows for communication to be conversational. The researcher usually asks the interviewee an open-ended question in the interest of starting a

conversation between them. As previously mentioned, I conducted the interviews online on the Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms, where a second mobile phone was used to record my conversation with the participant and stored safely on both my phone and personal computer. I add that I had discussions with my supervisor regarding the preparation of an interview schedule for this approach. This certainly helped in guiding conversations, yet I must highlight that I did not restrict myself or participants to follow this structure formally because I wished to maintain some freedom for myself as the researcher and my participants, when expressing themselves. During the interview process, it is the researcher's responsibility to take on the role of listener and inquirer (Hesse-Biber, 2011).

Following data collection, I have applied a thematic analysis in the interpretation of the findings. I write that this method of data analysis has been conducive and applicable to the data obtained from either of the methods of data collection, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic. This comprises of distinguishing and analyzing patterns and/or themes present within qualitative information (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) write that this means of analysis is the most widely and commonly used one within qualitative research. This approach is advantageous to researchers in many ways, and it is for this reason that I have selected it for this research project in particular. Scholars draw attention to its great flexibility, which grants much independence from a theoretical standpoint to the researcher (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). I note that the thematic analysis has been profitable in obtaining valuable, thorough findings, in conjunction with the online in-depth interview on Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While this outline of the preferred research method is most certainly valuable to the research process, it is crucial to explore an alternative method adapted to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. With that being said, should the alternative method of data collection have been required, I would have chosen to employ a narrative analysis.

The narrative analysis is one that acknowledges the degree to which people's accounts are insightful to their lived realities (Burck, 2005; Thorne, 2000). Scholars discuss that these accounts are generated from lived realities and experiences that are generally recorded in autobiographies, biographies, journals, and other forms (Josselson and Liebeck, 1995, as quoted by Jackson, Drummond and Camara, 2007). I argue that this approach as an alternative is certainly adequate for this research project seeking to uncover narratives of masculinity within women track athletes' lived experiences. This would have allowed me, the researcher to

identify and analyze various elements of an individual's situation and how these merge together to establish a more comprehensive outlook of one's life. Moreover, the narrative analysis involves the researcher investigating the ways in which stories are established, start and end, and their objectives (Reissman, 1993, as quoted by Jackson, Drummond and Camara, 2007).

Reissman (1993, as quoted by Burck, 2005) observes that there are three approaches to narrative analysis: the life story method, selection of sequences, and rewriting narratives. The kind of narrative analysis selected is dependent on the researcher's aims and desires, which will usually have an impact on how texts are chosen and examined (Burck, 2005). I would have chosen to apply the second approach to narrative analysis, one that consists of selecting a series of 'core narratives', usually from an interview, analyze their format and establish their thematic links (Burck, 2005). However, for this particular research project, I bear in mind the fact that interviews, life stories and narratives of South African women track athletes are scarce. While my aim for this approach comprised of examining narratives and interviews from South African women track stars such as Geraldine Pillay, Gezelle Magerman, Zenéy Van Der Walt and several others, this scarcity in the literature has left me with few resources. I aimed to apply this approach to several 'jockographies' (sports autobiographies) of women track athletes located outside of the continent. These will include: *A Kind of Grace: The Autobiography of the World's Greatest Female Athlete* (1997) by Jackie Joyner-Kersey; *Chasing Grace: What the Quarter Mile Has Taught Me about God and Life* (2017) by Sanya Richards-Ross; *I Am a Promise* (2020) by Shelly Ann Fraser Price and *Superstars of Women's Track and Field (Female Sports Stars)* (1997) by Martha Wickham.

4.4. Possible limitations

It is evident that each of these methods of data collection and analysis hold certain benefits as discussed. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that these methods have certain limitations, which need to be considered as part of the research process. Scholars underline several limitations with regards to the in-depth interview as a method of data collection. To enumerate, Morris (2015) notes that during the interview process, there is a chance of participants giving imprecise and potentially false information to the researcher. Questions of representation may arise, as I argue that it is not advised that this information acquired from the in-depth interview be generalized to a population. Scholars place much importance on representation as

indispensable within research, particularly within feminist research and scholarship where we constantly need to acknowledge our locations (Morris, 2015; Narayan, 2004). Furthermore, organizing the in-depth interview on platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams required much time, effort, as well some resources for the transcription that followed. Added with the concerns of a pandemic, I assert that it was crucial to consider these limitations during the research process, in order to be aware of the potential risks and provide some possible solutions to any difficulty encountered. With that being said, even though modern technology prides itself as being innovative, it was important to be aware of the potential shortfalls from collecting research on online platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Access to a technological device such as a computer or smartphone, and the internet were certainly concerns and cannot always be guaranteed.

In relation to the narrative analysis as an alternative method of data collection, there are also several limitations that need to be recognized. Taylor (2008:29, as quoted by McAlpine, 2016:46) indicates that the nature of narratives suggests that these, “often speak in ways that overlook any overarching sense of indeterminacy, partiality and complexity”. I argue that this brings to mind the idea that there may be some obscurity and bias within narratives, which will affect the overall validity and reliability of the information obtained from them. Moreover, narratives tend to gather a controlled number of experiences, which researchers then use to match with a comprehensible story (McAlpine, 2016). Researchers need to be conscious of any discarded information, potential differences throughout participants’ stories, or even the significance of pauses or avoidance in these accounts (McAlpine, 2016), as yet again, this may have an effect on the quality of information received. Finally, Walker (2001, as quoted by McAlpine, 2016) highlights that narratives usually concentrate on insights that are ‘close to home’ and thus, can disregard greater structural impacts. This may, in turn, fail to show a holistic take across participants’ accounts.

Scholars explain that there is insufficient literature on thematic analysis in contrast to other methods of data analysis and this may result in feelings of uncertainty for beginner researchers attempting to undertake a meticulous thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). I argue that as a novice researcher, this is certainly a cause for concern which I believe I was able to overcome during this particular stage of this research project. As a method of data analysis, the thematic analysis’ versatility can lead to inconsistencies, which can be translated into a lack of cohesion when constructing themes from the information obtained (Holloway and Todres, 2003, as

quoted by Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006, as quoted by Nowell et al., 2017) add that this approach of data analysis is restrictive in the sense that the researcher is not able to make any declarations or assertions regarding the use of language. Yet again, I underline this as a concern, particularly in relation to a thematic analysis of jockographies as an alternative, where language will most certainly play a key role in determining themes and inquiry of discourses of masculinity among women track athletes.

4.5. Reflexivity

I held some reservations and anxiety regarding the research process. The idea of conducting research during a time of such great uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to pose was unsettling, and I felt that additional care and caution needed to be implemented in order to ensure that the process ran as smoothly as possible for both the researcher and the researched. Perseverance, patience, and flexibility were some of the key attributes needed during this process. Perseverance and patience resonate deeply as I often felt defeated when reaching out to many women track athletes and receiving little to no responses in return. At times, the process felt tiresome and disappointing, and forced me to dig deep and find the determination to carry on. Moreover, I learned how to be flexible and accommodating to constantly changing schedules between myself and the participants' commitments outside of this research. This sometimes felt like this step of the research process was never-ending, yet my passion and drive helped me get through these emotional hardships.

It is the researcher's responsibility to acknowledge their location and privilege as this may cause additional stress to participants during these times, as many may feel vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic and potential disrupting of certain spaces. This is incredibly crucial within feminist research and scholarship where issues of representation and generalization prevail (Morris, 2015; Narayan, 2014) from scholars 'whitesplaining' experiences that do not apply to them. With that being said, Pratt (2000, as quoted by Nagar and Ali, 2003:359) argues, "The researcher herself is reconstituted through the research process within a fissured space of fragile and fluid networks of connections and gaps."

My location as a white, heterosexual woman taking on the role of researcher in feminist scholarship within a South African context places me in a position of privilege. I recognize my

social intersections as determinants of the privilege that I experience and most certainly should not ignore. However, I did have some reservations and concerns that this would be in fact conflicting with my wish to steer clear from becoming, as Cronin-Furman and Lake (2018) put it, another ‘white woman with a notebook’ and the expectations generated from this cliché. I am certainly an ‘outsider’, a title which I believe my intersections convey and as such, forced me to exercise caution when entering certain spaces such as the African-centered one where power dynamics may occur between the researcher and researched. Although my location and social intersections are embedded within Eurocentric experiences, I entered this research space as both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. I believe that this ‘insider’ status emerged from my identity as a sportswoman navigating a sporting realm where questions of masculinity are constantly surfacing. For this reason, it is crucial that I navigated this research space, along with other spaces that do not belong to me, with much caution and consideration, while constantly being aware of my location. This research project’s focus does not consist of generalizing track women athletes’ lived realities and stories, but rather shed light on the variety of experiences that emerge from discourses of masculinity. I remained and continue to be attentive to the social intersections existing between my position as the researcher and the track women athletes agreeing to participate in this study. Therefore, I felt it crucial to allow the intersections and experiences to reveal themselves across track women athletes’ accounts.

4.6. Ethics

Conducting research requires the researcher to be mindful of possible issues occurring as consequences to violating ethical codes. A first step to ensure an ethical approach is implemented requires the researcher to obtain ethical clearance. I was able to work towards this with the guidance of my supervisor and obtained this in order to conduct fieldwork. The type of fieldwork that was conducted, was determined by the conditions and climate of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with my personal preference and suitability in acquiring rich and insightful material. After ethical clearance was obtained, I made sure that participants provided me with formal consent, both written and verbal, before the interviews with them took place. Consent forms and information sheets were provided to the participants, detailing the objectives, nature and potential risks present from participating in the study. These documents also served to inform participants of the implications from participating in this study.

I provided each of participants the option of anonymity throughout the course of the interviews, given that not all of them felt at ease or comfortable with having their identities disclosed in this study. Giving participants this option serves as a means of identity protection, while ensuring that any harm or repercussions are minimized. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the fact that these narratives told by the track women athletes may carry deep meanings for them, and by definition, the experience of storytelling, especially to a stranger, may have been challenging. Another point to consider is the relationships with other athletes and coaches, which may be perceived as having had an influence on the participants' willingness and perhaps, ease of sharing their stories and lived experiences. Furthermore, I remained hesitant regarding compensating participants for their time speaking to me, out of fear that they may refuse or withdraw their statements from the study, along with the limited resources I had access to at the time. Cronin-Furman and Lake (2018) note that despite researchers' best efforts to clarify to interviewees that no compensation or benefit will be received from their participation, this message may sometimes get lost in translation.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

This chapter explores four crucial themes along with their sub-themes that emerged from the young women's representations of their experiences. I organized the following four themes so as to profile material which can respond to my research focus on the meanings of masculinities in the experiences of cis women track athletes in South Africa. The first theme consists of "Projections of masculinity" and its sub-themes, "Baggy Clothes"; "Bullying and the trauma within tomboyism", and "Assumptions of same-sex desire". The second theme, "Self- recognitions" comprises of the sub-themes, "God's Plan and dealing with defeat"; "Constructing masculinity through notions of embodiment"; "Scrutinizing blackness", and "Masculinity as a 'danger' to integrity and womanhood". The third theme includes the sub-themes, "Exes, situationships and boyfriends: policing bodies within intimate relationships", and "Taking on masculinity". Finally, the fourth theme of this chapter, "Owning masculinity" consists of the sub-themes, "Representations of strong black women", and "Advice for young track athletes".

Because I am interested in women track athletes' stories of experiencing masculinities, I use this space to discover and reflect on patterns within my participants' material as an attempt to fill in the gaps that existing scholarship has left. The themes act as a gateway to facilitating my analytic process and considers how I chose to plan conversations with participants. I draw strongly on participants' own language to bring texture and voice into the presentation of the themes and have taken their articulation of complex experiences very seriously.

5.1. Projections of masculinity

This first theme engages with the beginning of the women track athletes' narratives in exploring discourses of masculinity within the track running realm and as a part of their identity and draws on material exploring their childhood memories both of embracing 'boyhood', and of being identified by others as 'boys'/'tomboys.' Here, we are exploring the stories of their childhood and growing up as young South African girls from diverse backgrounds discovering their passion for track running and leading an active childhood. Here, I note how elements of 'tomboyism' most certainly emerge and how this term holds meaning for these women, certainly more positive and enriching for some, to the extent of molding them into the women and athletes they recognize themselves to be. For others, this term holds trauma that has transcended into their adulthood. For the most part, tomboyism is seen as rite of passage into

girlhood and as a means of challenging heteronormative ideas of what childhood for young girls should look like. Conversations surrounding the women's childhoods, their immersion into girlhood and how they came to be, where they are as women, athletes and embracing their identities as women athletes act as a way easing into the 'Backstory' and notion of recognition within their narratives.

5.1.1. Baggy Clothes

This subtheme synergizes participants' material on the ways in which 'being a boy' was part of their growing up. When participants spoke of their experiences of being called a tomboy during their childhood, the responses to actually experiencing being labelled were quite mixed. The majority of the women athletes confirmed being labelled as tomboys during their childhood and when asked what they believe were certain indicators that resulted in them being labeled as tomboy, several participants highlighted that a muscular build as young girls, playing with boys during childhood, clothing and having short hair were key markers. Vanessa, a sprinter from the University of Pretoria said, "*I think my own meaning rather with my own understanding, someone who is perceived as a tomboy is someone who, um, they, they don't really want to convert into being a guy, but as more like being judged based on the way that they dress more on the baggy side of the guy tops and sizes, and you'll hardly see them in a pair of heels, a dress, a skirt, makeup or the gloss or something. If it's just braids, they'll tie them up and done. So I think, for me, the definition of a tomboy, they're not really much into girly, girly things.*" This shows that embracing a tomboy identity does not necessarily suggest a desire to abandon womanhood entirely and choose to identify as a man, but accepting that as a woman, one does not have to conform to heteronormative ideals of womanhood by rejecting items deemed as 'girly', particularly when it comes to clothing. Similarly, Lesedi, a track runner from Rhodes University, revealed "*I think it really does associate with like a whole lot of baggy clothes, because I think of, you know, going with outfits that boys wear, especially when it comes to skateboarding. Your typical stereotype of, um, you know, uh, as a tomboy you should, wear like baggy jeans, big shirts and you should hang out with all the guys. Also the beanies with the sneakers, that's what I think of when I think of a tomboy. Yeah, just looking very much like a guy for a girl.*" Again, baggy clothing is brought up and seen as synonymous with a tomboy identity, as in addition to a way of rejecting norms of femininity, which simultaneously allow one to remain 'a girl.'

Nomvula, a sprinter from Cape Town shares her experience of growing up as a tomboy where she would maintain her hair short and choose to wear loose fitting clothing, *“I grew up at tomboy. Um, I always had my hair short. I never wanted to grow my hair. Uh, always bought like baggy pants and, and for me it wasn't for anything. You know, some people, when they buy baggy clothes it is to hide something or they're insecure about something, but I just felt like, I didn't have to prove anything. I was just being myself.”* Nomvula’s words echo a dismissal of gender-surveillance articulated by many participants and also displays confidence in her clothing choices and identity, as well as the fact that she does feel the need to conform to heteronormative discourses of womanhood. Cynthia, a 400m hurdler from North-West University, added *“I used to cut my hair. My mom used to cut my hair a lot, but I didn't really mind”*. Vanessa and Nomvula, Cynthia also displayed confidence during the interview when being probed on her experiences of being called a tomboy. It is evident that she did not feel any feelings of discomfort or uncertainty with her haircut choices and the potential stigma that comes with having short hair as a little girl in relation to standards of girlhood.

Along with baggy clothing and short hair, several participants spoke of having spent their childhood playing with boys, as a clear choice around peer-culture. Cathy, a 100m and 200m sprinter from Rhodes University, said *“I'd make it a point to try and prove that I can do exactly what boys can do and better. Cause a lot of the time when we were kids, you know, we'd be at home playing, and they'd say boys can play soccer better than girls and stuff. So, I'd be, I'd usually be the one to challenge that statement when I was younger and occasionally now here and there. So, and most of it sometimes I'd prove them wrong. So then because of that, and in my school, they've known me for that, that also call me a tomboy for that, and I got along with a lot of guys too.”* For Cathy, the meaning of playing soccer with boys is simultaneously a choice about peers and a clear signal of the rejection of norms about femininity – this earns her ‘tomboyhood’ and also a sense of pride in her specific version of being nonetheless a ‘girl.’

Interacting and playing with boys within a male-dominated environment such as soccer fueled Cathy to challenge sexist ideals stating that men are stronger and more athletic than women, allowing her to assert her dominance as an athletic woman from a young age, whilst conforming to tomboyism through socializing with boys and men. Genevieve, a 100m sprinter from Johannesburg shared a similar sentiment of her interactions with boys during her childhood, stating *“I grew up in an area that was, I wouldn't say dominated, but it was mostly guys. So*

even when I did play with girls, it was just like here and there. But most of the time, it's just like, guys on the streets playing soccer, and I'd be there as well." Similarly, she was also mostly playing soccer with boys in a male-dominated space as opposed to socializing with other girls, which she shared was what tomboys do.

The women's track running careers began during their formative years as young girls. Their bodies started undergoing dramatic changes from a young age as they were actively participating in physical activity, whether it was track running, soccer, or gymnastics. So much so, that these physical changes have been deemed as being synonymous with being a tomboy. Cathy recalled, "*I inherited my muscular body from my dad and I'm naturally strong and toned, I can let it go without needing to do anything. So, when I started getting into sports, because I was just interested in it, honestly because of my build, I was called it all the time. So, like that kinda led to me living up to the term. It wasn't like I hated it, but I just kind of existed it didn't give me space to explore either.*" This suggests how her muscular build paired with her involvement in sports from a young age and others named her as "tomboy.". We see how she acknowledges and navigates this label, yet it does not provide any room for her to fully explore her identity, one is that may have been independent from the term itself and the idea of being labelled. Bailey, a 100m sprinter from the University of Cape Town, remembers her experience of being called a tomboy during her time in primary school and conveyed "*I think it was that was just when Caster had come into the scene. And when they were just out of the charges, stuff like that, so people were like, Oh, no, she's a boy. And so I was in track at the time, like Caster. And they be like, so I was naturally built like athletic bodies. I had like a six pack in primary. And then they'll be like, yeah, girls aren't supposed to have a body like a boy.*" It is interesting how Bailey was compared to athletic legend, Caster Semenya, from such a young age and how this conveys the idea that an athletic body for a woman is seen as detrimental to femininity and entails comparison with 'men.' This is most certainly enforced through the imagery of Caster Semenya, a woman athlete who has been placed under so much scrutiny throughout her athletic career.

Participants' material offered dramatically clear narratives of the intersections between their childhood clothing and playmate preferences, their body build, and their athletic interests and skills: they were all excluded from 'true girlhood' and cast into a category in which they could be tolerated as 'tomboys'. Despite the racial, class, and contextual differences among them (alongside vast differences in their athletic trajectories, and other life-stories), all experienced

this relationship to a version of a “side gender”, a barely tolerated space within “girlhood,”, where they had permission to pursue athletic strength but only on the terms offered, outside normative femininity.

5.1.2. Bullying and the trauma within tomboyism

While a few participants dismissed the marginalization of a “tomboy” label, for several of the participants, the tomboy identity and particularly, the physical appearance of being an active girl as part of tomboyism resulted in a lot of teasing and bullying being experienced, and with this, brought much trauma into their daily lives. Zanegugu, an ex-sprinter from the University of Cape Town, disclosed her experience of being teased, *“I had like quite a muscular build like my whole life, just, yeah, had like a muscular build. And obviously, that's like, you're bound to be like, you know, bullied and all that, the kind of Caster Semenya-like comments started coming up. and it was just a nightmare.”* This suggests that having a muscular physique as a young girl is seen as abnormal and again, a comparison to Caster Semenya was made within a negative light to the extent of being described as horror-like. For Vanessa, her experience of being bullied was predominantly in primary school where she explained, *“My voice was very, very deep. Like one time in class, I would speak, there'd be guys that be picking on me and they call me like, you know, Mendoza, right? The famous artist..., I got bullied also for quite some time because my “physique” came off as, um, more masculine. I mean it bruised my self-esteem. I don't want to lie. It really did because it resulted in distresses. Um, yeah, I just, it broke, it broke me, like lowered myself.”*

Similarly to Zanegugu, Vanessa’s physique and seemingly deeper voice as a young girl were used as a basis of oppression. Evidently, she experienced much distress and discomfort from being tormented, to the extent of feeling diminished and without self-esteem – “bruised.” Bailey discussed how her experience of bullying also took place during her developmental years in primary school, which to this day, is a painful memory to remember. She expressed, *“seven years of my whole life, like in primary, everyone was just like, yeah, that's a bad thing to go and look like that.”* There was emphasis placed on how having a muscular body as a young girl is seen negatively and perhaps detrimental to her development into an ‘appropriate’ womanhood. For Cynthia, her smaller chest being one of the markers of her tomboyism according to heteronormative standards, as well as the grounds for her being teased, also

provoked feelings of discomfort and hurt. She recounted, *“Then there was one guy who actually laughed and said, I really don't have breasts and that actually did kind of like get to me.”*

The material emerging from discussions with the participants indicated how the term, ‘tomboy’ carries much significance in relation to what it means to be an active young girl undergoing physical changes from sports participation, along with navigating spaces such as schooling institutions where heteronormative ideals are reinforced. The label provides a space of recognition, feelings of positivity, and exploration of their girlhood outside normative femininity for some, whilst for others, ‘tomboy’ elicits trauma and distress from past childhood experiences of bullying and teasing.

5.1.3. Assumptions of same-sex desire

Under heteronormativity, and intolerance for any version of gender fluidity, someone gendered as a girl/woman is expected to orient her sexuality towards “the other gender.” Deviation from normative femininities may entail suspicion about a young woman’s sexual orientation, and in homophobic cultures, such suspicion organically link a tomboy identity with lesbian desire. Several of the participants revealed that their family members, particularly the women members of their family and friends associated a tomboy identity with being lesbian. A few family members and friends were described as being dismissive when the young women athletes would reach out to play with ‘boy’ toys or wear loose fitting clothing. Cathy admitted, *“presumably because of the notation that when I'm older, I'm going to need to get a husband and to be a lady to impress my in-laws and stuff. And if I can avoid boy toys then their fears will go and then there's, it comes better. They ended up being these annoying women, and they put like a slight hint of homophobia.”* This refers to a moment where her mother and aunt refused to let her play with what they considered to be ‘boy’ toys out of fear that she would identify as a lesbian. We see how a certain ideal of womanhood, with the emphasis on being a wife, was being instilled into Cathy’s childhood. It is clear that she was well aware of her family members’ intentions in steering her into the ‘right’ direction of heteronormativity in order to be accepted by society, all the while knowing that such a sentiment is in fact of a homophobic nature. Atupele, a track athlete from Rhodes University, stated *“if you behave like a man, then what do men want? You know, in their eyes? Um, it would be like she has more*

potential than other girls to be lesbian, but I also think it depends also on how your family understands.” According to her, certain tomboy behaviors are seen as being man-like, and that being a tomboy certainly indicates a higher probability of one identifying as a lesbian. Interestingly, the element of understanding and acceptance emerges from this as family values and beliefs were brought into the conversation.

For Vanessa, she pointed out, *“the way I dress when I’m around the house, I mean, joggers, baggy tops, she said that she would look at the way that I’m dressing and she would perceive me as someone who’s probably lesbian.”* This was a particular instance she recalled having with her roommate, who evidently characterized Vanessa as a lesbian woman due to her outfit choices. Again, loose fitting clothing is highlighted here as an indicator of being a tomboy, who is paired with same-sex desire. Genevieve highlighted, *“I guess I could say just because I think it’s more of or rather comes from one not conforming to the girly girl, nor society. So if you’re out of the ordinary, then you are classified as rather other or there are thoughts or doubts that you may not necessarily be fully straight, fully a girl.”* Here, we see that the idea of one not conforming to heteronormative ideals of femininity emerging, along with the notion of same-sex desire. Compellingly, the process of othering is mentioned, as a way of reinforcing the notion that non-conformity equates to one being othered, and therefore, excluded from a certain identity. When discussing her experience of playing soccer as a tomboy and with lesbian athletes, Nomvula shared, *“because of me being a tomboy and I got into, um, uh, the sports team for, for soccer, I had, uh, lesbian girls that would hit on me cause I think that they would, they would also assume that you playing soccer since that’s where they feel at home and comfortable. That it’s the same for me, but I was just a tomboy. Back then for me, it kind of felt like people were insinuating that I was a boy or lesbian.”* Her statement suggests that even some women athletes identifying as lesbian, a tomboy identity is in fact synonymous with being a lesbian. Sports is seen as a safe space for both lesbian women and tomboy women, and again, the element of assumption comes into play, as athleticism and same-sex desire are considered to go hand-in-hand. While for those athletes who are lesbian, this may open up hospitable environments of acceptance, for athletes who want to explore their heterosexuality, they are wrapped into discourses misaligned to their own journeys. This simultaneously presents them with difficult protestation: how does one insist that one is not lesbian without sounding homophobic?

5.2. Self-recognitions

This second theme known as the title of ‘Self-recognitions’ brings us to the notion of self-recognition, as participants spoke of living their athleticism as “tomboys”. For the women track athletes participating in this research, their passion for track running was ignited during their formative years as young girls dabbling in sporting disciplines. A life commitment with dreams of making track running a career and going to the Olympic Games for some and a hobby for others. Their involvement and devotion to this sport allowed them to navigate this space while allowing room for self-discovery and reflection to conceptualize the women athletes they are today. We explored their daily routines, both on-season and off-season, as well training regimens and diet plans. There was some importance placed on training regimens and diets, suggesting that these athletes maintain a healthy and flexible lifestyle, although, surprisingly, no mention of them engaging in detrimental behaviors, even during stressful or high-pressure circumstances. There was thorough discussion of goals in terms of short-term, medium-term, and long-term, and the ways in which the women dealt with the feelings of disappointment and defeat they experienced when their goals were not reached. Compellingly, religion and their faith played a large role in helping the women resolve these negative thoughts and feelings. Moreover, the meaning of this space in relation to their identity was investigated, with the notion of surveillance coming to light, translating through pressure from coaches and others to maintain an athletic physique, performance and particularly for the black athletes, surveillance of their blackness within their communities. The participants’ stories are all stories about becoming athletes, under definitions of dismissal (by families, institutional spaces, and other community circles) from normative femininity, and their proximity to “being boys” plays a consistent role in their representation of their athleticism.

5.2.1. God’s plan and dealing with defeat

While I acknowledge that this particular material emerging from the discussions does not directly tie in with the research focus and the participants’ experiences of ‘recognition’, from under the umbrella of “being a boy” as a woman athlete, nonetheless, it is certainly interesting as a new research avenue into the livelihoods of women athletes. When speaking about their various goals as track athletes, I probed the women on how they dealt with the idea of certain goals not being achieved, and the feelings that come with this. Disappointment and feelings of defeat surfaced when speaking about this, and interestingly, several women athletes highlighted

religion and their faith as a powerful coping tool. Bailey commented, *“until the goal is reached, you don't get over it. But I, I'm not like too hard on myself. Like, I've gone past the stage of being too hard on myself. Now I understand that life happens. And if it's not God's plan, like if he doesn't want it, and it's not in his plan then it won't happen. So step by step, I guess. But I know that one day it will happen. It might not be now and just delays or denial. So, I know it's gonna happen. Like by the grace of God, so actually, I just need to pray about it and to start somewhere.”* We can see that, as an athlete, she puts an incredible amount of her pressure on herself to achieve her goals, provided with the space to move past any failure or obstacle and being kind to herself. The notion of God determining the outcome and the act of praying suggests how impactful faith is, and the power of belief to get through one's hardships. Cynthia shared, *“Sometimes it's just difficult. Sometimes I'll be hard on myself if I don't really perform that well and so forth. But as that, I thank God and my coach.”* Again, we see the effects of the pressure these women athletes put on themselves when they do not achieve their goals or perform as well as intended. This statement also suggests an element of gratitude with regards to the support received from both the coach and God.

Lesedi reiterates the power of prayer and religion as she discussed her coping mechanisms with regard to failure and setbacks. She disclosed, *“I cry and I think that it's the first thing that I should be doing, and also prayer is the one that really gets me through it.”* Here, we see much certainty and a slight hint of confidence in her choice of dealing with the obstacles she comes across through the acts of crying and praying. Similarly, Raissa recalls a particular moment of feeling defeated and stagnant with her current state in her athleticism. She revealed, *“I remember I broke down last week because like, to tears by myself training and I was just like, what's the point like I've been injured constantly, I haven't seen any results. Like, I'm so stagnant and I was just tired and then I prayed about it and I just remembered the reason to why I started like, if I'm not doing this for fun, whatever the case may be, this is a passion and I love athletics”.* Getting to a point of stagnation and not seeing visible results is certainly a major setback and disheartening for athletes, and we see here through Raissa's dedication and faith, that she is reminded of the reasons as to why she is located where she is. She is reminded of her love and passion for her sporting discipline through the power of prayer. Furthermore, Vanessa added, *“I say to a lot of people, as well as myself, that if God can plant to the idea or the dream. Surely he can give you the strength to accomplish it. So that for me is the biggest drive when I am dealing with defeat.”* Her statement also suggests the influence that faith has when dealing with hardships and defeat. The power of belief paired with a positive mindset is

perceived as the key to dealing with and overcoming frustration experienced from missing out on achieving personal goals.

5.2.2. Constructing masculinity through notions of embodiment

Being an athlete and navigating sporting spaces often comes with a lot of scrutiny and close surveillance, whether it is from their coaches, spectators, families, or friends. And this surveillance was dominant as a facet of self-recognition for my participant, as they all spoke of constant monitoring of one's behavior, activities or in this particular context, a constant monitoring of their bodies. The women athletes interviewed reflected on this, with several of them admitting that they feel 'watched' by many to maintain their muscular physiques because of their identities as athletes. Mentioning of weight gain, weight loss and certain bodily features were raised as issues that people located outside of the athletics realm, have concerning women athletes not looking as 'athletic' as heteronormative images of athleticism dictate. There is a fine line between appearing too masculine and athletic, and therefore, deviant to heterosexual desirability or not appearing athletic enough in order to meet these expectations of athleticism. In saying that, Raissa highlighted "*So there is a pressure to constantly look the part, and especially because a lot of people come to me for fitness advice even if I'm not training you know, but there is a point in my life, where I feel like there's a lot of pressure and to have to keep up this look that I have going on.*" Evidently, society expects women athletes to constantly maintain a specific look, given the nature of sport, and especially track and field, where a strong and powerful physique is favored. Yet, women athletes continue to face the dilemma of embodying a strong physique, whilst still conforming to normative standards of desire. This dilemma does not allow these women to explore the possibility of embracing traits of masculinity without compromising their identities as cis-gendered women athletes.

Zanegugu asserted, "*When I think I've always been, like, you know, like, like fit and you know, toned and everything, and the moment like kind of like, you know, like rest. You need to take like maybe like a month off, it's almost as if people are always really quick to nit-pick things. Oh my gosh, like, your calves have shrunk or whatever. I don't know, like, you've actually gained a little bit of weight, you know, people are always so quick to pick on those little things. And you, I can't even help but like, sometimes be like, Oh my gosh, like, you start like feeling really, really self-conscious.*" This statement is a clear sentiment of the type of scrutiny that women track athletes experience from being constantly watched by others, as well as by

themselves. Zanegugu clearly shows that along with other people, she's used to seeing her physique being built a particular way, yet the notion of change is perceived as negative and a trigger for insecurities. This super-surveillance is eminent, as the women track athletes participating in this research continue to watch themselves by keeping a close sense of their own bodies, in addition to being reminded of the surveillance by others through the criticism they receive. Likewise, Camilla, a 400m sprinter from the University of Stellenbosch conveyed her experience on gaining weight whilst she was off-season from competing, and the scrutiny she received from people. She claimed, "*And once you're done competing, you do put on a little weight because you take a month off from training. So you put it on in a healthy way, but then you look at yourself and you don't feel actually comfortable. Like people will make comments. Cause they'll be like, oh, I can see you put on weight. Is it something necessary to tell somebody that?*" There is certainly a sentiment of disbelief and perhaps irritation here as Camilla's weight gain is inspected and commented on, a common occurrence and feeling experienced by many athletes as they are continuously nitpicked. It is clear that with this super-surveillance and nitpicking of women track athlete's bodies that weight gain or loss provokes, the possibility of exploring one's masculinity through physicality can certainly be ruled out, as this would perturb the status quo of womanhood.

On the other hand, Genevieve shared an experience of being scrutinized for her apparent weight loss and being 'too' skinny to look like a sprinter. She recounted, "*So I think in my mind there's constantly thoughts like I don't want to be skinny, because they will be all like, wow you look so skinny! Thank you, I guess. But I think on the back of my mind constantly was like, I just don't want to look skinny.*" Here, we can sense that there is an underlying notion of thinness being perceived as unhealthy, and particularly frowned upon within the sprinting sphere where a strong and muscular body is typically the norm. Genevieve expressed strong feelings against having a skinny frame because of the potential stigma associated with thinness, and her reputation as a sprinter. Simultaneously, Vanessa places emphasis on the issue of sporting bodies reinforcing heteronormative images of the 'ideal' athlete within different disciplines. She revealed, "*something that used to bother me within athletics, which is still going on right now is how, um, within the sporting codes that we would do there are certain body images. Um, specific, um, sporting codes, if you were to go do long jump and that you've got quite a bum, they'll be like, how is she even going to jump? You know, it was always, it's always been that stigma.*" As a long jumper and sprinter, she feels that she faces these discrepancies, with particular emphasis placed on her rear and her ability to perform as an athlete. There is a lot of

judgment passed, as heteronormative discourses continue to dictate ideas of the 'ideal' athlete, and in this case, the 'ideal' track and field athlete.

5.2.3 Scrutinizing blackness

The majority of the track athletes taking part in my research were black women. When probed on the meaning of the track and field space and navigating it as black women, discourses of surveillance surfaced during the discussion. Vanessa mentioned, "*in the black culture, bums are very important. So it was. I wasn't built as now that I am, I think it was a size 28, you know, my bum is there, but not the way that society wants it to be. So I kind of feel that oftentimes I've wanted to make my bum a bit bigger and as time went by, I just got used to it.*" There is an emphasis on the prominence that rears have within black communities and particularly in South Africa, where a woman with a larger rear is seen as more desirable. Vanessa's statement suggests a feeling of inadequacy as she believes that having a bigger rear as opposed to having a smaller frame will make her more worthy and accepted by society. Comparatively, Nomvula asserted, "*So in the black community, what is feminine? Oh, well, what a woman looks like is soft and the moment you have muscles popping everywhere, it feels like you're trying to always or it seems like you're trying to be a man. Like it's a power thing I believe. And I feel like also with black men, sometimes they feel small when they realize a woman might possibly be stronger than them.*" Heteronormative discourses of femininity are brought up here when describing the 'ideal' femininity within black communities in South Africa. This reinforces the notion that femininity and athleticism are incompatible entities, and an athletic woman is representative of a male-like identity. An interesting point mentioned in Nomvula's statement is that of power, and the belief that black South African men have that athletic women are stronger than them, suggesting elements of fragile masculinity.

She later summed it up as, "*in the black community, a woman having a strong physique is not very appealing. Um, they would much rather you have, you know, very curvaceous women, um, then to have a woman that is strong and has muscles cause it's like in the bigger scheme of things.*" The idea that strength and desirability do not match appears here, and thus, women who have curves are perceived to be heterosexually desirable as opposed to athletic women. Cathy recounts a similar experience surrounding the issue of strong looking women perceived as undesirable within black South African communities. She disclosed, "*I do all the time*

because there's this underlying opinion that like as a, a woman, African women specifically, if you're going to be slim or skinny, you need to still be shapely. But if you're, let's say mid-size or a larger size, you should also still be shapely and have curves, and you should also still be in shape. So, with me being toned sometimes like my family members would be telling me, oh, wow you've gotten so skinny, you should drink, you should eat more, or you should drink more water and put on some weight. I also, I'm not usually at my best when I'm resting, when I'm not training at all, I gain a bit of weight, but strangely that's when I performed best." Feelings of insecurity and hyper awareness are present here, as she mentions how societal standards reinforce the notion that African women should be curvaceous in order to be heterosexually desirable. An interesting point to note here is there is no space for negotiation or finding neutral ground in relation to acceptable body shapes and sizes for women. Cathy's statement suggests that there is always judgment being passed regardless of one's physique at a particular point in time.

5.2.4. Masculinity as a 'danger' to integrity and womanhood

The women athletes were probed on the meaning of the track and field space for them, and how navigating this space allowed them to reflect and embrace their identities as women track athletes. Athleticism is a space in which 'gender-battles' are both fought and at times, transcended, and particularly within track and field, where women athletes find themselves in a constant battle between embracing masculine traits and the desire to maintain the status quo within womanhood. I do note that this question was found to be slightly challenging to respond to for several of the athletes, as they encountered some difficulty in the task of describing themselves as women athletes. The reason for this, as they explained, is from the novelty of this experience of being interviewed and type of conversation. They shared that prior to this interview, they had not given much thought or reflection to the ways in which they would conceptualize their identities as track women athletes and the idea of owning and possibly embracing masculine traits as cis-gendered women. However, some of the answer that the women athletes participating in this research highlighted consisted of certain physical and psychological traits as the key elements of being a track athlete, as well as the power they exert and experience from track running. Genevieve said, "*Generally, sprinters' body, you need to be fit. Um, legs, your glutes, everything tight, abs, arms, you know, you just look like a power athlete from afar. And then with me, I'm just having an issue because I feel like my breasts have*

disappeared cause my chest is getting a little bit bigger.” An overall fit aesthetic is highlighted here as being crucial to women sprinters. An interesting point here that Genevieve mentions is the reduction of her breasts due to her chest muscles becoming more developed as she continues to navigate this space whilst battling the thought of potentially appearing ‘masculine’ with a smaller chest, and at the same time, witnessing her progress as an athlete. Her issues surrounding her evident muscle gains within her chest area symbolizes the loss of womanhood for her as her body continues to change. While she continues to train and maintain her passion for athletics, she certainly raises concerns of perhaps not appearing womanly enough, even as a track athlete.

Raissa asserted, *“as a woman track athlete I feel, I'm strong. I'm fearless. I'm courageous and brave. I find myself doing things that I did not think I could do. I find myself breaking stereotypes and not your average girl.”* Her statement suggests that she is confident in who she is as a track athlete and continues to challenge heteronormative ideas of both athleticism and womanhood. The words used to describe herself echo strength and power, both being important traits of athleticism and strength, often synonymous with masculinity, which transcends into her identity as a woman track athlete. Likewise, Nomvula’s experience and conceptualization of being a track runner also mirrors discourses of strength and power both mentally and physically. She expressed, *“there’s something about track running that makes me feel powerful that the other sports or the other forms of training don't, I don't get from it. I just feel like with the other forms of training, I just feel like most of the time I trained for physique, but when I sprint, I just, it feels like I'm, because when you accelerate and the way you train to become faster and faster, and to become stronger, you have to dig deep and you have to give it your all to become this symbol of strength.”* Nomvula’s statement conveys the idea that being a track athlete and navigating the track and field space requires extensive mental capacity and strength. Therefore, being a woman athlete requires one to encapsulate that strength and power from both a physiological and psychological aspect.

5.3. Negotiating Masculinity

This third theme unpacks discourses of gendering and exploration of masculinity in relation to heterosexuality. The sub-themes identified within this theme consist of “Exes, situationships

and boyfriends: navigating masculinity within intimate relationships” and, “Navigating a masculine ‘look’”. I explore the ways in which the women track athletes have encountered discourses of masculinity, as well as how they encounter themselves, and how this may potentially affect their relationships with their significant others. I noticed that some of the women felt slightly perplexed and at times unsure of their answers when I probed them on how they encounter themselves in relation to discourses of masculinity. I believe that many of them felt unsure and even disconcerted about the concept of embodying masculinity as heterosexual women. Some of the women perhaps felt a little afraid at the thought of identifying with masculine traits out of fear of giving up their womanhood. The research area of masculinity among women athletes identifying as heterosexual remains largely unexplored and discussions surrounding this area also remain scarce.

5.3.1. Exes, situationships and boyfriends: policing bodies within intimate relationships

The women track athletes expressed having experienced being in at least one relationship during their lives, or as the youth of today coin it, ‘situationship’, that being the basis of a relationship without the official titles of labelling significant others. Most of the women that I spoke to were single at the time of our interaction, but openly discussed their previous relationships and situationships. An important point that I raise from these conversations is that aside from a few exceptions, many of the women revealed that their ex-boyfriends were not fully accepting of them. Moreover, this close-mindedness was found to be present among men who were not athletes or as athletic as the women, whilst athletic men were shown to be understanding and accepting of the women athletes. For example, Raissa mentioned, *“I do feel like I do intimidate guys, and girls and things like that, like oh she's too strong to be in a relationship or Yoh, she looks too masculine for my liking. Like, I remember a friend said as a joke and I was like, there's always truth in some sense. And he was like, ya, Raissa, imagine me and you dating, who's gonna like, people are gonna think you're much stronger than I am.”* Her statement suggests how she believes that her masculine-appearing physical traits is intimidating and makes her unworthy to be in a heterosexual relationship. We also see that she somewhat accepts this and is aware of her masculinity being a ‘deal-breaker’ for men. Moreover, there is the notion of fragile masculinity emerging from Raissa’s statement as her friend admits to having concerns of appearing less strong than her.

Nomvula touched on two previous relationships with men from different races and backgrounds where she asserted, *“He didn't have an issue with it and my ex, before that, at some point he would make snide remarks, but he, he would be careful about it. He wasn't a big fan. He would say like, you know, you know, on the side that is on a big fan of women looking too strong or anything like that and I think it's also because back then when I was with him, I was not as strong as I look now.”* The first ex-boyfriend she references is a white man that she dated during her time at University, who was fully accepting of her identity as an athlete and masculine traits. However, the second ex-boyfriend she references was a black man she went out with a few years later. It is clear that he felt negatively towards women embracing strong physiques and considered them to be sexually undesirable. This particular sentiment reflects the notion that masculinity among women and heterosexual desirability are not compatible. Nomvula continued, *“for example, if something came up or a woman athlete, a female athlete was on, he would make remarks that, you know, um, that is a bit much, or maybe I made the first comment saying, Ooh, she looks amazing. And then he gets sort of like worried that I might want to go towards that. And he would say, ah, I think don't you think that's a bit too much.”* In this statement, the second ex-boyfriend's aversion and disapproval of athletic-looking women is reinforced. His concern towards Nomvula's admiration for these women is apparent, as he most certainly fears that she may choose to develop her physique as such. This certainly echoes the concept of athleticism being incompatible with heterosexual desirability and synonymous with same-sex desire.

Moreover, Cathy recalled a specific interaction with a male acquaintance where her muscular and thus, perceived as masculine, frame was commented on. She stated, *“He said, wow, you're, you're just so toned, and your arms, they're so muscular, more muscular than mine, but I could really, if you were my friend, I'm sure you could beat up anyone who would come my way. And like, it sounded like you wanted to compliment me, but it sounded more, uh, bros then like skip straight past friends, straight, like he was profiling. So to say, because I'm a muscular build and I'm probably going to be good at fighting contrary to popular believe I've never fought anyone ever in my life.”* Here, we see that a link is made between masculinity and violence, and therefore, even as a masculine-presenting woman, an assumption that she is capable of displaying violence is made. I find this association interesting, considering that it is defiant of heteronormative ideals of femininity, and even more so that such an association was made by a man, who would usually associate womanhood with submissiveness. Despite this, she emphasizes the fact that despite her apparent strong frame, she does not condone violence and

would not engage in violent behavior. This is certainly a case of misjudging someone based on their appearance. Another point to note is the way in which Cathy's acquaintance immediately 'friend-zones' her and ultimately, disregards the possibility of being in an intimate relationship with her. I add that there is evidently a process of 'othering' involved in this situation.

Interestingly, some of the women's ex-boyfriends commented on traits other than the women's physique as being masculine. For instance, with Lesedi's experience, we see an ex-boyfriend showing concern over her eating habits and way of speaking as being perceived as too masculine for his liking. She stated, "*We would just all be like talking and even the way I spoke with him, he was just like, you know, sometimes it feels like I'm chilling with like one of the guys chilling with the dude, the way you speak. Also, the eating habits that he pointed out. It's like, it's like, you eat like a guy, like, what does that mean? And it was one of the very many arguments that. Just the way I eat.*" In this particular extract of the conversation, we see how her ex-boyfriend is scrutinizing her behavior as being of a masculine nature and is evidently problematic for him. This shows the extent of heteronormative ideals of femininity being emphasized and forced within heterosexual relationships in order to avoid any deviance which may be shunned by society. We also see this as being a restrictive relationship, prohibiting Lesedi from exploring her masculinity as a heterosexual woman. Bailey highlighted, "*he said, I always act like I want to be the man and the woman in the relationship. But that's because I just didn't let him boss me around. That was in grade 11 and then I started to realize that men want submissiveness and I cannot offer that. So that's how they will take it if you're dominant then you're more like, masculine presenting or whatever. But never because of my physique, no.*" This statement shows the power dynamics that are usually present within heterosexual relationships and suggests the idea that women should be submissive to men, as stated by heteronormative discourses. Bailey displays much resilience as she challenges this notion by refusing to be submissive to her ex-boyfriend. Her resilience and perseverance is perceived as a trait of masculinity, and therefore, she is considered to be defying the status quo according to societal norms.

On the other hand, it was also the case that a few of the women's ex-boyfriends and current boyfriends were accepting and even in awe of the women track athletes' masculine traits. Their more masculine perceived physiques were often complimented and embraced by the men. This was mostly evident amongst men who were athletes themselves or at the very least, active and took part in some form of physical activity or exercise. Bailey shared, "*my most current*

relationship and mature was now in varsity, and he was a track athlete, as well. So I mean, he understood, I like to think he never said anything. He does have a very dominant personality, but it had nothing to do with my body. He loved it.” There is a mutual understanding between Bailey and her partner with both of them being track athletes, and therefore an appreciation for the hard work and time that a women athlete puts in maintaining her body and her sporting discipline. Cathy also shares having a positive relationship and experience with her ex-boyfriends, stating *“I actually like the exes that I have, they actually supported whatever I wanted to do. Cause my ex he was the guy. Um, he knew I did sports and you know, the gym and stuff and he'd sometimes wake me up to go train and encourage me. Like he was, um, never ridiculing me or making me feel like less of a, less of a woman.”* Her ex-partner referenced here appears to be supportive by encouraging her to keep to her routine as an athlete, in addition to refraining from belittling her as a woman. This suggests that athleticism, elements of masculinity and womanhood can certainly be deemed as heterosexually desirable.

Likewise, Raissa finds herself in a healthy and positive space with her partner, especially in relation to her perceived masculinity. She revealed, *“I think he's the one person that has constantly, he reminds me of how there's so much beauty in masculinity as well. Like, they, I am not any less pretty or whatever the case. he was just like going off for an hour on how gorgeous I look or just whatever the case may be, and there's no intimidation. we'd have a stupid contest, where he'd be like, Raissa, let me see how big your bicep is. He's very loving, like masculine or not, he says, I'm in it for you, for who you are, not for the outside. He's more internal than external.”* Her partner's impression of masculinity affirms the concept of masculinity among heterosexual women athletes, and that being heterosexually desirable. Furthermore, the notion of athleticism and womanhood is also reinforced. In relation to the notion of men finding athletic, more masculine-looking women attractive, Genevieve shared an interesting experience where she felt like she was perhaps being sexualized for her athletic body. She observed, *“I currently feel that with some that some guys who usually show interest in me, it could be just into my head. But I sometimes feel like that's not necessarily because they like me for me, but they like what they see physically.”* The notion of the male gaze is apparent in Genevieve's statement as she describes an experience of being sexualized. This certainly echoes the notion that regardless of body shapes, sizes and even traits of masculinity, women continue to experience being vulnerable to sexual objectification.

While most of the women track athletes taking part in this discussion were single, the material shows evidence of their previous involvement in intimate relationships with partners- in the form of more formal relationships of a 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend' nature or more casual relationships, as colloquially known as 'situationships.' Most of all, with the exception of a few women athletes, many of them acknowledged the discomfort and lack of acceptance of them, expressed by their previous partners. This feeling of close-mindedness was prominent among men who do not consider themselves to be athletes or partake in as high levels of sport or physical activity as the women. However, athletic men were seemingly understanding and extremely accepting of the women athletes and the ways in which they chose to embody their identities. All in all, men remain divided within their views of athletic women and the relationship between athleticism and desirability.

5.3.2. Taking on masculinity

The women athletes were probed on their thoughts regarding masculinity and whether they identified with having masculine traits in the form of physical traits, personality traits, behavior and more. The discussions with the women track athletes revealed a range of perplexed responses. Some of the women fully embraced their masculine traits, whilst others disclosed feeling insecure and anxious about having masculine traits. Vanessa shared, *"People used to question that, um, Yoh, is she, is she really a woman? Is she, you know, all those things and. It breaks you because even when you train for athletics, you gym, you kind of don't want to go overboard. You don't really want to build that much muscle before they're going to call you this and that."* Her muscular physique is considered to be masculine-passing according to societal norms, and she is subject to much scrutiny by having people question her identity as a woman. She shares her discomfort and dismay from this experience, and we see that this has had an impact in the way she wishes to train her body, by not going 'overboard' and facing constant judgment. This is certainly detrimental and hindering to her as both a woman and athlete navigating a sporting space where heteronormative ideals continue to be imposed. Vanessa continued, *"I always say that I don't want to be bulk. I don't want to be all big and you know, I still want to look like a woman. I still don't. I, it sounds very odd but I still want to look like a woman who's just toned and takes care of herself."* There is an emphasis placed on the word, 'bulk', seemingly associated with masculinity for Vanessa, and deemed as being incompatible with her identity as a woman athlete. She asserts the desire of appearing toned

and athletic, whilst remaining feminine and ensuring that the lines are not blurred with masculinity. The desire to conform to heteronormative ideals of femininity and be regarded as attractive is eminent in this particular statement.

Likewise, Raissa shared her experience of navigating spaces with her masculinity and revealed, *“I have people who see me and the first thing is like oh, you know, you're muscular. It's like a lot of just because generally I am built. I felt like sometimes I'm very insecure, like approaching some people like the like, especially guys or think oh, she's too masculine, or whatever the case may be. So I do hinder myself and stop myself from doing certain things just because of the fact that people perceive me as the strong guyish looking girl. While I'm actually as soft as like a litchi.”* Her muscularity is deemed as being synonymous with masculinity and subjects her to being policed by men. She also expressed feelings of insecurity and discomfort with regard to this judgment because of her masculine frame and latches on to an ideal of femininity by speaking of her softness. Her fear of appearing too masculine and the stigma associated with masculine women is detrimental for Raissa too, as she admits to avoid doing certain things that she believes will reinforce her masculinity. The pressure of heteronormative ideals of femininity is extremely detrimental in the ways in which interferes and hinders with women athletes' morale and training regimens. Compellingly, Cynthia's discussion revealed some feelings of uncertainty regarding masculinity. She discussed, *“I actually love the look of being, having muscles and stuff, I didn't get, like, I would gym but my, my, my, muscularity wouldn't be bad that, that much, but like, sho, this girl does run. This girl is an athlete, but I wouldn't look that manly.”* Here, we see how muscularity and masculinity are placed together as going hand-in-hand. Despite this, her statement raises some confusion as she shared the desire of having her identity of a track athlete being apparent by appearing muscular and athletic, whilst disregarding the idea of an exaggerated or excess masculinity that could deter her womanhood.

Several of the women athletes however, shared positive thoughts and experiences in relation to navigating discourses of masculinity within their daily lives. Cathy stated, *“I've come to like being masculine because it means that the work that I put into my body and I'm working out and I go to the gym is showing. So it's a good sign, my hard work, basically. So there are times I'd wake up and just be feeling muscular, and masculine. So to say, dress in a seemingly masculine way and not like, feel like that without needing to think, okay, I'm going to just be masculine that I need to, I need to make sure I behave a certain way. So it's just, I've accepted my masculine side and I've embraced it instead. So even when I'm, when I'm wearing a tank*

top or I'm wearing a crop top or something, and my arms are showing, I used to be so anxious about my arms and my arms showing, I wouldn't necessarily think, okay, I'm a masculine person today. I'm wearing a crop top and I'm feeling great as a woman." She displays confidence and pride of her masculine traits as a woman athlete. Her athletic physique is deemed as masculine and is a celebration of the hard work implemented within her training regimen. Cathy does not believe that her masculinity requires any explanation or justification as she embraces it in her everyday life. She echoes the idea that a woman can definitely embrace having masculine traits, whilst still keeping her womanhood intact.

Genevieve's statement is another example of how masculinity and womanhood are being celebrated as compatible. She asserted, *"With this training, I don't know if it's me or what, but I started seeing physical changes really quickly. And at first, it was just like, really shocking. And I wasn't accepting of it. Because I felt like oh, my God, I'm too masculine. And then it went back to my insecurities of feeling like I'm not womanly enough type of thing. I spoke to my coach about it, and he was like, Nah, like, it's gonna get better, but you just gotta get used to it. And you know, and just take it a day, at a time. And I'm actually pretty proud of my body."* Her concerns surrounding the stigma of appearing too masculine due to her training regimen, are appeased from the support and reassurance received from her coach. She displays pride and strength from the way in which she chooses to acknowledge and accept the physiological changes occurring from her training routine, and particularly the masculinity arising from it. Likewise, Raissa later confessed during our discussion, *"if people are going to call me, a tomboy or lack of femininity and point out my broadness in my shoulders or how defined my calves or whatever the case may be or how I walk, I'm not as affected by it. To me, it does have a stain here and there. But no, I think once a lot of my people that I know specifically they'd know me as like Raissa is like a girly girl, but just has a very masculine body."* Her masculinity is evident in her athletic physique, yet she maintains the idea that certain behaviors and mannerisms she exhibits are deemed as conforming to heteronormative discourses of femininity. Again, this example suggests that heterosexual women athletes navigating and embracing traits of masculinity within their identities.

5.4. Owning masculinity

This fourth and final theme explores contemporary issues within the sporting realm with particular reference to athletes such as Serena Williams, Caster Semenya and Sha'Carri Richardson to name a few. This theme explores the following sub-themes: “Representations of strong black women” and, “Advice for young track athletes” I attempted to stimulate conversation around contemporary discourses of masculinity among women athletes and representations of them in the media. These conversations sparked much interest surrounding issues of representation and scrutiny that many black women athletes continue to face, especially for Caster Semenya, a black woman track athlete who continues to be excessively scrutinized. I also used this opportunity to probe the women athletes on their favorite athletes, where track stars such as Allyson Felix, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Elaine Thompson-Herah were brought up. Furthermore, I used this space to discuss the women athletes’ personal achievements within their sporting disciplines. Finally, the ‘power’ was turned back to the women athletes and I probed them on how they could help young girls identifying as tomboys navigate the stigmatization associated with the label. There is a sense of pride that emerges as the women track athletes participating in the discussions assert the importance of ‘owning’ and taking pride of their masculinity as part their gender identity, dismantling heteronormative ideals of girlhood.

5.4.1. Representations of strong black women

Caster Semenya, Serena Williams and many black women athletes continue to be the victims of much scrutiny inflicted by the media as they are regarded to be defying heteronormative ideals of both womanhood and athleticism. Throughout time, black athletes, and particularly black women athletes are disregarded by media platforms and as such, there is an erasure of black excellence. This was a conversation that sparked much interest for the women athletes in this research, with most of the participating women athletes being black women themselves and shedding their views on prominent issues of representation. Nomvula shared, “*we didn't have equal opportunities to take part in sports and, uh, to see black women that look like myself on TV being celebrated for their, you know, for, for their power, for their strength, other than just being sexualized for me, that that is, that is amazing.*” There is a sense of pride and happiness expressed as there is finally recognition surrounding black women athletes’ sporting abilities. We also see how this enables black women athletes to feel empowered through large media platforms such as television. Bailey reinforces the sentiment of the disregard of black

women athletes, particularly in global events such as the Olympic Games. She asserted, “*there really is a lack of representation, like you shouldn’t have to ask yourself, like, if I can’t see someone who looks like me, I’m not going to go, you know?*”. There is an emphasis placed on the lack of representation that black women athletes receive, and in this particular context, black women track athletes are neglected. Moreover, there is a feeling of hopelessness too as she shared feeling discouraged as a black track athlete to attend events such as the Olympic Games given the fact that there will be few black athletes present.

Raissa shared a powerful sentiment of some of the struggles she experiences as a black woman, and especially as a black track athlete navigating spaces that remain dominated by white heteronormative ideals. She stated, “*I’m just like, can a black woman breathe. I was telling my friend, we live in a world where a strong black woman stops and says no, there is always a problem, where they stand their ground, and no, I’m not going to do that. I was talking to my one friend and I said that it’s so similar with like Naomi Osaka and Sha’Cari and whatever the case may be. There’s also just such a high amount of jealousy and you know, you want so many things to go your way and the minute it doesn’t then you do everything in your power to stop it, even if it means tarnishing someone’s name or breaking someone down or making someone question who they are as a whole.*” As a black woman, she expresses how she feels suffocated and powerless in a world that favors white folk, leaving no room for her to impose her strength and herself as a black woman within these spaces. The notion of jealousy is mentioned in relation to the disregard and erasure of black excellence and within this context, the erasure and disdain of black sporting excellence. Black sporting icons, Naomi Osaka and Sha’Cari are mentioned as examples of this excellence, as well as the judgment they have received for establishing themselves, and their power as athletes.

Along with the likes of Naomi and Sha’Cari, the women track athletes participating in this research mentioned South African track star, Caster Semenya and the scrutiny she continues to receive. Vanessa asserted, “*she always has to prove herself, not even to come off racist, but when there are people in a different color than us who look similar to her, they never really get questioned, but because it’s Caster Semenya, it’s always, she needs to get sex tested and stuff.*” She emphasizes on the harsh criticism and sex-testing procedures that Semenya is forced to undertake, and sheds light on how these processes reflect the inherent racism and bias inflicted on the athlete because she does not conform to heteronormative standards of femininity. Cathy added, “*So her testosterone levels are too high and she can’t always qualify*

for female races, but also they're too low for her to qualify for male races. And I'm like, but at the end of the day, I believe she identifies as female. I'm not sure about that, but then if she identifies as that then I don't see the problem. It was just, to me it seemed ridiculous that it was like they're making a mountain out of a mortgage." She highlights some of the issues that Caster Semenya has faced over the years with regard to her gender identity, as well as the absurdity of all of the processes undertaken in order to 'confirm' her identity as a woman. This shows the extent to which the gender binary is strengthened within the sporting realm and colonial discourses surrounding womanhood and race. Moreover, Bailey discussed how international sporting bodies are scrutinizing Caster for her gender identity and race, but also her sexual orientation. She asserted, *"the IAAF is marginalizing her because of her sexuality. And it was speaking about that. I mean, I was speaking about that. Just remembering like, everything that I went through, like in primary, with the experience, my own personal experience of how it is in the track world."* The International Athletics Association (IAAF) is mentioned here as the driving force marginalizing Caster for her sexual identity. Bailey shows that she both sympathizes and understands what Caster is experiencing to some degree, based on her personal experience as a black woman athlete navigating the track and field realm.

The women athletes also discussed how black women athletes have been perceived as almost 'alien-like' and perhaps, abnormal because of their sporting prowess and abilities, suggesting the fetishization of black womanhood, and specifically within athleticism. Zanegegu raised, *"I think that for a really long time, black women have been seen as people that like, it's almost like, the superhuman quality that is expected from them, and so are judged more harshly, you know, and, yeah, I think that it's just always, they're always the example, you know?"*. Her statement shows how the judgment of black womanhood stems back to a history of scrutiny and marginalization throughout time, as well as painting black womanhood as the image of 'abnormality'. Moreover, Genevieve commented, *"I think it's; it's coming as a shock to them. Because it's like, we are not winning at everything. And how come you are this good. But also more than girls with most of the black athletes that are actually good. They come from nothing. Yeah. So it's very baffling to them. Like, how come you just good with such little resources? Now we got to find a way to bring you down and it's just yeah, yeah, I think it's more, I wouldn't say a personality trait, but it's more in trying to prove a point."* We see here how black women athletes' sporting abilities are perceived as abnormal according to heteronormative discourses and as a result, are diminished or belittled. She mentions the 'shock' and disbelief expressed when black women athletes coming from disadvantaged or low social economic backgrounds

exhibit such a high level of sporting excellence. The disregard for black excellence within sport is eminent as white heteronormative discourses continue to prevail.

With the Tokyo Olympic Games having just taken place, American sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson and the doping scandal was explored within my conversations with the track women athletes. Sha'Carri was banned from participating in the Games as THC had been detected in her system. Vanessa said, *"I understand the measures that they had to take, but some of them were a bit too harsh. They were quite a bit too harsh. But other than that, I do understand that it had to happen. Um, she just had to pay, be an example rather, I guess, for the next people that are coming back, is it, if you run quite a time, that was not expected from you, you're bound to get tested there, because I believe if it was Shelly-Ann probably ran that specific time, she was definitely not going to go get tested. They're used to her."* There is a level of distrust and skepticism here as Sha'Carri is a young emerging athlete within track as opposed to prominent runners such as Shelly-Ann or Allyson, and therefore, she is being closely monitored. The idea of profiling is apparent here as Vanessa alluded to the fact of Sha'Carri having a high probability of being tested versus other black women athletes. Furthermore, Cynthia raised an interesting point in relation to the profiling of black athletes, and specifically African athletes. She mentioned, *"not to be racist or anything like that, but, um, it's also what I've seen. Mostly it's more in African people that are being like, okay, if you ran a fast time as an African person, then there's something wrong with you. But look at the Westerners, the Americans, if they run fast times, they don't say anything about them."* She suggests how there is an inherent bias geared towards African folk, and especially African athletes. There is a sense of disbelief that African athletes are able to achieve sporting excellence, and as such, colonial discourses fuel much interrogation surrounding their abilities, whilst athletes in western contexts are exempt from this.

5.4.2. Advice for young track athletes

Navigating the tomboy label was not easy for many of the women athletes, and they felt that it was important to shed light on this experience as part of their narrative as track women athletes negotiating discourses of masculinity. I used this space to allow the women athletes to take the opportunity to provide guidance and advice to aspiring young women athletes hoping to excel within athletics, and how to deal with the potential stigma associated with being called a

tomboy. Cathy shared, *“I would tell them that even though you’re called a tomboy, it doesn't mean you can't do other stuff that tomboys don't do. Like, wearing dresses when you’re chilling at home, you don't need to be sitting in sweat pants or whatever, doesn't mean that you don't have to not like makeup, doesn't mean you don't have to not like boys certain kind of ways. And that doesn't mean that you have to live up to the label of tomboy. If you want to change. If you decide tonight that you don't want to behave like a tomboy anymore and you want to behave like Sharpay from high school musical tomorrow. Then you can do that too. Even you’re labelled by other people, you don't have to do anything that they tell you to do.”* Her statement suggests that the tomboy identity should not be limiting to young girls, and that they should embrace their tomboy identities in their own ways, whether this incorporates more masculine traits or not. She emphasizes on the notion that young girls identifying as tomboys should not be boxed into a rigid ideal of tomboyism and should be allowed to include more fluidity within their gender identities. There is also this sentiment of pride, and that aspiring women and girl athletes should take ownership of this masculinity and celebrate it as a part of their identities. Likewise, Vanessa asserted, *“So just stay true to yourself if you know who to all, um, and, and what your motives are, anyone else has to say, shouldn't really move you like that. Just embrace who you are, and you don't have to prove yourself to anyone besides the person you were yesterday. So if someone treats you as a tomboy, well, that's what they see, but then if you know you’re not a tomboy, you know, carry yourself with pride.”* She highlights the importance of embracing oneself, while forbidding others’ judgment to be deterring. Interestingly, there is a slight negative connotation associated with the tomboy label and the prejudice that may arise from being labelled such a term.

Raissa affirmed, *“You are not living in the world for someone else, there’s one of you and that’s enough. You don't need to pretend to be somebody else or want to live in someone else’s shoes, don't do that. You’re pretty, you’re gorgeous, you are amazing, you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and ain't nobody tell you nothing.”* Similarly to Vanessa, she reiterates the importance of proudly embodying one’s identity regardless of any stigma or judgment that may arise from it. Again, we pick up on this sense of pride and embracing one’s identity, particularly for young women athletes who are negotiating discourses of masculinity as part of their gender identity. The use of such positive adjectives is certainly affirming and encouraging for young women athletes, with the hopes that they remember their worth and continue to assert themselves within these spaces. Correspondingly, Bailey advised, *“If she knows that this is how she wants to live her life then she shouldn't let other people’s opinions let her change that*

because at the end of the day, like, someone is going to say something, but that shouldn't let you, like, dim down who you are as a person." She suggests that one should live their life as desired, despite the fact that will always be some form of judgment from others. With that being said, she emphasizes that others' judgment should not deter one's lifestyle choices or compromise on one's identity, even if it means challenging heteronormativity. When sharing her advice to younger women athletes, Cathy stressed on the importance of maintaining a good balance between training and enjoyment, especially as women and being constantly nitpicked by society. She contended, *"Have fun with it because we do tend to take, um, take sports a bit too seriously, especially when we're women and we're constantly scrutinized for the fact that we do sports and the labeling that you might go through."*

Whilst discussing the guidance to be given to aspiring young women athletes, some of the women athletes in this study revealed that they had longed for more support and advice growing up. Zaneugu revealed, *"I wish I had someone who would it be like, this is okay, like, this is real. And you should never be ashamed of that. Someone just talk to me about it, you know, and kind of be more informed. And also, maybe, like, I think, I never met anyone who looked like me. For a really long time, I think there's only like, in varsity, where I was like, Oh, my gosh, there are other girls that look like me. So I think, had I had someone close to me who maybe was going through a similar situation, to think that I would, they would have been a completely different story."* The yearning of emotional support and assistance is apparent here as she discusses her experience as a young women athlete navigating the track and field space. This is an interesting point raised, particularly for girl athletes still figuring out the ropes of their gender identity through discourses of masculinity such as tomboyism. She also mentions the lack of representation experienced as a young black woman athlete growing up in a sporting space that was predominantly white, and only being able to see other black women athletes at University level. Moreover, receiving support and navigating the sporting space with more black women athletes sharing similar experiences during her formative years would have undoubtedly helped. Genevieve disclosed, *"I wish I had someone to talk to us. But I would tell them to, like that's fine, just keep on being you don't necessarily need to conform to the next person's thought of you or expectation of you. So just live your life as long as you're not infringing on the next person's rights."* Equally, Genevieve also expresses her desire to have had a figure of support during her developmental years. She also echoes the sentiment of

embracing one's identity and not having to compromise it in order to please anyone or conform to heteronormative discourses.

Compellingly, in relation to the issue of representation for black women athletes, Bailey argued, *“you don't have to see someone who looks like you to be like, you can make it. You can open the doors for yourself, and honestly, just stay focused and disciplined.”* She advises that despite this lack of representation, one should take matters into their own hands and believe in achieving success through focus and discipline. Zanegugu asserted, *“I think it's to just take up space, don't be afraid to take up space. And just, you know, do what you have to do, do it. And if you love it, carry on doing it for as much as long as you can, because there are going to be people that are just like, trying to get you out of it. And we need that representation, and I know, like a lot of like, my, I have a niece and she's black and she does netball and she does all the sports. And I think for me as much as I can, I do want to like show her that, Hey, like, you're like, I don't know, like a sports magazine. I want to show her that like, dude, like, all these black girls are literally killing it.”* She brings up the notion of asserting oneself and claiming space fearlessly as a black woman athlete within the sporting spaces that continue to reinforce heteronormative ideals. It is certainly a crucial piece of advice that she extends in light of the lack of representation experienced by black women athletes, as well as the erasure of black sporting excellence that continues to take place. It is time to challenge these notions and celebrate the sporting prowess of black women athletes.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this final chapter, I want to theorize the material I have analyzed in earlier chapters, in which, the women track athletes participating in this research find themselves navigating discourses of masculinity within their everyday lives. These discourses were multiply located: as part of narratives about their own identity, as socio-political notions of who athletes are, or may be, within gendered conventions of embodiment or sporting regimes, and always as enmeshed with discourses on race where blackness places women athletes' performance within a crucible of stigmatizing exoticism or marginalization.

The four major themes and sub-themes explored comprised of 'Projections of Masculinity' (sub-themes: *Baggy clothes*; *Bullying and the trauma within tomboyism* and, *Assumptions of same-sex desire*); 'Self-recognitions' (sub-themes: *God's Plan and dealing with defeat*; *Constructing masculinity through notions of embodiment*; *Scrutinizing blackness* and, *Masculinity as a 'danger' to integrity and womanhood*); 'Negotiating masculinity' (sub-themes: *Exes, situationships and boyfriends: policing bodies within intimate relationships* and, *Taking on masculinity*); 'Owning masculinity' (sub-themes: *Representations of strong black women* and, *Advice for young track athletes*). These themes aided in establishing the women's narratives as track athletes negotiating discourses of masculinity within South Africa. Most of the women track athletes participating in this research acknowledged being called tomboys as children and young girls transitioning into womanhood. Yet, exploring their gender identity means that they find themselves in a liminal and temporary space out of which they must all move, once they are adult, and once the gender-binary recloses around them so that "temporary boyhood" for these girls is no longer granted and they must negotiate their performative proximity to manhood without the safety of "tomboy".

The key markers of tomboyism identified within the conversations comprised of young girls having muscular physiques, interacting, and playing with boys during their developmental years, loose fitting clothing or in this case, 'baggy clothes' and short hair. The literature consulted on tomboy identity seldomly makes mention of short hair. However, this was something strongly explored amongst the discussions with the track women athletes in this study, and particularly amongst the black women track athletes participating in this research. Scholars have noted that women athletes donning long hair, as opposed to short hair, amidst other markers of femininity are indicative of the pressures they experience having to affirm

their womanhood as athletes (Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005; Dworkin and Messner, 2002; Krane et al., 2004; Musto and McGann, 2016; Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Waldron, 2007). Hence, short hair is considered as a characteristic of masculinity and the tomboy identity. These are certainly indicators considered as compatible with a 'masculine' identity and echoes Craig and LaCroix's (2011) statement in relation to the idea that this choice of clothing does not consider fashion, but rather comfort and practicality. This was evident for the women track athletes in this study, who preferred wearing sweat pants and loose fitting clothing for these reasons, as opposed to a transcendence into boyhood.

For many, the tomboy label did not, by definition, convey the desire to abandon elements of womanhood completely and affirm a gender identity resembling manhood, but rather, challenge heteronormative discourses of femininity by acknowledging traits of masculinity, and opening up to the idea of gender fluidity within their womanhood (Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Carr, 2005, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011). The women athletes revealed participating and excelling in sports and physical activity from a young age, which Caudwell (2002), Craig and LaCroix (2011), Halim et al., (2011) and Kidd (2013) regard as being synonymous with tomboyism. Therefore, by default, taking part in sports and physical activity from a young age places them on the spectrum of tomboyism and access to a temporary boyhood. Along with being active from their childhood, interacting and playing with boys emerged frequently throughout the discussions as a key marker of being a tomboy.

Interacting with boys from a young age enabled the women track athletes to challenge negative stereotypes claiming that women are weaker than men. Whilst the literature consulted does not specifically mention such an idea as being in line with the tomboy label, it is worth noting that it certainly was mentioned considerably throughout the discussions. The women track athletes indicated having built and athletic frames from a young age during their girlhood. Muscularity and masculinity were paired together as compatible entities, and subsequently discerned as a key component of being a tomboy. Incorporating a muscular, and therefore, masculine frame, scholars have noted that this usually implores notions of same-sex desire (Engh, 2011; Davis-Delano et al., 2009; Kane et al., 2013; Schultz, 2014, as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016; Blinde and Taub, 1992; Brownsworth, 1991; Kauer and Krane, 2006; Veri, 1999, as quoted by Sartore and Cunningham, 2009). Correspondingly, intersectional research on the tomboy identity across various cultures suggests a connection to same-sex desire. To enumerate, within the Chinese culture, the tomboy term characterizes a partner within a lesbian relationship that

appears more ‘masculine’ than the other (Chen and Chen, 2007, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011). In American contexts, the term is positioned on a spectrum of lesbian gender identities (Craig and LaCroix, 2011). Evidently, research and scholarship produced by white folk within these contexts underline the extent to which the tomboy term is racialized and generally used to describe non-conforming young women. Yet, this does not indicate that the tomboy term and its meanings are not present within other cultures and languages. An intersectional lens was applied within this research project and the discussions that took place. However, it did not offer much insight in relation to the meanings of the tomboy term and culture within a South African context and vocabularies, despite the women track athletes’ intersections and social locations.

For several of the black women track athletes and women track athletes of color participating in this research and more specifically, according to their family members and friends, the term tomboy was often used interchangeably with same-sex desire. Scripts within feminist scholarship explore how dominant discourses on race paint black women athletes to be muscular and therefore, masculine beings compared to white women athletes (Collins, 2005; Davis, 1981, as quoted by Brown, 2015; Birrell and McDonald, 2000; Carrington, 2013; Carter-Francique and Flowers, 2013, as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016). For the black women track athletes and women athletes of color participating within this study, they began their athletic careers from an early age, during their developmental years more specifically, and as such, a naturally ‘built’ body and tomboy label were generally perceived as being closely associated. Given the fact that tomboyism and a lesbian identity were often seen as going hand-in-hand, the women track athletes’ loved ones expressed concern that included hints of homophobia and the condemnation that comes with same-sex desire in a heteronormative society. This suggests how tomboyism remains stigmatized by many and discerned as a threat to womanhood. Again, the women track athletes and women track athletes of color experienced being labelled as masculine and lesbian (Hall, 1988, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008) and as such, experience dismissal and judgment (Griffin, 1992, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008).

The sporting realm tends to be perceived as a safe space for tomboy women to perform aspects of both femininity and masculinity, provided that they ensure that they are successful within their sporting disciplines (Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005). Needless to say, the women track athletes taking part in this research are most definitely successful within their disciplines,

with the majority of them having competed at both national and international levels before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their sporting successes are discernible as appropriate performances of being a tomboy (Ross and Shiness, 2007). The tomboy label revealed to have caused trauma for some of the black women track athletes and women track athletes of color, as they experienced bullying and teasing from other children. This teasing stemmed from their athletic and as such, 'boy-like' physiques being scrutinized by their peers (Griffin, 1992, as quoted by Meân and Kassing, 2008) and consequently, inducing trauma into their livelihoods. This trauma manifested into feelings of discomfort, distress and compromising to their mental health as they continued to navigate the tomboy identity and later negotiate this performative 'closeness' to manhood without the safety of the tomboy label. The tomboy culture remains an unexplored, yet intriguing area of research, particularly within heteronormative sporting contexts in South Africa.

The notion of recognition emerges within the second theme entitled 'Self-recognitions'. The women track athletes' passion and devotion to the sporting discipline of track running is discussed, and how this space has provided room for them to discover themselves and conceptualize their identities as the women athletes they find themselves to be today. The track running space and its implications for these women track athletes revealed how notions of surveillance are eminently present. This surveillance was manifested through the pressure and policing of the athletes from their coaches, folk within their social circles, and their own surveillance of themselves and particular body parts. The urge to preserve their muscularity, strong physiques and athletic performances was most conspicuous. This was found to be more so for the black women athletes who experienced significant scrutiny and supervision within their communities, who continue to interrogate and criticize their embodiment of blackness. We explored the women track athletes' fitness routines and regimens, their goals, and their feelings and coping mechanisms when dealing with unattainable goals. Compellingly, although the material on coping does not suggest or attempt to provide insight into the study's research focus on discourses of masculinity, the findings were interesting in that they revealed that religion and prayer acted as a crucial means to coping with feelings of defeat and obstacles encountered in the track running space. This shows how impactful faith and the act of prayer are for the women track athletes dealing with hardships experienced from not reaching their goals. With that being said, I reiterate that while my research does not explore women athletes' personal relationship with religion and prayer, it is certainly a fascinating area for future research to be undertaken, particularly with regards to the ways in which they may negotiate

their masculinity, along with their faith and the rigid structures and beliefs that bind Christianity.

To be an athlete navigating the sporting realm and in the public eye to a certain extent means that criticism and surveillance is inevitable. The women track athletes experienced close surveillance from their coaches and people in general regarding their bodies. Immense pressure was felt in order to meet the stringent expectations of athleticism, particularly within track running, claiming that a muscular physique is required (Mosewich et al., 2009). An interesting point to be highlighted is that no distinct connection between muscularity and masculinity was made throughout the discussions. Being muscular was not a prerequisite of masculinity in the case of these women athletes. Appearing too masculine was not a cause of concern for coaches and people nit-picking at the women track athletes as this masculinization forms part of a natural process for women athletes engaging in high levels of activity. Contrarily to this, scholars argue that a process of masculinization is inevitable for women athletes, with perceptions of 'unusualness' emerging (Lenskij, 1986 as quoted by Harry, 1995:110; Richman and Schaffer, 2000; Ross and Shinew, 2008; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009) and therefore, suggesting an appropriate and scrutinized masculinity.

Moreover, the women track athletes reported experiencing feeling most scrutinized when their bodies were undergoing apparent physical changes such as losing weight, gaining weight, or not looking as toned as 'usual'. Social trends and platforms continuously favor a 'hetero-sexy' body as the 'current' and 'trendy' physique for women to aspire to have (George, 2005; Mosewich et al., 2009; Choi, 2000, as quoted by Steinfeldt et al., 2011), which places additional pressure on the track women athletes to both maintain an ideal physique in order to maximize their athletic performance as sprinters, along with conforming to heteronormative standards. Evidently, this suggests that any form of masculinity must be abandoned and is not permitted, forcing them to conform to a rigid ideal of womanhood. For the women track athletes criticized for their apparent weight loss and displaying a lack of curvature, connotations of deviance to gender norms emerge as they are perceived to be challenging conceptions of what consists of a 'reasonable' or 'appropriate' aesthetic (Goffman, 1983; Schilling and Bunsell, 2009:156, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2016). Again, a 'reasonable' or 'appropriate' aesthetic does not allow for experiences of manhood to be explored in relation to their gender identity.

Interestingly, the material from the discussions with the women track athletes revealed that having a more curvaceous frame such as a larger rear was perceived as “despicable” and “unworthy” to their sporting performances and abilities within the track and field realm. This suggests an element of hypocrisy demonstrated as heteronormative discourses of womanhood celebrate curves and a toned body as the ideal for women to aspire to, yet, at the same time they also condone such an aesthetic as being performative of same-sex desire and masculinity. This leaves women athletes in vulnerable positions as they continue to navigate these spaces negotiating their gender identity and these ‘gender-battles’ as well as recognizing feelings of worthiness and acceptance. Given that most of the women track athletes participating in this research identify as black, it is imperative to be aware and recognize their experiences and the intersections that exist among them, as well as those of other women athletes of color.

Black women’s bodies have relentlessly been subject to much policing and scrutiny through tropes of exoticization and racialization, and specifically black women athletes. In his writings, Fanon (1952, as quoted by Brown, 2015:15) depicts this as, “the most ‘eroticized’ form of blackness within the white imaginary.” The findings from the material revealed that the black women track athletes’ bodies were targets of much scrutiny within their communities, with certain bodily attributes such as the rear being highly sexualized and policed, and therefore, leaves little to no room for the exploration of masculine traits, particularly amongst ‘strong’ black women athletes. In South African contexts, a larger rear on a woman is perceived as an ideal of heterosexual desirability. Colonial discourses continue to have a significant impact on the ways in which black womanhood is illustrated. These discourses depict it as a denotation of sexual promiscuity and hypersexualization (Abrahams, 1998; Cahn, 1993; McKay and Johnson, 2008), with Saartjie Baartman being a prominent figure of this in South African contexts.

It is evident that the Baartman analogy translates into the lives of many black women athletes, and especially in relation to the black women track athletes participating in this research. Scholars highlight how existing dominant discourses with regard to race establish black women athletes as embodying much muscularity and masculinity as opposed to white women athletes. At the same time, the notion of masculinity is blurred with the meaning of being a ‘natural’ athlete (Collins, 2005; Davis, 1981, as quoted by Brown, 2015; Birrell and McDonald, 2000; Carrington, 2013; Carter-Francique and Flowers, 2013, as quoted by Musto and McGann, 2016). This is apparent by the manner in which certain black men and other folk perceive some

of the black women track athletes' muscularity as synonymous with the desire to embody a masculine identity and, explore elements of 'manhood', particularly through the lack of bodily curves and larger buttocks. Moreover, this evokes the compatibility between athleticism and masculinity, along with the ways in which the black female body and masculinity within the sporting realm are connected to beliefs of black women athletes having 'unusual' or even 'abnormal' identities.

According to certain folk, especially black men as depicted from the findings, within black communities in South Africa, a very muscular and athletic build appears to be seen as a woman's desire to forego her womanhood and become a man. Intersectional writings indicate that black women athletes experience great pressure and as a result, go to extreme efforts in having to be more feminine and repressing any 'deviant' traits (Adjepong and Carrington, 2010; Douglas, 2012, as quoted by Engh and Potgieter, 2018; Heinecken, 2016 Walker and Melton, 2015, as quoted by Blodgett, Ge, Schinke and McGannon, 2017). The women athletes face a lot of pressure to conform to ideals of an exaggerated femininity through musculature and physical appearance, and therefore forego any exploration of the possibility of embracing masculine traits, as a means of avoiding the disparities that come with challenging heteronormative discourses.

Interrogations of the track and field space emerge for the women athletes as they find themselves on a journey of reflection and self-discovery into understanding how they conceptualize their gender identities as young track athletes in South Africa. The findings highlighted certain traits as being indispensable to the conceptualization of one's identity as a South African woman track athlete. Possessing certain physical and psychological traits are indispensable to being a track athlete. The women track athletes are required to have a strong physique and power for sprinting, yet the fear of appearing too masculine looms over them as they continue to negotiate discourses of masculinity without the safety or reliance of the tomboy label, and at the same time, conforming to heteronormative ideals. The findings reveal the evidence of this particular sentiment in relation to the women track athletes scrutinizing the appearance of body parts such as their chest and arms, fearing that these would be perceived to be overly masculine and compromise on their womanhood. Scholars observe, "When a woman displays muscular aesthetics, it impinges on most people's sense of normality in relation to gender and sexuality" (Schilling and Bunsell, 2009:146, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2016:147). Likewise, Beard (2012, as quoted by Heinecken, 2016) critically

discusses the female body by enforcing the notion of power and muscle as coinciding with meanings of masculinity. As a result, this fear of appearing too masculine is inflicted and embedded within them. They experience a gender-battle with the ways in which they choose to perform their gender identity and ‘degree’ of masculinity that is still rendered appropriate.

On the other hand, the material also revealed that several of the women track athletes exclaimed feeling confident, strong, and powerful within their gender identities. The track space is seen as an area that permits and inspires empowerment for many of them as they negotiate their gender identity as athletes. Scholars argue that the sporting realm certainly acts as a fundamental area for women athletes to defy rigid, derogatory, and outdated traditional notions of a frail and passive feminine body (Adams, Schmitke and Franklin, 2005; St Martin and Gavey, 1996, as quoted by Grogan et al., 2004). The strength and confidence exhibited as athletes suggests how the women track athletes challenge these stereotypes. Hargreaves (2004, as quoted by Ogunniyi, 2015) contends that women athletes’ bodies may withstand representations of weakness through the transformation of universal power structures in sports, where different gender identities are created, displayed, and executed. Reshaping and resisting these power structures suggest that women athletes reject the notion of accommodating hegemonic discourses of womanhood and rather embody the freedom and power obtained within sporting spaces. This suggests an element of resistance, which is present amongst the women track athletes as they continue to reject hegemonic ideals navigating the track realm and asserting their unique gender identities, regardless of appearing too masculine or not feminine enough. All in all, the findings showed particularly mixed responses from the women track athletes, as a few rejected the embodiment of discourses of masculinity and the possibility of masculine traits within their gender identities, whilst others showed some assimilation to these discourses without the added commitment of labelling themselves as masculine or abandoning their womanhood.

Being a woman track athlete requires much dedication and commitment, which in many cases does not leave much room for them to explore and pursue intimate relationships with significant others. For heterosexual women track athletes, discourses of masculinity emerge in their personal relationships from the apparent surveillance in the ways in which their partners perceive them within physical, behavioral, and emotional aspects. Their heterosexual desirability is interrogated as their ex-partners and sometimes current partners point out their masculine traits in a reprimanding and negative manner, out of fear that these traits assimilate

with same-sex desire. With that being said, Nelson (1994, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2015) writes, “girls are meant to learn that female strength is unappealing to men, that being attractive to men is important, and that competing with boys in sports risks having called into question one’s gender and sexuality”. This points to the effects of sexist practices reflecting from rigid systems of male domination that women athletes come across as a result of the threat they pose to hegemonic discourses when navigating sporting spaces. Many men pursuing relationships with women track athletes displayed a closed-minded attitude towards their partners’ sporting careers and development of their ‘exaggerated’ muscularity. The notion of athleticism and femininity as being incompatible is highlighted here and that women track athletes possessing masculine-like physical traits should not be exaggerated or perhaps present at all in order to be considered heterosexually desirable.

Moreover, several of the women track athletes’ ex-partners scrutinized certain behavioral traits such as eating habits and ‘dominant’ personalities as coinciding with a performative masculinity and therefore, deemed as undesirable within a heterosexual relationship. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that several of the women track athletes’ current and ex-partners perceive the women’s masculine traits as heterosexually desirable and empowering to their gender identities. Their muscularity is praised by their partners or ex-partners who share similar interests in sport and fitness, and as such, understand the hard work and dedication that the women track athletes implement in the pursuit of sporting excellence. Encouragement and affirmation is provided to the women track athletes in their intimate relationships for them to continue pursuing their passion and careers in track running. This reinforces the notion that athleticism and womanhood are certainly compatible, along with permitting heterosexual women athletes to embrace traits of masculinity without having to compromise on their womanhood or challenge heteronormative discourses.

Navigating a masculine appearance remains somewhat perplexing for the women track athletes as many feel uncertain about the meanings of discourses of masculinity in relation to the ways in which they perform their gender identity. Whilst some choose to completely embrace their masculine traits, others find themselves negotiating these traits whilst feeling apprehensive. A muscular physique is synonymous with masculinity and for some, this fuels feelings of insecurity and anxiety as they perceive themselves to be transgressing hegemonic discourses. Scholars note, “women’s bodies are presented simultaneously as [a] source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and

remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness” (Gill, 2007:6, as quoted by Washington and Economides, 2015). The insecurities of appearing too masculine results in many women track athletes engaging in certain behaviors such as modifying their training regimens, often detrimental to their health as an attempt to halt masculinization (Beals and Manore, 1994 as quoted by Mosewich et al., 2009:100; Duquin, 1994; Johns, 1996; Krane, Greenleaf, & Snow, 1997 as quoted by Krane et al., 2004:315; George, 2005; Kilham et al., 2018; Sartore and Cunningham, 2009; Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Taub and Blinde, 1992). For the women track athletes participating in this research, minimizing, or reducing the workload implemented within their training regimens is a result of feeling pressure to conform to the exigencies of rigid hegemonic orders. These discourses are continuously perpetuating discourses of femininity, and therefore, rejecting the idea of embracing masculinity as part of one’s gender identity entirely.

There is much concern surrounding the idea of appearing ‘bulky’ and hence, masculine and undesirable. The desire to appear toned and athletic without having to compromise on their femininity or gender identity as women track athletes is conspicuous. There is an element of resistance to developing an overly muscular physique as a means to outweigh the toned body ‘ideal’ and can be interpreted further as restraint from the potential negative labelling of same-sex desire has shown to be (George, 2005; Waldron, 2007). Muscularity and masculinity are paired together, and for several of the women track athletes, this does not leave room to explore the possibility of encompassing both masculine and feminine traits without disrupting the status quo. Contrarily, the findings also suggested that some women track athletes maintain a positive relationship with embodying certain discourses of masculinity within their lives without the security or surety of the tomboy label. Pairing muscularity with masculinity is perceived to be positive and a celebration of the hard work and effort that the women track athletes put into their everyday training routines. Embodying masculine traits during their adulthood suggests that these women track athletes open themselves up to the possibility of tomboyism and gender fluidities.

Scholars highlight the debates on tomboyism in relation to the idea as to whether athletic girls and women are purposely dismissing aspects of womanhood or either encompassing fluidity within their gender identity as a way of protecting their identity (Ahlqvist et al., 2013; Carr, 2005, as quoted by Craig and LaCroix, 2011). Negotiating both elements of masculinity and femininity within their gender identities as heterosexual women athletes certainly suggests the

possibility of a heteronormative female masculinity. Several of the women track athletes participating within this research materialize this premise and present us with the possibility of embodying a cis-gendered identity. Along with masculine traits and a performative proximity to manhood, they present an identity that does not rely on the surety of the tomboy label and without having to abandon their womanhood. Presently, the concept of female masculinity is explored in scholarship within queer contexts as complimenting the tomboy identity and challenging girlhood femininities. Halberstam (1998) confers that the tomboy term suggests notions of same-sex desire and a queer identity within American contexts. They have also taken ownership of the articulation of the term into ‘tomboi.’ This colloquial articulation suggests an identity which is more masculine and associated with “butch” and “sporty dyke” beings. Furthermore, this also gives lesbian women more room to explore and acknowledge an identity that is more masculine and overrides the tomboy label, and its temporariness (Craig and LaCroix, 2011).

Contemporary issues and debates surrounding black sporting excellence continue to prevail, with sporting icons such as Caster Semenya, Serena Williams and many more as the targets of merciless scrutiny and criticism. The lack of representation and disregard of black women athletes by media platforms is a crucial point of interest for the women track athletes participating in this research, given that many of them are black women and share similar experiences as they continue to navigate the track realm. As black women track athletes navigating a predominantly white and male realm, they fall victim to much criticism, along with disregard to their sporting abilities as competitive athletes. The black women track athletes feel unseen and neglected by the media, sports scholarship, and society in general, as the erasure of black excellence continues to occur. Historically and still to this day, black women athletes do not receive adequate representation. Sports scholarship within American contexts depict how African American women athletes have been disparaged or completely excluded due to their gender and race as sociocultural intersecting identities (Bruening, 2005). Having said that, black feminist writings acknowledge this as being situated ‘on the margin’ (hooks, 1984) or operating as ‘outsiders within’ (Hill Collins, 1990). This shows how black women athletes are not entitled to holding space and making their mark as genuine athletes. Their experiences continue to be silenced or entirely discounted from research and scholarship within sports. Furthermore, research and scholarship within sports tends to disregard African contexts, with very few studies taking place in South Africa (Hargreaves and Anderson, 2014; Hong and

Mangan, 2004, as quoted by Adjepong, 2020). Thus, the repercussion is that black women athletes are continuously excluded.

The women track athletes conferred how discourses of a racist nature conceive images of fantasy of black women athletes as ‘alien-like’ with their sporting abilities being entrenched in a fictitious and cliché world (Vertinsky and Captain, 1998). Notably, Caster Semenya amongst several black sporting icons was mentioned and discussed as representative of this conflation of these terms. Material from the discussions suggested that the black women track athletes themselves had experienced these tropes of exoticization and racialization navigating the track space in South Africa. They noted encountering feelings of suffocation and frustration as the media and general folk continue to fetishize their bodies as these ‘abnormal’ and ‘heroine-like’ beings instilling wonder, as well as fear and revulsion. In spite of the black women track athletes’ sporting successes and prowess within track and sprinting, like their compatriot Caster Semenya, they are susceptible to stigmatizing representations of masculinity because the sporting realm acts as a means of dramatizing these and labelling them as ‘sporting space invaders’ (Hardin et al., 2004; Vertinsky and Captain, 1998, as quoted by Brown, 2015; Pieper, 2014). Nirmal Puwar (2004, as quoted by Adjepong, 2019) describes this as particular bodies existing within a space and threaten other bodies manifesting to exist and as a consequence, these ‘space invaders’ are monitored closely so as to deter any potential menace. This applies to the black women track athletes in South Africa as they continue to navigate the athletics space rendering them as ‘foreigners’ and disregarding their sporting abilities. This highlights the dangers that masculinity evokes in spaces where racism is particularly ‘live’ and threatening to black women athletes and women athletes color negotiating their gender identities.

Navigating the athletics realm and negotiating discourses of masculinity such as the tomboy label, as well as forfeiting it, was not always so painless and simple for many of the women track athletes participating in this research. As part of their narrative as women track athletes negotiating these discourses within a South African context, they believe that it is crucial to share some much-needed wisdom and guidance to future generations of young women athletes aspiring to excel within the discipline of track running. For the most part, the women track athletes assert the importance of staying true to oneself, embracing all aspects of one’s identity whether from their past and identifying with being a tomboy or not, to their adulthood whether they find themselves negotiating performances or traits of masculinity without holding on to a label such as tomboy. They felt that this would help in preparing these future generations of

young women athletes to deal with the potential stigma that comes with embodying forms of masculinity as part of their identities. Exerting pride and confidence are key for future young women track athletes in order to survive any difficulty or obstacle thrown into their way as they pursue their journey of being successful track athletes. Along with commitment and dedication required to become a successful athlete, the women track athletes participating in this research also stressed the importance of maintaining a healthy balance and having fun so as to avoid burning out. The findings suggests that many of the women track athletes felt that there was a lack of support and guidance provided to them, which is why this task of ‘giving back’ and providing advice felt essential for them. They find themselves constantly having to negotiate discourses of masculinity as part of their gender identity, without the stigma from heteronormative ideals proclaiming this as being deviant to traditional womanhood and femininities. Thus, leaving little room for the possibility of embracing a female masculinity as cis-gendered women athletes navigating the track realm in South Africa.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Ultimately, this master's research dissertation aimed to explore discourses of masculinity among South African women track athletes' lives and the ways in which they negotiate them. Taking part in sports and exercise enhances one's physiological and psychological health, as well as being a great means for socialization. Until now, men continue to monopolize the sporting realm, leaving women navigating and participating within this realm to be perceived as defying gender norms. Traditional ideals of heteronormativity also continue to construct the gender gap within sporting domains, and as a result, reinforce narratives endorsing femininity and athleticism as mutually exclusive entities. Arguably, scholars discuss how women athletes taking part in sports still experience many disparities in terms of opportunities, status, recognition, and representation available to them. These are heavily entrenched within socio-cultural convictions on the significance of them, women, as bodies, athletes and as such, as 'human beings' (Capranica et al., 2013; Pieper, 2014). Prior to this master's dissertation, my research examined how these convictions have materialized themselves through the notion of surveillance. More specifically, surveillance of women athletes' bodies participating in 'male-identified' sports known as football or rugby at the University of Cape Town. My analysis pinpointed questions of regulation and how these were administered within women athletes' experiences, whilst being under the eye of surveillance, and stringent demands of heteronormative femininity. Interestingly, while existing literature on sports scholarship complemented the findings, new information emerged too.

Women track athletes located within South African contexts and participating in the athletic discipline of track running, constantly find themselves negotiating discourses of masculinity. This was identified through the temporariness and safety of the tomboy label where we embark on the women track athletes' journeys and learn about their stories on masculinity, and how this is established within their gender identities as track runners. The act of self-recognition as an integral part of their narratives on understanding the meaning of their identities within the track running space. Additionally, policing of themselves and by others through notions of surveillance where racial, class and contextual differences are highlighted. The findings revealed tellingly clear narratives surrounding the intersections between the clothing worn and playmate choices during their childhood, physiques, as well as their sporting interests and abilities. Women track athletes experience being excluded from a 'true' and 'authentic' girlhood and assigned to a category where they can exist as tomboys. In spite of the racial, class

and contextual diversities among them, together with their different athletic journeys and other life stories, they have all encountered this connection and narrative of a 'side gender'. The narrative of a space that is hardly accepted within girlhood, and where they are permitted to proceed with their athletic journeys, with certain terms offered, foreign to a normative femininity.

The tomboy term still holds much importance in relation to the meanings of being a young girl actively participating in sport and experiencing many physiological changes that comes with high levels of activity, as well as continuing to navigate spaces such as schools where the gender binary and heteronormative ideals are emphasized. For some women track athletes, the memory of embracing and embodying the tomboy label signifies recognition, positive feelings, and safety to explore a girlhood that goes beyond traditional notions and approaches the idea of a temporary boyhood. On the other hand, this label is traumatic, upsetting and triggering of painful memories of bullying and torment from their childhood. An ongoing 'gender battle' arises as tomboyhood is perceived as a liminal and temporary space out of which the women track athletes must all move, once they are adult, and once the gender-binary recloses around them so that "temporary boyhood" for them is no longer granted and they must negotiate their performative proximity to manhood without the safety or reliance of the tomboy label.

The notion of self-recognition emerges among women track athletes' narratives, as they navigate ways to find balance between their commitments to their sporting discipline, while at the same time, giving themselves the space to reflect and engage in their self-discovery and conceptualizations of their gender identities. The track running space provides them with a means of constructing their identities, however, not without the ramifications of surveillance coming into play. This translates to the pressure that women track athletes encounter from their coaches, other folk within their surroundings, and from within themselves. The pressure to maintain a certain physique, level of athleticism and performance is especially pointed out with regards to black women athletes and women athletes of color, experiencing surveillance from their communities nit-picking their blackness and the idea of an 'appropriate' blackness. Their stories are all about becoming athletes whilst being overlooked and dismissed by their families, institutional spaces, and other community spaces. They experience being dismissed from normative femininity and, their perceived closeness to boyhood is consistent in the depictions of their athleticism.

Negotiating discourses of masculinity as heterosexual women athletes pursuing and experiencing intimate relationships comes with certain complexities. For women track athletes located within South African contexts, regardless of their current relationship status, notions of surveillance and the policing of their bodies are particularly visible. The nature of intimate relationships and partners have taken different meanings in modern society as more colloquial and 'trendy' terms such as 'situationships' are employed. For some, there is the extent of removing the 'boyfriend', 'girlfriend' and 'relationship' label entirely and discerning their intimate connections as more 'casual' within the realm of heterosexual dating. Above all, many South African women track athletes recognize encountering a lack of acceptance and feelings of discomfort from partners in relation to their athletic bodies. This closed-mindedness was evident among men who do not participate actively in sport or any form of physical activity, and hence, struggled to understand the women's commitment and desire to constantly take part in high volumes of training and exercise. Intersectional discourses of racism are also observed, as many black men and communities continue to scrutinize black women's bodies, while reinforcing images and expectations of 'appropriate' black femininities, which do not include athleticism. Conversely, male partners taking part in high levels of activity are complimentary of the women athletes and their bodies. They present themselves as being more understanding and accepting towards these active lifestyles and believe that an athletic physique is certainly desirable. Ultimately, South African men's views on the relationship between athleticism and womanhood are complicated, as they reinforce the gender-battles that women track athletes experience in negotiating discourses of masculinity.

Historically and still to this day, black women athletes and women athletes of color are at the forefront of scrutiny, particularly with regards to the ways in which some of them take 'pleasure' in owning their masculinity for their own purposes. Conversations on the contemporary issues surrounding prominent athletes such as tennis star, Serena Williams; track stars, Caster Semenya and even more recently, Sha'Carri Richardson are crucial as a stepping-stone into eradicating the colonial discourses that still dominate many media platforms. Some of these issues include contemporary discourses of masculinity among 'strong' black women athletes and the ways in which media platforms continue to represent them. For black women track athletes and women track athletes of color located within South African contexts, these are important conversations to initiate and maintain as they share similar experiences of the scrutiny strong black women athletes encounter in these white heteronormative spaces. Among the many strong black athletes that the media endlessly nit-picks and scrutinizes, and

particularly with reference to an emblematic South African athlete such as Caster Semenya, sparking these conversations is a deeply personal and somewhat liberating process for some of the women track athletes through the location of their intersections.

Women track athletes located within South African contexts believe that it is necessary to extend guidance and support to future generations of young girls aspiring to make their mark in track running. Many of them did not receive much support and advice during their developmental years as they negotiated their gender identities and performative proximity to boyhood, both with the tomboy label and then later without the temporariness and surety of it. Their hope is that this guidance and wisdom will help young girls identifying with the tomboy label to navigate the potential stigmatization that comes with embodying the label. Feelings of pride are evident as women track athletes insist of the significance of taking ownership and celebrating their masculinity as part of their gender identity, whilst at the same time, tearing down heteronormative standards of girlhood.

Whilst exploring the South African women track athletes' routines, both during the on-season and off-season periods, training regimens and diet plans, my findings reveal that although much importance is placed on these, they are not at any point in time, forced to adhere to rigid schedules and are enabled much freedom and flexibility. Much of the existing sports scholarship, along with my previous research, have shown that many women athletes tend to engage in detrimental behaviors in order to alleviate some of the pressures they encounter in terms of keeping an 'adequate' level of athleticism. Women track athletes located within South African contexts make no mention or hint at engaging in detrimental behaviors such as limiting their weight training or calorie intake, even during nerve-racking or high pressure environments, for the sake of attaining a certain physique or level of athleticism. Moreover, while some of these new findings emerging from the material do not contribute or in any way attempt to answer the main research question of this study, they do provide new insights into future areas of research within feminist sports scholarship. Discussions surrounding goals and dealing with feelings of defeat and setbacks when these goals are not achieved, surface. Interestingly, many women track athletes within South Africa admit to the extent in which the role of religion and prayer have in helping them overcome these negative feelings and thoughts.

I consider my research to be crucial to the process of knowledge creation, and a key contribution to the area of feminist sports scholarship within African contexts. Fundamentally,

women athletes' sporting experiences are still highly disregarded and ostracized (Engh, 2010). The available research and scholarship on gender and sports underlines how rigid the gender binary is, and as a result, femininities put into effect around women athletes and masculinity is only investigated as relative to men athletes. By the same token, existing literature on women's masculinities is extremely limited, and especially within South African contexts, suggesting that gender fluidities are not permitted within women athletes' livelihoods. Combining women's sporting experiences and masculinities together into a single research area has clearly shown me that analyses on masculinities within women's experiences of becoming athletes barely exists. For these reasons, I contend that this extreme scarcity of literature makes my research project crucial as means of addressing this theoretical blindness.

I view this master's research dissertation as an indication of my passion and deep-rooted love for sports and empowering women who continue to be shunned yet find the strength to resist these hardships in order to leave their mark within a space that has been dominated far too long by men. I wish for this research to provide an informative and enlightening journey into feminist academia, and even more into the depths of feminist sports scholarship. These sentiments resonate deeply within me as I continue to navigate male-dominated sporting spaces on a daily basis due to my personal involvement in sports and physical activity. These white heteronormative spaces continue to reinforce the idea of athleticism and femininity as being incompatible, and as such, the idea of a heteronormative female masculinity would be deemed as incomprehensible. I reiterate my confidence with regards to the suitability of my research, considering my commitment and dedication as both an extremely physically active woman and researcher investigating the lived realities of other sportswoman sharing similar and different experiences to me. My main goal with conducting this research consisted of gaining more knowledge, along with encouraging women athletes to proudly embody a masculinity that does not necessarily consolidate with heteronormative ideals of gender identity. I hope that this study will be used as a grounds for further research in this area to be undertaken, and in the long run, challenge the stigma and discrepancies that come with a heteronormative female masculinity, to allow women athletes to navigate sporting spaces freely.

Given the last few years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have found ourselves dealing with much uncertainty and adversity, immensely testing our adaption and flexibility skills. Conducting research during the pandemic has instilled new qualities, as well developed other qualities. I have learned that research is extremely versatile and achievable when space and

permission is granted to creativity and change to take place. In saying that, I believe that is important to reflect on the research process and particularly with regards to conducting research during unknown and unprecedented times such as the COVID-19 pandemic for additional planning and measures to be taken for future research. Undertaking research during the pandemic was a difficult, unsettling and at times, disheartening process for me, the researcher.

I went into the data collection stage with many reservations and anxieties, fearing that I would not be able to find women track athletes willing to participate, as well as having to adapt an in-person in-depth individual interview to an online platform such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While conducting these interviews on these online platforms resulted into a positive and novel experience, benefitting me in terms of being both travel, cost and time-efficient; it certainly did take away the authenticity and experience of building in-person relationships with the participants. Moreover, overseeing interviews on Zoom and Microsoft Teams adds to the complexities of transcription and the ethics of visually recording participants' narratives as opposed to simply voice recording. Additional resources and literature are recommended to provide guidance to scholars contemplating this method of data collection. Using this method has added to my skillset and ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances.

As a white cis-gendered woman researcher, I assert that it is and was my responsibility to constantly acknowledge my location and keep my privilege in check when entering spaces and contexts that do not belong to me. This is very important within feminist studies and writing where issues surrounding representation and homogenization often occur (Morris, 2015; Narayan, 2014) and my fear was to become another white researcher 'whitesplaining' narratives and experiences that do not apply or correspond to mine, and my intersections. I was forced to always be aware of the spaces I was occupying and the spaces that I was entering in order to avoid becoming another 'white woman with a notebook' (Cronin-Furman and Lake, 2018). I found myself to take on the roles of both 'insider' and 'outsider' during this process, given that my social intersections are entrenched within Eurocentrism. I took on the role of the 'insider' through my gender identity as a cis-gendered woman actively taking part in sports and exercise, and continually encountering discourses and interrogations surrounding masculinity. My role as the 'outsider' materialized itself upon entering African-centered contexts, along with acknowledging the different social intersections between myself, the researcher, and the women track athletes, the researched.

This research dissertation's focus consciously attempts to avoid homogenizing South African women track athletes' narratives and experiences, but instead, shed light on the ways in which discourses of masculinity are embedded within. With that being said, I underline the importance of allowing the women athletes' intersections and experiences reveal themselves across their accounts. I affirm with conviction that this research presented how cis-gendered women track athletes located within South African contexts negotiate masculinities and femininities as part of their gender identities, while giving way to the possibility of a heteronormative female masculinity. Furthermore, their locations within 'tomboyhood' suggests a liminal and temporary space. Once they reach adulthood, they are expected to move out of this space and transcend into one where the gender-binary recloses around them. As a result, a 'temporary boyhood' for these young women is no longer authorized and they are forced to negotiate their performative proximity to manhood without the safety of the tomboy label.

Chapter 8: Bibliography

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Were you ever called a ‘tomboy’ during your childhood?
3. Why do you think that you were called a ‘tomboy’?
4. How does being called a ‘Tomboy’ make you feel?
5. Are you still called a ‘Tomboy’ today?
6. Does this term have a particular meaning within your community?
7. Tell me about your background in track running.
8. What does track running mean for you? A hobby? A career?
9. Tell me about what a day in the life of track runner consists of.
10. What are your goals, as an athlete?
11. How do you feel when these goals are not reached, and how do you move past these feelings?
12. How would you conceptualize yourself as a woman track athlete?
13. Do you feel pressure to maintain a certain ‘look’?
14. What does the ‘ideal’ physique look like to you?
15. What are your thoughts on being muscular?
16. Have people made comments or judged you about the way you are being a woman?
17. Do you identify with having masculine traits?
18. Do you see ‘masculinity’ as a threat to your identity as a woman?
19. Do you experience being masculine or having masculine traits?
20. Are you currently in a relationship? If yes, does your partner feel threatened by your ‘masculinity’?
21. Does he wish that you would be more feminine?
22. What about your family and friends?
23. Tell me about your athletic accomplishments/ achievements.
24. How does your body feel?
25. Let’s chat about a few athletes- Have you seen Caster’s latest ad for LUX? What are your thoughts? Bring in Sha’Carri and Serena (they ways they are portrayed in the media) ...
26. Who are your favorite athletes?

27. Turn back power to participant here- ask for advice (what advice would you give aspiring young women athletes in track running?) if I have a sister called 'tomboy', how would you help her navigate the stigmatization?