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She Shoots, and She Scores: Women and Sports in Samoa

Taylor Thorp
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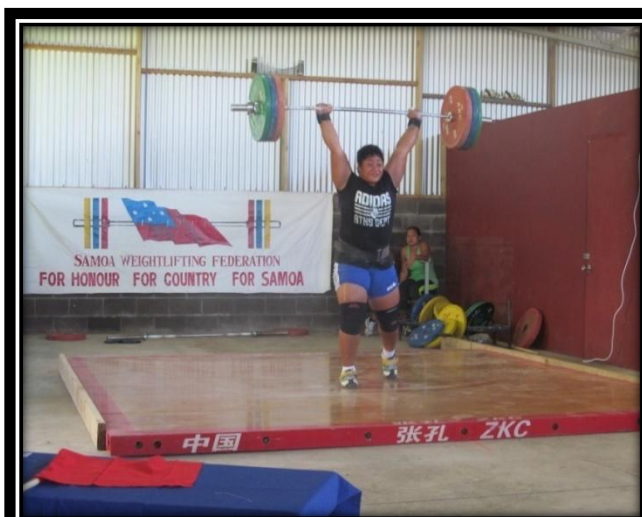
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She Shoots, and She Scores:

Women and Sports in Samoa



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S.I.T Samoa, Spring 2014

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Abstract

In Samoa, female athletics are shaped by a variety of factors such as gender issues, health, and the interaction of sports with education and family obligations. This paper explores the experiences of Samoan female athletes in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of sports in Samoa. Surveys, interviews, and observations were used to collect data about women in sports. Cultural constructs such as *fa'samoa* and education expectations help and hinder athletic experiences of Samoan women. Gender inequality also proves to be an issue, preventing women from participating in sports. Despite shortcomings of athletics in Samoa, women enjoy playing sports because of the health benefits, as well as the enjoyment of participating in physical activity. By recognizing flaws and strengths in Samoan athletics, improvements for future women can begin to be obtained.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family back home in Jersey. Thank you for supporting me in all I do and encouraging me to explore the world and immerse myself in new cultures and experiences.

I also want to dedicate this paper to the amazing group of girls (and Evan) that embarked on this trip with me. It has been amazing to learn with and from you, and I cannot imagine my semester without you.

Lastly I would like to dedicate this paper to all of the amazing women I interviewed and interacted with over the duration of my ISP who participate in sports in Samoa. Keep doing what you love and play your best until the very end!

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Introduction

Competition to prove the mental and physical strength of an individual or social group is a human universal. Sports stretch the globe, ranging from sled dog racing in Arctic regions to canoeing competitions in Oceania. Regardless of global location, sports play an important role not only in the health of individuals, but also their mental and emotional well being. The American Center for Disease Control (CDC) is a firm believer that sports and physical activity combat non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. The CDC also finds regular physical activity keeps the brain active, as well as reducing the risk of depression, and improving mental health and moods (Physical Activity and Health, 2014).

Despite the plethora of benefits for both men and women who participate in sports, a distinct disparity exists between the genders and the acceptance of their involvement in sports. Upon my arrival in Samoa, I was attuned to physical activity occurring around me because of my personal passion for sports. As I explored Samoa, I witnessed men playing rugby, basketball, soccer, and volleyball. When I went on jogs in the evening, Samoans would wave as I ran past, giving the *palagi* confused and befuddled looks. My suspicion that a woman jogging was out of the ordinary was confirmed when a survey respondent stated, it is "...not very usual for Samoan girls to be in shorts and run around." As I settled into life in Samoa, I began to wonder where all the women who play sports were hiding. The justification of this research is to examine the experience of women who participate in sports in Samoa and explore the triumphs and tribulations of the nation's female athletes.

Issues pertaining to women in sports are not unique solely to Samoa, but are an international quandary. In May 1994, 280 delegates from 82 countries met in Brighton, England at the international conference, *Women, Sport and the Challenge of Change*, to "address the issue of how to accelerate the process of change that would redress the imbalances women face in their participation and involvement in sports" (J. Hargreaves, 1999

p.465). The delegates at the conference created the *Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport* (BDWS) which addresses the rights of women who are involved with, and participate in sports. These rights include, but are not limited to, involvement in sports regardless of their gender or level of physical fitness, a right to physical education within the school system, proper sports facilities and equipment, leadership roles in sports organizations, and equal opportunity to participate in high performance events such as the Olympic Games (J. Hargreaves, 1999). The declaration was adopted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in September 1995, and continues to provide a model for the ideals of the female experience of sports for all countries, especially those that participate in the Olympic Games, like Samoa and other Pacific Island nations such as Fiji. The BDWS states,

Sport is an activity which offers the individual the opportunity of self knowledge, self expression and fulfilment; personal achievement, skill acquisition and demonstration of ability; social interaction, enjoyment, good health and well being. Sport promotes involvement, integration and responsibility in society and contributes to the development of the community. (J. Hargreaves, 1994, p.465)

With the mentality of this declaration, sports around the world, including Samoa, can continue with positive development.

In Samoa, sports pre-date colonial contact to the islands. Samoans participated in sports such as wrestling, martial arts with clubs, and pitching games such as *lafoga* and *tāgā ti'a*. After colonial contact, games such as *kilikiti*, Samoan cricket, *fautasi* or longboat racing, rugby, tennis, golf, croquet and netball became popular between both men and women, although women were limited to games such as croquet, tennis, and netball. In 1961, one year before Samoan independence from New Zealand, the Samoa Sports Federation was established, marking the beginning of the formalization of sports in the nation (D. Rasmussen & Fuamatu, 2012). Samoa first participated in international games in 1963 when they sent a delegation of both male and female athletes to Suva to compete in the first Pacific Games. Samoa continues their tradition of involvement in international sporting competitions by

participating in the Pacific Games, and even hosting the event in 1983 and 2007 (SASNOC Content, 2014). Samoa has also participated in the Commonwealth Games, Pacific Mini Games, and the Olympic Games. Since 1984, Samoa has sent a total of 39 athletes to the Olympic Games. Arguably one of the most successful Samoan athletes in the Olympics is female weightlifter Ele Opeloge, who placed fourth in the 2008 Beijing Olympics in the 75kg division (SASNOC Content, 2014). Opeloge provides a model not only of female physical strength, but also mental strength to follow her passion of lifting onto an international level. This research strives to tell the experience of a variety of female athletes across Samoa.

Methodology

This research paper is comprised of a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews, surveys, and observations. This paper explores the experience of the female athlete through the viewpoints of Samoan female athletes and their fellow countrymen and women. In order to glimpse their experiences, it is important to hear their opinions of sports from themselves and their peers through interviews and surveys. It is also imperative to include observations in the research, to gain a full perspective of female athlete's experiences in Samoa by experiencing the topic through witnessing events, competitions and practices. For the purpose of this research paper, sports are defined as any organized physical activity and active training where an individual or group competes in a designated event with set rules until a final person or group is deemed the best (D. Burton, 2008, p.12).

In total, ten interviews with a variety of people including female athletes, sports scholars, lecturers, and employees at various sports associations in Samoa were conducted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Positives of conducting interviews included the ability to ask open-ended questions and have participants elaborate on their answers. The researcher could also further explain questions if the participant does not understand a

question. It is important to note that not all participants were always full-time residents of Samoa, and their international perspectives may not reflect all of Samoa's perception of the female experience of sports.

In total, 42 bilingual, open-ended surveys examining the experience of women and sports in Samoa were successfully distributed and returned between April 30 and May 3, 2014. Surveying was a useful method of research because the thoughts and opinions of a wider population can be reached. Surveys were given to men and women at the National University of Samoa (NUS), The University of the South Pacific Alafua Campus (USP), and in Apia. Although 50 surveys were distributed, only 42 were returned. Two versions of surveys were created. The first version, Survey A, was specifically for female athletes, while the second version, Survey B, was for women who did not participate in sports and men. In total, 32 females and 10 men were surveyed. Of the 32 females 57.6% or 19 respondents, participated in sports. Out of the women who did not participate in sports and men, 70% or 16 out of 23 Survey B respondents, had a relative who played sports.

Several issues were identified with the use of surveys. One primary issue encountered was the reluctance of men to participate in my research about women and sports. This explains the lack of an equal male to female ratio in survey respondents. Survey data may not also reflect general population's opinion of women and sports. Surveys were mostly distributed at universities to a younger population in an urban area, so the data may not reflect the opinions of older Samoans or those who live in rural areas. The ages of those surveyed ranged from 17-56 years of age. The mean, or average, age of those surveyed was 20.4 years old. Another drawback of surveys was questions could not be clarified if the respondent misunderstood or misinterpreted specific questions. An additional flaw was the open-ended nature of the survey. Respondents may or may not choose to elaborate their answers. However, the researcher chose to do an open-ended survey in hopes of receiving

honest responses in respondent's personal voices. Another drawback of surveys was respondents tended to answer the surveys in the presence of friends or co-workers, which may have altered their personal, truthful answers. Finally, because surveys were bilingual, questions or answers may have been lost in translation.

Observations were also important to collecting data. Observations of events such as touch rugby tournaments, weightlifting, triathlons, and netball were used to gain insight into the athletic experiences of females. Observations by the researcher also confirmed or denied data gathered from survey, interviews, and secondary sources, and allowed the researcher to create an outsider's perspective.

Initiatives for Women and Sports in Samoa

As an initiative to improve development around the world, the United Nations created the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which are desired to be met by participating countries, including Samoa, by 2015. These goals include, but are not limited to furthering education, eradicating poverty, environmental sustainability, and women equality and empowerment (Millennium, 2014). Samoa is on course to meet many of these goals, however human rights identified in the MDGs must first be met before development in sports can efficiently occur. It must be kept in mind "...sport of any sort [have] no relevance to the lives of the majority of women in the world for whom poverty, malnutrition, and disease are a way of life" (J. Hargreaves, 1999, p.465). Issues such as poverty, and issues in education must first be eradicated before issues pertaining to women and sports can be fully acknowledged. However, that does not mean that Samoa does not have initiatives to improve the quality of sports for women.

In order to better understand the experience of women in sports in Samoa, it is not only important to identify women's personal testimonies, but also examine the infrastructure

of sporting associations and other initiatives offered to women. By investigating these organizations and initiatives, the narrative of female athletes will be more complete.

Government and Organization Initiatives

A variety of government and independent organizations and associations are designated for the development of sports in Samoa. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture's (MESC) sports divisions' mission and vision for sports in Samoa is to focus on the youth, and encouraging physical activity. MESC believes in fostering the leadership skills of Samoa's youth to prepare them to become successful leaders in their communities in the future (T.Tamala, Personal Communication, March 17, 2014). Despite MESC's desire to further sports for the youth several issues are apparent. MESC focuses on development of children in sports in schools, leaving a gap in the development of sports for adults. Another major issue is the funding of the sports division at MESC. Each year, MESC sports division receives two million dollars in funds from the government; however it is difficult for the division to use the funds because of requirements and regulations created by the Ministry of Finance. When funding is finally approved, it is a challenge to obtain sports equipment because of limited suppliers in Samoa, forcing MESC and other organizations to order equipment from abroad (T. Tamala, Personal Communication, March 17, 2014).

MESC also receives financial aid from abroad, such as the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), formerly AusAid. DFAT sponsors initiatives such as the Samoa Sports for Development Program through the Australian Sports Commission. The Samoa Sports for Development Program focuses on providing villages to engage in sports within their community. Their focus is primary on youth and women.

Other organizations face similar issues MESC has been struggling to combat. Dengue Soonalole, the Sports Development Officer at the Samoa Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (SASNOC) expressed concern for SASNOC and the progress of their

initiatives. SASNOC's mission is to "provide opportunities on partnership with its stakeholders to all the people of Samoa to participate in quality sports programmes in order to achieve excellence at all levels of sports" (Soonalole, Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). SASNOC helps get athletes in the 36 International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved sports in the country to reach international competitions such as the Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games, and to further the development of sports in Samoa. However, it is difficult to fulfil these goals when realities of the organization are acknowledged. In 2013, SASNOC was audited, however as of September 2013, all financial accounts were up to date (M.Moore, 2013). Finding successful funding is always a struggle as well. SASNOC is funded by the IOC, and the World Program, however it is not substantial enough to provide finances for the visions SASNOC has for the future of sports in Samoa.

Funding of organizations is not only an issue for SASNOC and MESC, but other National Federations (NF) as well. The Samoa Netball Association (SNA) is one of the only associations with an actual office (Soonalole, Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). Most NFs lack funding as well as full-time employees. NFs typically apply for funding to organizations such as DFAT and other international organizations. The reliance of Samoan sports is not on their own individual organizations but on outside groups such as international governments and federations. Samoa also has a significant home-grown advocate for sports, the cell phone company Bluesky. Bluesky sponsors events such as the Bluesky Triathlon, the Saintz Touch Rugby Challenge, outrigger canoeing, and Netball (*Samoa Observer*, April 28, 2014). Other companies, such as Digicel, Eveni Carruthers, and Ford Samoa also support athletic events in Samoa.

Without international help and organizations such as SASNOC, MESC, and other NFs, sports in Samoa would have even greater difficulty developing. Now that sports

initiatives in Samoa have been explained, the experience of women and sports can be explored with a greater understanding of difficulties faced at different levels of athletics.

Experience of Female Athletes

While examining the realities of present-day women who participate in sports in Samoa, it is essential to regard issues and triumphs of athletics through the lense of the *Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport*. The declaration provides a global model for the standards expected of women's athletics around the world. The standards observed in female sports in Samoa that will be investigated include the general attitude of females playing sports, the interaction of cultural values such as the *fa'asamoa* into athletics, a healthy lifestyle, the perceived relationship between sports and education, equality of involvement in athletics regardless of gender, the opportunity for women to compete internationally, and the proper facilities and equipment for athletic use. Why Samoan women participate in sports will also be explored. All of the subcategories help compose the big picture of the experience of women and sports in Samoa.

General Attitude of Females Playing Sports

Those interviewed agree that sports and physical activity have generally been changing for the better in Samoa over the years. Suzie Schuster, a former Peace Corps volunteer, now a lecturer of health and physical education at the National University of Samoa (NUS), states in regard to sports, "it's completely evolving. Twenty-one years I've been here and it's just developing from one step to the next, to the next. People didn't used to go for walks on the seawall. People didn't and wouldn't even consider a triathlon, and now there are many locals joining in" (Personal Communication, May 24, 2014). This change in attitude is also observed by twenty year old Debbie Tuitama, a student at the University of the South Pacific and netball player. She has observed a change in the attitude towards sports when she was younger and the present day attitude. Tuitama states, "... it is a lot different

than it was when I was younger for sure. There was no netball at all. My older siblings were not allowed to even join the social games” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). Tuitama currently competes on the USP netball team, and even went to Singapore to compete in netball when she was fifteen years old.

The positive attitude in the enjoyment and pride in playing sports is shared by virtually all female athletes surveyed. All females claimed to be proud of being a female athlete and enjoying their respective sports. One respondent stated, “I am proud of being a female athlete, cause it’s my pride and my purpose to use my talent.” It is encouraging to recognize women are participating in athletics because they want to and take pride in their athletic endeavors.

Fa’asamoa and Sports

Fa’asamoa is literally translated as “the Samoan way.” The Samoan way places cultural value on family and respecting elders, respecting the greater community, and respecting the church. Throughout interviews, many mentioned the impacts, positive and negative, of the *fa’asamoa* on the sporting experience of women in Samoa.

In relation to sports and family obligations one-third or 33% of respondents, felt that sports interfered with family obligations. One survey respondent indicated sports were a hindrance to maintaining obligations to the family and Samoan culture. She states sports interfere, “when I have trainings in the evening while I am supposed to have prayer with my family.” Dawn Rasmussen, a former athlete in the Pacific Games and now an advocate for the advancement of women in sports, is generally positive about the impacts of *fa’asamoa* values on athletics. However, Rasmussen was critical of how assigned gender roles impact athletics. Dawn states that many believe:

Women’s place is at home. *Faletua* means the house at the back. I mean, if you look at it literally [a women’s role] is at the back. Yes, your first priority is to help clean-up. After school, particularly for girls, they have their roles to play. It interferes with them taking part in sports (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014).

Other respondents shared similar sentiments to Rasmussen, fearing some aspects of *fa'asamoa* could be a hindrance in relation to familial roles. Suzie Schuster explores the reality of cultural limitations, specifically in village areas of Samoa. Schuster states,

At what point do they stop playing with their friends at school, playing a sport, and do they hone in on their responsibilities, culturally speaking. At what point, will those still residing in the village and coming to school in town hinder the development of sport, because...she'd go home, and you'd know exactly what she'd have to do, is all the chores. Can she train, can she go for a run up and down the road? I don't know. But I would assume that even if she does (*sic*) feel comfortable doing it, she doesn't have time to do it. Because of all the other responsibilities (Personal Communication, May 24, 2014).

The obligation to the family and the community has the potential to outweigh the personal drive for individual success in sports.

Despite some limiting qualities of *fa'asamoa* such as the pull to fulfil obligations to the family, the positives of *fa'asamoa* on the sporting experience of Samoan women are abundant. Out of the respondents, 52.4% believed that sports did not interfere with familial duties, and cultural qualities of the *fa'asamoa* contributed positively to sports. Suzie Schuster believes in using the imprint of *fa'asamoa* on her teams. She praises travelling internationally with her Samoan swim team, stating,

...they all fit so cohesively because if you just give them a framework, in terms of duties within the hotel. Morning prayer and devotional, they cook their own food and everyone participates with dishes...I'll take the Samoan way, because that can easily transfer to things you want to develop in an athlete. Discipline, comradery, respect, cooperation (Personal Communication, May 24, 2014).

Not only do coaches praise the incorporation of cultural values into their teams, but athletes as well. They believe *fa'asamoa* encourages virtues such as humility, hard work, and pride in culture and country (Hogarth, Personal Communication, April 30, 2014). Alana Schuster, the youngest member of the National Samoan Netball team, also praises Samoan values for enforcing respect towards coaching and management and giving her an identity. Schuster states, "Respect is big. It's one of the main things of the *fa'asamoa*. And just

knowing where I come from, that's how I have values, which I never want to forget or lose. I always want to have [them] in mind. It helps to know who you are and where you come from" (Personal Communication, May 23, 2014). The cultural values engrained in Samoans from a young age help Samoan females not only succeed and thrive in athletic pursuits, but other areas as well.

Hogarth further stresses the utilization of *fa'asamoa* in athletics by relating and using Samoan proverbs to inspire her as she competes in sporting events such as netball and sailing internationally. Hogarth recites the proverb, "One mosquito can ruin the whole oil" (Personal Communication, April 30, 2014). Hogarth uses the proverb as a reminder to be on her best behavior while she is competing. She firmly believes in representing her country in a positive light, and wants to maintain her culture and its values (Hogarth, Personal Communication, April 30, 2014).

The most popular sport for female athletes is netball, which is also an indicator of the relationship between *fa'asamoa* and athletics. Netball is a competition of two teams of seven players each. The objective of the game is to get the ball into a net elevated off the ground to receive points. The team with the most points at the end of the game is deemed the winner. Netball is unique to team sports because there are no heroes in netball. Unlike basketball where one player can drive up the court by themselves and shoot, netball players can only take a designated amount of steps and only hold the ball for a designated amount of time before they are required to pass the ball to another teammate. This forces players to work as a cohesive unit. Netball is the game of choice because it focuses on working as a team with distinctive roles each player fills, equally as important as another. Values of netball directly reflect values of *fa'asamoa*, making netball's popularity unsurprising.

In conclusion to this section, positives and negatives of *fa'asamoa* contribute to the attitudes of Samoans towards female athletics.

Health

The CDC finds that an hour of physical activity at least five times a week can give physical and mental health benefits (Physical Activity, 2014). Therefore, athletic activity is not only important because it provides an outlet for physical activity and health, but it also provides benefits on a mental and social level. Samoan women seem to agree that sports help maintain a healthy lifestyle. When surveyed female athletes were asked why they participate in sports. One-third of athletes claimed to participate in sports because of the constructive benefits of physical exercise. Answers of respondents include, “to avoid a fat body and unhealthy lifestyle” and “Because I enjoy to do some exercise and to make my body stronger.” Obesity, and other non-communicable diseases are pressing issues in Samoa. Rasmussen stresses the serious nature of obesity in her observation: “We are not moving. All they do is eat and sleep instead of eat and move...There are a lot of issues for people to realize how important it is to participate in physical activity to make them move and keep them healthy and strong” (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014). Therefore, Samoan athletes taking an initiative to combat preventable health issues by exercising is a step in the right direction to better the physical fitness of Samoans.

Sports are also integral to government and international organizations such as MESC and the United Nations to implement the visions of the Millennium Development Goals. Athletics in Samoa are being used as a vehicle to promote and develop Samoa in a “social health context, HIV awareness, immunization, nutrition, healthy lifestyles, decrease drinking, decrease smoking, and all of the public health campaigns” (S. Schuster, Personal Communication, April 24, 2014). Initiatives to encourage health will greatly contribute to bettering the physical and mental health of female athletes, as well as the average Samoan. It is difficult for an athlete to give their best performance when they are combating health issues such as poor nutrition, viruses, and even sexually transmitted diseases. The promotion of

physical activity and health is vital for the improvement of the athletic experience of women and men alike in Samoa.

Education

The relationship between sports and education in Samoa is tightly intertwined. Samoans tend to be mostly of three general mindsets. The first is that while girls are in school they must focus primarily on their education, while others believe sports and education work in a symbiotic relationship. Most popular sports in Samoa such as netball and rugby were initially introduced and developed by teachers in government and Catholic schools across the nation during the control of colonial powers (Rasmussen & Fuamatu, 2012). Health and physical education are taught to students in school at a young age, and continue to be taught until students graduate, however once students graduate, particularly women in villages, their sporting opportunities dissipate because “...there are no club competitions available to them. There are sports for boys, but very few for girls” (Rasmussen, Personal Communication, April 28, 2014). The limits of sports development in villages and beyond the conclusion of formal education need to be addressed if progress of female athletics is desired.

Despite the connection between sports and school, a variety of opinions exist in relation to education and sports. Many informants seemed to be of the mindset that once students reach the level of higher education, they either had to choose to participate in athletics or focus on school work. Twenty-one percent of survey respondents believed sports interfere with school obligations, while 52% believed sports did not interfere with female athletics. Lastly, 17% felt that it depended on the individual and their time management skills. Many answers reflected the relationship between schools and sports positively in responses such as, “Sports are another part of education. That’s why we have physical education in schools.” And, “It’s good to play sports and free your mental self from depression and overload of studies.” Rasmussen further confirms the benefits of sports by

looking at athletics as a form of applied science. While playing games and competing, a female athlete needs to have the ability to think on her feet. “Do they have time to sit down and think? Time to say where, what am I gonna do now? No, it’s quick thinking... You don’t have time to calculate the speed of the ball, how am I gonna kick the ball, where am I gonna kick it? Sports is applied science” (Rasmussen, Personal Communication, April 28, 2014).

Many Samoan women believe in the balance between sports and academics, forming a symbiotic relationship, and women should have the opportunity and right to participate successfully in both. An example of success in both athletics and sports can be seen in the accomplishments of Alana Schuster. Schuster was at the top of her class at Robert Louis Stevenson School, coming as first in her class in Accounting, Geography, and English. Alana also was the youngest ever player to be a member of the National Samoa Netball team (*Samoa Observer* December 8, 2012). Schuster believes her success is in part because of the time-management skills she learned as she balanced school and athletics (A.Schuster, Personal Communication, April 23, 2014).

Another example of the successful fusion of sports and education by female athletes in Samoa is Olivia Hogarth. Next year, Hogarth will be attending Shanghai International Studies School in China. She states, “One thing that really sold me to the Chinese was the reference from the president of netball in Samoa...I guess because of sport it’s given me that extra level over someone else that doesn’t do it” (Hogarth, Personal Communication, April 30, 2014). The edge sports has given Hogarth has allowed her to access to an education that otherwise might not have been attainable to her, as well as providing her with new opportunities as a result of her future education in China.

Despite these success stories, some women believe that sports and education cannot occur at the same time. Dengue Soonalole states:

“[Women] get to a certain age and they have to choose. It’s either do your sport, or school. Because that is the only option we have here. If you go to school in New

Zealand there is no [choice between] college or athletic sports, you can do both. I'm trying to do the same thing here [in Samoa]. I'm head of the Athletes Commission, and that is one of my projects. To make athletes and parents aware that you can do both, rather than just one...For example our weightlifters. We have an Olympian there, but I think they stopped going to school when they were in 10th grade" (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014).

Some respondents of surveys agree that sports interfere with education as some surveys declare "Sports disturb study time" as well as sports can distract students from concentrating on their education. Once students reach high school and become busier with classes and tutorials, student athletes often make the choice to focus primarily on school so they can study in attempt to get a scholarship to attend university rather than find a balance between the two (S. Schuster, Personal Communication, April 24, 2014). Therefore, development is necessary to encourage women to balance their academic and athletic ambitions.

Male vs. Female: Gender Equality

Another part of the BDWS is encouraging gender equality in, and through, athletics. Universally, although women and girls account for more than half the world's population, the representation of women participating in sports, whether it is as an athlete, coaching, management, or on the officiating level, is significantly less than the representation of men and boys. In Samoa, not only is participation of females in sports an issue, but female involvement in the governing and administrative level of athletics as well. Rasmussen laments,

"At the moment I think the biggest issue women are facing is that especially in sports is gender. That women always seem to be secretaries, and being in that position. They don't seem to be given the opportunity to be president, to be a leader. The only president in women sports are netball and women's rugby. Other sports thus far don't have women as president. I'm not sure why but I think it has to do with attitudes and that the male should be the head (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014).

Female leadership in athletics in Samoa is necessary because they will know best what is needed and desired for development of female athletics.

Objections to women participating in sports is not something new to the twenty-first century, or specifically Samoa. Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympics, wrote

in his *Revue Olympique* in 1912, “that the Olympic Games should be for the sole purview of men. Women have but one task, that of the role of crowning the winner with garlands, as was their role in ancient Greece” (C. Klafs, 1978, p.14).

Although the participation in the Olympic Games is now offered to both men and women, residual repercussions of Coubertin's sexist attitude reverberate into the twenty-first century.

Throughout interviews and in surveys, it was evident that rugby is king in Samoa. One of the evident disparities is discussed by Alana Schuster, an eighteen year old international netball player. Schuster states, “...the main sport here is rugby. It’s a rugby nation. Samoa rugby doesn’t necessarily have a lot of funds, but they have more than netball. I’ve played for Samoa for three years and not a single time was I given an allowance...I have to pay out of pocket” (Personal Communication, April 23, 2014). Not only is there an inequality in the funding of male and female sports, but there is also a double standard in regard to professional rugby players and professional female athletes leaving their family and homes to pursue their athletic dreams. Tuitama observes:

“[There are] different expectations of women who are successful in sports, that, that’s not what your role should be in your community... There is an expectation that women have to start their families, where you’ll never see anyone saying that about male rugby players. You’ll never see a successful rugby player and think, he should be at home taking care of his wife and family. Whereas for women that is the case” (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014).

The *fa'asamoa* belief that the women's role is in the kitchen and in the home interferes with the success of female athletes in Samoa.

If rugby is king in Samoa, netball would be considered the sporting queen. Out of the 35 positive responses to female sports activity, whether the respondent played sports or a relative played sports, 27 respondents or 77% play netball. Support of female athletes in Samoa is generally positive. Only three respondents to surveys or in interviews stated that they felt their families were not supportive. One survey respondent stated that she felt

unsupported “Because they don’t know how important and crucial sports are. All they think is study, then have a job later.”

The attitude towards women playing sports is complex however, and is not evolving in a linear manner. Of those surveyed, 64% stated they believed there were sports inappropriate for women to play. Of those who believed there were sports inappropriate for women to play, one-third stated that rugby was the inappropriate sport. The survey’s findings support the ideology of rugby being a male dominated sport, which is not a new philosophy in Samoa. When the Women’s Rugby Union was formed in 1998, the public’s response was not all positive.

Owing to the public’s tendency to view rugby as a men’s sport, there were many negative reactions to women’s rugby. Commonly hear comments included ‘rugby doesn’t do any good for women’, ‘they should stick to netball’ and ‘rugby is a sport for men, not for women’. The perceived intrusion of women into this sport, donning ‘men’s’ rugby boots and jerseys, was not welcomed by many men, and neither by many women, who were critical of participation by women in this sport perhaps, because rugby may have been perceived as a threat to some of the established ‘women’s’ sports. Other men and women were positive about the development, however; they saw the capability that women had in playing and organizing the sport, and gave their support. (Rasmussen & Fuamatu, 2012, p. 212).

It is hoped that Samoa will begin to support their female rugby athletes, who are capable and dedicated to their sport.

Another group of women who broke gender equality barriers is the *Nafanua* outrigger canoe team. Last year, *Nafanua's* women's team made history when they became the first group of women to participate in the forty-four kilometer crossing between Upolu and Savai'i. The crossing took six hours and proved the strength of women and their ability to compete at the same caliber as men. This year, four women's paddling teams are already registered to compete in the Savai'i crossing (Rossi, Personal Communication).

Despite women attempting to deconstruct gender barriers such as the women's rugby team and *Nafanua*, women are still viewed as the weaker gender in Samoa. When survey respondents were asked what the differences between male and female athletes, 45%

commented on the physical differences that made men 'better' athletes. Responses included “Men are strong, women are weak” and “Males have muscle mass, height, weight, and also the potential of being faster when they run, unlike females. They can't run fast or jump as high as men can.” Although it is true that men and women physically differ, disparities of the sexes physically should no longer be considered a negative and are now largely irrelevant in global athletics (Carbon, 1994).

Clothing is another area of gender inequality. While competing in athletic events, it is necessary to wear the proper sports equipment. Shorts are typically desirable in order to allow easy running and range of motion. Despite the necessity for such articles of clothing, many traditional Samoans find it difficult to tolerate women wearing proper sports gear. Rasmussen observes:

“In particular, women, they're not allowed to be seen in anything that short. That's why they always wear a *lavalava*. That's a big thing currently when it comes to sports. One big thing now is villages are beginning to change that attitude. When they are on the court it is okay to wear those types of clothes, but the moment they step off they need to put the *lavalava* on” (Personal Communication, April 28, 2014).

The modesty of female athletes was observed at events such as the Saintz Easter Challenge Rugby tournament and the Samoan weightlifting qualifying competition for Oceania. After women competed in games, they would wrap themselves in a *lavalava*, covering their shorts until it was time to play in their next game or lift in the next round.

Despite variations in the perception of female athletes, there are some who believe there are no differences between athletics of men and women in Samoa. Hogarth feels there are no real differences between the treatment of male and female athletes:

“I say, I've been treated equally. Some guys, might take it easier on us girls, because we're girls, and because it's a Samoan thing. You know, every girl is your sister, you must treat them with respect. But I'd say if the guy knows the girl is capable or anyone else, and how far the girl can go, they will push her that far. So I guess it's just based on how able she is and if she can prove herself (Personal Communication, April 30, 2014).

Hogarth's statements provides hope that equality for female athletes in Samoa is just around the corner and issues unique to women in sports, such as their bodies, attire, and the public's attitude towards female athletics can be identified and rectified in the future.

Women and Sports Internationally

It is the nature of sports to find competition that challenges the athlete and forces them to prove their prowess in whatever sport they participate in. Therefore, athletes competing internationally seem like the next logical step once you are one of the best in your own country. Samoa is a small country, making successful athletes big fish in a little pond. Many successful female athletes compete internationally not only to rise to the challenge of new adversaries in their sports, but also to be representatives of Samoa to the rest of the world.

For female athletes ambitious enough to leave the country to play, the competition becomes more fierce. Both Alana Schuster, and Olivia Hogarth competed in the Netball World Youth Cup in Glasgow, Scotland, stating the experience was one of the biggest athletic moments of their lives (Personal Communication, April 23 & 30, 2014). Hogarth has also competed in sailing competitions in the Cook Islands and New Zealand, while Schuster is currently playing netball in New Zealand and has also competed in Australia. Both athletes indicate the challenges of playing sports internationally because of the increased amount of talent and competition found abroad.

Although playing internationally is a dream of many young female athletes, there are some flaws in Samoa's current relationship with international athletics. Most players on the Samoan National Netball team do not currently inhabit Samoa, but are residents of New Zealand and Australia. The presence of these players is due to the rigor of competition in their own countries, but their desire to still play internationally. Samoa is a smaller country, making it easier for athletes to compete on the national team. Tui Hicks, the Director of the

Samoa Netball Association indicated her desire to attempt to build up the Samoan netball programs and encourage local girls to join the netball team in order to foster better team dynamics (Personal Communication, March 19, 2014). However, finding talented girls will prove difficult because there is no formal scouting system currently in Samoa (Soonalole, Personal Communication, May 2, 2014). Talented girls who live in villages who have the athletic ability to play internationally might never get the opportunity because their talent will never be seen by someone who will use their skills for teams.

Despite some of these limitations, there are also positives of Samoans participating in sports internationally. Examples of Samoa's willingness to compete internationally include their involvement in the Pacific Games since its inception, as well as Olympic Games appearances. This year, the Samoa Outrigger Canoe Association (SOCA) is hosting *Ala Paopao* an international outrigger canoeing competition. Teams from Australia, Tonga, New Zealand, and Fiji will all be represented (K. Rossi, Personal Communication, May 1, 2014). Events such as live music, swimming, and an after competition party will help participants and spectators to celebrate their shared Pacific identity.

Facilities and Equipment

A final issue that impacts female athletics is access to proper facilities and equipment. In 2012, Cyclone Evan destroyed the netball courts used by the National Netball team at Apia Park, and still have not been repaired. Another issue is that in order to play sports, regulated facilities are necessary. After the Pacific Games were held in Samoa in 2007, there is a plethora of sports facilities in the Apia area. However, the use of these facilities is limited. Only those who can afford transportation to the facilities, or live in the Apia area can access them. An example of this issue can be seen in tennis. Only the affluent in Samoa can afford the equipment and access the proper courts needed to practice (Rasmussen, Personal Communication, April 28, 2014). Two survey respondents stated that a lack of equipment and

sporting facilities could lead to challenges in playing sports. If Samoan government and national federations can find funding to create better facilities and equipment, participation in athletics can become easier for the average athlete.

Why Play Sports?

The variety of issues pertaining to women and sports in Samoa lead to the inevitable question: Do Samoan women enjoy athletics and what are their athletic plans for the future? When asked why they participate in sports 9 out of the 19 female athletes surveyed stated they played sports for the enjoyment of the game. One respondent declared, “It’s a hobby and I’m also addicted to sports, especially netball and handball.” Seven respondents also stated they played sports because “it is useful to exercise my body, especially to stay healthy.” Positive feedback by female athletes interviewed focused on the important life skills learned from participating in sports. Olivia Hogarth responded: “I love it. It’s addictive. I think one really good benefit that sport has given me is time management and self-discipline” (Personal Communication, April 30, 2014). Alana Schuster concurs with Hogarth, stating, “Sports have given me confidence. And working as a team ... determination to push myself, determination of mind. Push yourself to be better. It’s healthy to have a sport and have goals. I wouldn’t be as successful in my school work if I wasn’t so involved in my sport” (Personal Communication, April 23, 2014).

Analysis

If the development of female sports and athletics is desired by athletes, several areas of Samoa’s approach towards sports can be improved. Areas of improvement could include initiatives being provided to female athletes, attitudes towards athletes, the incorporation of *fa’asamoa* in sports, health, education, gender equality, international relationships, and access to proper training facilities and equipment. Each of these realms of female athletics have strengths and weaknesses that can make or break the future of women and sports in Samoa.

Initiatives being provided to female athletes, and all Samoan athletes, need to be increased. Although, Samoa is a small country the Samoan government and other organizations have a limited reach. If sports can be provided for female athletes in villages, participation can increase, as well as provide a catalyst to change Samoan negative attitudes towards female athletes. Governmental agencies and national federations can also create a more cooperative atmosphere where programs work together to foster female athletics, and provide the proper equipment and facilities for athletes.

Although some Samoans believe sports interfere with *fa'asamoa* and education, others believe sports can foster the Samoan way, as well as promote education. Female athletes and their advocates need to make their voices heard and provide models, such as Olivia Hogarth, Alana Schuster, and Debbie Tuitama who have the ability to balance their academic pursuits as well as their athletic endeavors.

Gender Equality in Samoa is not only an issue in athletics but also on the governmental level in the under-representation of women in the Samoan parliament. Women have the right to pursue their dreams, no matter what they are, and should not be hindered from doing so just because they are a woman. Female athletes should have the ability to participate in the sports that they want to, as well as travel to continue their athletic careers.

Samoa is a small country, with a small population. This may limit athletic pursuits, or it can create an atmosphere of support, where all athletes, male or female, young or old, can encourage each other to play sports for the love of the game.

Conclusion: The Future for Women in Sports

The experience of women and sports in Samoa covers a range of issues, varying from education, health, gender equality, cultural issues, international participation, and equipment. All these issues are ones that the BDWS attempts to identify and hopefully over time, rectify.

The future of female sports in Samoa is interconnected with these topics and the vision of female athletes. Tuitama's vision for sports includes:

The acceptance of it [sports], and that it's okay for women to leave the kitchen and leave the babies and play sports. It's just not a future that people in Samoa associate with women. It's almost like you're abandoning your role in the family if you were to pursue sports. I think that is what I would change (Personal Communication, May 2, 2014).

If women can recognize ways to balance family and sports, a greater acceptance of female athletes may be possible.

Another possible goal for the future is government organizations and national federations working more closely together to better sports, share resources and enhance the overall experience of sports in Samoa. SASNOC, hopes to join forces with MESC and strive for development of sports in Samoa. Soonalole envisions:

We can bring the expertise of the sporting associations under us. And we can get the experts from those sports and help with the development, rather than depending on MESC to do the development. There is a sports academy in the works and I know SASNOC one of their goals is to set up a sports academy where we can identify the kids from the villages and all the schools when they get to a certain level, and offer them scholarships to train and stay. So they can train and stay here. I think that is one of the visions (Personal Communication May 2, 2014).

Samoans working in tandem, regardless of their place of employment would greatly improve women in sports.

Overall, women who want to participate in sports seem to be enjoying their experiences. Despite enjoying playing sports, several issues still need to be addressed. Issues include the acceptance of women playing sports regardless of what sport they are participating in. Another issue is how *fa'asamoa* is incorporated with athletics, and how female athletes can balance family obligations and athletics. Female athletes, like Hogarth and A. Schuster, can use Samoan values to thrive in sports. Balance can also be found between education and sports, if athletes accept that schoolwork and sports can work in harmony. Sports can even help Samoan female athletes to get scholarships, furthering both

their athletic and academic careers. Sports also promote healthy lifestyles, allowing women to exercise and prevent non-communicable diseases. The future of Samoan female athletes is bright, as long as women involved continue to strive for equality in their sporting careers.

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Appendix

Acronyms and Samoan Vocabulary

Acronyms

BDWS- Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport

CDC- Center for Disease Control

DFAT- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

IOC- International Olympic Committee

NF- National Federations

NUS- National University of Samoa

MDG- Millennium Development Goals

MESC- Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture

SASNOC- Samoa Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee

USP- University of the South Pacific

Samoan Vocabulary

Fa'asamoa—The Samoan Way

Faletua— The wife of a high chief or pastor (literally the back of the house)

Fautasi—Samoan long boat

Kilikiti—Samoan cricket

Lafoga—traditional Samoan pitching game

Lavalava—Piece of fabric worn around the waist as clothing

Nafanua—Samoan goddess

Palagi—A foreigner to Samoa

Tāgā ti'a— Samoan game where participants throw darts as far as they can.

Women and Sports in Samoa Survey (Survey A)

Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Thank you for your participation!

Age/ Tausaga_____

What sport(s) do you participate in/play? *O a ni taaloga e te auai pe taalo ai?*

How old were you when you started to participate in sports? *O le fia o ou tausaga sa amata ai on e taalo i taaloga? E fia ou tausaga ina e amata ona taalo i taaloga?*

Does anything interfere with you playing sports? *E iai ni mea e faalavelave atu i lou taalo ai i Taaloga?*

Are you proud of being a female athlete? Why or why not? *E te fiafia pe mitamita i le aveai ai o oe ma se tamaitai taalo?*

Why do you participate in your sport(s)? *Aisea e te auai ai i Taaloga?*

Are there any challenges that accompany being a female athlete in Samoa? *E iai ni faigata poo faafitauli I le ave'a ai o oe ma se tamaitai taalo I Samoa?*

Does your family and friends support you as a female athlete? Why or why not? *E tapuai pe e fiafia lou aiga ma au uo I le ave'a ai o oe ma tamaitai taalo? Aisea?*

What differences are there between male and female athletes? *O a ni eseesega o tama ma tamaitai taalo?*

Do you believe there are any sports that are unsuitable for women to participate in? *E te talitonu e iai ni taaloga e le fetauti mo tamaitai?*

Do you feel sports interfere with education? *E te manatu e ono a'afio le aoga ona o ta'aloga?*

Do you feel sports interfere with family obligations? *E te manatu e fa'alavelave taaloga i mataupu fa'aleaiga?*

Women in Sports Survey (Survey B)

Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Thank you for your participation!

Please check off your gender:

Male_____

Female_____

1) *Do you have a female relative that participates in sports? If yes, answer questions a, b, and c. If no, please proceed to question 2. E iai ni tamaitai o lou aiga e taalo/auai I taaloga? Afai e ioe, tali fesili a, b and c. Afai e leai, tali le fesili numera 2.*

Yes_____Ioe

No_____Leai

a. *What sport does she play? O a taaloga e taalo ai?*

b. *Does your family support her when she plays sports? How? E tapuai e lou aiga le tamaitai taalo I ana taaloga? E faapefea?*

c. *Does anything interfere with your female relative playing sports? O a ni mea e faigata ai ona taalo le tamaitai I taaloga?*

2) *Are there any challenges that accompany being a female athlete in Samoa? E iai ni faigata poo faafitauli I le aveai ai o oe ma se tamaitai taalo I Samoa?*

3) *What differences are there between male and female athletes? O a ni eseese o tama ma tamaitai taalo?*

4) Do you believe there are any sports that are unsuitable for women to participate in?
E te talitonu e iai ni taaloga e le fetui mo tamaitai?

5) Do you feel sports interfere with education? *E te manatu e ono a'afia le aoga ona o ta'alogā?*

6) Do you feel sports interfere with family obligations? *E te manatu e fa'alavelave ta'alogā i mataupu fa'aleaiga?*