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**Oppression versus Empowerment: A Philosophical Analysis of
Female Participation in Sport**

Self-report of PhD Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Title: Oppression versus Empowerment: A Philosophical Analysis of Female Participation in Sport

Objectives: Utilising feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, this thesis aims to define and critically analyse what the concepts of oppression and empowerment mean in relation to women. In determining that women's oppression is systemic, internalised and exploitative, the findings are applied to the female sport category. This discussion primarily focuses on whether sport has the propensity to perpetuate the oppression of women through its rules and conventions, categorisations, financially and emotionally exploitative practices, and through novel methods such as health data manipulation. Drawing upon current texts in the field of sports studies, the theme that sport can be a source of empowerment for women is discussed.

Methodology: This thesis employed a desk research approach, gathering, interpreting and critically assessing information from second-hand data, including, but not limited to, philosophical texts, journal articles, newspaper sources and social media. This thesis draws upon ideas from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* to provide a more thorough philosophical analysis of the terms 'oppression' and 'empowerment'. This thesis also draws upon standpoint theory, the origins of which lie in the work of feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock. The theory assumes that knowledge is 'always socially situated', and those who are socially located as 'insiders' have an epistemological advantage when producing such knowledge.

Results: It is concluded that sport has the potential to be a vital source of bodily empowerment for women, but also a site where oppression can manifest. In addition to several specific policy recommendations, three broad policy recommendations to help sports governing bodies tackle women's oppression and enable women's empowerment are presented. It is proposed that sports governing bodies ought to take the majority of the responsibility in making such changes. Effective changes can be brought about through a

review of rules and codes, responding with protective measures, the eventual reformation of education, and the introduction of non-traditional sports.

Keywords: Oppression, Empowerment, Beauvoir, Ethics, Sport, Philosophy

ABSTRAKT

Název: Útlak versus posílení postavení žen: Filosofická analýza účasti žen ve sportu

Cíle: Cílem této práce je na základě knihy feministické filosofky Simone de Beauvoir *Druhé pohlaví* definovat a kriticky analyzovat, co znamená pojmy „útlak“ a „posílení postavení“ žen. Zjištění, že útlak žen je systémový, internalizovaný a vykořisťovatelský, jsou aplikována do ženské kategorie ve sportu. Tato diskuse se zaměřuje především na zjištění, zda má sport tendenci utvrzovat útlak žen prostřednictvím svých pravidel a konvencí, kategorizace, finančně a emocionálně vykořisťujících praktik a prostřednictvím nových metod, jako je manipulace se zdravotními údaji. Na základě současných textů z oblasti kinantropologie je rovněž diskutováno téma sportu jakožto zdroje pro posílení postavení žen.

Metodologie: Tato práce je čistě teoretickou studií, ve které byly shromažďovány, interpretovány a kriticky hodnoceny informace z filosofických textů, odborných článků, novinových článků a sociálních médií. Tato práce vychází z myšlenek knihy Simone de Beauvoir *Druhé pohlaví*, která poskytuje důkladnější filosofickou analýzu pojmů „útlak“ a „posílení postavení“. Práce rovněž vychází z teorie stanoviska (standpoint theory), jejíž počátky leží v díle feministických filosofek, jako jsou Sandra Hardingová a Nancy Hartsocková. Tato teorie předpokládá, že poznání je „vždy sociálně situované“ a ti, kdo jsou sociálně situovaní jako „insideři“, mají při vytváření poznání epistemologickou výhodu.

Výsledky: Závěr této práce uvádí, že sport má potenciál být pro ženy důležitým zdrojem tělesného posílení, ale také místem, kde se může projevat útlak. Kromě několika doporučení konkrétních strategií jsou prezentovány tři obecné strategie, které mají pomoci řídicím orgánům sportu řešit útlak žen a umožnit posílení jejich postavení. Je navrženo, aby řídicí sportovní orgány převzaly většinu odpovědnosti za provedení takových změn. Účinné změny lze provést prostřednictvím revize kodexů a pravidel, ochrannými opatřeními a případnou reformou vzdělávání a zaváděním netradičních sportů.

Klíčová slova: Útlak, posílení postavení, Beauvoir, etika, sport, filosofie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGY	4
PART 1 – SETTING THE SCENE – WHERE ARE ALL THE WOMEN? THE CASE OF FORMULA 1	7
PART 2 – ON OPPRESSION.....	10
PART 3 – WOMEN WITH BALLS – ‘BASKET’ SPORTS AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER IDEALS	13
PART 4 – NOVEL MANIFESTATIONS OF WOMEN’S OPPRESSION IN SPORT	18
PART 5 – ON EMPOWERMENT	23
PART 6 – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TACKLING OPPRESSION AND ENABLING EMPOWERMENT	27
PART 7 – THESIS CONCLUSION	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	32

INTRODUCTION

This thesis utilises the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir's major literary text, *The Second Sex* ([1949] 2011), and applies it to the study of women's sports. At present, women's sports is a fast-growing movement, particularly in the past decade. Nonetheless, women's sport requires continued critical analysis, and I contend that Beauvoir's reflections can offer unique insights into issues such as sex, gender, movement, and, most pertinent to this thesis, the concepts of oppression and empowerment.

Due to the fact that *The Second Sex* was first published in 1949, women's sport is an infrequent topic of discussion for Beauvoir, with the exception of the following extract:

And in sports, the goal is not to succeed independently of physical aptitudes: it is the accomplishment of perfection proper to each organism; the lightweight champion is as worthy as the heavyweight; a female ski champion is no less a champion than the male who is more rapid than she: they belong to two different categories. It is precisely athletes who, positively concerned with their own accomplishments, feel the least handicapped in comparison to men. But nonetheless her physical weakness does not allow the woman to learn the lessons of violence: if it were possible to assert herself in her body and be part of the world in some other way, this deficiency would be easily compensated. If she could swim, scale rocks, pilot a plane, battle the elements, take risks and venture out, she would not feel the timidity towards the world I spoke about. It is within the whole context of a situation that leaves her few outlets that these singularities take on their importance, and not immediately but by confirming the inferiority complex that was developed in her by childhood (Beauvoir [de], 2011, pp. 356-357).

In the above, Beauvoir highlights how sports enable women to feel more physically empowered ('It is precisely athletes who...feel the least handicapped in comparison to men'), yet emphasises how women are anchored by a society which treats the female body as inferior from birth. The sports we play are inextricably linked to the societies we belong to – sport impacts society, and society impacts sport. It is this relationship between sport and society that complicates the role of sports in women's lives: does sport contribute to their oppression, reifying their inferior position in Western society, or does sport empower them, giving them the tools to challenge prejudices and enabling a full, physical exploration of the body? Though it is impossible to say if *every* sport plays a role in woman's oppression and

empowerment, this thesis examines several different sports with the overall aim of providing some insight into this question.

Though this thesis examines the themes of oppression and empowerment, the focus lies more heavily with the former topic. Whilst Part 1 seeks to ‘set the scene’ and explore how women continue to be positioned as inferior athletes in the world of automotive racing, Part 2 provides a theoretical analysis of the Beauvoirian characterisation of oppression, examining several interpretations from scholars with the aim of providing a robust definition of oppression. Following on from this, Part 3 applies the previous findings with the aim of understanding how the rules and conventions of sports have the potential to perpetuate systemic oppression. In doing so, this part provides case studies from the sports of netball, basketball and korfbal. In addition to a rigorous historical analysis, Part 3.5 to Part 3.8 specifically focuses on sex segregation, highlighting how sex segregation could be understood as oppressive to women, yet, in certain circumstances, emancipatory. Having looked at existing forms of oppression in specific women’s sports, Part 4 addresses developing forms of oppression, considering how the digitalisation of society poses new and emerging problems for women in sport. Responding to the previous sections, Part 5 decodes how Beauvoir understands empowerment, and in applying texts extracted from *The Second Sex*, determines that physical empowerment is a favourable response to oppression providing that sports institutions are largely responsible for ensuring women’s empowerment. Finally, Part 6 provides three broad policy proposals which sports governing bodies ought to adopt with the goal of tackling women’s oppression in sport and enabling their empowerment. The overall conclusion of the thesis is presented in Part 7.

Before the analyses of oppression and empowerment begin, there is a clear need to clarify what is meant by the term ‘female’ employed in the title of this thesis, especially when the term ‘woman’ is also present in the forthcoming discussions. The answers are (quite) straightforward: a female is a biological sex categorisation, depending on one’s sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones. Jurists, biologists, philosophers and sociologists have yet to agree with one another on the exactness of the qualities. Nonetheless, there is a very general agreement that females are one part of the sex binary, though there are a few outliers which make the edges of this categorisation a little fuzzy (Martínková et al., 2022, p. 143).

A definitional ‘rupture’ occurs when the term ‘woman’ is introduced, meaning that ‘a break occurs between facts of usage and facts of essence such that process of definition itself becomes an issue’ (Schiappa, 2022, p. 10). This rupture can perhaps be dated back to Simone de Beauvoir, who famously asked ‘what is a woman?’ (2011, p. 3). The answer to this

question is much less clear. Though Beauvoir gives us a potential answer – that a woman is her situation – it is undeniable that the research which she used to evidence her argument is - in many places - flawed, for she assumes that all women have a common identity, which is both impossible to verify and a generalisation which she fails to acknowledge. Today, the term ‘woman’ is a gender identity, assuming that there are specific feminine qualities and characteristics linked to one’s femaleness.

A great deal of Beauvoir’s musings in *The Second Sex* address how this linkage between female and woman has come to be. However, this does not contribute to this specific debate so heavily – rather, this is the work of those who specialise in gender studies and a handful of sports ethicists concerned with sex categorisation. What is particularly problematic is that the terms sex and gender are used synonymously in society, and sports often make the mistake of conflating the two (Martínková et al., 2022, pp. 134-135). I will not aim to define what a woman is in this thesis, for I am uncertain that it has a straightforward and definitive answer. Instead, I try to use the term ‘female’ when I am referring to the biological category used for sports categorisations, and the term ‘woman’ or ‘women’ for those who identify as this gender categorisation. Trying to keep these terms separate at all times is, however, an impossible task from a lexical point of view. Therefore, unless specified, I will often refer to ‘women’s sports’ in this thesis, meaning sports played by females, instead of the alternative understanding of sports that suit traditionally feminine qualities.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis draws upon ideas from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* ([1949] 2011) to provide a more thorough philosophical analysis of the terms 'oppression' and 'empowerment'. *The Second Sex* – referred to as Beauvoir's 'magnum opus on women's oppression' (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 326) – was not originally written as a philosophical text but rather a literary discussion that served as a prelude to Beauvoir's autobiography. As a result, Beauvoir's arguments surrounding women's oppression are not as clear-cut and methodical as a philosophical text and are woven into often long-winded prose. It is also worth noting that Beauvoir did not explicitly use the term 'empowerment' but instead used the term 'liberation', which, for reasons justified in Part 5, should be understood synonymously. Nonetheless, rich philosophical musings that provide insights into women's oppression can be found in multiple chapters. Consequently, this thesis draws on both Volume I (specifically the introductory chapter, *Biological Data, The Point of View of Historical Materialism, Myths*) and Volume II (specifically *Childhood, The Girl, The Married Woman, The Mother, and The Independent Woman*).

A potential limit of this methodology is that these reflections brought about by a reflexive inquiry can only go so far. Whilst topics such as Formula 1 and netball provide interesting insights, they are culturally relative, and thus, the findings that the research offers may be less applicable to other culturally specific sports. For example, the sport of netball was based on particular English values and was shaped by British politics, education, and Commonwealth relations. This thesis was written in the Czech Republic, a country partly unaffected and, for a long time, far removed from the sports cultures of Western Europe and beyond. As a result, the discussion of netball and korfbal in Part 3 is limited in its application to other sports with broader international and cultural ties.

Additionally, a common critique of philosophical research methods I address is that they do not provide empirical results. I argue that this is a non-issue due to the policy recommendations made throughout the thesis. Policy decisions present value-based proposals – they are assertions as to what we ought to do, and therefore, they must be situated within a philosophical framework. The outcomes of empirical research are, at best, an improved understanding of factual matters, and so this 'fact-value gap' can inform but cannot determine policy and practice. Furthermore, although empirical research is not produced in this research, second-hand data produced by sociologists and psychologists are frequently drawn upon to strengthen the philosophical and ethical arguments made. Thus, the analysis of

literature, policy, and philosophical concepts bridges the gap between the factual evidence and what ought to be done about it, and such findings are only producible through a philosophical approach.

This thesis also draws upon standpoint theory, the origins of which lie in the work of feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding (1987, 1992) and Nancy Hartsock (1997). The theory assumes that knowledge claims are ‘always socially situated’, and those who are socially located as ‘insiders’ have an epistemological advantage when producing such knowledge (Harding, 1992, p. 442). Standpoint theory claims that a researcher’s characteristics affect substantive and practical aspects of the process of knowledge production. Harding contends that a standpoint epistemology enables scientists to draw upon their own experiences to determine ‘blind spots’ in research processes, resulting in an enhanced notion of objectivity where all positions are considered and consequently, more thorough results are obtained (1992, pp. 457-459). Transparency of the researcher’s social location is important in preventing an ‘anonymous voice of authority’, and instead allows the reader to understand the researcher as a ‘real historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests’ (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

Within the research process, the researcher reflected on their ‘insider’ positionality, which can be drawn from their identity as a former athlete, a participant in sports such as netball, a spectator of various sports, and a woman. The researcher also drew on their ‘outsider’ positionality, acknowledging their identity as a white, heterosexual, British woman. By engaging with texts reflexively, this thesis aimed to understand better how the experience of womanhood varies due to intersecting oppressions such as race and sexuality, as well as social location and culture.

These reflections on social location not only inspired the questions asked but also allowed the researcher to pursue alternative perspectives to those discussed in current published research. Though this approach appears subject to harmful biases, a level of objectivity can be achieved through discussion and debate with diverse communities of sports ethicists within and beyond the faculty. Ramazanoğlu and Holland write that it is ‘necessary to reflect on how you are constituted as a knowing subject’ as the research undertaken will incorporate one’s own values (2002, p. 143). In acknowledging their positionality, the researcher and the supervisor of this proposed research identify as different genders (one woman and one man), consequently allowing potentially harmful biases caused by personal gendered experiences to be better balanced.

These two methodological approaches to some extent converge. It can be suggested that Beauvoir herself employs a prescient version of standpoint theory through what Kruks calls a 'situated subjectivity', where the knower making knowledge claims rejects the notion of the autonomous subject and instead acknowledges the weight of the subjective experience (1992, p. 92). Although Beauvoir does at times try to remove¹ herself from the analysis in an attempt to provide a view 'from nowhere' (Haraway, 1988, p. 581), she readily emphasises the importance of personal experience by relying on the testimonies of women throughout chapters five to thirteen (Beauvoir [de], 2011, pp. 283-734). On the contrary, however, Beauvoir's reflexivity is less evident, and her writing oftentimes produces problematic and outdated discussions on 'motherhood, race, and queer sexuality' (Oksala, 2023, p. 144). Taking this into account, the researcher acknowledges that social and philosophical critiques in which the researcher is situated are sometimes fragmented and subject to fallibility (Oksala, 2023, p. 144).

¹ Oksala questions whether *The Second Sex* can be interpreted as standpoint theory in action, and instead posits that Beauvoir employs a phenomenological methodology (2023, pp. 143-144).

PART 1 – SETTING THE SCENE – WHERE ARE ALL THE WOMEN? THE CASE OF FORMULA 1²

Preface: It is worth noting that since this thesis section was written and also published, significant changes in the world of motorsport have been made. In 2021, when the ideas for this section were first formulated, W Series was an up-and-coming, novel championship format which brought about new opportunities for women in automotive racing. However, in late 2022, W Series founder and chief executive Catherine Bond Muir stated that the series was in financial trouble due to ‘unforeseen circumstances outside of W Series’ control’ (Reuters, 2022).² W Series did not return in 2023. Nevertheless, a new race format directed by Susie Wolff appeared: F1 Academy. F1 Academy seemed to take over from W Series; however, instead of being a separate enterprise, it is in fact supported by the Formula 1 championship. The aim of F1 Academy is to elevate female drivers into Formula 1, thus acting as a feeder league. Though F1 Academy is not without its problems, it does address multiple barriers which women face in the sport, namely representation and (in)visibility, and assumed inferiority. Though F1 Academy is still in its infancy, the issues which it aims to address appear to be a step in the right direction.

Part 1 of this thesis is written with the intention of ‘setting the scene’. To understand what kinds of discrimination women face in sport, I have drawn on the particular example of Formula 1. Arguably, gender equality in the West is improving and sport is a particular aspect of society that demonstrates such improvement. Nonetheless, there are specific areas and types of sport that continue to discriminate against female athletes. It is possible that no matter the focal point, we will find that women are discriminated against. Formula 1, however, is somewhat of a peculiarity. A common argument used to justify female inferiority in many masculinised sports is that they are less strong, less aggressive, less fast, and less powerful. Formula 1, due to the use of a car, relies much less on bodily strength, speed and power. As a result of this, the sport is categorised as unisex. Despite this categorisation, very few women are involved in the sport.

At present, there have been fewer than ten female drivers in Formula 1 since its inception. Matthews and Pike write that ‘despite claiming to be a gender-equal sport,

² Part 1 has been published as an article online: Howe, O. R. (2022). Hitting the barriers – Women in Formula 1 and W series racing. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 29(3), pp. 454-469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068221094204>

motorsport appears to share characteristics of many sports in that it is inherently gendered in favour of male involvement and control' (2016, p. 1534). They also point to an article in *The Times*, stating 'One thing is certain: women are for decorating Formula One and not for taking part in it' (Eason, 2003). Since this article, models who promote sponsors known colloquially as 'grid girls' have been removed from Formula 1 (hereafter F1), but only seven women have successfully sat in the driving seat of an F1 racing car despite the sport being classified as unisex (BBC Sport, 2018). It has been hypothesised by multiple sports ethics scholars (English, 1978; Fink et al., 2016; Kane, 1995, 2015; Martínková, 2020b; Theberge, 1998) that unisex sports provide positive opportunities in combatting gender inequality in sport on the basis of there being no 'muscle gap' that women must overcome (Kane, 1995, p. 198). Rather, athletes work together regardless of sex and gender, demonstrating that it is not only discourse which creates inequalities, but also the activities that athletes engage in, too.

Susie Wolff drove for team Williams as a test driver between 2012 and 2015. However, she never made it as part of the racing team. In a blog post, Wolff commented on her retirement and being a woman in F1:

Do I think F1 is ready for a competitive female racing driver that can perform at the highest level? Yes. Do I think it is achievable as a woman? Most definitely. Do I think it will happen soon? Sadly no. We have two issues, not enough young girls starting in karting at a young age and no clear role model. Sometimes you just have to see it to believe it. (Wolff, 2015)

Above, Wolff highlights a cyclical problem which dominates conversation surrounding women's sports: because there are not enough young girls karting and taking it all the way to professional driving in F1, there are no role models, and because there are no role models there is little inspiration for young girls to continue the karting, and so *ad infinitum*. It was recently found in a study on NASCAR racing that specifically the fathers of female drivers are considered the patriarchs and powerful political actors within the sport (Kochanek et al., 2020, p. 5). Kochanek et al. found that women drivers typically gained entry into the sport via their fathers (2020, p. 5). Though some women drivers had access to the sport via female family members, women drivers often placed greater emphasis on their fathers as enabling their entry, evidencing the influence of gatekeeping in automotive racing.

Cycles can nevertheless be broken, and this may be demonstrated by the up-and-coming, women's only, single-seater car racing championship known as W Series. Before I set out to examine W Series and its ethical implications for women in sport, I begin a

chronological, cultural analysis of women's participation in F1 and how the demand for representation has grown to what it is today. I build on Pflugfelder's theorisation (2009) of the gendered body in motorsport; however, unlike Pflugfelder, I argue that the sexed or gendered body is accounted for in both the physical conditions of motorsport and the discourse of the sport. It is arguable that there are significant barriers in F1 racing that prevent women drivers from securing a professional driving position and racing on equal terms with men.

In my main thesis text I discuss five barriers – historical and current attitudes, assumed physical/mental inferiority, sexualisation, money, and representation/(in)visibility – which I believe to be preventing women from participating in F1. I will not aim to provide an immediate solution to increasing women's involvement in F1, nor do I believe that this list of barriers is exhaustive, but I am hopeful that the initiation of this discussion in a philosophical context will lead to further analyses. After I outline the five barriers, I discuss the introduction of W Series and critically discuss the advantages and disadvantages that it poses. I argue that W Series provides women drivers with both equity³ by providing women with a feeder league to advance into F1, and equality⁴ as everyone is given the same car and are not given their positions on a pay-to-race basis. I conclude that although the series is problematic for those who champion the benefits of unisex sports, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages, and this brings hope to a new era of women's car racing.

³ I understand equity to be where someone is given the opportunity and tools to succeed.

⁴ I understand equality to be where everyone is treated as equals.

PART 2 – ON OPPRESSION

In her introductory chapter of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir suggests that, throughout history, women have always been considered the inferior sex (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 8). Either through ignorance of cultures beyond Western Europe or perhaps because such anthropological explorations were yet to be conducted and communicated, it is now known that Beauvoir's claim is factually incorrect. Women have not always been considered the inferior sex; myths surrounding female warriors such as the Amazonians continue to be circulated, and possibly even evidenced by recent archaeological discoveries (Donakson Russian Science Communication Association, 2019; Hawkins, 2020). Anthropologists have written on the existence of matriarchal societies, such as the Khasi of North Eastern India and the Mosuo of Southwestern China (Goettner-Abendroth, 2018), contradicting claims that such societies are no longer present (Bamberger, 1974). Nonetheless, it is clear that these societies are of an extreme minority, and are 'seriously threatened' by mainstream patriarchal cultures (Goettner-Abendroth, 2018, p. 21). Taking this into account, it can be suggested that women in a universal context do not share the same experiences regarding oppression, but that many women are threatened by oppressive structures such as patriarchy.

With the above in mind, when reading Beauvoir's discussion on women as a subordinated group, it must be acknowledged that her understanding of woman is influenced by her personal experience of womanhood, resulting in 'an epistemological standpoint of ignorance' (Gines, 2014, p. 252). Beauvoir's position as a Western European, middle-class, educated white woman is often written in *The Second Sex* as representative of the entire gender. Aside from this, her musings of how and why women have come to be a subordinated group are important, and struck a chord with many geographically diverse readers who wanted to understand their existence and their femininity, ending their search and their solitude (Garcia, 2021, p. 108).

Beauvoir writes that women have been economically, socially and sexually subjugated on the basis of biological difference (2011). In the eyes of major (Western) historical academics such as Aristotle and Aquinas, females were seen as 'defective males' (Gondreau, 2021, p. 181), reducing females to a lesser status. As Beauvoir notes, 'the ruling caste bases its arguments on the state of affairs it created itself' (2011, p. 12). These misunderstandings have led to claims which continue to prevent females from participating in 'masculine' realms. For example, women in Western countries in 'skilled trade' occupations such as electro-technology, automotives, bricklaying, carpentry, painting/decorating, welding and plumbing are low in number at around 1-3% (Bridges et al., 2020, p. 895). Arguably, this

is caused by (and feeds into) multiple barriers, including the female body being perceived as weak and inferior, resulting in women who wish to enter the skilled trade occupation being ‘resisted and excluded’ (Bridges et al., 2020, p. 906). An important question that must be asked is this: if women were not always subordinated, how has it come to be that many women can be considered oppressed? Are they even oppressed? To find the answer to this question, an understanding of what constitutes oppression must be realised, asking ‘whether this state of affairs must be perpetuated’ (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 13).

In the main thesis text, I explore how Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* lays out her causes and effects of women’s oppression. *The Second Sex* – referred to as Beauvoir’s ‘magnum opus on women’s oppression’ (Hill Collins, 2017, p. 326) – was not originally written as a philosophical text but rather a literary discussion which served as a prelude to Beauvoir’s autobiography. As a result of this, Beauvoir’s arguments surrounding women’s oppression is not as clear-cut and methodical as a philosophical text, and is woven into often longwinded prose. In order to extract how Beauvoir understood women’s oppression, I propose a framework which categorises the causes and effects of oppression into four distinct themes, these being i) oppression is dichotomous, ii) women’s oppression is perpetuated by falsehoods, iii) women’s oppression results in economic and social inequalities and iv) women’s oppression is internalised. Taking into account interpretations presented by Knowles (2019) and Melo Lopes (Melo Lopes, (forthcoming)), I pay particular attention to the fourth theme on the basis that complicity is ‘a commonplace feature of female existence’ and their status as oppressed persons (Knowles, 2019, p. 243). Although this section may not be an exhaustive interpretation of Beauvoir’s writings, my discussion of Beauvoir aims to present a clearer-cut perspective on how oppression may occur in a population which is not a minority yet continues to lack ‘solidarity’ (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 8).

Over the past 74 years feminism has expanded to include multiple philosophies, and the result of this has shown that Beauvoir’s understanding of women’s oppression is no longer fully reflective of women’s oppression today. In an attempt to update Beauvoir’s understanding of women’s oppression, academics ought to examine other scholarly inputs regarding how and what it means for women to be oppressed. There are several intersecting oppressions which have been widely addressed by scholars before me and whose work I wish to highlight before moving forward with my discussion. Some key intersections of oppression in women’s sports include, but are not limited to, homophobia (Anderson et al., 2016; Cahn, 1993; Cooky et al., 2010; Fink, 2012; Griffin, 1992, 1998; Krane, 2016; Mann & Krane, 2018; Stewart, 2018), racism (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Clarkson et al., 2022; Cooky et al., 2010;

McDonald, 2009; Ratna, 2008; Withycombe, 2011), ableism (Cottingham et al., 2018; Gatt & Trussell, 2022; Lynch & Hill, 2021; Richard et al., 2023) and classism (Cooky et al., 2010; Edwards et al., 2015; Gatt & Trussell, 2022; Lemmon, 2019; Little, 2014; McCrone, 1991), and the referenced research only scratches the surface of the vast scope of scholarship related to these topics. With these papers in mind, my main thesis text employs Iris Marion Young's paper *Five Faces of Oppression* (2014) in places where I believe Beauvoir's theory is lacking, modernising Beauvoir's discussion of oppression so that it is richer and more reflective of 21st century feminist philosophies.

In sum, Part 2 concludes that, on a wider level, the oppression of women can be characterised as systemic, exploitative, and internalised. Along with sexism, the intersecting oppressions of homophobia, racism, ableism and classism demonstrate the complexity of women's oppression and how the interlinking oppressions grant some women privilege whilst denying it to many others. Most women will experience sexist oppression in their lifetime. Notwithstanding this, not all women will experience the crisscrossing variations of oppression which must be considered if a robust image of women's situation is to be provided (which Beauvoir does not always do). However, in combination with Young's insights, our conception of women's oppression is significantly enhanced.

PART 3 – WOMEN WITH BALLS – ‘BASKET’ SPORTS AND THE REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER IDEALS

To gain a fuller understanding of women’s oppression in sport and how it may manifest in non-unisex sports, my attention now turns to basketball, netball and korfbal. These three ‘basket’ sports all have the same origin, stemming from James Naismith’s artificial game of basketball in 1891 (Treagus, 2005, p. 89). What is particularly interesting about these three basket sports is that, although they all can be traced back to Naismith, they can all be typified differently. Basketball was traditionally, and continues to be, a sex segregated sport, this being the categorisation and separation of athletes based on their biological sex. It was also created by a man for the purpose of men’s health and recreational lifestyles. Netball soon followed and continued to be sex segregated, yet it was created by women to improve women’s health and recreational lifestyles. The third sport to stem from basketball is korfbal, a game of Dutch tradition that is a mixed sex. Korfbal was another adaptation of basketball and was created by Nico Broekhuysen, a primary school teacher who wanted a co-educational game which involved both sexes (van Bottenburg & Vermeulen, 2011).

Though these sports bear a family resemblance (van Bottenburg & Vermeulen, 2011, p. 636), they have developed into sites of deep interest due to their ideals. Gender ideals are based on an essentialist ideology that men are better suited to hard labour, intellectual outputs and athletic pursuits, whereas women are better suited to childrearing, the arts, and roles of care. It is theorised that whilst sport may reflect social values and gender ideals, it also has the power to construct them (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, pp. 3-4). I propose that gender ideals are a type of false information which serve to oppress women whilst elevating the social status of men in society. The discussion in the main thesis text explores how basketball, netball and korfbal may reinforce gender ideals through the continuation of their sex categorisations, rules, and practices. Part 3 also develops McDonagh and Pappano’s theorisations of ‘coercive sex segregation’ and ‘gender coded’ athletic pursuits to gain knowledge on how they impact women’s sports (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, pp. 7-10).

On Sex Segregation

Sex and gender segregation is a social practice which has been widely discussed by feminist philosophers in the West, including Beauvoir. The complexities and impact of sex and gender segregation continue to be discussed today, particularly in the domain of sport. McDonagh and Pappano provide perhaps one of the most extensive analyses of sex segregation in sport,

arguing that coercive sex segregation in sport perpetuates notions of female inferiority and reinforces the exclusion of females from all areas of American society (2008, p. 19).

Beauvoir echoes this viewpoint from a more general perspective, stating that a status of ‘separate but equal’ serves as wrongful justification for discrimination, and perpetuates the roles of the oppressors and the oppressed (2011, pp. 12-13).

Beauvoir writes that for a woman to be emancipated and seen as man’s equal, she must have ‘access to the male world as man does to the female one’ (2011, p. 741). There is reason to believe that this claim can be understood in more nuanced and alternative ways. Taking Beauvoir’s theorisation into account, it may be hypothesised that sex and gender discrimination could be reduced if female athletes were granted access to the man’s ‘sport world’. How the man’s ‘sport world’ may be accessed can be interpreted twofold: the first form of access being access to the same amount of income, sponsorship and airtime as their male counterparts. The second form of access may be understood more literally, with access implying a level of sex integration in sport.

The Emergence of ‘Basket’ Sports and Methods of Sex Segregation

The sports of basketball, netball and korfbal differ in terms of how they segregate sexes at the elite levels. Basketball is sex segregated, and its male and female teams do not play in a mixed sex or unisex format. Netball is also sex segregated, with women’s⁵ netball being significantly more popular at all levels, however there is an increase of men’s and mixed netball leagues at national and international levels. Contrastingly, korfbal is only played in a mixed sex format. Sex segregation is a way of categorising sport so that fair competition can be ensured. Not only this but sex categorisation has also been reinforced ‘so that female sport might flourish’ (Parry & Martínková, 2021, p. 1488). This binary categorisation is not without problems and it often excludes or questions the status of those who identify as trans or intersex, however, this topic is addressed by Sailors (2020), Martínková et al. (2022, 2023), and Lenskyj and Greey (2023) and need not be discussed further here.

Rather, my inquiry is based on McDonagh and Pappano’s concepts of ‘coercive sex segregation’ and ‘voluntary sex segregation’ (2008, pp. 7-8). Coercive sex segregation is the act of categorising participants in sport and is based on three core beliefs: that females are on average athletically inferior to males (in some sports), that because of this, females need to be

⁵ Here I use the gender term ‘women’s’ and ‘men’s’ opposed to sex terms ‘female’ and ‘male’ as to reflect the labels used by sports organisations and governing bodies. Therefore, I am using the terms interchangeably.

protected from males in sport, and that it is immoral for females and males to compete with or against one another (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, p. 7). McDonagh and Pappano are not explicit as to whether the three core beliefs of inferiority, protection, and morality must be employed simultaneously for coercive sex segregation to occur, or whether one of the three beliefs is sufficient. It may be implied that only one of the beliefs is required for coercive sex segregation to occur, yet the beliefs often come as a trio for they are inextricably linked. Coercive sex segregation, however, differs from voluntary sex segregation, where a 'historically subordinated group' is self-segregated to 'compensate for past and present discrimination' (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, pp. 7-8).

A terminological caveat: though I agree with McDonagh and Pappano that sex segregated sports are based on beliefs surrounding female inferiority and their consequent need for physical, emotional and moral protection, I believe that their term may be better framed as *persuasive sex segregation*. McDonagh and Pappano argue that sex segregation in sports is 'coerced by law', and this is a reference to Title IX in the US (2008, p. 8). Sex segregated sports are, however, a global matter, and whilst I will not argue against the coercive nature of American federal and state law, the application of the terminology goes beyond the US and to other countries where laws may not necessitate sex segregation; rather, it is a convention. Furthermore, coercion suggests that there is an element of force and threat in sex segregation in sports. Whilst this may be in part true, I am more inclined to use the term *persuasive sex segregation* hereafter on the basis that it is more inclusive of non-codified methods of sex segregation, and further emphasises how women may be socially persuaded to be sex segregated through internalised beliefs of inferiority.

Additionally, I believe that McDonagh and Pappano's term of voluntary sex segregation may be better viewed as *conservational sex segregation*. I argue this on the basis that the term 'voluntary' implies that there is a level of individual choice made, however this may not be the case if an organisation or governing body has chosen to be sex segregated for conservational purposes. If there is no option for an individual agent to join a mixed sex team and she only has the option to join a team which is sex segregated for conservational purposes, the act is arguably not a voluntary one. Therefore, the term *conservational sex segregation* will be employed hereafter in lieu of voluntary sex segregation.

Here, a major distinction between basketball and netball can be drawn. Basketball is arguably a persuasively sex segregated sport. Because the sport was created with young male college athletes in mind, the sport favours speed and power, but most importantly, height. Therefore, basketball is male-apposite and not female-apposite. The adaptation of basketball

for women by Berenson in 1891 was based upon the beliefs that women were physically inferior to men but nonetheless required a physical education. Forward-thinking women such as Berenson, suffragist Susan B. Anthony and physical educator Amy Morris Homans believed that women's emancipation relied on increased physical strength and self-sufficiency (Grundy & Shackelford, 2007, p. 16). Despite this, women's physical education was still taboo during this period, resulting in the game's 'feminisation' to soothe critics and their preference for rigid sex segregation rules.

Netball, however, falls upon blurred lines of persuasive and conservational sex segregation. On the one hand, netball stems from women's basketball – a game originally created to maintain femininity. Yet on the other hand, women can be considered a historically subordinated group, and their efforts to play sports were and continue to be long and hard fought. As discussed above, netball provides 'a safe space for women to play sport' according to WN's CEO Claire Briegal, as 'the world isn't an equal place yet and there is a place for women-only programmes' (Gwilliam, 2018). Though netball is strongly historically rooted in persuasive sex segregation, it has arguably grown to become a conservational sex segregated sport. In 2021 WN released their strategic plan, which states that they are driving for game development, highlighting that they will continue to 'build on [their] unique female-focused foundations while embracing boys' and men's' participation through collaboration and support' (World Netball, 2021). This further suggests that although they are developing the game in alternative formats, the governing body aims to preserve women's netball as a conservationally sex segregated sport, despite research showing that co-participation in mixed sex netball yields positive results and noncontact sport policy ought to be developed (Tissera et al., 2018).

Arguably sex segregation in sport is a policy issue as it 'sanctions, rather than challenges, pernicious stereotypes about women's inferiority' (Sharrow, 2021, p. 260). Furthermore, sex segregation in sports has many after-effects of 'spillovers', such as reinforcing the idea of sex binary and excluding those who do not align with strict biological senses of female and male (Sharrow, 2021, p. 260). In their analysis of Title IX, Sharrow highlights how the policy allows mixed sex classrooms but sex segregated sports teams (2021, p. 260). To Sharrow, this is paradoxical for the policy has the aim of treating girls and boys the same, yet ultimately treats them as equal but different when it comes to sports, thus fulfilling the Jim Crow style laws and 'knitting civil rights policy to binary notions about sexual difference and biology' (2021, p. 260).

Though Sharrow raises some interesting points, their argument does not consider the position of sports such as netball which hold that males and females are categorically biologically different. In sports which are male-apposite it is unusual to find significant overlaps between male and female performances, simply because the sport is unsuited to the average female athlete's physique. Even in ultra-events⁶, where it has been recently speculated that women are better ultra-athletes than men, research has shown that 'males generally outperform females in most ultra-endurance events and over most distances, with the exception of extreme distance swimming' (Tiller et al., 2021, p. 897) and it is a 'rare' occurrence when females do outperform males in endurance running (though certainly and increasingly possible) (Besson et al., 2022),

The main thesis text addresses the effects of persuasive and conservational sex segregation in basket sports and its relation to the oppression of women in sport. The overall conclusion proposes that some sex integrated sports such as korfbal have the potential to promote and reinforce oppressive gender ideals more than other sex segregated sports such as basketball. Contrastingly, the research shows that mixed netball may challenge gender ideals more than sex segregated netball. Although korfbal, basketball and netball are of the same genus, their histories, cultures, and locations have caused them to radically differ in terms of the ideals they challenge and sustain. It is also concluded that mixed sex sports such as mixed netball and korfbal can give us valuable lessons about cooperation and the creation of inclusive environments. It must be stressed that the very nature of these sports, due to their biological demands and roles, cannot achieve total egalitarianism. Nevertheless, this should not stop sport organisations in their quest for equality and empowerment, may this be through equal pay, participation numbers, inclusivity, diversity, and the reworking of rules which perpetuate and reinforce oppressive gender stereotypes, ideals and practices.

⁶ An ultra-event may be defined as 'sporting activities lasting >6 hours', such as but not limited to running, swimming, cycling or cross-country skiing (Scheer, 2019).

PART 4 – NOVEL MANIFESTATIONS OF WOMEN’S OPPRESSION IN SPORT⁷

In Part 2, this thesis discussed how women’s oppression is systemic, exploitative and internalised, and Part 3 discussed how women’s oppression could be woven into the very layers of sports games, rules, categorisations and histories. Now, in Part 4, this thesis examines how oppression can manifest in more novel ways. As Western society has advanced, so has technology, leading to the digitalisation of many aspects of human life. One of these aspects is health. The digitalisation of society has improved human health in many ways, making access to health care faster, more efficient, and more accessible. Female-specific healthcare, such as healthcare relating to the menstrual cycle (hereafter MC), is one of the more recent aspects of healthcare to be digitalised. However, as the discussion below suggests, new technologies are often promoted for their benefits whilst overlooking the disadvantages and ethical considerations. I argue that this social issue deeply affects women’s sports. Before this argument is explored, a brief overview of the significance of MC research must be presented.

The discussion of the MC has historically been considered taboo (Hyde & Zipp, forthcoming; Marais et al., 2022; O’Loughlin et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021; von Rosen et al., 2022); however, scholars have recently noted that ‘[In] broader society, breaking the taboo nature of the menstrual cycle seems to be gaining momentum’ (O’Loughlin et al., 2022, p. 150). For example, in 2017, menstrual product advertisers in the UK challenged the stigma by using red fluid instead of blue in their marketing campaigns to depict a more accurate representation of menstruation, and this change is slowly being adopted by other brands within and beyond the UK (BBC News, 2017; Deighton, 2023). However, breaking the taboo of menstruation is not as straightforward as the advertising example suggests. Nonetheless, scholars have suggested that normalising conversations surrounding the MC is a good place to start (Findlay et al., 2020; McHaffie et al., 2022; von Rosen et al., 2022). It may be suggested that with a greater focus on the MC, scientific research into the deeper effects of the cycle on the female body can advance more rapidly as there is no longer fear or embarrassment associated with menstruation, and it is consequently normalised as a biological fact rather than a ‘curse’ (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 356; Gottlieb, 2020, p. 145).

Over the past decade, research into the MC and its impact on women’s sports has grown. This is partially due to the breakdown of taboos, with recent research on female

⁷ The majority of this section (Part 4) will be published as an article online: Olivia R. Howe (forthcoming) Ethical Risks of Systematic Menstrual Tracking in Sport, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*.

footballers by Forsyth et al. suggesting that open dialogue between the coach and the athlete surrounding the MC ‘may go towards improving the health, wellbeing and social development of the footballer’ (2023, p. 1292). It is also partially due to the realisation that sport science is historically male-centric (Meignié et al., 2021; E. S. Smith et al., 2022), and this one-size-fits-all science has prevented many female athletes from unlocking their true potential. An example of a one-size-fits-all application of sport science is the use of male football boots in women’s football. A widely available, female-specific football boot is yet to be made available to players, despite the increasing number of women in football (Downey, 2023). A major consequence of this gap in research and engineering is that female footballers are at a heightened risk of injury, severely impacting their performance and demonstrating the demand for ‘more products based on an enhanced understanding of women’s specific needs’ (Okholm Kryger et al., 2022, p. 25).

In order for athletes to unlock their potential and perform optimally, their biological and mental well-being must be prioritised. To support female athletes' well-being, it may be suggested that coaches and support staff (nutritionists, doctors, psychologists, physiotherapists) should monitor their athletes’ MC to determine whether the body and mind are experiencing excessive stress. A key indicator of biological or emotional stress in female athletes is amenorrhea⁸ and/or impaired menstrual function. Advances in MC research suggest that amenorrhea and impaired menstrual function are key indicators of Relative Energy Deficiency syndrome (hereafter RED-s) (Mountjoy et al., 2014, p. 1). If untreated, RED-s can end an athlete’s career and cause long-lasting detrimental physiological and psychological effects that often go beyond sport.

In a review of literature on the prevalence of menstrual disorders in female athletes from different sports disciplines, Gimunová et al. found that the prevalence of menstrual disorders in athletes could be as high as 61%, with higher prevalence of menstrual disorders in sports such as gymnastics and endurance disciplines (2022, p. 17). Team sports such as volleyball and football (soccer) ‘also presented a considerable percentage of menstrual

⁸ For the purpose of this discussion, the distinction is not necessary. Amenorrhea is caused by the body trying to self-preserve often due to stress, not meeting the calorific needs of the body, and low body fat. To prevent further stresses such as pregnancy, the body produces less oestrogen, resulting in health issues such as ‘increased rate of musculoskeletal injuries, stress fractures, abnormal lipid profiles, endothelial dysfunction, potential irreversible bone loss, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and increased mortality’ (Berz & McCambridge, 2016). It is worth noting that there are two types of amenorrhea: primary amenorrhea and secondary amenorrhea. Primary amenorrhea can be described as ‘a failure to reach the first menstrual period’, whereas secondary amenorrhea can be described as ‘as the absence of menstruation for three or more months in women with previous regular menses’ (Gimunová et al., 2022, pp. 15-16).

disorders compared to the general population' (Gimunová et al., 2022, p. 17). The review concluded that the prevalence of menstrual disorders is notable, and 'reinforces the importance of coaches and physicians...to monitor the menstrual cycle regularity of the athletes as the occurrence of these disorders can be associated with impairment on some health components' (Gimunová et al., 2022, p. 17).

Due to technological advances in the past decade, monitoring of the MC is easier than ever. The widespread use of smartphone applications has enabled the 'quantifying' of the self, meaning that habits and bodily functions can be reduced to numbers and small data (Sharon & Zandbergen, 2017, p. 1696) as a way of 'understanding' the body (Lupton, 2015, p. 446). Tracking our health data through mobile applications is promoted as a more efficient way of handling public health, aiding self-management and accessibility on a global scale (Lucivero & Jongsma, 2018). Research has asserted that menstrual tracking (hereafter MT) can be viewed as 'empowering' for users as it improves menstrual cycle and health literacy (Levy & Romo-Avilés, 2019; Robertson et al., 2022; Zhaunova et al., 2023).

Research by Eschler et al. claims that over 300 MT applications are available for download 'and an estimated 200 million downloads worldwide' (2019). Since their publication, the numbers are likely to have increased. In 2022 it was reported that two of the most popular MT applications, Flo and Clue, have more than 55 million users combined (Garamvolgyi, 2022). Individual MT applications today are relatively user-friendly, and allows athletes, users and coaches to fully understand what phase of the MC the athlete is experiencing. By understanding at what point of the MC an athlete is at, there are hypothesised benefits. Studies have shown that tracking and understanding the MC can improve athlete knowledge and support for nutrition (Helm et al., 2021; Rehrer et al., 2017; Sims & Yeager, 2016), injury prevention (Forouzandeh Shahraki et al., 2020; Khowailed et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2021), anaerobic performance (Kissow et al., 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2019), and psychological well-being (Ramey, 2023).

Providing that the body of evidence grows to support these findings, it may be hypothesised that tracking the MC can be of great benefit to athletes who are hoping to improve performance through marginal gains and even prolong their career by ensuring that their bodies are adapted to the strain of rigorous training. Systematic MT, which is large-scale, organised tracking of the MC by a sport team or organisation, is now making its way into elite sports such as football. In 2019, the success of the United States women's team win at the FIFA World Cup was partly accredited to their MT practices (FitrWoman, 2019; Pender, 2019; Saner, 2019). More recently, it was reported that the Welsh women's rugby

union team partnered with Vodafone to conduct MT (Gauci, 2023; Sky Sports, 2023; Vodafone, 2023), and the elite English football team Chelsea uses MT ‘in a bid to mitigate the impact’ of the MC on the athlete body (Smith, 2023).

Even though the benefits of MT may unlock further potential in women’s sports, systematic MT is a cause for concern. Writing on the topic of mobile health applications, Lucivero and Jongsma warn that ‘there is often a gap between expected technology-driven scenarios and their actual realisation in specific societies’, causing technologies to ‘bite back’ with unintended but possibly predictable consequences (2018, p. 688). If the bite back is to be avoided, mobile health applications and systematic MT ought to be scrutinised. Casto gives a strong overview of the potential issues of systematic MT in sport, arguing that if systematic MT is going to be implemented on wider scale, issues surrounding data protection, selection policies and discrimination, privacy, and autonomy must be addressed (Casto, 2022, p. 1725).

In developing and disentangling Casto’s suggestions, this thesis section addresses the problems highlighted by identifying the ethical issues behind each concern and providing a conceptual analysis. In doing so, I first propose that the ethical issues at hand can be divided into two, broad⁹ categories: 1) data access and ownership 2) protection of digital privacy and vulnerable persons. Additionally it is argued that there are further issues to what Casto (2022) has mentioned, and this thesis section comments on how systematic MT of athletes might be considered oppressive from a Beauvoirian perspective. Briefly expanding on this claim, I advance the view that women’s oppression systemically criss-crosses with and reinforces other intersecting oppressions such as homophobia, racism, ableism and classism, and defend the view that the socialisation of women has also normalised a state of ‘Other’ to such an extent that it is internalised.

It must also be noted that arguments are not specific to individual MT, and although there are some references to the practice of individual MT, the main discussion focusses solely on systematic MT in sports. It is worth noting that the risks of individual ‘self-logged’ menstrual health data - misinterpretation, over-diagnosis, and privacy - in a non-sporting context have already been expressed by Robertson et al. (2022). Finally, I propose five policy recommendations. These recommendations are intended as starting points for academics and sports governing bodies in addressing issues with systematic MT in sports. The

⁹ I would like to further add that although I have presented these categories as distinct, they will at times overlap considerably.

recommendations focus on promoting athlete bodily autonomy, education and safeguarding before concluding that systematic MT in women's sport has the potential to cause serious harm to athletes if unscrutinised.

PART 5 – ON EMPOWERMENT

So far, this thesis has established that sport may oppress women if masculinist approaches continue to determine the policies and practices of sports organisations and governing bodies. Acknowledging the obvious – that oppression is, in the most basic and normative sense, bad – what should we strive for if we want women’s sports to be good¹⁰? The Beauvoirian framework adopted in this thesis suggests an overarching goal: freedom. To Beauvoir, to be free is to be a ‘creator’ – that is, a being who can put forth original ideas and make change – and many women cannot achieve this position for they continue to be recognised as a gendered being first and a human second (2011, p. 767). Notably, and what is quite critical in relation to this thesis, the term ‘empowerment’ does not appear in the most recent (and arguably most accurately translated) version of *The Second Sex*. Does this mean that empowerment is synonymous with liberation? Before stating my position on this, terminological clarification is needed. Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir uses the terms ‘freedom’, ‘emancipation’ and ‘liberation’, all of which have different meanings and appear in different stages. To be emancipated is to be freed from control and being overpowered or ‘power-over’, may this be economic, social, psychological or physical control. ‘Power-over’ can be understood as ‘the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way’ (Allen, 1998, p. 33). Arguably, ‘power-over’ is not always synonymous with ‘domination’; rather, domination is a particular application of ‘power-over’ (Allen, 1998, p. 34).

However, emancipation does not necessarily require that an agent is free and has the power to act or ‘power-to’, which Allen defines as ‘the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends’ (1998, p. 34). This is the key difference between emancipation and liberation. Liberation is the obtaining of power-to, where an agent is not only released from constraints, but has the power to go forth into the world and change one’s situation individually or collectively¹¹. With this definition in mind, I argue that Beauvoir’s term ‘liberation’ should be understood as synonymous with ‘empowerment’. It is empowerment

¹⁰ A terminological clarification that should be made is that, due to the intricate dynamics of oppression and empowerment, the concepts ‘empowerment’ and ‘oppression’ cannot be reduced simply to opposites – as stated by Samie et al., empowerment is ‘more than having/gaining power, privilege and voice’, and oppression is ‘more than not having power, privilege and voice’ (2015, p. 932). Nonetheless, this thesis regards empowerment as an appropriate response to oppression.

¹¹ Allen also introduces a third term, ‘power-with’, which is defined as ‘the ability of a collectivity [sic] to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end or series of ends’ (1998, p. 35). However, I argue that the term ‘power-with’ comes under the umbrella of ‘power-to’, and thus the definition of ‘power-to’ should be the acknowledged ability of an individual actor *or* a collective to attain an end or series of ends.

which leads to freedom - the ability to act without restraint - and going back to Beauvoir's understanding, to be a creator; a being who initiates change and can forge their path authentically.

Beauvoir's musings on the problem of freedom and the quest for emancipation can be found in the fourth and final part of *The Second Sex*, titled 'Toward Liberation – The Independent Woman' (2011, pp. 735-768). A key quote from this chapter states that 'Even the woman who has emancipated herself economically from man is still not in a moral, social, or psychological situation identical to his...she does not have the same past as a boy; society does not see her with the same eyes; she has a different perspective on the universe' (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 739). In this passage there is a key problem for the woman who wishes to be free from oppression. For Beauvoir, a woman's existence is contradictory; if society is to accept her, she is required to be both 'object and prey' (2011, p. 739), dooming her to inferiority. Her situation in the world is heavily influenced by the objectification of her body, and to understand this objectification, and possibly internalise it, changes a woman's outlook on the world and impacts how she interacts with the world psychologically and physically. This is not the same for men, who are not as easily or less commonly objectified, and are thus less aware of their gendered existence.

In conceptualising Beauvoir's understanding and requirements of freedom, this thesis interprets the rejection of femininity as a key starting point for women's emancipation. Femininity, to Beauvoir, is (amongst other things) a psychological condition experienced through the body and has been prescribed to women as an 'immutable essence' (2011, p. 770). It is femininity, argues Beauvoir, that prevents women from fully realising their potential – she goes as far as to say in *The Independent Woman* that femininity convinced girls that they have 'limited capacities' and leads woman to 'doubt her professional opportunities' (2011, p. 754). The social construction of femininity, and its endorsement by men and women alike, has created a history of women doubting their ability to act freely. This constant position of inferiority through time 'weighs on her' and it keeps her 'from feeling responsible for the universe', causing the woman to reject positions of superiority (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 766). Only when the woman realises that femininity is imposed on her can she begin to resist it and challenge the oppressive structures she faces (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 767). By resisting femininity, the woman can be psychologically and physically liberated, and 'be left to take her own chances' (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 768), enabling women to fight for further liberation in the economic and social realms.

Though Beauvoir's account of oppression and the consequent call for women's liberation is original, she pays little attention to the concept of bodily empowerment. Despite this, Beauvoir does seem to indicate that bodily empowerment is an important experience denied to women, as detailed in the following extract from *The Independent Woman*: 'The woman is already naturally deprived of the lessons of violence: I have said how physical weakness disposes her to passivity; when a boy settles a fight with punches, he feels he can rely on himself in his own interest; at least the girl should be allowed to compensate by sports, adventure, and the pride of obstacles overcome. But no. She may feel alone *within* the world: she never stands up *in front* of it, unique and sovereign' (Beauvoir [de], 2011, pp. 765-766). Given that Beauvoir views the body as 'situation' (Beauvoir [de], 2011, p. 46), it is perhaps arguable that she is undervaluing what it means to experience the body without passivity, relying on economic and social empowerment as the key to emancipation too heavily. I however contend that, without bodily empowerment, a woman cannot be empowered in the fullest sense possible, as it is bodily empowerment, or more commonly *disempowerment*, that determines how she interacts with and her position within the physical world. The main thesis text suggests that there are two criteria for bodily empowerment, these being the experience of uninhibited movement and the experience of the body as resistance to the status quo. It is also proposed that bodily empowerment can be experienced individually and collectively.

The main thesis text concludes that sport empowers women when it gives them a sense of bodily power. Throughout time, women have experienced the body as something other than themselves. It has not belonged to them, and what it is capable of has been taught to them, without the possibility of finding out for themselves what their body can do. Experiencing uninhibited movement enables women to realise that they can be powerful, fast and aggressive, and that they have always been so, and that the limit of their bodies is much farther than they have been told. The main thesis text also concludes that sport empowers women when it enables them to resist the status quo. Resistance can take on many forms, may this be resisting masculinist definitions and values of sport, psychologically resisting narratives of victimhood and negative stereotypes, and resistance through self-affirmation.

Critically, the main thesis text suggests that if women in sport are empowered, they can challenge oppressive systems within and beyond sport, yet the success of challenging oppressive systems wholly relies on the ability of women working collectively for a common cause. Instead of positioning women against one another as fierce rivals, sport should work to unite women and help them to see that there are pragmatic political reasons to form a

collective, namely that their voice is strengthened when speaking up against inequalities. Although many sports are, by definition, competitive, the values of cooperation and respect must be emphasised. Finally it is concluded that bodily empowerment directly responds to the Beauvoirian characterisation of oppression. By regaining the body as one's own, by removing it from the hands of others, a woman is able to begin the undoing of the socialised body. When she undergoes this process, she becomes more aware of what has been forbidden to her and the role she plays in accepting the forbidden. She also begins to affirm her sovereignty over the world, understanding what it means to be empowered. This new sense of empowerment gives the woman the strength to speak up against the various oppressions that she and others experience, and thus, we begin to see the gradual breakdown of a systemic, exploitative and internalised oppression.

PART 6 – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TACKLING OPPRESSION AND ENABLING EMPOWERMENT

Throughout this thesis multiple policy recommendations have been made in Parts 1, 3, and 4 in response to specific issues concerning sports and the oppression of women in sport. These recommendations are as follows:

- Formula 1: the need for a merit-based, equally financed championship for women, which is broadcast on live, national television, that gives women the opportunity to address detrimental stereotypes without concerns surrounding sponsorship and money.
- Netball: the reformation of netball rules, especially with regards to contact, dress codes, sex segregation, and Physical Education curriculums.
- Female-specific technology in sport: scrutiny of systematic menstrual tracking applications, ensuring that informed consent is obtained by team physicians, the protection of privacy, the protection of vulnerable athletes, and improvement of education.

Although these specific policies are sufficient for narrow-scope issues, there is a need to develop broader policies which can be adopted by other sports governing bodies who have not been directly addressed in this thesis. By taking into account the thesis as a whole, I propose three broad policy proposals which sports governing bodies ought to adopt if they are to contribute to the tackling of women's oppression and the enablement of women's empowerment. These broader policy proposals have been grouped into three stages – review, respond, reform – and are intended to be undertaken sequentially. Each stage is divided into three more specific, yet non-exhaustive, ways that they may be implemented for effective change is to occur.

Review

A strong starting point for making institutional change is a review, this being a critical assessment and evaluation of the situation at hand. A foundational issue that this thesis is built upon is that the oppression of women in Western society is so far-reaching that it is entangled with other spheres of society such as sport. This research found that the oppression of women is so deeply engrained it has permeated sports rules, in that sports have been

created or adapted to maintain the status quo by promoting inhibited movement and prohibiting displays of power, competitiveness and aggression. The sport of netball, discussed in Part 3, is a key example of a sport where oppression has manifested in the rules and conventions. The investigation of the research pointed to other sports which, although labelled ‘egalitarian’, also promote problematic gender ideals, behaviours and roles. Although this thesis is extensive, it only pays direct attention to a few sports categories. Given that sports is such a broad term, encompassing multiple categories, this thesis proposes that other sports categorisations require similar review and research.

Respond

Following the review process, governing bodies ought to evidence a response to demonstrate that they are paying attention to the situation at hand and are willing to make changes. Issuing a response is critical for a sports governing body if they want to gain the trust of their stakeholders. In addition to institutional responses, responses can also come from individuals who desire change. In using a Beauvoirian conceptualisation of oppression and, consequently, empowerment, a particular criticism which this thesis acknowledges is the issue of individual freedom. Though Beauvoir appears to respond to Sartre’s theory of ‘bad faith’ and argues that women are inescapably complicit, there is an underlying assumption that, if she *really* wanted to, a woman could stand-up to her oppressors and challenge her unfree status. Problematically, this leads to an over-emphasis on the fight for freedom being a bottom-up responsibility – the responsibility of individual women - rather than top-down responsibility which lies with large organisations such as sports governing bodies. However, this thesis has also highlighted that Beauvoir places importance on both individual freedom and collective empowerment. This thesis therefore proposes that there needs to be both individual, bottom-up responses to oppression and empowerment as well as organisational, top-down responses, but the response to oppression must begin at the top.

Reform

A theme that emerged from the research conducted is the need for sport governing bodies to reform. The scale of this reformation varies, and it would be impossible to highlight which sports governing bodies need to reform and which do not. Consequently, the reformational policies which this thesis proposes are not specific to an organisation, as this requires in-depth and first-hand knowledge of the organisation itself. This thesis therefore proposes some very general requirements which sports governing bodies should adopt depending on the

results of internal reviews. Preferably, these requirements would be enforced by an external ombudsman.

PART 7 – THESIS CONCLUSION

In the beginning, the following questions were asked: does sport contribute to the oppression of women, reifying their inferior position in Western society, or does sport empower them, giving them the tools to challenge prejudices and enabling a full, physical exploration of the body? In answer to this question, it has been shown that sport has the potential to be a vital source of bodily empowerment for women, enabling them to explore the limits of the physical body individually and collectively. However, this thesis has also shown how there are multiple conditions required in ensuring that women are empowered and not oppressed, and that the responsibility of empowering women in sport heavily lies with sports governing bodies. The discussion evidenced how the oppression of women in sport can manifest in a multitude of ways, whether this be through the rules and conventions, through categorisations, through financially and emotionally exploitative practices, and through novel methods such as health data manipulation. Utilising a Beauvoirian approach has shown that oppression is a complex and multifaceted issue, but also an issue that can be tackled and addressed once recognised. The importance of physical empowerment and its role in elevating women to recognise that their bodies are not inferior or handicapped was also demonstrated.

The research conducted was particularly important, for although many scholars and sports governing bodies freely use the terms ‘oppression’ and ‘empowerment’, few have dissected what these terms really mean in relation to women’s sports and bodies. Because of this, many organisations have failed to identify effective methods of preventing oppression and enabling empowerment, which this thesis aimed to rectify. As well as technological clarifications, novel insights into several sports, such as Formula 1 and netball, were produced. These sports, until now, have had little theorisation despite presenting important points of discussion. This study was also important from a philosophical perspective, demonstrating that Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* remains a substantially relevant text in the 21st century.

When constructing the research there was a clear need to identify sports which had been largely overlooked in the field of sports philosophy and sociology. Until now, several questions regarding women’s sports had gone unanswered, such as how the rules of netball could be considered oppressive in extreme circumstances, what barriers women face in Formula 1 racing, and whether systematic menstrual tracking in sport requires more scrutiny before mass usage. In the beginning I started by reviewing unexplored avenues of discussion

in sports ethics and women's studies. As a result, I found that little attention was being paid to women's involvement in automotive racing. Automotive racing, specifically Formula 1, appeared to be a fruitful topic due to the interesting typologies that it presented, namely that it is a unisex sport which is almost entirely dominated by men. This peculiarity provided the ideal starting point for this thesis, and led to other avenues of research relating to sports categorisations with the aim of creating extensive case studies where concepts of oppression and empowerment could be applied. Although it is impossible to address each and every sport which women participate in, I have addressed multiple sports categorisations, thus providing widely applicable insights as to how the oppression and empowerment of women may manifest in some sports.

The use of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* showed that second-wave feminist thought can still produce interesting and important insights regarding the position of women in society today. Beauvoir's texts and lines of thought have received criticism in recent years, and they are largely justified, for so much has changed since the original publication and updates are undoubtedly required. However, thanks to the scholars who analysed Beauvoir and published their hypotheses before the production of this thesis, interpreting and critiquing *The Second Sex* with a balanced approach was possible. The variety of insights enabled me to take all positions into account and form my own opinions, which produced some different insights towards the text, and a new application to the philosophy of sport.

This leads to the final recommendations, addressing areas for further investigation. What has been made starkly clear is the need for further social and philosophical research into sports which may not be considered 'mainstream', such as Formula 1, netball and korfbal. At present, there is little information on women's involvement in these sports, resulting in a lack of international and first-hand perspectives. If scholars are to produce results which can be considered wholly accurate, there is a great need for input from those with differing backgrounds: people of different ethnicities, classes, locations, sexualities and genders are required if the oppression of women in sport is to be tackled from every angle, and their empowerment can be enabled in a plethora of ways. Additionally, my research has shown that philosophical and ethical research is still very much needed. The nature of philosophical thinking allows researchers to dissect what we mean by important terms such as oppression and empowerment, and how it relates to areas of society in sport. This careful examination of value and meaning helps facilitate the creation of actionable policies that aim to protect and empower women in sport so that their participation can be both prosperous and enjoyed.

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