The Experience of Iranian Women Inter-University Athletes with a Focus on Gender in Sport

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Abstract

This research explores the experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sports, with a particular focus on gender. Utilizing a descriptive, narratively informed approach and the concept of the gender regime, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the gendered experiences of these athletes. The research addresses two primary questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sport? and (2) How do these athletes explore and navigate barriers, supports, and points of resistance in their sporting lives?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six current women student-athletes from Azad University, and thematic, narrative-informed analysis was used to analyze the data. This method enabled the identification of key themes within and across the participants' stories, highlighting their unique challenges and achievements.

The study identified three major themes: Barriers, Norms, and Discrepancies; Resistance, Solidarity, and Support; and Personal Growth and Development. These themes reflect the experiences of Iranian women athletes in university sports, revealing the challenges they face due to inadequate facilities, cultural restrictions, and gender inequality, their acts of defiance and support systems that empower them, and the personal growth that arises from navigating these obstacles. Together, these themes provide a clear picture of the many struggles and successes of women athletes in a sports environment shaped by gender.

Despite facing significant barriers, these athletes demonstrate resilience and adaptability, leveraging support networks and personal determination to pursue their athletic goals. The findings emphasize the importance of supportive environments and inclusive policies in promoting gender equity in sports.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on gender and sport by providing valuable insights into the specific cultural and contextual factors affecting women athletes in Iran. It underscores the need for further comparative studies in different Muslim-majority countries to explore how varying cultural contexts influence women's experiences in sports. By addressing the unique challenges faced by women athletes in different regions, future research can inform policies and practices that enhance gender equity in sports globally.

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Graduate school was an experience I never anticipated, but one that I am profoundly grateful for. If this thesis is my one contribution to academia, I hope the stories of my participants shine through, as they truly represent the strength of my research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender, a complex and multifaceted social construct encompasses the intricate web of culturally and socially constructed norms, roles, and identities that define what it means to be masculine or feminine within a given society (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This construct extends beyond mere anatomy, diving deep into the realm of behaviors, expectations, and the interplay between individuals and their surrounding environments, shaping and evolving notions of masculinity and femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It's a fluid and ever-evolving concept, influenced by historical, cultural, and societal factors, continuously shaping and reshaping our perceptions and expressions of gender.

Equality represents the fundamental principle of fair and impartial treatment, irrespective of gender identity. It encompasses the relentless pursuit of parity in rights, opportunities, and treatment for all individuals, regardless of their gender affiliations (Kabeer, 2005). UNESCO underscores the significance of acknowledging the diverse interests, needs, and priorities of every individual, acknowledging the different subgroups existing within each gender (Medel-Anonuevo, 1993). It advocates for an environment where every person could engage in sport devoid of any discrimination, nurturing values of camaraderie, unity, and equitable competition (Medel-Anonuevo, 1993).

This commitment is echoed in UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Sport, which unequivocally upholds the entitlement of all individuals to participate in physical education, physical activity, and sports without any barriers or biases. Despite these principles being enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, women in many societies still face obstacles and are denied equal

opportunities to participate in sport (Monazzami et al., 2011). Women athletes face challenges, such as combining motherhood with sport, inequality in managerial positions, and less access than men to sports equipment (Bowes et al., 2020; Burton, 2015; Martínez-Pascual et al., 2017).

Besides such general challenges, women athletes in Islamic countries encounter more limitations in sport than their counterparts in non-Islamic countries (Sadeghi et al., 2018; Pfister, 2010). These limitations consist of, for example, cultural attitudes of the general population towards women's sport participation, such as prevailing beliefs, norms, and perceptions concerning women's involvement in sport (Sadeghi et al., 2018; Pfister, 2010), "fear of de-feminization" as a result of sport practice (Sofian et al., 2010), limited knowledge or understanding of the religious principles, legal prohibitions, and social stigma related to women's sport participation (Qureshi and Ghouri, 2011), as well as poor facilities and scarce funds for women's sport (Kadi, 2016). Hargreaves (2007) attributes most of the restrictions to practicing sport for Muslim women to the patriarchal relations of power and the control of those Islamic governors who have generalized interpretations of Islam. These Islamic governors are seen as influential figures who wield control over how Islam is interpreted and applied, particularly with women's participation in sport (Hargreaves, 2007). Their specific interpretations of Islamic teachings and their authority within the societal structure might contribute to the limitations or restrictions imposed on Muslim women regarding their engagement in sport activities (Hargreaves, 2007).

In Iran as in many places, women's experiences within sport may also be influenced by families, especially husbands, and fathers, who are able to exclude their wives and daughters from participating in sport (Nazari et al., 2018). Moreover, women do not have equal opportunities to participate in sport because of the dominant Iranian belief that sport belongs to

men (Nazari et al., 2018). Overall, expectations about gender roles in Iranian society contribute to fewer opportunities and less support for women to enjoy and participate in sport (Nazari et al., 2018).

Mohsenitabrizi et al. (2009) contend that the division between Iranian men and women in society is not merely a result of external influences such as laws and policies; instead, it stems from a deeply ingrained phenomenon entrenched within the attitudes, beliefs, and values held by individuals. Within this framework, laws and policies often mirror the dominant attitudes, beliefs, and values present in a society at a given time. They suggest that social actors in Iranian society, both men and women, hold deep-seated beliefs about gender roles and the appropriate behaviour of men and women in different contexts (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009). These beliefs are shaped by cultural, religious, and historical factors, and are reinforced through socialization processes that begin in childhood and continue throughout an individual's life (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009). As a result, social segregation between men and women in Iran is not only matter of physical separation or legal restrictions but is also reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in different social contexts.

Cultural and religious beliefs play a major role in shaping the experiences of women in sport in Iran (Abbaspour, 2019). Conservative cultural norms and religious beliefs in the country have traditionally limited the involvement of women in sport, leading to persistent gender disparities (Abbaspour, 2019). Cultural norms in Iran are rooted in traditional values and gender roles, which tend to prioritize women's domestic responsibilities over their involvement in sport (Abbaspour, 2019). These norms often reinforce the perception that women should focus on family and household duties rather than pursuing athletic endeavors. Consequently, women may face societal pressures to conform to these expectations, which can hinder their access to sport

opportunities and restrict their freedom to participate fully in sport (Abbaspour, 2019). For instance, some conservative elements within Iranian society consider women's sport participation to be a violation of traditional gender roles and believe that it is inappropriate for women to engage in physical activities in public spaces (Farshi, 2012).

The legal framework in Iran also affects the status of women's sport. Despite the existence of laws and regulations aimed at promoting gender equality in sport, their implementation remains weak and inconsistent (Mohammadi, 2019). Moreover, some laws and policies, such as dress code regulations for women's sport, limit women's full participation and reinforce traditional gender stereotypes (Alizadeh, 2017).

Gender segregation refers to the separation of individuals based on their gender, often resulting in distinct social spheres for men and women (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009). In this context, it suggests that societal norms and practices create a division where men predominantly occupy the public sphere, which includes areas such as politics, employment, and public spaces, while women are relegated to the private sphere, primarily associated with domestic duties and family life (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009). This segregation limits women's participation in public life and reinforces traditional gender roles. (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009). Despite women shouldering most of the responsibilities such as caregiving, household chores, and family management, men have most of the decision-making power (Laar et al., 2019). This disparity in decision-making, along with lower women's participation in the public sphere, including sport, contributes to an unequal situation and limited access opportunities and sources for women in both public and domestic spheres (Mohsenitabrizi et al., 2009).

Despite women's growing interest and involvement in sport in recent years, the gender gap remains persistent in Iran, and numerous barriers continue to hinder their full and equal

participation (Khabiri & Afroz, 2021; Rezai & Mansor, 2017; Shirali & Khabiri, 2018). In essence, while "full participation" focuses on the extent of involvement, "equal participation" delves into the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and recognition, striving for a sports environment where gender does not act as a barrier to women's advancement and recognition. (Khabiri & Afroz, 2021; Rezai & Mansor, 2017; Shirali & Khabiri, 2018).

Iranian University Sport

The Iranian system is designed to promote physical education and sport among students (IAU, 2022). The system is comprised of three major components: (see Figure 1, Appendix F)

1. The inter-university category involves competitions between different universities and is often considered the highest level of university sport in Iran. These competitions are organized by the national university sport federation and provide students with the opportunity to showcase their skills and abilities (Ghafari & Karami, 2019).

2. The intra-university category involves competitions and physical activities within a single university, including recreational and fitness activities, as well as skill-based competitions between students. This category is aimed at promoting physical activity and health among students, as well as fostering a sense of community within the university (Razavi & Alizadeh, 2020).

3. The extra-university category involves physical activities and events that are organized outside of the university environment. The large size of the country, many universities, and the differences among geographical regions have resulted in the decentralization of decision-making authority over sport in Iran (Razavi & Alizadeh, 2020). These activities might involve community-based sport programs and fitness classes designed not only for

current students but also aimed at encouraging former students to sustain their engagement in physical activity after they transition out of the university setting (Ghafari & Karami, 2019).

The National University Sports Federation (NUSF) in Iran is the primary organization responsible for overseeing university sport in the country (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). NUSF is a public, non-governmental organization that promotes and integrates universities and higher educational institutes based on Iranian rules and regulations and the principles and rules of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). In Iran, regional secretariats are nominated to oversee and coordinate university sport within their respective regions (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). The secretariat universities are institutions tasked with coordinating events, managing budgets, overseeing academic activities, and facilitating communication among universities in the region (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). These regional secretariats play an essential role in promoting collaboration and coordination among universities and enhancing the overall quality of higher education and university sport (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).

Iranian inter-university sport serves as a platform for students to demonstrate their skills and abilities in various sports, such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, and track and field events (Abbaspour & Hassanpour, 2020). Through these competitions and participation, students are able to engage in friendly competition with students from other universities, fostering a sense of community and teamwork among participants (Alizadeh & Farrokhian, 2019). However, women's participation in Iranian university sport has been affected by cultural and social barriers. From my personal experiences, the university setting in Iran stands as an exception, providing equal numbers of opportunities for both men and women athletes to play on university

teams. However, cultural, and social barriers, such as the belief that women's participation in sport is incompatible with traditional gender roles, have limited women's opportunities to participate in university sport. Women constitute approximately half of the students at Iranian universities (Fars News, 2013).

Women students have relatively higher chances to participate in sport and exercise than non-student women of their age (Fars News, 2013). The opportunities for them to participate in indoor activities are almost equal to those for male students. They can participate without dress codes in those activities; however, men are not allowed to be present (Ehsani, 2005). Women's opportunities for participating in outdoor sporting activities on the university campus are low, even if they follow the dress codes (Ehsani, 2005). Many studies indicate that the lack of awareness of women about the benefits of physical activity, as well as social restrictions and cultural problems, are the most important reasons affecting the participation of women in sport (Ehsani, 2005).

Various studies indicated that more than 60 percent of women Muslim university students do not participate in any sporting activities. In a study on Iranian women Muslim students' attitudes and motivations, Azizi et al., 2011 disclosed that the attitudes of the respondents were negative. Although the majority were aware of the value and effect of sport and exercise on the human body and they had sufficient free time, most of them preferred to participate in other leisure activities and not in sport (Azizi et al., 2011). They reported that social and cultural factors, laziness, and the lack of positive experiences are the major barriers to their participation in sports (Azizi et al., 2011).

To address these challenges, the government granted authority over sport to regional secretariats, allowing for more locally based decision making (Ministry of Science, Research and

Technology, 2022). This decentralization of authority has allowed for the development of sport programs that are better tailored to the specific needs and cultural differences of each region (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2022). For example, in some regions, traditional sports such as wrestling and martial arts may be more popular, while in others, team sports like soccer and basketball may be more prevalent (Razavi & Alizadeh, 2020). Additionally, this is intended for greater collaboration between regional secretariats and local universities, promoting the development of university sport programs that are more responsive to the needs of students and communities (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2022).

The intention behind universities participating in sport activities under the supervision of regional sport secretariats is to gain access to valuable support and resources for equipment and funding, as noted by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in 2022. These secretariats aim to provide guidance to universities in developing and implementing sport programs. Through this collaboration, universities can tap into the expertise and resources available at the regional level, thereby enhancing the quality and reach of their sport initiatives (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2022).

Research Questions and Rationale

The purpose of this project is to explore Iranian women athletes' experience in inter-university sport, with a particular focus on gender. The first research question for this study is "what are the lived experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sport? The second research question is "how do Iranian women inter-university athletes explore barriers, supports, and points of resistance?

The impetus behind my research is rooted in my personal journey as a woman athlete during my undergraduate years, which led me to focus on university sport as the subject of study.

Through my own experiences, I became aware of how universities present opportunities for women to engage in sport. This means that for all types of sport they have both women's and men's teams. However, I also observed that these experiences and opportunities are often influenced by gender-related factors. Consequently, my primary objective in this project is to explore how women athletes understand their experiences in university sport to be gendered.

The significance of this study is the exploration of women athletes' experiences in the specific context of Iranian university sport. In Iran, girls and women face restricted access to sport due to regulations, cultural norms, and social expectations. By concentrating on women athletes, this research aims to shed light on their unique experiences within a sporting landscape primarily dominated by men. From my personal experiences, the university setting in Iran stands as an exception, to other middle eastern universities, providing equal numbers of opportunities for both men and women athletes to play on university teams. This exceptional environment serves as a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the experiences of Iranian women when they are granted equal access to participate in sport. Currently, the existing literature lacks information about the experiences of Iranian women athletes when they have equal or comparable opportunities for participation, as they do in university sport. By focusing on the experiences of women athletes, this study aims to shed light on the conditions of their participation, examining the nuances and challenges that shape their university sport experiences.

Understanding these experiences is crucial for describing the lived realities of Iranian women athletes, highlighting the factors that influence their participation, their interactions with teammates and coaches, and the overall environment in which they compete. By delving into these dimensions, I aim to contribute to the existing knowledge gap and provide insights that can

inform future policies, interventions, and support mechanisms to enhance the experiences of women in Iranian university sports.

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I must situate myself within the research context and consider the relationship between the research participants and me, and the implications of this relationship for the research process, and those involved. As Bloor and Wood (2006) suggested, "reflexivity is an awareness of the self in the situation of action and of the role of the self in constructing that situation" (p. 145). As a result, my personal experiences with gender inequality in the education system of Iran influences the way I approach this topic.

I am an Iranian woman and have experienced gender inequality during my time as a bachelor's degree student at an Iranian university. I studied physical education for my bachelor's degree, and, in addition to academic courses, we had different practical courses. We used a gym for these courses, and our university had only one gym. As women and men in Iran are not allowed to practice together, the university rented another gym for the women students to use. The gym was half an hour from the university and had much less equipment than the university gym. The university scheduled the women's classes at that gym each semester that I was an undergraduate. This situation lasted for four years, and terrible things happened to the women students. The gym was outside the city, and women often experienced theft and harassment. Many students did not have a car, and there was no bus stop in the area. During this time, I began to wonder why only female students would be required to travel off campus to a gym, even though it seemed that it would be easy for the university to schedule practical courses in a way that was fair for all the students. In essence, my journey as an undergraduate student in a system

marked by gender-based challenges has instilled in me a passion for research that explores these experiences in more detail.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I review relevant literature that have influenced the development of my research questions. The literature review is organized into four main sections. Firstly, I will explore previous studies that have investigated women's sport participation from a broad perspective. Secondly, I will include studies of women's sport in Muslim countries. The final section is focused on studies about Iranian women's sport participation and how it has been affected and limited within the context of an Islamic state.

My guiding critical concept for this study is Connell's (2009) "gender regime," which offers a comprehensive approach to understanding gender beyond a simplistic focus on sex differences. Connell emphasizes the dynamic and complex nature of gender relations, highlighting the evolving relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions. To understand gender relations across different social contexts, Connell introduces the concept of a "gender regime," referring to the prevailing set of norms, practices, and power dynamics that shape and govern gender roles and relations within a specific society, community, or organization. The concept comprises four interconnected dimensions.

The first dimension is the "gender division of labor," which involves the organization of work along gender lines (Connell, 2009). It entails examining the number of men and women involved in a particular organization or business and the distribution of tasks based on gender (Connell, 2009). This dimension highlights how men and women engage with each other.

The second dimension is "gender relations of power," which refers to how control, authority, and force are exercised along gender lines, including within organizational hierarchies and legal structures (Connell, 2009). This dimension also focuses on decision-making processes and the

continuum of relationships between domination/subordination/resistance and mutuality/reciprocity/cooperation among genders (Connell, 2009).

The third dimension, "emotion and human relations," deals with the organization of attachment and antagonism among individuals and groups based on gender (Connell, 2009). It involves examining emotional expressions, ranging from love, affection, and solidarity to hatred, hostility, and abuse, within an organizational setting (Connell, 2009). The nature of emotional relations influenced by gender has consequences for achieving gender equality within the organization.

Lastly, the fourth dimension is "gender culture and symbolism," which pertains to how gender identities are defined and represented within an organizational context (Connell, 2009). It includes prevailing beliefs and attitudes about gender, encompassing understandings of gender roles and expectations (Connell, 2009). Connell (2009) highlights how these symbolic representations influence participants' perceptions of themselves, others, and gender equality within the organization. It is important to note that these four dimensions of the gender regime are interconnected and constantly interact with each other (Connell, 2009). Gender relations are not isolated; rather, they are woven together, shaping the overall dynamics of gender within an organizational setting (Connell, 2009).

This study uses Connell's, 2009 concept of the gender regime to explore gender relations and power dynamics within university sports in Iran, highlighting the specific challenges faced by Iranian women athletes. Key findings indicate that women encounter significant institutional barriers, such as inadequate facilities, poor-quality equipment, and restrictive dress codes, with policies often favoring men's sports. Cultural and religious norms further restrict women's autonomy and freedom, notably through the mandatory hijab. Despite these barriers, support

from family, friends, teammates, and coaches plays a crucial role in helping women athletes navigate challenges and pursue their goals, fostering resilience and motivation. Acts of resistance against restrictive norms and advocacy for better conditions strengthen camaraderie and mutual support among athletes. Additionally, sports participation contributes to personal growth, development of life skills, improved physical and mental health, and a sense of community and belonging.

Gender Equality and Women's and Sport Participation

Gender equality refers to the belief that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or expression, should have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). This concept is rooted in the belief that no individual should be discriminated against, or experience disadvantage based on their gender (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). Girls and women comprise more than half of the population of many countries, but women's rates of sport participation are still lower than men's (Pourakchi et al., 2016). Historically, sport was male-dominated, and women were considered outsiders (Wangari et al., 2017). Sport has been perceived as more appropriate for men (and masculinity) than for women (and femininity) (Wangari et al., 2017). The notion that sports are more appropriate for men than women is rooted in social and cultural norms that have historically associated physical strength, competitiveness, and aggression with masculinity, while femininity has been associated with more passive and domestic roles (Messner, 2002). This gendered understanding of sport has resulted in the marginalization of women's sport, and the underrepresentation of women athletes in media coverage, sponsorships, and leadership positions in sport organizations (Koivula, 1999).

Research has shown that gender stereotypes and norms play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of athletes, coaches, and spectators, and can influence the opportunities

and support available to women athletes (Hargreaves, 2000). For example, studies have found that men athletes are more likely to receive higher levels of investment, media coverage, and endorsements than their women counterparts (Cooky et al., 2013). In addition, women athletes are often subjected to sexist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour from peers and officials (Koivula, 1999).

Moreover, women face several obstacles that hinder participation in sport, including spousal abuse, gender discrimination in society, and work-life balance challenges (Graff, 2014). One of the significant challenges identified by Graff (2014) is the prevalence of spousal abuse in sports, which can deter women from participating due to fear of physical harm or social stigma (Duncan & Hasbrook, 2017). Work-life balance challenges are also a significant obstacle for women's participation in sport, as they often struggle to balance training, competition, and family responsibilities (Bruening et al., 2009). These challenges can lead to decreased participation and retention rates among women athletes, as well as limit their opportunities to reach their full potential in sport.

It is crucial to consider how these challenges may intersect with cultural and religious contexts, shaping a unique landscape for women's sport participation in Muslim countries (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2012). To challenge prevailing gender norms and recognize the benefits of women's sport in terms of physical and mental well-being, social inclusion, and community development, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in sport have been undertaken (Messner, 2002). This has involved the development of inclusive policies and practices, promoting positive role models and visibility for women, and providing targeted training and support for women athletes (Messner, 2002). The examination of women's sports in Muslim

countries will provide valuable insights into how these challenges manifest in specific cultural settings.

Women's Sport in Muslim Countries

The term "Muslim country" is often used to describe a country where most of the population is Muslim and where Islamic law (Sharia) plays a significant role in the legal system and daily life (Oxford Islamic Studies Online). However, the use of this term can be problematic, as it overlooks the diversity of Muslim-majority countries and the different ways in which Islam is practiced and interpreted in each country (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). For example, Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, is a secular country with a constitution that recognizes multiple religions and does not establish Islam as the state religion (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran have a legal system based on Islamic law and require adherence to certain religious practices. The religious practices of Islam encompass the Prohibition of Alcohol and Pork, Fasting during Ramadan, and Daily Prayers (Quran) and dress code. Muslim women face various constraints regarding their participation in sport and exercise in Muslim countries (Mirsafian et al., 2014). Muslim women's attitudes toward sport and exercise are influenced by religious affiliation, the environment, culture, traditions, and social factors (Mirsafian et al., 2014).

Religious Regulation and Muslim Women's Sport Participation

Muslim women's participation in sport and exercise is affected by religious regulation (Abu-Dalbouh, 1997). For many Muslim women, religious beliefs and values give meaning to the ways in which they structure and approach their life; Islam is a fundamental aspect of their identity (Khan et al., 2012). According to some interpretations of the Quran, women are encouraged to participate in sport and exercise as a means of recreation and enjoyment to

maintain healthy lifestyles, with certain restrictions on the types of sport and their manner of involvement (Abu-Dalbouh, 1997). However, it's important to note that interpretations of the Quran vary widely, and there is diversity in how different individuals and communities understand and apply its teachings, including regarding women's participation in sport.

Some Muslim countries allow women to participate in almost all sports but also stipulate Islamic dress codes (Mirsafian et al., 2014). Islamic dress code is a set of guidelines for modest dressing in Islam that applies to both men and women (Al-Hashimi, 1996). The purpose of this code is to encourage modesty and humility and to prevent the display of wealth and beauty as a means of attracting attention (Al-Hashimi, 1996). For women, the Islamic dress code typically includes covering the body with loose-fitting clothing, including the head, arms, and legs, and a headscarf or hijab worn to cover the hair (Mirsafian et al., 2014). The extent of the covering can vary depending on cultural and regional differences and the three categories of Muslim countries:

1. The first category is comprised of Muslim countries in which the Islamic dress code is not required for women's participation in sport, regardless of the level of sporting competition (pewresearch.org). Therefore, in countries such as Turkey, women are not obliged to follow the Islamic dress code during sporting activities, including competition (pewresearch.org).
2. The second category comprises moderate Muslim countries, meaning that women are allowed to participate in nearly all sport, and Islamic dress codes are prescribed (pewresearch.org). These countries do not accept the international dress code, and this fact limits women athletes' opportunities to participate in international competitions in several sports. Iran and Pakistan are example of this category (pewresearch.org).

3. The third category constitutes those Muslim countries that do not allow women to participate in sport publicly, due to religious obligations, traditions, beliefs, rules, and regulations of their own country (pewresearch.org). Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and Qatar are the Muslim countries that did not allow women to participate in international competitions, including the Olympic Games, until 2012.

One of the primary social restrictions on Muslim women is the requirement to dress modestly in public (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Moving forward to the next sub-section addressing social restrictions and taboos in women's sport participation, it becomes evident that these religious regulations intersect with broader societal norms, creating a complex interplay of factors that impact the opportunities and challenges faced by Muslim women in sport (Smith & Thompson, 2020).

Social Restrictions and Taboos

According to Ferris (1981), Muslim women are often bound by social restrictions and taboos that limit their participation in public life and physical activities, including sport (Ferris, 1981). These restrictions are rooted in traditional beliefs and attitudes towards women (Ferris, 1981). One social restriction is gender segregation, which requires Muslim women to limit their interaction with men who are not their close relatives or husbands (Qureshi & Ghouri, 2011). This restriction can limit Muslim women's participation in sport, especially in co-ed environments, as they are not allowed to play with or against men (Ehsani et al., 2007).

In some Muslim countries, separate facilities and programs are available for men and women to address this issue (Ehsani et al., 2007). However, this can also limit opportunities for women to compete at a higher level or receive the same resources and support as men athletes (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009). Despite these social restrictions, some Muslim women have challenged

and overcome these barriers in recent years. They have advocated for greater opportunities to participate in sport while maintaining their religious and cultural identities (Qureshi & Ghouri, 2011). For example, there have been successful campaigns to allow Muslim women to wear hijabs and other head coverings while participating in sport (Muslim Women in Sport, 2017). These efforts have helped to break down social taboos and restrictions that have traditionally limited Muslim women's sport participation. For instance, Muslim women athletes have succeeded and gained visibility in international sports competitions, challenged stereotypes and inspired others (Ahmed, 2020). Prominent athletes such as Ibtihaj Muhammad (fencing, United States), Sarah Essam (football, Egypt), and Kimia Alizadeh (taekwondo, Iran) have become role models, breaking barriers and encouraging more Muslim women to pursue sport (BBC, 2021; Al Jazeera, 2021).

Walseth (2006) explored the connection between young Muslim Turkish women's identity work and their participation in sport and physical activity. The young women who participated were part of the Muslim community in Turkey, which is the majority religion in the country (Walseth, 2006). However, Turkey is also a secular state with a constitution that separates religion from the state (Walseth, 2006). This means that the government and political institutions are separate from religious authorities and one religion cannot be given special status over another (Walseth, 2006). The young women in Walseth's (2006) study navigated multiple identities, including their ethnic and religious identities and their identities as active and engaged individuals. She found that sport participation allowed them to challenge some of the limitations and expectations associated with their ethnic identity and assert their own identities within their broader social contexts (Walseth, 2006). Sport participation provided a platform for these young women to showcase their talents, skills, and passions, which often transcended the confines of

their ethnic or religious identities (Walseth, 2006). Within the sporting context, they were recognized and valued for their athletic abilities, determination, and dedication rather than being defined by their cultural background (Walseth, 2006). This allowed them to break free from preconceived notions and stereotypes associated with their ethnicity and assert their own identities.

Moreover, engaging in sport provided these young women with opportunities for personal growth, empowerment, and self-expression (Walseth, 2006). By actively participating in sport, they gained confidence, developed leadership skills, and cultivated a sense of agency (Walseth, 2006). They were able to challenge societal expectations and pursue their passions regardless of any perceived cultural or gender limitations (Walseth, 2006). More recently, Yenilmez (2021) used a semi-structured questionnaire to explore Turkish women's experiences of unequal salaries, lack of sport facilities, media misrepresentation, and pressures from the family. These all-limited Muslim women's sport participation in Turkey. Yenilmez's (2021) findings are consistent with previous research on Muslim women's sport participation, which has identified various structural and cultural barriers. Yenilmez's (2021) study also highlights ongoing inequalities in Muslim women's participation in sport, despite some interpretations of Islam as supportive of women's sport and physical activity. However, in Islamic countries, where Islam is the predominant religion, women's experiences with these challenges vary depending on their specific cultural and social context (Laar et al., 2019).

Islamic Countries and Muslim Women's Sport Participation

Islamic cultures and countries comprise a diverse range of societies influenced by Islam; a monotheistic faith founded by the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE (Abu-Lughod, 2008). These cultures are characterized by principles of monotheism, submission to Allah, and adherence to the Quran and Hadith (Abu-Lughod, 2008). Islamic countries, where Islam is the predominant religion, span regions like the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Asia. Each nation has its unique cultural expressions shaped by historical, political, and socio-economic factors (Abu-Lughod, 2008).

Cultural norms and expectations have an impact on women's participation in sport. For example, in some societies, women's role in the family and household is prioritized over their involvement in sport and other physical activities (Ehsani et al., 2007). Traditional gender roles may reinforce the idea that sports are primarily for men, making it more challenging for women to participate (Laar et al., 2019). Women's experiences with these challenges vary depending on their specific cultural and social context (Laar et al., 2019). According to Al-Mohannadi et al. (2020), women may face social stigma, harassment, and discrimination for participating in sport, especially if it goes against traditional gender roles or conservative interpretations of Islamic values. For example, women may face pressure from their families, peers, or communities to prioritize their domestic duties over sport or be required to wear restrictive clothing that can limit their movement and performance (Al-Mohannadi et al., 2020). Furthermore, these factors can create significant barriers for Muslim women who want to participate in or pursue a career in sport (Shakiba & Kianpour, 2016).

According to Alipour et al. (2012), the impediments faced by Muslim women in accessing and participating in sports in countries like Turkey are more deeply rooted in cultural norms,

societal expectations, and ethnic traditions than religious doctrines. While religion may play a role in shaping cultural values and norms, it is not the sole determining factor in limiting women's sport participation (Alipour et al., 2012). In many cases, cultural and ethnic norms within certain Muslim-majority societies emphasize gender segregation, modesty, and prescribed gender roles, which can create challenges for women who aspire to participate in sport (Alipour et al., 2012). These norms may stem from societal perceptions of appropriate women behavior or the fear of women deviating from traditional gender roles. Consequently, women face barriers such as limited access to sport facilities, lack of appropriate sporting attire, and disapproval or social stigma associated with women engaging in physical activities (Alipour et al., 2012). However, it is important to note that the experience of Iranian women participating in sport may differ due to the unique context of Iran being an Islamic state, where the principles and teachings of Islam hold significant influence over the country's political, social, and legal systems (Arab-Moghaddam et al., 2007).

Iranian Women's Sport Participation

Iran is an Islamic state where the principles and teachings of Islam hold significant influence over the country's political, social, and legal systems (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted in 1979, explicitly emphasizes the Islamic state and its commitment to implementing Islamic law, known as Sharia, in all areas of governance (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). Sport in Iran is different than other Muslim-majority non-Islamic countries. Studies about Iranian women and sport participation emphasize Islam/the Islamic state as a barrier to women's sport participation (Atghia, 2008; Naderian et al., 2009; Mirghafoori et al., 2009, Ehsani et al., 2007). A consistent finding is that there are significantly fewer opportunities for women to participate in sport than

men and very little support for women's sport participation (Monazzami et al.,2011, Naderian et al., 2009; Mirghafoori et al., 2009, Ehsani et al., 2007).

Ehsani et al. (2007) conducted a survey to explore both the individual and structural elements that affect women's sport participation. Individual inhibiting factors included social attitudes towards women's specific sport activities, women's attitudes towards sport activities, self-confidence and self-image, fear of insecurity, and shyness all prevented Iranian women from participating in sport activities (Ehsani et al., 2007). Some researchers have identified factors that negatively affected Iranian women's participation in public sport. Public sport refers to activities that are available and accessible to the public in Iran and can be practiced in public spaces such as parks, community centres, and other public facilities (Atghia, 2008; Naderian et al., 2009; Mirghafoori et al., 2009). Those factors include the lack of sport spaces for women, the high cost of user fees for sport spaces, lack of information and advertising about public sport, poor health conditions in the existing sport facilities and women's lack of interest (Atghia, 2008; Naderian et al., 2009; Mirghafoori et al., 2009). Atghia (2008) found women who lived in areas with limited public spaces for sport were less likely to participate in physical activity. Additionally, Naderian et al. (2009) highlighted that the high cost of user fees for sport spaces was another significant factor that deterred Iranian women from participating. Many women were unable to afford the high user fees charged by sport facilities (Naderian et al., 2009). Moreover, Mirghafoori et al. (2009) highlighted the lack of information and advertising about public sport as a crucial factor that negatively affected Iranian women's participation in sport. They found that many Iranian women were unaware of the public sport facilities available to them, limiting their ability to participate in physical activities (Mirghafoori et al. ,2009).

In response to these findings, Monazzami et al. (2011) identified several factors that could promote Iranian women's sport participation. These include creating more opportunities for women by building women-only sport facilities and allocating separate times for women to use public sport spaces (Monazzami et al., 2011). They suggested that providing financial support for women's teams and offering incentives for women coaches and trainers could encourage more women to participate in sports (Monazzami et al., 2011). Additionally, they emphasized the importance of raising awareness about the benefits of sport for women's health and well-being and promoting positive attitudes toward women's sport participation through media campaigns and community outreach programs (Monazzami et al., 2011). Furthermore, they recommended increasing the participation of women in decision-making processes related to sport and providing training for women in sport management and administration (Monazzami et al., 2011).

However, it is important to note that how societal influences on women's engagement in sport. The following sub section explores how cultural norms and beliefs shape Iranian women's opportunities and attitudes toward sport, providing a deeper understanding of the structural barriers to their participation.

Cultural Norms and Beliefs

Iran's political and legal environment is distinct. This has implications for women's participation in sport, as the government has strict control over public life and often imposes restrictions on women's activities (Afshari & Mousavi, 2017). Additionally, the legal framework in Iran often discriminates against women, particularly in matters related to marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Shakiba & Kianpour, 2016), which can limit their opportunities and resources for participating in sport. While cultural and religious factors have been identified as key barriers to women's sport in Iran, other factors also play a significant role.

Social attitudes towards Iranian women's specific sport activities refer to the cultural norms and beliefs that shape perceptions of what is appropriate and acceptable for women to engage in when it comes to sport (Ehsani et al., 2007). In Iran, these attitudes have traditionally been conservative and have limited women's access to sport activities perceived as "masculine" or outside of traditional gender roles (Ehsani et al., 2007). For example, in a study of the experiences of women athletes in Iran, researchers found that "society's conservative views and beliefs about gender roles and appropriate behavior were seen as the most significant barriers to women's sport participation" (Keshavarz & Shojaei, 2014, p. #). These views have resulted in limited opportunities for women to engage in activities that are traditionally perceived as gendered, reinforcing stereotypical associations and restricting women's participation in domains historically dominated by men. An investigation by Rahmati et al. (2019) shed light on the attitudes of some Iranian women towards physical activity, revealing that many held positive views. However, despite their positive inclinations, several significant barriers hindered their active participation, primarily stemming from social norms and cultural expectations (Rahmati et al., 2019). Insecurity concerns are a prominent impediment to Iranian women's involvement in sport (Rahmati et al., 2019). Within Iran, conservative social norms and cultural traditions often deem women's participation in sport inappropriate and immoral (Fathi, 2018). Consequently, many Iranian women feel threatened and insecure when taking part in sport, especially in public settings (Fathi, 2018). Notably, social norms and cultural traditions are the factors contribute to limiting women's engagement in sport within the Iranian context. Firstly, religious and cultural norms influence the shaping of gender roles and behaviours (Fathi, 2018). These norms play a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions of women's role in sport.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that Iranian women face significant challenges to their sport participation, including cultural and familial barriers, legal restrictions, and limited access to resources. These challenges have resulted in low sport participation rates and limited opportunities for Iranian women. However, universities in Iran offer opportunities for women to participate in sport, as they have established sport competitions that are more organized, structured, and supported than in other contexts. This assertion is supported by the presence of documented competitions and their schedules readily available on university websites.

Despite the growing interest in women's sport in Iran, no studies to my knowledge have explored the experiences of women athletes at the university level. This is a significant gap in the literature because universities are a space in which women have more opportunities to participate in sport than in other parts of Iranian society. The next chapter will delve into a narrative inquiry research design, aiming to reveal the lived experiences and perspectives of Iranian women athletes in university sports. Utilizing in-depth interviews and storytelling, this qualitative approach aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of Iranian women student-athletes' experiences within the university sports context.

Chapter3: Research Design

This study employed a descriptive, narratively informed approach, while the concept of the gender regime provided a valuable framework for shaping research inquiries, guiding the research design, and directing data analysis. The exploration of Iranian women athletes' experiences in inter-university sport is framed by two key research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sport?

Research Question 2: How do Iranian women inter-university athletes explore barriers, supports, and points of resistance?

In this chapter, I will elucidate the considerations stemming from my choice of choosing a descriptive, narratively informed approach as my methodology, and my strategies for participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Narrative -Informed Inquiry

Narrative informed inquiry is a concept that encompasses various interpretations, but a widely accepted definition is provided by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). They describe narrative inquiry as a collaborative process between researchers and participants, taking place over time and in specific social interactions and environments. The researchers immerse themselves in this dynamic context, continuously engaging with and exploring the stories that constitute people's individual and collective life experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The foundation of narrative inquiry is rooted in the Deweyan conception of experience, as an ever-changing stream resulting from the continuous interaction between human thought and the personal, social, and material environment (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Drawing from

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) definition and the Deweyan perspective, there are three fundamental aspects, referred to as the commonplaces of narrative inquiry.

The first commonplace is temporality, which considers the relationship between people and events in terms of the past, present, and future. In doing so, stories move beyond description to become more explanatory (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The second commonplace is sociability, which encompasses both personal and social conditions (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Personal conditions encompass the individual's emotions, aspirations, reactions, and desires, while social conditions encompass the contextual factors and the influence of other individuals shaping that context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Third, place, relates to where the events occur and consider the explicit physical boundaries of the place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Thus, narrative inquirers are curious about experience, locate experience in what people do, how they live, and how they make sense of living, and recognize that people are always in the midst of experience (Caine et al., 2019).

Narrative inquiry can also be employed as a methodological approach rooted in critical theory (Pitre et al., 2013). Indeed, when a narrative -informed approach is blended with a critical lens, it can extend our knowledge of the cultural and relational structure of human lives throughout time (Frank, 2010; Smith, 2016). The conceptual framework of gender regime allows me to apply a critical lens to the analysis of the participants' experiences and stories. In this context, conducting a descriptive, narrative -informed analysis using the gender regime critical lens meant scrutinizing the stories and experiences of Iranian women athletes within the university sport setting with a keen awareness of power dynamics, gender inequalities, and societal norms. It involved examining what the participants' stories of their experiences conveyed and how they challenged and/or reinforced dominant ideologies and structural

constraints related to gender. Through this approach, I discovered the ways in which these women athletes explored and navigated barriers, supports and points of resistance in their experiences in the context of university sport.

Critical social thought allows researchers to consider how the social formations of sport can be improved, socially just, made more democratic, and humane (Smith, 2016). As a result, I found that combining a descriptive, narrative informed approach and a critical conceptual framework as a guiding methodology in this study was highly effective in comprehending the experiences of Iranian women athletes within interuniversity sport for several reasons. It enabled an in-depth exploration of individuals' lived experiences. I gained valuable insights into their unique challenges and achievements within the interuniversity sport setting. This approach also aligned well with the objectives of understanding the experiences of Iranian women athletes in university sport. By exploring the personal stories of these athletes, the intersection of gender with their participation could be examined. Applying the gender regime conceptual framework allowed for an analysis of how the accepted norms and values of Iranian culture shaped the experiences of Iranian women athletes.

The primary focus of this study was on how gender influenced sport participation, aiming to discern how being a woman in Iranian society impacted the participants' experiences in sport, particularly university sport. Contextual factors, including societal constructs, ideological contexts, power relations, and women's agency, shaped the experiences of these athletes, underscoring the influence of cultural, social, and power dynamics on their athletic experiences. Being authentic as a researcher involved scrutinizing the accepted norms and values within Iranian culture that affected women athletes and identifying the ways women athletes navigated the potential inequalities within these established norms.

Participant Recruitment

The research population for this study was comprised of current women student-athletes at the Azad Universities. The goal of this study was to recruit six women athletes participating in university sport. The experiences of this specific population provided valuable insights into women's gendered experiences within university sport at Azad Universities. Six participants offered a rich and diverse pool of perspectives and experiences that could be analyzed to identify common themes and patterns. Another important factor to consider was the available resources and time. Conducting in-depth interviews with a larger sample size was not feasible due to time and resource constraints.

I began the recruitment process by reaching out to my own personal contacts from the past, including friends and colleagues within the Azad University of Karaj's sport community who had connections to women student-athletes. During these initial interactions, I provided a clear and concise explanation of the research study, highlighting the aim to understand the gender-based experiences of Iranian women athletes (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). I emphasized that I was particularly interested in connecting with current women student-athletes who were willing to share their experiences (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Once I successfully recruited participants, I used a passive snowball sampling strategy by asking participants to assist in disseminating information about the study to potential participants within their own circles (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The goal was to create a chain of referrals, allowing interested individuals to voluntarily come forward to participate while avoiding ethical concerns about privacy (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Relying solely on personal connections to recruit participants might have led to sampling bias by limiting the participant pool to individuals who shared similar backgrounds and viewpoints (Kothari, 2004). There was also the risk of

confirmation bias when researchers or participants recruited via personal connections had preconceived notions, potentially influencing data collection and analysis (Nickerson, 1998). In my study, I employed diverse recruitment channels and emphasized informed consent and candid responses (Borgatti & Molina, 2003; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Elliott et al., 2004; Guest et al., 2006; Sarantakos, 2005). These strategies enhanced research quality while minimizing potential biases associated with personal connections in participant recruitment.

In addition to recruiting from my personal networks, I used social media to recruit participants for my study by posting a call for participants on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (see Appendix F). Informative posts about the study included specific hashtags relevant to the research topic, such as #universitysport, #womensuniversitysport, #universitysportteams, #universitysportcompetition, #azaduniversities, and #azaduniversityofkarajsportteams. These hashtags helped to increase the visibility of the posts and attract individuals interested in the subject matter. Additionally, I tagged relevant university pages, such as Azad Universities Instagram pages and specific Azad Universities sport team accounts, to ensure that the study information reached the university community and potential participants active on these platforms.

To effectively recruit participants for the study, it was crucial to consider the language preferences of the target population. As the study specifically focused on women athletes at Azad Universities in Iran, using Farsi as the primary language for recruitment was more suitable than English. This approach increased potential participants' understanding of the study and enhanced their willingness to participate, as they could use their native language with confidence. I translated the study information, including the recruitment posts, interview guides, and consent forms, into Farsi to ensure that all interested participants comprehended the study's

purpose and requirements. Additionally, there was confirmation of the translations with the participants, via member checking of their Farsi transcripts, ensuring clarity and understanding. This collaborative effort ensured that the translations were accurate and that the participants fully understood the study's details. Following the confirmation, I then translated the interviews into English for analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection commenced promptly once the recruited participants were available to schedule interviews. Email served as the primary mode of communication to coordinate the scheduling of interviews, determining suitable times for conducting the interviews. This initial communication permitted the development of rapport and fostered a comfortable experience for participants. It also provided an avenue for participants to address any questions or concerns they had regarding the research process, ensuring their involvement was well-informed and voluntary (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Upon participants' initial contact via email to express their interest in taking part in the interview, I sent them the consent form. The subsequent section delineates the data collection method, which was in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Interviews

In this study, participants engaged in in-depth, semi-structured, online interviews, following the guides outlined in Appendix A. Six women participated in one interview, with three of these participants also took part in a second round of interviews. Prior to each interview, participants reviewed a consent form. The recordings from these interviews were transcribed verbatim. Semi-structured interviews are considered an appropriate method for a descriptive, narrative-informed inquiry because they enable the exploration of more complex viewpoints, tapping into both

content and emotional levels, and encouraging storytelling rather than restricting it (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Smith, 2010; Tracy, 2019).

Since a main goal of any qualitative inquiry is to explore the depth and breadth of a chosen phenomenon (Lindsay & Schwind, 2014), semi-structured interviews have proven to be a ripe approach to enhancing our knowledge base (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). Descriptive, narrative-informed inquiry typically relies on multiple interviews (Smith, 2010). When deciding how many interviews were required in this study, Tracy (2019) helped to inform the final decision. Tracy (2019) argues that if the selection criteria for the study is relatively narrow and the participants in the study possess expertise on the study's topic, then fewer interviews are needed. The participants in this study represent a specific population (Iranian women student-athletes currently competing at one university) and have expertise about their own lived experiences.

Interviews were between one hour and ninety minutes long, depending on the participants' availability and level of engagement. I decided to conduct the interviews online because I was not able to travel to Iran to interview the participants. According to Bampton and Cowton (2002), online interviews can provide participants a sense of anonymity and control, which may lead to them feeling more comfortable and open in their responses (Bampton et al., 2002). It can also reduce social desirability bias, where respondents may provide answers, they believe are socially acceptable rather than their true opinions (Cowton, 2002). Couper (2000) suggests that online interviews can save participants time and resources as they are able to attend the interview from anywhere with an internet connection. However, it might be harder to understand and feel participants' emotions during an online interview (Couper, 2000). I worked to manage these potential limitations by actively listening to participants' responses and paying close attention to

their tone, intonation, reaction, and choice of words. Moreover, emotional cues can be embedded within their verbal responses, so being attentive to these aspects helped me discern their emotions to some extent.

In the context of conducting online interviews for narrative informed inquiry, the challenge of facilitating an environment conducive to personal storytelling and building rapport with participants, despite the lack of physical control over their surroundings, was acknowledged. To address this, a series of deliberate strategies were employed. Prior to the interviews, pre-interview communication through email established a connection, fostering trust and familiarity. I guided participants on setting up their virtual interview space, encouraging them to choose quiet, private, and distraction-free locations. During the interviews, rapport was developed through small talk and by actively engaging with participants. Active listening, empathetic responses, and the use of nonverbal cues, such as maintaining eye contact and exhibiting interest, were pivotal in making participants feel heard and valued. With the participants' consent, interviews were audio and video recorded. If participants preferred not to be video recorded, I asked to audio record the interviews.

In the first interview, I focused on asking about the participants' current perspectives and experiences regarding inter-university sport. This interview aimed to collect evidence about the lived experiences of Iranian women athletes playing inter-university sport. Before conducting the second interview, the data from the initial interview was analyzed (the data analysis process is discussed below). There was a two to three weeks gap between the first and second interviews. For the second interview, participants were asked to bring a picture, word, or thing that best described their experiences with university sport. What they chose to share was the starting point for the second interview (Appendix A).

All interviews were conducted in Farsi, and the resulting transcripts were available to participants in both Farsi and English. After completing and immediately transcribing the interview, I sent the participants their transcripts to check for accuracy and allow them to provide further commentary or clarification of their remarks. If I did not hear back from participants within two weeks, I moved forward with the transcript as is. When the data analysis was finished, I deleted the video files.

Translation

Translation is the search for an equivalent in another language (Müller, 2007) or the "transfer of meaning from a source language to a target language" (Esposito, 2001, p. 570). Translation is challenging as not all concepts are universal or meaningful (Jones & Kay, 1992). In my thesis, I emphasized the complexity of the participants' experiences and provided context as well as interpretation alongside my translations. To enhance the accuracy of translating the data for meaning, I engaged in discussions with individuals who are fluent in both Farsi and English, including Iranian peers at Brock University and my aunt and uncle, who are professors at another Canadian university. During these collaborations, I ensured that participants remained confidential. In instances where a Persian word lacked a direct English equivalent, I made every effort to provide a comprehensive English explanation for the most effective translation. This commitment to confidentiality and precise translation methods was integral to the data collection process.

Data Analysis

The chosen data analysis approach for this study was thematic analysis. I used Smith's, (2016) seven-step method. However, I should note that I inserted an additional existential coding strategy within Smith's steps four and five to flesh out Smith's seven step method. Thematic analysis focuses on central themes within stories and how these themes make sense in terms of the ways the participants presented their experiences in a narrated or storied manner (Lieblich et al., 1998; Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2016). In the subsequent sections, I have detailed each of the seven steps and highlighted their application in the present study. It is important to note that these steps are not strictly linear; instead, they are cyclical and iterative (Smith, 2016). The first step of analysis is writing. Writing serves as the foundational component of the analytical process, and it functions to initiate, open, and enable the progression of thematic analysis. (Smith, 2016). Writing began early and was continuously revised, reviewed, and edited throughout the research process (Smith, 2016). In the context of this study, the writing had already begun with my engagement with translation and transcription; thus, I was in step one. I also wrote my reflections about interviews before, during, and after transcribing them. I continued to review, revise, and edit as I progressed through the stages of analysis. Translation from Farsi to English occurred during the transcription process to ensure accuracy and to maintain the integrity of the participants' narratives.

The second step of thematic analysis was transcribing the data. Upon the completion of an interview, that interviews were transcribed verbatim and as soon as possible (Smith, 2016). During the transcription process, analytical thoughts were likely to occur, and thus, transcribing was also a part of the analytical process (Lieblich et al., 1998; Smith, 2016). While transcribing the interviews, I made note of any related thoughts to the focus of this study in my reflective

journal (Smith, 2016). Examples of topics that I discerned during transcription included the impact of dress codes on athletic performance, the role of family support in sports participation, and the experiences of navigating institutional barriers such as inadequate facilities and gender discrimination. These reflections provided deeper insight into the participants' stories and informed subsequent stages of analysis.

The third data analysis phase involved meticulously organizing the collected information. I created and organized all data files in a password-protected folder in Dropbox only accessible by myself and my research supervisor (Smith, 2016).

In the fourth stage of data analysis, narrative indwelling, I immersed myself in the material. This involved repeated readings of interview transcripts and multiple listens to the recorded interviews (Smith, 2016). During this process, I engaged in a reflective interaction with the transcripts seeking to perceive beyond the surface and making a note of initial impressions (Smith, 2016). My initial impressions included the profound resilience of the athletes, the pervasive impact of cultural and religious norms on their sports participation, and the substantial role of solidarity and support systems in overcoming institutional barriers. This is the practice of thinking alongside stories, rather than simply about them (Smith, 2016). I listened attentively to the audio and video recordings of each interview several times – during transcription and at this stage. Additionally, each transcript was read through several times. Alongside this, I diligently recorded my impressions and emotions in both my reflective journal and the margins of the transcript. For instance, I noted the frustration expressed by participants like Sarina regarding the restrictive dress codes and poor facilities, as well as the pride and motivation they derived from family support and achieving personal milestones in sports. These reflections provided deeper insights into the participants' experiences and informed subsequent stages of analysis.

In the fifth stage, the focus shifted to identifying themes and their interconnections (Smith, 2016). A theme refers to a noticeable pattern throughout a set of stories and is identified through closely reading the data several times (Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2016). In this stage, I re-read the interview transcripts additional times. To help guide my analysis, I continuously asked myself what the common ideas were within stories and what was occurring repeatedly across transcripts while reading (Smith, 2016). Throughout this stage, I generated extended phrases in both the margins of the transcripts and my reflective journal, summarizing explicit and underlying meanings (Smith, 2016).

Within phase process: what happened inside steps four and five….

In this section, I will explore in greater detail a further six-step analysis process that I utilized (within the existing seven step process) to excavate the finer details of each interview so that I could recognize patterns and salience. While indwelling and engaging with/consolidating participants' descriptions and stories of their experiences are given as steps four and five in Smith's process, I found that I needed an additional strategy to begin the distillation process of discerning patterns within and across the transcripts. I began the 'within steps four and five' analysis by re-reading the entire set of data in its entirety, which allowed me to gain an intuitive understanding of the overall content and to note initial insights and salient points. This initial reading provided a foundation for deeper analysis. Building on this initial understanding, I then reread the data with my research questions in mind. This focused reading helped me identify connections, insights, and salient points specifically related to the research topic, refining my understanding and ensuring that the subsequent coding process would be targeted and relevant to the research goals.

With a clearer understanding of the data and the research focus, I proceeded to code the data. I worked with sentences, paragraphs, or entire pages. I began with an existential category system, categorizing the data into broad groups such as People, Places, Objects, and Happenings. Existential categories allow researchers to begin a reduction process while still honoring the verbatim level of description. Existential categories are those aspects of experience that are always present. That is, there are always people, places, objects and happenings almost regardless of the context or question. In addition to these categories, I employed various coding strategies, including tagging important words, verbatim phrases (participants' exact words), actions, events (both ordinary and notable), emotions, values, surprises, and notable non-occurrences. I also incorporated literature-driven typologies or concepts, noting instances where the data reflected ideas from relevant research literature. This comprehensive coding process enabled me to systematically break down the data into meaningful units for analysis and began the process of recognizing patterns within and across the transcripts.

After coding, I examined the data for patterns within individual entries and across multiple entries. This step involved identifying recurring themes, behaviors, or experiences that appeared consistently throughout the data. By recognizing these patterns, I began to see connections and relationships between different parts of the data, which helped to build a coherent narrative around the participants' experiences. Subsequently, I clustered patterns that seemed to belong together. By grouping related patterns, I identified broader themes or significant categories that encapsulated key aspects of the participants' experiences. This clustering process condensed the data into a more manageable form, highlighting the most important and relevant themes for the study and ensuring a comprehensive analysis that captured the full range of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Finally, I named each cluster to define the themes that I developed from the data analysis. These names captured the essence of the clustered patterns, providing a clear and organized framework for presenting the findings. Naming the clusters was a critical step in transforming the raw data into meaningful insights, ensuring that the findings were clearly communicated and aligned with the research questions.

Critical social thought allows researchers to consider how the social formations of sport can be improved, made more socially just, democratic, and humane (Smith, 2016). As a result, I believe that using the critical lens of gender regime in combination with a descriptive, narrative informed approach has been highly effective in comprehending the experiences of Iranian women athletes within inter-university sport for several reasons. Firstly, it enabled an in-depth exploration of individuals' lived experiences, providing valuable insights into their unique challenges and achievements within the inter-university sport setting. Secondly, this approach aligned well with the objectives of understanding the experiences of Iranian women athletes in university sport. By delving into the personal stories of these athletes, I could then explore and examine the intersection of gender with their participation in university sport.

The focus of the sixth step was describing and interpreting the identified themes. In this phase, I named each theme, actively interacted with both the data and my personal notes and outlined the connections relating to my research questions found within each theme (Smith, 2016). These descriptions demanded precision, encapsulating the content, its core meaning, and potential theme relationships (Smith, 2016). This statement emphasizes the importance of being extremely precise when describing the experiences shared by the participants in the research. It means that my descriptions effectively captured and conveyed the core content of the participants' experiences their fundamental meaning or significance, and any potential

connections or relationships they might have to the overarching themes or patterns within the data in the study. Additionally, I offered interpretations of the thematic content identified, which were enriched by engaging critically with the existing theory and stories (Smith, 2016). I explicitly outlined and described the identified themes. While engaging in the process of interpretation, I critically reflected on myself, the data, and the gender regime conceptual framework to enhance the quality of interpretations; while also continuously (re)writing, revising, and editing my interpretations.

Finally, the seventh stage of thematic analysis entailed representing the outcomes. This involved presenting the findings from analysis in a manner that captured the participants' experiences and effectively communicated the underlying themes and patterns that I discerned from analyzing the data (Smith, 2016). When conducting thematic analysis, the chosen method of representation was the realist tale (Smith, 2016). Realist tales offered a platform to convey the identified themes, shedding light on the participants' and researcher's spoken words, actions, and inner thoughts during the research process (King, 2016; Smith, 2016). The creation of a realist tale remained an ongoing process, acknowledging that even when I believed I had encapsulated the principal themes of participant experiences, these stories remained open to evolution, mirroring the changing nature of people and their stories (Smith, 2016). I represented the data through thick, rich descriptions which aligned with thematic analysis and realist tales by providing extensive, intricate details and verbatim portrayals of participant stories (King, 2016).

Rich and thick description offered intricate contextual details about social, cultural, and political phenomena (Rose & Johnson, 2020). By emphasizing the depth and granularity of the data, this approach enhanced a contextualized comprehension of the research topic, evoked emotional resonance with the participants' experiences, and imparted a sense of authenticity to

the readers (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Rich and thick descriptions were developed through my own reflexivity and participant quotes focused on participants' accounts of their gender-based experiences in inter-university sport. I have chosen to represent this rich and detailed description as a composite narrative. Composite narratives allow me to consolidate several accounts into a larger narrative that honors the salience and patterns I discern and develop through a process of iterative and recursive engagement with the interview transcripts. This approach allows me to consolidate the interviews of the six participants into an overarching story for one composite narrative. A composite narrative is a descriptive accounting of experiences that consolidates several experiences—in this case, the combined experiences of the six participants rather than a separate narrative for each participant's experiences. I used the 'names' of participants, but these names are not the actual names of the participants; rather, they consolidate the experiences of the six student participants over time and across contexts.

The primary focus of this study was to explore how gender influences sport participation, specifically examining how being a woman in Iranian society impacts the participants' experiences in university sport. The analyzed data revealed that contextual factors such as societal constructs, ideological contexts, and power relations play a significant role in shaping these athletes' experiences. For instance, many participants faced challenges related to strict dress codes and inadequate facilities, which were compounded by cultural expectations and gender separation. These factors created an environment where women athletes had to navigate and negotiate their participation in sports while dealing with systemic inequalities. Through the process of inquiry, it was evident that women athletes in Iran encounter both support and resistance within their families and broader society. Families' support often evolved as they witnessed the athletes' dedication and achievements, highlighting the interplay between personal

agency and cultural constraints. Additionally, the analyses of the data underscored the impact of religious and dress code regulations on performance and participation, with many athletes noting how these rules hindered their comfort and effectiveness in sports.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a paramount concern in narrative informed approaches (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It underscores the importance of ethical considerations within the researcher-participant relationship, where participants' lives and preferences should be given top priority throughout the research journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To uphold this principle, I initiated a discussion with participants at the outset of the research and maintained periodic check-ins to ascertain their preference regarding the confidentiality of their participation. For those who chose to remain confidential, pseudonyms were used and chosen with the participant. In an effort to ensure confidentiality for participants who requested it, I changed all names and potential identifiers when transcribing data and using my reflective journal (Josselson, 2007). To protect the identities of individual participants, it was essential to use pseudonyms when referring to them throughout the research. Furthermore, data within the study was de-identified, ensuring that specific details that could lead to the identification of participants were modified or redacted.

Additionally, I generated a document or reference guide within a password-protected folder on my computer, employing a codebook for this purpose. This codebook served the purpose of documenting the methods of disguising or anonymizing data, which involved altering or redacting certain details to protect the confidentiality of participants. The codebook also ensured that I had all the necessary information and guidelines in one place to reconstruct the original data if required. This approach aligned with the guidance provided by Josselson (2007),

emphasizing the importance of maintaining data integrity, privacy, and the ability to retrace steps if necessary. When reporting research findings, I avoided including any identifying information that could link responses to specific participants. Lastly, I continuously reiterated that participation was voluntary and ensured that participants gave full consent to each stage of the research process.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential to ensuring the rigor and credibility of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four criteria to assess trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria guided my approach to enhancing the reliability and validity of this research.

Credibility was established by providing a detailed account of the research process, including clear descriptions of the data collection and analysis methods. I used verbatim transcripts and participant language to maintain the authenticity of the athletes' experiences. To ensure that the findings accurately represented participants' perspectives, I re-read data sets, reviewed themes, and provided illustrative examples from the data.

Transferability was addressed by offering rich descriptions of the participants and their contexts, allowing readers to determine whether the findings could apply to similar settings. By thoroughly detailing the steps taken during the research process and providing context for the athletes' experiences, I aimed to support readers in assessing the applicability of the findings to their own situations.

Dependability was strengthened through a systematic and transparent approach to data collection and analysis. The use of a reflective journal throughout the study allowed me to document my thoughts, emotions, and interpretations, which helped in identifying and mitigating

any biases. Triangulating data sources and cross-checking findings ensured a consistent and rigorous approach, allowing readers to trace how conclusions were derived from the data.

Confirmability was enhanced by providing evidence from the data, such as direct quotes from participants. The use of a reflective journal further contributed to confirmability, as it documented the research process and decisions, ensuring that findings were grounded in the data rather than influenced by preconceived notions.

Aligned with my perspective within university sport, I engaged in self-reflection throughout the research process, which enabled me to interrogate my own assumptions, subjectivities, and lived experiences in relation to the research topic (Doucet, 2018; Josselson, 2007; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Since I did not take a passive role in the data collection process, I kept a reflective journal to log my emotions and thoughts throughout the duration of the study (Doucet, 2018). This journal was used to track my preconceived notions, interpretations, and personal connections (Caine et al., 2019; Doucet & Mauthner, 2003; Doucet, 2018; Squire, 2008). This thesis project aimed to ensure that confidentiality and trustworthiness were achieved within a narrative inquiry study.

In summary, the primary purpose of this study is to examine Iranian women athletes' experiences of gender in inter-university sport. To achieve this goal, I used descriptive, narrative-informed inquiry as the methodology, and the concept of the gender regime as a valuable framework for formulating research questions, guiding the research design, and informing the data analysis. I conducted two rounds of semi-structured, online interviews. The first round was with six current women student-athletes completing for the Azad University of Karaj. The second round was with three of these students who were able to remain committed to the second round of interviews. The interview transcript data were analyzed using Smith 's (2016) thematic

narrative analysis approach, with an existential categories coding strategy to deepen steps four and five of the analysis and support cross interview interpretation and consolidation of themes.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter explores the stories of six Iranian women athletes and their experiences participating in inter-university sports. To provide a comprehensive understanding of their journeys, I begin with an overview of each athlete's background and involvement in university sports. Following this, I present a summary table of the cross interview existential categories patterns from the first round of interviews. Then, I present a 'by question' consolidation of the patterns from the existential categories analysis. Following the by question consolidation, I present the summary table of the second round of interviews, followed by a summary of the existential categories from the second round of interviews. Then I present a composite narrative which consolidates the women's experiences from the first round of interviews. The composite narrative sheds light on the intricate realities faced by these athletes, and explores barriers, supports, and points of resistance. The composite narrative unfolds to reveal the rich and nuanced meanings embedded in their university sport participation, illustrating how each athlete navigated the complexities of gender norms, institutional barriers, and personal aspirations. Presenting a consolidation of the six interviews in this manner also upholds the expectations of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative approach. The experiences of Marjan, Setareh, Samaneh, Neda, Bahar, and Sarina offer a window into the intersection of university sport, culture, and gender within the Iranian context.

Studies employing narrative informed inquiry aim to describe and interpret how individuals perceive and navigate the world (Smith & Sparkes, 2017). By applying Connell's (2009) concept of gender regime, I was able to examine the roles and power dynamics within this specific social

institution. This includes analyzing the types of sports available to women athletes and the level of funding and resources allocated to women's sports. The analysis revealed three key themes related to the experiences and perspectives of Iranian women athletes regarding their participation in university sports These themes include the following headings, Barriers, Norms and Discrepancies, Resistance, Solidarity and Support and, Personal Growth and Development.

Background on the Research Participants

Iranian women athletes shared their journeys and experiences in inter-university sports, highlighting diverse paths, high points, challenges, and the broader impact of cultural and religious norms. Each participant will be profiled in the sections below, followed by an outline of the six key themes related to the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Bahar

Bahar's introduction to basketball came through a professor's suggestion while she was studying physical education, even though she had no prior experience. Initially hesitant, she eventually embraced the sport and found joy in it. Bahar's journey in university sports was marked by her growing confidence and the thrill of competition. She vividly recalls reconnecting with an old friend during a competition and the pride of winning matches. Despite facing challenges such as poor coordination in her early games, Bahar's dedication led her to significant personal growth and success.

Marjan

Marjan discovered tryouts for university sports via social media, despite government internet restrictions. Her determination and resourcefulness in overcoming these barriers reflect her resilience. Marjan's involvement in university sports included multiple activities such as volleyball, mountaineering, and futsal. She particularly values her experience climbing Mount

Damavand, which she dedicated to Mahsa Amini, reflecting her commitment to both sports and social causes. Marjan faced numerous challenges, including inadequate facilities and strict dress codes, but her perseverance and advocacy helped her navigate these obstacles.

Neda

Neda initially joined a sports team to earn extra grades but found herself deeply involved after making the team. Her journey into volleyball started with a pragmatic decision but quickly turned into a passionate engagement. Neda's university sports experience was enriched by the camaraderie with her teammates and the sense of solidarity during challenging times, such as standing up against restrictive dress codes. Her involvement in sports taught her valuable lessons in teamwork, discipline, and resilience, which positively impacted other areas of her life.

Samaneh

Samaneh, known for her high physical fitness, was accepted into the handball team through a friend's introduction, despite her lack of experience. Her entry into university sports was facilitated by her innate physical abilities and the support of her social network. Samaneh faced challenges such as inadequate sports attire and strict dress codes but managed to navigate these with determination. Her story underscores the importance of personal connections and support systems in overcoming barriers and succeeding in sports.

Setareh

Setareh, already competing at a national level, was selected for the university team based on her national competition records. Her advanced level of competition prior to university highlights the pathway for elite athletes to continue their sports careers in academic settings. Setareh's experience at university was marked by her struggle with the dress code and limited facilities, but her dedication and commitment to sports remained unwavering. Her story

illustrates the seamless transition from national to university sports for accomplished athletes and the ongoing challenges they face.

Sarina

Sarina, an established athlete, was introduced to the university's sports department by friends from Karaj. Her pre-existing sports background and the support of her friends helped her integrate into the university sports environment. Sarina faced challenges such as poor conditions for travel and accommodation, but her love for sports and the support from her family and professors kept her motivated. Her journey highlights the role of peer networks in facilitating athletic opportunities and the continuation of sports participation in higher education.

Interview Categories Summary Table

Category	Samaneh	Bahar	Sarina	Neda	Marjan	Setareh
People	Friend introduced her to the team coach; father supporter; new friends	Family support after initial hesitation, professors and teammates, unfair refereeing	Professor noticed her, roommate encouraged shooting, family support, good friends	Professor mentioned extra grade, family eventually supportive, supportive teammates	Joined volleyball in middle school, kickboxing, mountaineering, indoor soccer	Joined track and field team in middle school, supportive family and professors
Places	University matches in different cities; good place and food in Tabriz	Poor conditions, disappointing food, basic and below standard venues	One gym for women with limited time, poor facilities in the dormitory gym	Poor conditions for travel and accommodation, old buses, inadequate food	Poor equipment access, strict dress code, limited access to facilities	Limited facilities, poor equipment, restricted access to gyms
Objects	Poor facilities, poor clothing	Comfortable clothes in indoor halls, mandatory	Lack of facilities and equipmen	Strict rules on hijab and modest clothing,	Mountaineering shoes issue, strict hijab	Inadequate sports attire, strict dress

	and incentives	hijab hinders performance	t, strict dress code enforcement	pressure from security	enforcement during sports	code enforcement
Happenings	Selective process, had to work twice as hard, lack of prominent referees	Gender discrimination, lack of respect and recognition, lack of experience in competitions	Dress code violations, poor scheduling, strict rules on clothing, protests	Solidarity with women's rights, turned away from competition, argument with security	Dedicated Mount Damavand climb to Mahsa Amini, exclusion due to lack of equipment, perseverance	Turned away from competition due to dress code violation, argument with security
Values	Interest and motivation in university teams, achieved successes	Support from family and professors, dedication, equality in sports	Honor of being part of the team, camaraderie with other athletes	Lessons in hard work, teamwork, healthy lifestyle, friendships	Standing up for beliefs, perseverance, calm progression	Commitment to sports, support from family and professors, importance of proper facilities
Emotions	Self-confidence, stress	Happiness, pride, stress, frustration	Enjoyment, stress from dress code, motivation	Pride, happiness, frustration, anger	Happiness, frustration, motivation	Confidence, frustration, motivation

Interlude: below, you will see patterns from the existential categories coding presented according to the interview questions, thus allowing you to see a 'by question' consolidation.

High Points

Marjan experienced a high point when she climbed Mount Damavand, dedicating the climb to Mahsa Amini, which brought her happiness and motivation. Neda highlighted the solidarity with her teammates during women's rights activism, gaining confidence and support from her family. Samaneh's improved performance and confidence after overcoming initial challenges

stood out, while Bahar cherished winning competitions and family support. Setareh achieved a personal record in the 100 meters and enjoyed the camaraderie and support from family and professors. Sarina felt honored to be part of the university team, enjoying the competition and camaraderie, encouraged by her family.

Challenges and Low Points

Marjan faced difficulties during mountaineering without proper footwear and strict dress codes, while Neda argued with security over inappropriate sports clothing, experiencing poor travel and accommodation conditions. Samaneh's team initially struggled with coordination, and she dealt with poor facilities and lack of incentives. Bahar's low point involved arguments with security over sports clothing, leading to a serious injury, along with poor conditions and inadequate food. Setareh felt limited by additional hijab measures, impacting her enthusiasm for sports. Sarina's team also faced coordination issues, poor facilities, and strict dress code enforcement, affecting their performance.

Lessons Learned

Marjan learned perseverance through mountaineering challenges, while Neda realized the importance of hard work and teamwork, boosting her confidence and commitment. Samaneh developed a sense of belonging and enjoyment in sports, Bahar started taking sports more seriously, adopting healthier habits due to positive experiences. Setareh improved her performance and confidence, overcoming initial challenges. Sarina's sports participation fostered a focus on health and nutrition, enhancing her overall life quality.

Family and Cultural Influence

Marjan's family was supportive despite cultural expectations. Neda's family initially prioritized her studies and traditional values but became supportive as they saw her progress and

enjoyment. Samaneh's family, though academically focused, showed increased support as she achieved more in sports. Bahar's family was initially hesitant due to traditional values but became supportive seeing her passion and achievements. Setareh's family supported her financially and encouraged a balance between sports and academics. Sarina, from a sporty family, received significant encouragement to pursue sports.

Impact of Religion and Dress Code

Marjan prayed to God and connected with imams before competitions but found the dress code limiting. Neda's performance was impacted by strict dress codes, affecting participation. Samaneh noted that Islamic dress code regulations hindered performance and limited television coverage. Bahar, not particularly religious, observed that the mandatory hijab made sports participation challenging. Setareh found mandatory skirts hindered her running, and Sarina faced similar challenges with hijab and modest clothing rules.

Broader Context

Marjan, Neda, Samaneh, Bahar, Setareh, and Sarina all felt that gender separation in sports led to unfair treatment and unnecessary gaps. They believed that without such divisions and outdated views, women's sports would improve. The mandatory hijab rules forced many women to step away from sports. Marjan highlighted that while the university had modern, clean gyms, the strict dress code and poor facilities overall dampened interest in sports. Neda, Bahar, Setareh, and Sarina echoed these sentiments, noting mixed-up competitions, inadequate support, and the pressure on appearance as significant deterrents.

Second interviews Categories Summary Table

Category	**Sarina**	**Setareh**	**Neda**
People	Family: Supportive Teammates: Supportive Coaches: Frustrated but supportive	Family: Supports sports but prioritizes education Friends: Encouraging University Officials: Lack accountability and support	Family: Initially opposed, later supportive Friends: Encouraging Teammates: Solidarity in protest
Places	University Gym: Often unavailable Alternative Training Locations: Used when needed	University Gym: Lacking basic facilities. External Leagues: Better facilities and supervision	-University Volleyball Team: Sense of community University Gym: Training sessions
Objects	Running Shoes: Symbolize journey and resilience	Medal: Represents achievements	Victory Symbol: Represents strength and perseverance
Happening	Training Sessions: Hindered by facilities Institutional Barriers: Strict dress codes Support Systems: Emotional and logistical support	Competitions: Differences between university and higher leagues Dress Code: Stricter in federations Gender Discrimination: Better facilities for men	Joining Volleyball Team: Motivated by grades, later valued for social aspects Confidence Building: Boosted by participation Acts of Protest: Demonstrating solidarity
Important Words/Phrases	- Resilience Support Limitations Solidarity Gender Discrimination Confidence	Quality Accountability Support Prioritize Dress Code Gender Discrimination	Confidence Perseverance Community Support Solidarity Gender Norms
Actions	Training Protests Support Competition Advocacy	Training Competitions Dress Code Compliance Advocacy	Training Protests Support Competition Advocacy
Events	Competitions- Protests- Training Sessions	Competitions- Dress Code Enforcements- Training	Competitions- Acts of Protest- Training Sessions

Emotions	Frustration- Motivation- Solidarity- Disappointment Hope	Frustration- Disappointment- Hope- Motivation- Support	Frustration Motivation Solidarity Hope- Pride
Value	Perseverance Community Health Education	Perseverance Support Health Education	Perseverance Support Health Education

Summary of Existential Categories Offered by Iranian Women in Inter-University Sports (Second Interview)

People Summary

Sarina

- Family: Supports Sarina's sports activities, providing emotional and logistical support.
- Teammates: Share similar challenges and support each other, fostering a sense of camaraderie.
- Coaches: Frustrated by the lack of facilities but supportive of the athletes.

Setareh

- Family: Supports her sports activities but emphasizes the importance of education due to lack of income from sports.
- Friends: Encourage and support her sports endeavors.
- University Officials: Lack of accountability and support for women athletes.

Neda

- Family: Initially concerned about her studies but supportive once they saw her enthusiasm.

- Friends: Provide psychological encouragement and motivation.
- Teammates: Share a sense of solidarity, especially in acts of protest.

Places Summary

Sarina

- University Gym: Often unavailable for women athletes due to other events, impacting their training.
- Alternative Training Locations: Used when university facilities are inaccessible.

Setareh

- University Gym: Basic facilities lacking, better quality in higher leagues.
- External Leagues: Better facilities and supervision compared to university competitions.

Neda

- University Volleyball Team: Provides a sense of community and support.
- University Gym: Place for training sessions coordinated with the coach.

Objects Summary

Sarina

- Running Shoes: Symbolize her journey and resilience as an athlete.

Setareh

- Medal: Represents her achievements in university competitions.

Neda

- Victory Symbol: Represents the strength and perseverance of Iranian women athletes.

Happenings Summary

Sarina

- Training Sessions: Hindered by limited access to facilities.
- Institutional Barriers: Strict dress codes and poor conditions affecting morale and performance.
- Support Systems: Emotional and logistical support from family and professors.

Setareh

- Competitions: Experiences differences between university and higher league competitions.
- Dress Code: Stricter enforcement in federation competitions compared to university.
- Gender Discrimination: Better facilities and broadcasting opportunities for men.

Neda

- Joining the Volleyball Team: Initially motivated by grades, later valued for social aspects.
- Confidence Building: Participation in sports boosts her confidence and social skills.
- Acts of Protest: Demonstrates solidarity and challenges gender norms through sports.

Composite Narrative of Iranian Women in Inter-University Sports (Interview One)

Bahar became an inter-university sport athlete by studying physical education, where a professor suggested she try out for the basketball team despite having no prior experience. After joining, she developed a liking for the sport. Bahar's high point was winning competitions and the excitement of improving, which motivated continued hard work and enjoyment of the sport, bolstered by family support. Her low point involved experiencing stress and frustration from arguments with university security about sports clothing, which led to a serious ankle injury during practice. She also encountered poor conditions, disappointing food, and basic, below-standard venues. Though not particularly religious, Bahar loves God and observed that the mandatory hijab made participation in sports challenging. She views gender separation as creating a gap leading to unfair treatment, believing that without such divisions, women's sports would improve. Bahar highlighted that meeting new people and making friends is a positive aspect, but many rules about clothing and hijab make sports harder. The university sports facilities are not great, and there's a lot of pressure about appearance, leading to less interest and motivation among students.

Marjan found out about tryouts through social media despite government internet restrictions and became involved in inter-university sports this way. A high point in Marjan's experience was climbing Mount Damavand and dedicating the climb to Mahsa Amini, which brought her happiness and motivation from participating in university sport. A low point occurred during her time with the university's mountaineering team, where she faced the difficulty and danger of climbing without proper footwear, compounded by a strict dress code and limited access to facilities. Marjan prayed to God and connected with imams before competitions to reduce stress and compete better but doesn’t like the strict dress code. She found that being a woman in Iranian inter-university sports meant facing challenges like inadequate facilities and dress code

restrictions, but it also brought moments of perseverance, such as climbing Mount Damavand. Marjan believes gender separation creates a gap leading to unfair treatment and ideas that don't match up. She noted that the university has very nice gyms in terms of cleanliness, modernity, and equipment.

Setareh was already competing at a national level when a friend introduced her to the university's sports department, and her selection was based on national competition records. Setareh achieved a new personal record in the 100 meters and cherished the camaraderie and friendships developed through university sports, supported by her family and professors. Her low point involved dealing with additional hijab measures, which impacted her spirit and enthusiasm for the sport. She dealt with limited facilities, poor equipment, restricted access to gyms, inadequate sports attire, and strict dress code enforcement. Setareh's performance was affected by the mandatory requirement to wear a skirt during competitions, which hindered her running. She believes that without gender separation, women's sports would be better. Outdated views and hijab rules force women out of sports. She also noted that the university does not spend enough money or care enough about making sure sports competitions go smoothly.

Neda's journey began when a gym teacher mentioned extra grades for joining sports teams; she initially joined to help her grades but became deeply involved after making the team. For Neda, achieving a high level of solidarity with teammates during a time of heightened women's rights activism and showing support through their attire stood out as significant moments. She also gained confidence, a better lifestyle, friendships, and family support. Neda experienced a significant low point when she was stopped by security guards at the university due to sports clothing deemed inappropriate, leading to an argument. She also faced poor conditions for travel and accommodation, including old buses and inadequate food, and felt pressure from strict hijab

and modest clothing rules enforced by security. Neda's experience highlighted how religion influenced sports clothing, with strict dress codes affecting performance and restricting participation. She feels that gender separation leads to unfair treatment and a significant gap that shouldn't be there. Neda mentioned that the university's sports facilities aren't great, with mixed-up and poorly planned competitions making some students prefer to go home instead of staying for competitions.

Samaneh was introduced to the team coach by a friend and was accepted due to her high physical fitness despite having no prior experience in handball. Samaneh experienced improved performance and confidence after overcoming initial challenges in joining the handball team with no prior experience, which enhanced her self-confidence and demonstrated the value of hard work in sport participation. She recalled the stress of her team not working together smoothly during their first-year competition due to a lack of experience, despite winning, and struggled with poor facilities, inadequate clothing, and a lack of incentives. Samaneh found that Islamic dress code regulations hindered her performance and limited television coverage of women's competitions. She believes that gender separation creates an unnecessary gap leading to unfair treatment. The university's gyms are nice in terms of cleanliness and modernity but have issues with the equipment provided.

Sarina, already known as an athlete in the league, was introduced to the university's sports department by friends from Karaj. She felt honored to be part of the university team and enjoyed the sense of competition and camaraderie with other athletes, encouraged by her family and professors. A low point for Sarina was her team not being coordinated during their first-year competition due to a lack of experience, causing stress and a feeling that they could have performed better. She struggled with having only one gym for women with limited time, poor

facilities in the dormitory gym, a lack of facilities and equipment, strict dress code enforcement, dress code violations, poor scheduling, and strict rules on clothing. Sarina faced challenges with the hijab and modest clothing rules, impacting her comfort and performance in sports. She feels that gender separation creates a gap leading to unfair treatment. The sports facilities at the university are not that great, with mixed-up and poorly planned competitions, causing many students to feel it's not worth staying for competitions and preferring to go home.

Across their experiences, these women highlighted several common themes. Gender separation and strict dress codes were consistently seen as barriers to fair treatment and performance, with many believing that without these divisions, women's sports in Iran would improve. The university sports facilities were frequently criticized for being inadequate, with poor conditions for travel and accommodation, limited access to gyms, and subpar equipment. Despite these challenges, the women also spoke of the positive aspects of their involvement in sports, such as building confidence, making friends, and receiving family support. The experiences of winning competitions, improving performance, and achieving personal records were significant highlights, motivating them to continue participating in sports. However, the mandatory hijab and additional dress code measures were recurring obstacles that negatively impacted their spirit and performance.

Theme 1: Barriers, Norms, and Discrepancies

The first theme highlights the challenges Iranian women athletes face in sports due to institutional and cultural limitations. These barriers include inadequate facilities, poor equipment, and unequal support compared to men, making it difficult for women to train and compete effectively. Religious and cultural norms, like the mandatory hijab, add further restrictions, impacting their performance and confidence. Additionally, the pressure to prioritize

education over sports creates struggles in balancing both. These ongoing frustrations reveal deep-rooted inequalities that shape their experiences in university sports.

Institutional Barriers

Facilities and Equipment

A recurring issue faced by the athletes was the inadequate facilities and poor-quality equipment available to them compared to their male counterparts. This lack of proper infrastructure significantly impeded their training and competition experiences. For example, Sarina often found the university gym unavailable for women athletes due to its frequent use for other events. "The university gym is often unavailable for women athletes, forcing us to seek alternative training locations that are often inadequate". Setareh described the basic and substandard conditions of the university gym: "Our university gym has basic facilities, but external leagues have better facilities and supervision, highlighting the disparity in investment and support for women's sports".

Samaneh and Bahar also faced significant challenges due to the poor quality of equipment. Samaneh recalled, "We struggled with inadequate clothing and a lack of incentives, which demotivated us". Bahar mentioned, "The poor conditions of sports venues and the disappointing quality of food provided during competitions were significant challenges".

Equal Numbers of Sports does not mean an equal quality of experience

The athletes' experiences indicated that simply having an equal number of sports teams for men and women did not ensure equality in the quality of their experiences. There was a significant gap in the resources, support, and opportunities provided, resulting in a lower-quality experience for women athletes. This gap contributed to feelings of frustration and discouragement as they compared their situations with their male counterparts, who often had

better access to training facilities and equipment. As Marjan mentioned, "Our university is equipped with facilities like a grass field, which, unfortunately, we're rarely allowed to use. There were plans to build a cycling track, which got me excited at first. But then, it turned out that this was another opportunity that wouldn't be open to women students; only the male students were given access. It's a recurring theme that we're often sidelined in terms of access to sports facilities." This underscores the reality that equal team numbers do not translate into equal quality of experience for women in sports.

Frustration and Disappointment

While the athletes' stories are filled with instances of motivation and perseverance, they also frequently expressed frustration and disappointment. The lack of institutional support, gender discrimination, and the constraints imposed by the dress code were recurring sources of discontent and disillusionment.

Sarina often felt frustrated by the limited access to training facilities and the strict enforcement of dress codes by university security. As she explained: "These barriers not only hindered my performance but also dampened my enthusiasm for sports, leading to a sense of disappointment and discouragement". Setareh experienced similar frustrations due to the poor conditions of university sports facilities and the additional hijab measures required during competitions. "The inadequate support from university officials and the lack of recognition for women's sports added to my feelings of disillusionment and decreased motivation".

Bahar recounted instances of stress and frustration stemming from arguments with university security about sports clothing, which ultimately led to a serious ankle injury during practice. "The substandard conditions of sports venues and the disappointing quality of amenities further exacerbated my feelings of frustration and discontent".

Religious Restrictions and Cultural Norms

Dress Code and Hijab

The strict enforcement of dress codes, including the mandatory hijab, posed a major barrier to the athletes' participation and performance in sports. The dress codes not only restricted their physical movements but also affected their psychological well-being and confidence. Neda recounted how she and her teammates chose to wear their scarves loosely as a form of subtle protest against the restrictive dress code. This act of defiance led to them being barred from competing, highlighting the stringent enforcement of dress codes and its detrimental impact on their sports participation.

Marjan faced significant challenges during mountaineering due to the strict dress code. "The enforcement of modest clothing, including the hijab, made it difficult for me to perform optimally and added to the physical strain of the sport". Similarly, Sarina also struggled with the dress code enforced by university security, which limited her participation in track and field events. As she explained: "The constant pressure to adhere to the dress code detracted from my focus and performance, impacting my overall sports experience".

The accounts of the six athletes underscore the profound impact of inadequate facilities, poor-quality equipment, and strict dress codes on their sports participation. These institutional barriers not only hindered their ability to train and compete effectively but also affected their morale, confidence, and overall experience in university sport.

Balancing Sports and Education

Participants often had to navigate the cultural emphasis on education over sports, which was a common concern among families.

Bahar faced initial hesitation from her family regarding her involvement in sports, as they prioritized her education over extracurricular activities. Coming from a traditional background,

her family was not initially supportive of her participation in university sports. However, as Bahar's passion for basketball grew and she began to excel in her physical education major, her family's perspective shifted. They started to recognize the positive impact that sports had on her well-being and academic performance, leading them to become some of her biggest supporters. "Initially, my family was hesitant about the whole sports thing, focusing more on my education. However, they saw how passionate I was and gradually began to support my involvement in sports".

Setareh highlighted the challenge of balancing sports and education due to the cultural emphasis on academic success. "My family supported my sports activities but emphasized the importance of education due to the lack of income from sports".

Theme 2: Resistance, Solidarity and Support

This theme focuses on how resistance, solidarity, and support systems shaped the experiences of women athletes. Despite facing challenges like restrictive dress codes and limited resources, the athletes found strength in support from family, friends, and teammates. This support helped them stay motivated and overcome obstacles in sports. Acts of resistance, such as challenging unfair rules, and solidarity among peers played a vital role in creating a sense of unity. These efforts not only pushed back against inequalities but also built a strong community of support, empowering the athletes to advocate for better conditions and equal treatment in sports.

Support Systems and Relationships

Family and Friends

Support from family and friends played a vital role in the athletes' ability to participate and succeed in sports. For many participants, family support was not just emotional but also

logistical, providing the necessary encouragement and resources to continue their athletic pursuits.

Sarina shared how her family supported her sports activities by offering emotional and logistical support, which was crucial for her continued participation despite the challenges she faced, such as limited access to training facilities and strict dress codes:

> In the beginning, my family was a bit hesitant about the whole sports thing. We come from a traditional background, and they didn't know much about university sports, so they weren't too keen on me getting involved. But everything started to change when I decided to major in physical education. They saw how passionate I was about it and gradually began to support my involvement in sports. They even came to watch me play sometimes, which was a big deal. Initially, they had their doubts, but as they noticed my achievements and how happy sports made me, they completely turned around and became some of my biggest cheerleaders.

Neda initially faced concerns from her family about balancing sports with her studies, but their support grew as they saw her enthusiasm and commitment:

> When I first got interested in playing sports at university, my family wasn't too excited about it. They were much more focused on my studies. They wanted me to spend more time on my books rather than on the sports field. However, their attitude changed as they noticed my passion and happiness. My father and brother, both athletes, started to encourage me significantly, supporting me to engage in sports daily and even encouraging me to go to the gym and exercise when I didn't feel like it.

Teammates and Coaches

The camaraderie and solidarity among teammates were recurring themes in the athletes' stories. Teammates often shared similar challenges and supported each other, fostering a sense of community and resilience. Coaches, while supportive of the athletes, frequently expressed frustration with the institutional barriers that impeded their ability to provide better training and competition conditions.

Neda's journey in university sports was significantly shaped by the support and solidarity among her teammates. A pivotal moment that highlighted this bond occurred during a time of heightened activism when many women were standing up for their rights. Neda and her teammates decided to show their support for these movements by wearing their scarves loosely around their necks instead of the traditional way. This act of solidarity was met with resistance from the security guards at the opposing college, who refused to let them enter the competition venue. As Neda explained:

> Even though we were sent back and missed out on playing, that moment brought my teammates and me closer together. We knew we had each other's back, and none of us really wanted to be in the competition if it meant going against what we believed in. It was a tough time, but it's something I remember vividly because it showed how strong we could be together, even when things didn't go our way.

Setareh highlighted the encouragement from friends and the lack of accountability and support from university officials, which contrasted with the camaraderie she experienced among her peers in the sports community. "Friends encouraged and supported my sports endeavors, even when university officials lacked accountability and support for women athletes".

Emotional and Logistical Support

Emotional and logistical support from family, friends, and teammates was indispensable for these athletes. This support helped them navigate the myriad challenges related to sports participation, including inadequate facilities, strict dress codes, and gender discrimination. Marjan and Neda both recounted how their teammates' solidarity, particularly during politically sensitive times and acts of protest, brought them closer together. Marjan shared, "One of the best moments I experienced as a woman doing sports at the university was the time I climbed Mount Damavand. This adventure was not easy due to a lot of hurdles we faced within the university's system". Neda added, "When my teammates and I decided to wear our scarves loosely as a form of protest, we knew we had each other's backs, and that brought us closer together".

The support systems and relationships surrounding the athletes were pivotal in their sports participation. Family and friends provided essential emotional and logistical backing, while teammates and coaches fostered a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. These relationships helped the athletes navigate and overcome significant challenges, highlighting the critical role of community and support in their athletic journeys.

Acts of Resistance and Solidarity

Protests and Advocacy

The athletes employed various forms of protest to challenge the restrictive gender norms and institutional barriers they faced. These acts of resistance were not only a means of asserting their rights but also a way to foster unity and solidarity among themselves.

Neda shared a poignant example of resistance when she and her teammates chose to wear their scarves loosely during a competition as a form of subtle protest against the strict dress code.

This act of defiance led to our disqualification, but it significantly strengthened the bond among us, highlighting our collective resolve to challenge unfair regulations.

Marjan's dedication of her Mount Damavand climb to Mahsa Amini, a young woman whose death was linked to mandatory hijab laws, was a powerful act of resistance. This dedication was a symbol of defiance against the oppressive dress codes and a statement of solidarity with the broader women's rights movement in Iran.

Advocacy for Equality

Beyond individual acts of protest, the athletes demonstrated a strong commitment to advocating for better conditions and equal treatment for women in sports. Their descriptions reflect a deep-seated desire to bring about change and improve the sporting environment for future generations of women athletes.

Sarina expressed her hopes for gender equality in sports, envisioning a future where universities treat women's sports with the same respect and resources as men's sports. Her desire to be a role model for younger girls and her participation in advocacy efforts underscore her commitment to challenging and changing societal perceptions.

Setareh also highlighted the importance of advocacy, noting the better facilities and broadcasting opportunities provided for men. Her experiences fueled her determination to fight for equal recognition and support for women athletes, reflecting her broader commitment to gender equality in sports.

Fostering Solidarity

Acts of resistance and advocacy were instrumental in fostering a sense of solidarity among the athletes. The shared experiences of challenging institutional barriers and gender norms created strong bonds, and a collective identity centered on mutual support and empowerment.

Neda's account illustrated how acts of protest, such as wearing scarves loosely, not only challenged restrictive dress codes but also brought her team closer together. "This solidarity was crucial in maintaining our morale and commitment despite the obstacles we faced".

Marjan's participation in mountaineering and dodgeball during politically sensitive times showcased the importance of mutual support among teammates. Her acts of resistance against strict dress codes and inadequate facilities were supported by her peers, reinforcing the collective spirit of defiance and solidarity.

The acts of resistance and solidarity played a crucial role in the descriptions offered by the six Iranian women athletes. Their protests and advocacy efforts not only challenged gender norms and institutional barriers but also fostered a strong sense of unity and mutual support. The athletes' commitment to advocating for better conditions and equal treatment reflects a broader desire for systemic change and empowerment, ensuring that future generations of women athletes can thrive in a more inclusive and supportive sporting environment.

Theme 3: Personal Growth and Development

This theme explores the personal growth and development that came from the athletes' involvement in sports. While participating in sports brought challenges, it also became a powerful source of motivation and self-improvement. The athletes experienced a mix of emotions—joy and pride from their achievements, alongside frustration from ongoing struggles like dress code restrictions and lack of facilities. Despite these hurdles, sports played a crucial role in building their confidence, resilience, and healthy habits. The lessons they learned—perseverance, teamwork, and self-advocacy—extended beyond the playing field, shaping their approach to life and contributing to their overall well-being.

The Complex Emotional Landscape

The athletes' accounts reveal a complex emotional landscape characterized by both positive and negative experiences. On the one hand, sports participation was a source of motivation, resilience, and personal growth. On the other hand, the persistent challenges and barriers led to significant frustration and disappointment. Marjan's experience of dedicating her Mount Damavand climb to Mahsa Amini, a symbol of resistance against mandatory hijab laws, brought her happiness and motivation. "However, the constant struggle with dress code enforcement and inadequate facilities often left me feeling demotivated and constrained".

Neda and her teammates' acts of solidarity during women's rights activism were moments of pride and empowerment. "Yet, the recurring arguments with security over dress code violations and the poor conditions for travel and accommodation created a backdrop of continuous frustration and dissatisfaction".

The emotional and psychological impact of sports participation for these six Iranian women athletes is marked by a dynamic interplay of motivation, perseverance, frustration, and disappointment. Their stories highlight the resilience and inner strength required to navigate the numerous challenges they faced, as well as the significant emotional toll imposed by institutional barriers and gender discrimination.

Motivation and Perseverance

Participation in sports provided a crucial avenue for building confidence and resilience among the athletes. Despite the obstacles they faced, their commitment to sports was unwavering, and their perseverance was a testament to their inner strength and determination. For example, Marjan's journey was marked by her determination to overcome significant

challenges, such as climbing Mount Damavand without proper footwear. "This experience taught me a lot about perseverance and advocating for myself in challenging situations".

Samaneh discussed how joining the handball team with no prior experience was initially daunting. "However, through hard work and perseverance, I improved my skills and eventually outperformed some of my more experienced teammates".

Neda highlighted how participation in sports boosted her confidence and social skills. "Joining the team changed my daily routine. I started practicing almost every day, and I got to know my teammates really well".

Health and Lifestyle

Participation in sports contributed positively to the athletes' physical and mental health, encouraging healthier lifestyle choices and habits.

Bahar noted the positive impact of sports on her physical health and lifestyle. "Winning competitions and the excitement of improving motivated me to continue working hard and take sports more seriously, leading to healthier habits such as better nutrition".

Setareh emphasized how sports participation improved her performance and confidence, which translated to other areas of her life. "Overcoming initial challenges and stress led to improved performance and confidence in sports and other aspects of life".

Sarina shared how her experience in sports fostered a focus on health and nutrition, significantly enhancing her overall life quality. "Participation in sports contributed positively to my physical and mental health, encouraging healthier lifestyle choices and habits".

Life Lessons from Sports

The athletes shared how their involvement in sports taught them valuable life lessons such as perseverance, self-advocacy, and the importance of teamwork.

Marjan reflected on how climbing Mount Damavand taught her perseverance and self-advocacy. "This experience taught me a lot about perseverance and advocating for myself in challenging situations".

Setareh's involvement in sports provided her with numerous life lessons that extended beyond the athletic arena. Through her participation in university sports, she learned the value of hard work, teamwork, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Setareh's involvement in sports provided her with numerous life lessons that extended beyond the athletic arena. Through her participation in university sports, she learned the value of hard work, teamwork, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. "Sports have taught me the importance of hard work, teamwork, and living a healthier lifestyle. Being part of the team became much more important to me than just the grade. It was about enjoying the sport I love, making friends, and learning new things that helped me in class and in life".

Neda highlighted the lessons in hard work, teamwork, and living a healthier lifestyle that she gained from sports participation. "Being part of the team became much more important to me than just the grade. It was about enjoying the sport I love, making friends, and learning new things that helped me in class and in life".

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sports, particularly in relation to gender. This study sought to explore (1) the lived experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sport, and (2) how these athletes explore barriers, supports, and points of resistance in sport. In Chapter 4, Findings, I presented background on the women athletes who were the participants in this study, provided an

explanation of how I organized the several layers of data analyses and a description of why I included the preliminary levels of findings in the various appendices, and then presented the three themes that I discerned and developed from the several levels of data analyses. This chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and their contribution to the existing literature. The discussion will be structured around the two research questions to highlight how they were answered through the research process.

The role of support systems, including family, friends, teammates, and coaches, was crucial in facilitating the athletes' participation in sports. Family support provided both emotional encouragement and logistical assistance, which was vital for the athletes to overcome various challenges. This mirrors findings by Ehsani et al. (2007) on the role of family in supporting women's sports activities despite societal constraints. Participants like Sarina highlighted how their families offered not only moral support but also practical help, enabling them to navigate challenges such as limited training facilities and strict dress codes. This can be understood through Connell's (2009) dimension of emotion and human relations, where support systems played a significant role in shaping how these athletes navigated gendered barriers. Teammates and coaches also played significant roles in providing moral support and fostering a sense of belonging and motivation. This is consistent with studies by Bowes et al. (2020) and Bruening et al. (2009), which highlight the importance of supportive relationships in the athletic context. For instance, Marjan's relationship with her coach provided her with the necessary encouragement to persist despite institutional barriers, reinforcing the critical role of supportive networks in sports. Participants reported encountering numerous institutional barriers and gender discrimination, such as unequal access to facilities and resources, and restrictive dress codes. The gender division of labor, another dimension of Connell's framework, becomes evident here, as resources

like facilities and equipment were disproportionately allocated to men's sports, reflecting the systemic inequality in sports infrastructure. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on women's sports in Iran and other Islamic countries (Sadeghi et al., 2018; Pfister, 2010). Limited access to suitable facilities was a common issue, with many participants having to train in inadequate environments. This reflects the findings of Mirghafoori et al. (2009) on the lack of proper sports infrastructure for women in Iran. Gender discrimination manifested in various forms, including restrictive dress codes that hindered performance. This is supported by Alizadeh (2017), who discusses how dress code regulations restrict women's full participation in sports. Participants like Neda described how these institutional barriers not only affected their physical performance but also their psychological well-being, leading to feelings of frustration and demotivation.

The emotional and psychological impact of participating in sports under restrictive and discriminatory conditions was significant. Participants reported feelings of frustration, anxiety, and isolation, but also moments of empowerment and resilience. Connell's dimension of gender relations of power helped illuminate how male-dominated policies and control over facilities and resources in university sports settings affected the athletes' emotional well-being. Feelings of frustration and anxiety were common, particularly related to societal and institutional barriers. This aligns with the work of Duncan and Hasbrook (2017), who found that discriminatory practices in sports can lead to adverse psychological outcomes for women athletes. Despite these challenges, many participants demonstrated resilience and found empowerment through their sports participation. This finding echoes the research by Walseth (2006), who highlights how sports can be a site of resistance and personal growth for women in restrictive environments. For

example, Bahar's narrative illustrated how overcoming these emotional challenges through sports participation led to increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of identity. Participants engaged in various acts of resistance and solidarity, challenging gender norms and advocating for greater equality in sports. These acts included advocating for better facilities and forming supportive networks with other female athletes. Acts of resistance, such as challenging discriminatory policies and advocating for better resources, were common. This is tied to Connell's dimension of gender culture and symbolism, where athletes resisted symbolic gender norms such as dress codes and fought against the cultural expectations placed on them in sports settings. This is consistent with Qureshi and Ghouri (2011), who discuss how Muslim women athletes navigate and resist societal restrictions. Participants like Samaneh actively sought to improve conditions for women athletes by campaigning for equal access to sports facilities. Forming networks of support and solidarity with other female athletes was critical for many participants. This aligns with Ahmed (2020), who underscores the importance of solidarity in overcoming barriers to sports participation. These networks provided a platform for sharing experiences and strategies, fostering a collective strength that helped participants navigate their challenging sports environment.

Cultural and religious norms significantly influenced participants' experiences, shaping societal attitudes towards women in sports and influencing institutional policies. Cultural expectations often limited women's participation in sports, with societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles being a significant barrier. This finding reflects Abbaspour (2019) and Fathi (2018), who highlight the impact of cultural norms on women's sports participation in Iran. Participants like Sarina faced societal disapproval, which impacted their ability to participate freely in sports. Religious norms, particularly dress codes, posed significant challenges but also

provided a framework within which participants negotiated their sports participation. This finding aligns with Mirsafian et al. (2014), who discuss the complex interplay between religious beliefs and sports participation for Muslim women. For example, Setareh described how she adapted her sportswear to comply with religious guidelines while still striving to perform at her best.

Despite the challenges, participants reported significant personal growth and development through their sports participation, including improvements in self-confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of agency. Sports participation fostered self-confidence and leadership skills, as described by participants like Neda and Bahar. This is consistent with the findings of Ehsani et al. (2007) who highlight the personal development benefits of sports for women. Engaging in sports also enhanced participants' sense of agency, enabling them to challenge gender norms and assert their identities. This finding aligns with the work of Walseth (2006) on the empowering potential of sports for women in restrictive environments. Through sports, participants like Marjan were able to cultivate a stronger sense of self and navigate societal expectations more effectively, demonstrating the transformative power of sports in their lives.

This chapter has discussed the findings from the study within the context of existing literature, highlighting the complex interplay of support systems, institutional barriers, emotional impacts, acts of resistance, cultural and religious norms, and personal growth in the experiences of Iranian women athletes. The implications for policy and practice underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to promote gender equality in sports. Future research should continue to explore these themes, with a particular focus on longitudinal studies to track changes over time and the impact of policy interventions.

The discussion and implications provide contributions to the existing literature on Iranian women athletes' experiences in inter-university sports. One novel contribution is the detailed examination of family support systems, revealing the unique ways Iranian women athletes navigate limited facilities and societal restrictions through practical family support, adding a new dimension to the understanding of support systems in sports. Additionally, the research offers new insights into the psychological impact of gender discrimination, highlighting feelings of frustration and demotivation that hinder physical performance. Another novel finding is that sports participation can lead to empowerment and resilience, with detailed descriptions showing how athletes gain self-confidence and a stronger sense of identity despite significant societal and institutional barriers. The study also highlights specific acts of resistance and solidarity, such as advocating for better resources and forming networks among women athletes, providing a unique perspective on how collective action helps athletes navigate and challenge restrictive norms. Furthermore, the research contributes new insights into the dual role of religious norms as both barriers and frameworks within which athletes negotiate their participation, adding complexity to the understanding of cultural and religious influences on sports participation. Lastly, the emphasis on personal development, particularly the acquisition of leadership skills and enhanced sense of agency through sports participation, extends the literature by underscoring the broader societal implications of sports engagement beyond physical health and fitness. These contributions collectively enhance our understanding of the multifaceted experiences of Iranian women athletes and highlight the transformative potential of sports in restrictive environments.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Future Research Directions

In this chapter, I discuss the limitations of this study in efforts to contextualize the implications of my work and how future research may build upon it.

During this study, three participants were unable to participate in the second round of interviews. This attrition resulted in a reduced sample size for the follow-up interviews, potentially limiting the depth and breadth of data collected. The absence of these participants' second interviews might have constrained the ability to fully capture the evolution of their experiences and the nuances of their perspectives over time. Future studies should aim to implement strategies to minimize participant attrition, such as offering more flexible scheduling options or maintaining regular contact to ensure continued engagement.

All interviews were conducted in Farsi and later translated into English for analysis. While every effort was made to ensure accurate translations, some nuances and cultural contexts might not have been perfectly conveyed in the English versions. Language inherently carries cultural meanings that may not have direct equivalents in another language, potentially leading to a loss of subtle but significant insights. To address this limitation, future research could involve bilingual researchers or employ back-translation techniques to enhance the accuracy and cultural fidelity of the translated data.

The statement that language inherently carries cultural meanings that may not have direct equivalents in another language is supported by several research findings. Yunus et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of accurately reporting the translation process to preserve participants' meanings and ensure research trustworthiness in cross-language qualitative health research. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2024) argue that equivalence in translation is not always possible, and that embracing uncertainty and difference can enhance the validity of qualitative research by allowing researchers to interrogate their positionality and power dynamics. Thompson and Dooley (2019) highlight the necessity of ensuring translation fidelity in multilingual research to avoid inaccurate conclusions and maintain research rigor. Clark et al. (2017) provide practical

guidelines for transcription and translation protocols in sensitive cross-cultural research to assure data accuracy and study validity. Finally, Gawlewicz (2019) discusses the complex epistemological and methodological issues related to translation in qualitative research, emphasizing its non-neutral nature and the ethical issues linked to representation and meaning distortion.

The findings of this study are deeply rooted in the specific cultural, social, and political context of Iran. While this provides valuable insights into the experiences of Iranian women athletes, it also means that the findings may not be directly transferable to women athletes in other Muslim-majority countries or different cultural contexts. The unique intersection of religion, politics, and culture in Iran shapes the experiences of women in ways that may differ from those in other regions.

Future Research Directions

Building on the insights gained from this study, several avenues for future research are recommended to further explore the experiences of women athletes in Muslim-majority countries and enhance our understanding of gender dynamics in sport. Future research should consider conducting comparative studies in other Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. These countries have different cultural, social, and political landscapes, which can provide a richer understanding of how varying contexts influence women's participation in sport. By using the themes identified in this study—such as support systems, institutional barriers, emotional and psychological impact, acts of resistance, cultural and religious norms, and personal growth—researchers can explore how these themes manifest differently in various Muslim countries and what unique challenges and opportunities arise in each context.

Longitudinal studies that follow participants over an extended period can provide deeper insights into how their experiences and perceptions evolve. Such studies can capture changes in attitudes, institutional support, and personal growth, offering a dynamic view of the impact of sport participation on women athletes' lives.

Research supports the need for longitudinal studies in this context area. Eime et al. (2020) studied the patterns of sport participation and retention among women and girls over seven years, finding significant variations in retention rates based on age, emphasizing the need for age-appropriate sports programs and retention strategies (Eime et al., 2020). Thompson et al. (2021) analyzed the long-term stability of eating disorders in female athletes from college to retirement, highlighting ongoing issues with body image and nutrition that extend beyond active sports participation (Thompson et al., 2021). Miles and Benn (2016) explored the experiences of Muslim women in university sports, noting multiple socio-cultural, familial, and religious constraints that impact their participation (Miles & Benn, 2016). Ahmad et al. (2020) conducted a critical dialogue with Muslim women and sports facilitators to explore the opportunities and constraints for Muslim women's participation in sport, emphasizing the need for cultural diversity in sport programs (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Future research should explore the intersectionality of gender with other social categories such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, and religion. Understanding how these intersecting identities impact women's sport experiences can provide a more nuanced understanding of the barriers and facilitators they encounter.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guides

- Review the consent form with the participant. Ask if the participant has any questions.
- Request consent for participation, and then for recording, and record both in the consent log.

Interview #1 Topics:

Temporality (Commonplace of Time):

1. Can you tell me a story of you as a woman in Iranian university sport?
2. Can you tell me how you became an inter-university sport athlete?
3. Tell me about a high point in your inter-university sport experiences.
4. Tell me about a low point in your inter-university sport experiences.
5. Tell me about a turning point in your inter-university sport experiences.

Sociability (Commonplace of Identity and Relationships):

1. Can you tell me stories of your experiences of family, in relation to Iranian university sport?
2. Can you tell me stories of your experiences of religion in relation to Iranian university sport?
3. Can you tell me stories of your experiences of dress codes in relation to Iranian university sport?
4. Can you tell me stories of your experiences as a woman in Iranian inter-university sport?
5. Can you tell me what the term 'gender' means to you (i) in relation to women athletes? (ii) In relation to inter-university sport for women?

Place (Commonplace of Space):

1. Can you tell me about the place(s) you participate in for university sport?

Conclusion and request

Thank you very much for meeting with me today.

The next time we meet, will you please select something (e.g., a picture, word, or item) that you feel best describes your experiences with university sport. I will ask you to share this with me at the beginning of our next interview.

Interview #2 Topics:

Temporality (Commonplace of Time):

1. Can you tell me what you thought about after our last interview. Do you have questions? Would you like to add something that you thought about afterward?

Sociability (Commonplace of Identity and Relationships):

1. Last time we met I asked you to bring a picture, word, or thing that best describes your experiences with university sport. Please tell me about them.
2. Question(s) related to resistance of gender (using stories from interview #1 to refer back)

پیوست الف: راهنمای مصاحبه

مصاحبه #1 موضوعات:

(مکان مشترک زمان) :

آیا می‌توانید به من یک داستان از خود به عنوان یک زن در ورزش دانشگاهی ایران بگویید؟

آیا می‌توانید به من بگویید چگونه به عنوان یک ورزشکار در ورزش دانشگاهی شدید؟

درباره یک لحظه برجسته در تجربیات ورزش دانشگاهی شما بگویید.

درباره یک نقطه ضعف در تجربیات ورزش دانشگاهی شما بگویید.

درباره یک لحظه تحول‌آفرین در تجربیات ورزش دانشگاهی شما بگویید.

(مکان مشترک هویت و روابط):

آیا می‌توانید به من داستان‌های تجربیات خود از خانواده را در ارتباط با ورزش دانشگاهی ایران بگویید؟

آیا می‌توانید به من داستان‌های تجربیات خود از دین در ارتباط با ورزش دانشگاهی ایران بگویید؟

آیا می‌توانید به من داستان‌های تجربیات خود از کدهای لباس در ارتباط با ورزش دانشگاهی ایران بگویید؟

آیا می‌توانید به من داستان‌های تجربیات خود به عنوان یک زن در ورزش دانشگاهی ایران بگویید؟

ارتباط با (ii) ارتباط با ورزشکاران زن؟ (i) آیا می‌توانید به من بگویید که واژه "جنسیت" به نظر شما چه معنایی دارد ورزش دانشگاهی زنان؟

(مکان مشترک فضا):

آیا می‌توانید درباره مکان‌هایی که برای ورزش دانشگاهی شرکت می‌کنید، به من بگویید؟

برای مصاحبه بعدی، لطفاً تصویر، کلمه یا شیئی را بیاورید که بهترین توصیف کننده تجربه شما از ورزش دانشگاهی باشد.

نتیجه گیری و درخواست

از اینکه امروز با من ملاقات کردید بسیار سپاسگزارم.

دفعه بعد که همدیگر را می بینیم، لطفا بیاورید...

مصاحبه #2 موضوعات:

(مکان مشترک زمان):

آیا می‌توانید به من بگویید چه فکری پس از مصاحبه گذشته دارید. آیا سوالی دارید؟ آیا می‌خواهید چیزی اضافه کنید که بعداً به ذهنتان رسیده است؟

(مکان مشترک هویت و روابط):

آخرین بار که دیدار کردیم، از شما خواستم که یک تصویر، واژه یا شیء که بهترین تجربیات شما با ورزش دانشگاهی را توصیف می‌کند، بیاورید. لطفاً درباره آنها بگویید. سوال(های) مرتبط با مقاومت جنسیتی (استفاده از داستان‌های مصاحبه #1 به عنوان مرجع

Appendix B: Letter of invitation (e-mail message)

Dear [Participant Name],

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my master's thesis research project: Exploring the gendered experiences of women inter-university athletes in Iranian Azad Universities' sport. I hope this letter finds you well. As a reminder, my name is Kiana Kohandel, and I am a Master's student in the Department of Sport Management at Brock University in Ontario, Canada.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the experiences of Iranian women athletes in inter-university sport. If you choose to participate, I will ask that you take part in two interviews, during which I will ask about your experiences as a woman competing in university sport. Each interview will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes in duration and, with your consent, will be video recorded and transcribed. The interviews will be conducted on Skype at a time and date that is convenient for you.

Attached to this e-mail message you will find the consent form for this study. The consent form includes detailed information about what you are being asked to do, how your information will be used and stored, and more.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file #23-176).

If you have questions about the study, or you would like to schedule an interview, please contact me by e-mail: kk20qz@brocku.ca

Thank you for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Kiana Kohandel, M.A. student

Department of Sport Management, Brock University
kk20qz@brocku.ca

پیوست ب: نامه دعوت (پیام ایمیل)

با سلام [نام شرکت‌کننده] عزیز،

از اظهار تمایل شما به مشارکت در پروژه تحقیقاتی مقاله‌ی ارشد من، با عنوان: "بررسی تجربیات جنسیتی ورزشکاران زن در ورزش دانشگاهی دانشگاه‌های آزاد ایران"، متشکرم. امیدوارم این نامه‌ی شما را در وضعیت خوبی بیابد. به عنوان یادآوری، نام من کیانا کهندل است و من یک دانشجوی ارشد در دانشکده مدیریت ورزش در دانشگاه بروک در انتاریو، کانادا هستم.

هدف اصلی این تحقیق بررسی تجربیات ورزشکاران زن ایرانی در ورزش دانشگاهی است. اگر تصمیم به مشارکت گرفتید، از شما خواهم خواست که در دو مصاحبه شرکت کنید، در طی آن سوالاتی در مورد تجربیات شما به عنوان یک زن در ورزش دانشگاهی مطرح خواهم کرد. هر مصاحبه تقریباً 60 تا 90 دقیقه به طول می‌انجامد و با اجازه شما، ضبط و تحریر شده ویدیویی خواهد شد. مصاحبات بر روی اسکایپ در زمان و تاریخی که برای شما مناسب است، برگزار خواهند شد.

فرم موافقت برای این مطالعه را در این ایمیل پیوست کرده‌ام. فرم موافقت شامل اطلاعات دقیقی در مورد آنچه از شما خواسته می‌شود، چگونگی استفاده و نگهداری اطلاعات شما و سایر جزئیات مربوطه می‌شود.

این تحقیق مورد بازبینی و موافقت از سوی کمیته اخلاق تحقیقاتی دانشگاه بروک [۲۳۱۹۶] قرار گرفته است.

اگر سوالاتی در مورد تحقیق دارید یا می‌خواهید یک مصاحبه را زمان‌بندی کنید، لطفاً با من تماس بگیرید :
kk20qz@brocku.ca

از شما برای در نظر گرفتن مشارکت در این تحقیق سپاسگزارم.

با احترام،

کیانا کهندل
دانشجوی ارشد
دانشکده مدیریت ورزش، دانشگاه بروک
kk20qz@brocku.ca

Department of Sport Management
Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
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1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON
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Appendix C

Consent form

January 2024

Project Title: Exploring the gendered experiences of women inter-university athletes in Iranian Azad Universities' sport**.**

Project Title: Exploring the gendered experiences of women inter-university athletes in Iranian Azad Universities' sport.

Principal Investigator (PI):

Dr. Michele K. Donnelly, Assistant Professor

Department of Sport Management

Brock University

mdonnelly2@brocku.ca

Principal Student Investigator (PSI):

Kiana Kohandel, Master's Student

Department of Sport Management

Brock University

kk20qz@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this research project is to explore Iranian women athletes' experiences in inter-university sport, with a particular focus on gender.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be invited to engage in two interviews with Kiana Kohandel, the Principal Student Investigator (PSI). Each interview is expected to last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted via Skype video call at a time and date that are convenient for you, and may be conducted in either English or Farsi. With your consent, these interviews will be video recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Within one week after each interview, the PSI will send you the transcript of the interview. You will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy, and to request any additions or changes. This may take you approximately one hour for each interview. You will have two weeks to share your feedback

about the transcript with the PSI, and after that we will assume that the transcript is fine. The total amount of time you are being asked to spend as a participant in this study is between three and five hours.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

There are no direct benefits to you as a result of participating in this study. You may appreciate the opportunity to share your experiences. The study will contribute to a broader understanding of the gender-based experiences of Iranian women participating in university sport. The findings from this research will be used to develop recommendations that will be shared with Iranian universities with the hope of enhancing gender equality in Iranian university sport.

There is a possibility that you may experience feelings of frustration, anger, or distress due to the nature of the information you will be asked to share about your experiences as a woman university athlete. You are able to refuse to answer any questions you do not want to, and to end the interview at any time. Nobody but the researchers will know that you participated in this study or what you said; however, the community of women university athletes in Iran is relatively small. Others may be able to identify you based on the stories you tell. Please keep this in mind as you choose what to share with the researchers.

The researchers will do everything possible to ensure the security of the interview recordings and transcripts. These will be kept in password protected files on a password protected personal computer accessible only to the researchers. You can read information about Skype's privacy policy here: https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-ca/privacystatement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

If you choose to remain confidential – only the PI and PSI will know that you participated and what you said – then your participation and all information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name and identifying information (e.g., your sport, branch of Azad University) about you will not appear in the PSI's master's thesis or any report resulting from this study (e.g., scholarly publications, conference presentations). De-identified quotations will be used and attributed to a pseudonym assigned by the PSI.

You may choose to have people know that you participated in this study and what you said. If this is your choice, your first name and possible identifying information (e.g., your sport, unique experiences) will be shared in publicly available reports. Please carefully consider the potential risks associated with your decision.

Interview recordings will be deleted as soon as the interview is transcribed, and the transcription will be labelled with your pseudonym only. All identifiable information (including your name and e-mail address) will be kept in a password protected file on the PSI's personal, password-protected laptop, and only the PSI and PI will have access to it. All identifiable information will be destroyed at the completion of the study (August 2024). De-identified data will be retained by the PSI for a period of five years after the completion of the study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Until August 2024, you may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the PSI. After August 2024, the list matching participant names and pseudonyms will be destroyed, and it will not be possible to identify and remove your data from the study.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. If you would like, a summary of the study findings will be shared with you by e-mail in September 2024.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Kiana Kohandel or Dr. Michele K. Donnelly using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (file #23-176). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Consent form. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name:
_____

Signature: _____ Date:
_____

I would like to be given/choose a pseudonym [ ]

I would like my real name to be used [ ]

I agree to be video recorded [ ]

I agree to be audio recorded [ ]

I would like to receive a summary of the study findings [ ]

پیوست ج: فرم موافقت

ژانویه 2024

عنوان پروژه: بررسی تجربیات جنسیتی ورزشکاران زن در ورزش دانشگاهی دانشگاه‌های آزاد ایران.

محقق اصلی :(PI) دکتر میشل کی. دانلی mdonnelly2@brocku.ca
محقق اصلی دانشجو :(PSI) کیانا کهندل، دانشجوی ارشدkk20qz@brocku.ca
دانشکده مدیریت ورزش دانشکده مدیریت ورزش
دانشگاه بروک دانشگاه بروک

دعوتنامه
شما دعوت می‌شوید تا در یک تحقیق شرکت کنید که تحقیقات را دربر می‌گیرد. هدف این پروژه تحقیقاتی بررسی تجربیات ورزشکاران زن ایرانی در ورزش دانشگاهی با تأکید ویژه بر جنسیت است.

چه انجام داد می‌شود
به عنوان یک شرکت‌کننده، دعوت می‌شوید تا در دو مصاحبه با کیانا کهندل، محقق اصلی (PSI) شرکت کنید. انتظار می‌رود هر مصاحبه تقریباً 60 تا 90 دقیقه به طول بی‌اندازد. مصاحبات از طریق تماس ویدئویی اسکایپ در زمان و تاریخی که برای شما مناسب است برگزار خواهند شد و ممکن است به زبان انگلیسی یا فارسی انجام شود. با موافقت شما، این مصاحبات ضبط و برای تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها تحریر خواهند شد. در هفته‌ای که پس از هر مصاحبه است، PSIبه شما ترانسکریپت مصاحبه را ارسال خواهد کرد. از شما خواهیم خواست تا ترانسکریپت را برای دقت بررسی کرده و هر افزودنی یا تغییری که نیاز باشد درخواست کنید. شما دو هفته وقت دارید تا بازخورد خود را درباره ترانسکریپت با PSI به اشتراک بگذارید و بعد از آن فرض می‌شود که ترانسکریپت قابل قبول است.

مزایا و مخاطرات احتمالی
هیچ مزایای مستقیمی برای شما از مشارکت در این مطالعه به دست نخواهید آورد. شما ممکن است از فرصت به اشتراک‌گذاری تجربیات خود لذت ببرید. این مطالعه به درک گسترده‌تری از تجربیات زنان ایرانی در ورزش دانشگاهی کمک خواهد کرد. یافته‌های این تحقیق برای توسعه توصیه‌هاست که به امید افزایش برابری جنسیتی در ورزش دانشگاهی ایران به اشتراک گذاشته می‌شود.

ممکن است به دلیل ماهیت اطلاعاتی که از شما خواسته می‌شود در مورد تجربیات شما به اشتراک گذاشته شود، احساسات ناخوشایندی نظیر نارضایتی، خشم یا استرس تجربه کنید. شما می‌توانید از پاسخ دادن به هر سوالی که نخواهید، امتناع کنید و در هر زمان مصاحبه را پایان دهید. جز محققین کسی نخواهد دانست که شما در این تحقیق شرکت کرده‌اید یا چه چیزی

گفته‌اید؛ با این حال، جامعه ورزشکاران دانشگاهی زن در ایران نسبتاً کوچک است و دیگران ممکن است بتوانند شما را بر اساس داستان‌های شما شناسایی کنند. لطفاً این نکته را در نظر بگیرید تا در انتخاب اطلاعاتی که می‌خواهید با محققین به اشتراک بگذارید، دقت کنید.

محققین هر تلاشی را خواهند کرد تا امنیت ضبطها و ترانسکریپت‌ها را اطمینان دهند. این‌ها در فایل‌های محافظت شده با گذرواژه در روی یک کامپیوتر شخصی با گذرواژه‌ای که فقط برای محققین قابل دسترس است نگهداری خواهند شد. شما می‌توانید سیاست حریم خصوصی اسکایپ را در اینجا بخوانید-https://privacy.microsoft.com/en : ca/privacystatement.

محرمانگی
اگر تصمیم به محرمانه ماندن گرفتید - تنها PI و PSI خواهند دانست که شما شرکت کرده‌اید و چه چیزی گفته‌اید - شرکت شما و تمام اطلاعاتی که ارائه کرده‌اید محرمانه نگه داشته خواهد شد. نام و اطلاعات شناسایی شما در پایان‌نامه کارشناسی PSIیا هر گزارشی که نتیجه این تحقیق است (مانند انتشارات دانشگاهی، ارائه‌های کنفرانس) ظاهر نخواهد شد. نقل قول‌های غیرشناسایی با نام مستعاری که توسط PSI اختصاص داده شده است، استفاده خواهد شد.

ضبطهای مصاحبه‌ها به محض تحریر حذف خواهند شد و ترانسکریپت با تنها نام مستعار شما برچسب گذاری خواهد شد. تمام اطلاعات شناسایی (شامل نام و آدرس ایمیل شما) در یک فایل محافظت شده با گذرواژه در لپتاپ شخصیPSI ، که با گذرواژه محافظت شده است، نگهداری خواهد شد و تنها PSI و PI به آن دسترسی خواهند داشت. همه اطلاعات شناسایی به پایان تحقیق (اوت 2024) نابود خواهند شد. داده‌های غیرشناسایی توسط PSI برای مدت پنج سال پس از پایان تحقیق نگهداری خواهند شد.

شارکت داوطلبانه
مشارکت در این مطالعه اختیاری است. اگر بخواهید، می‌توانید از پاسخ به هر سوال یا شرکت در هر بخش از مطالعه خودداری کنید. تا آگوست 2024، می‌توانید هر زمان که بخواهید از مطالعه خارج شوید با تماس با .PSI پس از آگوست 2024، لیست متناظر با نام‌ها و نام‌های مستعار شرکت‌کنندگان از بین برده خواهد شد، و امکان شناسایی و حذف داده‌های شما از مطالعه وجود نخواهد داشت.

انتشار نتایج
نتایج این مطالعه ممکن است در ژورنال‌های حرفه‌ای منتشر و در کنفرانس‌ها ارائه شوند. اگر بخواهید، یک خلاصه از یافته‌های مطالعه تا اگوست 2024 از طریق ایمیل با شما به اشتراک گذاشته خواهد شد.

اطلاعات تماس و اخذ اجازه اخلاقی
اگر سوالی در مورد این مطالعه دارید یا نیاز به اطلاعات بیشتری دارید، لطفاً با Kiana Kohandel یا Dr. Michele K. Donnellyتماس بگیرید، از اطلاعات تماس فوق استفاده کنید. این مطالعه توسط شورای اخلاق تحقیقات در دانشگاه براک [۱۹۶-۲۳] بررسی و اخذ اجازه اخلاقی شده است. اگر سوالات یا نگرانی‌هایی در مورد حقوق شما به عنوان یک شرکت‌کننده در تحقیق دارید، لطفاً با دفتر اخلاق تحقیقات تماس بگیرید: (905) 688-5550 داخلی 3035، reb@brocku.ca.

از کمک شما در این پروژه متشکریم. لطفاً یک نسخه از این فرم را برای ثبت اطلاعات خود نگه دارید.

فرم موافقت

موافقت می‌کنم که در این مطالعه شرکت کنم که در بالا توضیح داده شده است. این تصمیم را بر اساس اطلاعاتی که در فرم موافقت خوانده‌ام گرفته‌ام. من فرصت داشتم جزئیات اضافی مورد نیاز خود را در مورد مطالعه دریافت کنم و درک دارم که ممکن است در آینده سوالاتی داشته باشم. من درک می‌کنم که می‌توانم هر زمان که بخواهم این موافقت را ابطال کنم.

نام_____ :

امضا: _____ تاریخ :

_____

مایل به داشتن/انتخاب نام مستعار هستم[ ]

مایل به استفاده از نام واقعی‌ام هستم[ ]

موافق به ضبط ویدئویی هستم[ ]

موافق به ضبط صوتی هستم[ ]

مایل به دریافت خلاصه‌ای از یافته‌های مطالعه هست[ ]

Appendix D: Recruitment post

آیا شما

- یک ورزشکار زن
- در حال رقابت در مسابقات ورزشی دانشگاه
- در دانشگاه های آزاد

آیا تمایل دارید در یک مطالعه درباره تجربیات ورزشکاران زن ایرانی در ورزش دانشگاهی شرکت کنید؟

شرکت‌کنندگان مطالعه دعوت می‌شوند تا:

- در دو مصاحبه به مدت 60 تا 90 دقیقه
- با استفاده از اسکایپ
- درباره تجربیات خود در ورزش دانشگاهی شرکت کنند

اگر سوالی دارید، لطفاً با کیانا کهندل (پژوهشگر اصلی) به:

- ایمیل آدرس kk20qz@brocku.caتماس بگیرید
- برای کسب اطلاعات بیشتر یا داوطلبی، به kiana-kohandel (اینستاگرام) پیام خصوصی ارسال کنید

این تحقیق زیر نظر دکتر میشل کی. دانلی (mdonnelly2@brocku.ca) انجام می‌شود وتوسط هیئت اخلاق پژوهشی دانشگاه بروک (23-176) تایید شده است. اگر سوالاتی در مورد حقوق شما به عنوان یک شرکت کننده دارید، لطفاً با هیئت اخلاقی پژوهشی
تماس بگیرید: 905-688-5550 داخلی 3035 یا reb@brocku.ca.

در صورت نیاز می توانید با 1480 خدمات پشتیبانی محلی در دسترس برای کمک به مقابله با استرس روانی تماس بگیرید.

Appendix E

Dear [Friend's Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

As you know, I am currently conducting research for my master's thesis in the Department of Sport Management at Brock University in Ontario, Canada. I am studying the gendered experiences of women inter-university athletes competing in Iranian Azad Universities' sport.

For this study, I am most interested in learning about women inter-university athletes' experiences in their own words. Knowing your connections with women student-athletes involved in inter-university sport, I would like to request that you share the information about the study that is attached to this email. Participation is completely voluntary, and interested participants should contact me directly via email or Instagram. Please know that I am contacting other people and sharing the study information on social media. If you do not know anybody who might be eligible or interested in participating in the study, or you do not want to share the study information, that is completely fine.

Attached to this email, you will find two things: 1. the social media post containing additional information about the study and my contact information; and 2. the consent form that provides more detailed information about the study, including my contact information.

As indicated on the attachments, this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from Brock University's Research Ethics Board (file #23-176).

If you have any questions, please let me know. And, if you receive any contacts from women who might be interested in participating, please ask them to contact me directly via email at kk20qz@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kiana Kohandel, M.A. student
Department of Sport Management, Brock University
kk20qz@brocku.ca

پیوستE

عزیز [نام دوست],

امیدوارم این پیام شما را در بهترین حالت پیدا کند.

همانطور که می‌دانید، در حال حاضر تحقیقات مربوط به پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد خود را در دانشکده مدیریت ورزشی دانشگاه براک در انتاریو، کانادا انجام می‌دهم. من در حال مطالعه تجارب جنسیتی زنان ورزشکاران دانشگاهی در ورزش دانشگاه‌های آزاد ایران هستم.

در این مطالعه، بیشتر علاقه‌مند به یادگیری درباره تجارب زنان ورزشکار دانشگاهی به زبان خودشان هستم. با توجه به ارتباطات شما با دانشجویان زن ورزشکار درگیر در ورزش دانشگاهی، خواهش می‌کنم اطلاعات مربوط به این مطالعه که به این ایمیل پیوست شده است، را به اشتراک بگذارید. مشارکت کاملاً اختیاری است و شرکت‌کنندگان علاقه‌مند باید به صورت مستقیم با من تماس بگیرند، از طریق ایمیل یا اینستاگرام. لطفاً بدانید که من با افراد دیگر تماس گرفته و اطلاعات مربوط به مطالعه را در رسانه‌های اجتماعی به اشتراک گذاشته‌ام. اگر شما کسی را نمی‌شناسید که ممکن است واجد شرایط یا علاقه‌مند به مشارکت در مطالعه باشد، این کاملاً مورد قبول است.

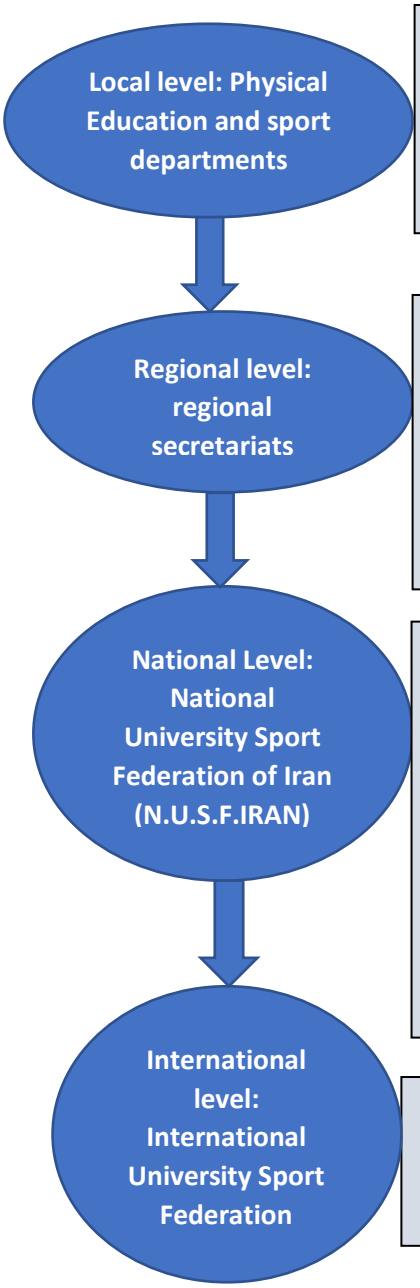
در پیوست به این ایمیل، دو مورد زیر را پیدا خواهید کرد: 1. پست رسانه‌های اجتماعی حاوی اطلاعات اضافی در مورد مطالعه و اطلاعات تماس من؛ و 2. فرم موافقت که شامل اطلاعات دقیق‌تر در مورد مطالعه، از جمله اطلاعات تماس من است.

همانطور که در پیوست‌ها مشخص شده است، این مطالعه مورد بررسی و اخذ اجازه اخلاقی از سوی شورای اخلاق تحقیقاتی دانشگاه براک (شماره پرونده 23-176) قرار گرفته است.

اگر سوالی دارید، لطفاً به من اطلاع دهید. و اگر تماسی از زنانی دریافت کردید که ممکن است علاقه‌مند به مشارکت باشند، لطفاً ایشان را به تماس مستقیم با من از طریق ایمیل به آدرس kk20qz@brocku.ca اطلاع دهید.

Appendix F

Structure of university sport in Iran



At the local level, departments consist of a head (dean), vice dean, and sport experts with different responsibilities, such as recreation, events, university festivals, competition, and women's sport. Based on student interest, several sport courses are offered at universities throughout the academic year. In addition, universities organize matches and competitions (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).

Universities are covered by the secretariat of sport affairs in their region. Every few years, one university in each region of the country (based on facilities, staff, budgets, etc.) is nominated (by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology) to be the secretariat of all universities in that region. The selection of the secretariat university may not necessarily (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).rotate among universities in the region. Still, it can be based on their capacity to effectively provide administrative support to other universities. (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).

The National University Sports Federation of I.R. Iran is a member association of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). In addition, they are one of Iran's Amateur Sports Federations. NUSF Iran is a public, nongovernmental organization and a legal entity. It was established to promote and integrate universities and higher educational institutes based on Iranian rules and regulations and the principles and rules of FISU (Mirsafaian et al., 2011). The Iranian rules and regulations that govern the National University Sports Federation (NUSF) are those related to the organization and management of public, nongovernmental organizations in the country. These rules include guidelines for establishing legal entities, financial management and reporting regulations, and managing and overseeing organizational activities (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).

The main non-governmental organization responsible for sport at universities around the world is the International University Sports Federation (FISU), which aims to promote sporting values and encourage sporting practice in harmony with the educational mission of universities worldwide (Mirsafaian et al., 2011).