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► **To cite this version:**

Julien Fuchs, Yannick Le Hénaff. Alcohol consumption among women rugby players in France: Uses of the " third half-time ". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 2014, 494, pp.367 - 381. hal-01684148

**HAL Id: hal-01684148**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01684148v1>**

Submitted on 3 Mar 2018

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# Alcohol consumption among women rugby players in France: Uses of the “third half-time”

International Review for the  
Sociology of Sport  
2014, Vol. 49(3/4) 367–381  
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1012690213510513  
irs.sagepub.com  


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## Abstract

This article explores alcohol consumption among women rugby players, particularly during the “third half-time”, which traditionally takes place after the matches. The article will focus on alcohol use and the transgression of the norms of femininity. A series of ethnographic observations were carried out and semi-structured interviews were conducted with players ( $n = 10$ ) from an amateur league-level women’s rugby team in Western France. The results show that within the context of rugby – which is marked by festive excesses and has been socially constructed as a “male” sport – women have a specific relationship with alcohol; although drinking is deemed necessary to demonstrate their inclusion in so-called “rugby culture”, it is, nevertheless, far from being completely unrestrained. On the contrary, some of its effects are a construct of the group itself. In this sense, drinking in the third half-time poses a dilemma for women: how to establish themselves as women rugby players whilst remaining women at the same time.

## Keywords

alcohol, rugby, third half-times, togetherness, women

It is difficult to imagine amateur rugby in France without the related post-match festivities, an activity that both male and female players have come to call the “third half-time”. This provides an opportunity to exchange and socialize with team mates, and sometimes opponents, and is generally characterized by a succession of festive excesses (provocative

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songs and sexual games) where consumption of food and alcohol in significant quantities is unavoidable (Saouter, 1995). These excesses have become part of collective memory to the point of being inextricably linked to the sport of rugby itself and proudly displayed: when players say “it wouldn’t be rugby without the third half-time”, they award this activity a special status. Such words also advocate the singularity of rugby, whose players intensify masculinity in the sporting world (Dine, 2007).

Far from being only a male preserve, the third half-time and its related festivities are also perpetuated by women, who, for their part, use a similar rhetoric to evoke them. The present study focuses on women rugby players and sets out to analyse their behaviour during this post-match activity and the meaning they give to it. We believe that such a focus is especially interesting, as it relates to situations marked by a dual transgression: both rugby and drinking have a masculine social construction. Although male festivities in rugby have been previously studied (Darbon, 1995; Saouter, 2000), as has the presence of women in this environment (Chase, 2006; Chu et al., 2003; Howe, 2002; Wheatley, 1994), very few studies in the literature address alcohol consumption among women rugby players and, from a more general perspective, studies on alcohol consumption among women are still few and far between. Within this context, we are particularly keen to understand what use these women have of alcohol in an environment where drinking is at the same time a norm (drinking to be a rugby woman) and a threat (drinking to the extent of no longer being a real woman). What is at play in this dialectic is the issue of constructing a certain type of femininity, one that flirts ambiguously with a masculine model. We believe that although the consumption of alcohol enables the informants to transgress norms and as such, to assert a specific identity, it is still fairly controlled and thoroughly permeated with a concern for maintaining femininity. As such, the women give this type of drinking a specific meaning and especially work towards shaping its effects through collective learning.

Our study focuses on women players from a national amateur league-level French rugby team in Brittany (Western France). It is based on ethnographic research that includes several observation sequences conducted during home and away matches and festivities. The present research is a follow-up to an initial study on women’s rugby (Le Hénaff and Héas, 2008) in which we examined female players’ experiences of their bodily transformations (haematomas, scars, muscular development), and was carried out under the Ireb [the French Institute for Scientific Research on Beverages] research programme in 2011–2012. Our immersion on the ground was facilitated by one of our students (one of the women rugby players) who argued our case with her team mates. We sought to identify (i) players’ drinking habits when amongst themselves, or conversely, in the presence of other women players or men, and (ii) consequences in terms of transgressing the gender norms attached to this type of drinking. Semi-directive interviews conducted with 10 female players enabled us to update their representations and, in doing so, reveal the different meanings of this relationship with alcohol. Firstly, we will provide some theoretical insight into rugby and drinking. Secondly, we will describe the different locations and related drinking behaviours: this will allow us to clarify the meanings and functions of this relationship with alcohol in this particular group of women. Finally, a third part will be dedicated to the learning mechanisms of the third half-time, which shall also bring to the fore the codes of these festivities.

## “Rugby culture”, women and alcohol

Rugby in France is often presented by both players and anthropologists as being not just a game, but rather of a “way of life” (Darbon, 1995; Saouter, 2000), a sport based on camaraderie and fraternity that the masculinity of the confrontation and the game’s controlled violence may sublimate. This perception is largely upheld by the fact that rugby is strongly embedded in regional areas (e.g. in the “grassroots rugby” particularly common to South Western France) reflecting the traditional values of effort, social interaction, group spirit and, above all, solidarity (Ravenel, 2004). Furthermore, because they entertain the idea that rugby may present the features of a “subculture” (Wheatley, 1994), its players tend to place value on excess and exaggeration (verbal exaggeration when recounting the matches and reminiscing over famous legends, rhetorical and lyrical exaggeration in the songs that accompany the sport, and excess consumption of food and alcohol during festivities (Sansot, 1990)). Moreover, these festive sociabilities play a social cohesion role in the towns and villages where rugby is embedded. The third half-time, in the words of its participants, is a way to go beyond the confrontation of the game to gather around values that transcend players, cultures and even nations: it is around the third half-time that the “rugby family” takes shape.

Idealizing this practice may lead to its essentialization, which fosters the use of the “rugby culture” concept. Faced with this discourse, sociologists, particularly interactionist ones, have shown that various groups unite behind a homogeneity facade that conceals the different processes of segmentation (Bucher and Strauss, 1961) or segregation, as is the case in women’s rugby. Most sociological studies stress that rugby mainly has a masculine social construction, and is seen by many as a “male preserve” (Sheard and Dunning, 1973). Perrot (1987) states that an activity may be considered as such as soon as it has (i) a social history, (ii) technical and symbolic characteristics, (iii) expected qualities that are overwhelmingly masculine in nature and (iv) a low percentage of women participants. In our case, these four conditions were met: historically, rugby was practiced in English public schools to learn how to be a *real* man. Furthermore, the game’s gendered representations strongly project courage and excess, with many male rugby players believing that “this is not a sport for the girls” or “[that] they are no longer *real* women” once they start playing it. Finally, the practice is still largely under feminized. The overall increase in the number of registered players in France (11,400 registered female players out of a total of 452,000 players in 2013 compared with 9200 out of 363,000 in 2008) does not hide the fact that the relative proportion of female players has remained constant over recent years (around 2.5%).

Most sociological studies acknowledge a gendered order in rugby, which these women players must try to counteract. This involves a challenging negotiation of the social construction of femininity via their bodies (Chase, 2006; Gill, 2007), actions or words (Broad, 2001; Carle and Nauright, 1999; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Wheatley, 1994). Numerous studies focusing on the experience of women in “men’s sports” develop similar perspectives: they show that violence or physical confrontation contradicts the hegemonic perception of femininity, as can be seen in body building, tackle football, boxing, etc. (Cox and Thompson, 2000; Crosset, 1995; Kolnes, 1995; Laberge, 1994; Migliaccio and Berg, 2007; Scraton et al., 1999; Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009).

Therefore, these women must strike a difficult balance: being regarded as both *real* athletes and also as *real* women. Mennesson (2000), nevertheless, shows that these commitments and negotiations vary according to both the athletes' individual dispositions and the local and institutional context of the sport under consideration. As such, each woman builds her relationship with femininity differently (Crosset, 1995; Messner, 1996).

Many processes exist both for limiting women's intrusion into this masculine sport and their participation in the third half-time, especially in relation to alcohol consumption, which some authors consider to be a gender deviance (Ettorre, 1997; Plant, 1997). This type of drinking "may symbolically express gender, particularly masculinity" (Peralta, 2005).<sup>1</sup> Beyond general drinking, binge drinking (supposedly representative of the third half-time) is still "owned" by men more than women: so much so that changes in women's drinking habits, and the increase in binge drinking in particular, have created a form of social anxiety (Day et al., 2004; Jackson and Tinkler, 2007). For example, in the expression "Drunkenness in a dress", the drunk woman takes on the position of "ladette" (Griffin et al., 2009) and for both society and the woman herself, this is a "significant threat" (Skeggs, 2005: 967). It is interesting to note that in this respect, some studies support these fears by focusing mainly on the risk of sexual assault for women under the influence of alcohol (La Brie et al., 2011; Maggs et al., 2011), and of regrettable unprotected sex (Bogle, 2008; Piombo and Piles, 1996). The primacy of the masculine model is strengthened by the fact that the pubs holding third half-times (rural ones in particular) often seem to be places of hegemonic masculinity, as shown by Campbell (2000), for example, in the case of New Zealand. Therefore, women must not only negotiate their entry into these places, but also the intensity of their drinking (Rolfe et al., 2009).

As a consequence, third half-times pose a dilemma to women, as they must balance being a rugby woman and cultivate the supposed elements of a rugby culture in which drinking plays a major role, whilst still remaining women. Studying women's third half-times in France seemed to be an interesting focus to understand the meaning behind the necessary negotiation (Gill, 2007; Pelak, 2005) that women must effectively manage in order to exist as female rugby players in this strongly masculine world. Our hypothesis is that drinking, as a possible gender deviance, enables these women to consider themselves as *real* rugby women. In other words, they make use of a practice that is sexually discriminating (alcohol) to shape a possibly stigmatizing identity (that of woman rugby player), in a sport from which they are, a priori, excluded.

## **Women's third half-times: rituals in which alcohol plays a major role**

Alcohol consumption among women rugby players must be understood in its multiplicity, that is, correlated with contexts and linked to networks of sociability. This study focuses on third half-times, not only because they take place on a frequent and regular basis (at the end of every match), but especially because the women players themselves spontaneously give importance to this practice when drinking is mentioned. In addition, these third half-times bring all of the players together, at least for a certain period, and

take place in very different locations and with diverse publics, all of which shed light on each other.

### *The plurality of the third half-time*

Initial observations led us to understand that once the match has finished, festivities unfold at almost set stages. During the season and in similar locations every weekend, the team's third half-times observed in this study take place mainly in four locations and display specific behaviours and drinking practices: the club house, the return coach journey in the case of an away match, the bar called *Le Blind'* and a nightclub.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of location, the drinking behaviours of these women rugby players vary according to whether they are amongst themselves or with others, such as (non-)rugby players or men.

The third half-time starts in the club house immediately after the match. Both teams meet there to eat and drink; hard liquor is rarely consumed: beer, at the most, will be served. This restriction in alcohol is recognized and accepted: "It's neither the time nor the place" say the players. Most of them consider that time spent socially mixing with their opponents, spectators, club managers and volunteers cannot be linked to the *real* festivities. Above all, this gathering is a symbolic celebration of a rugby tradition. They are careful to avoid any match-related antagonisms, preferring more civilized conversations on topics such as the results of past or future competitions, match strategy, etc. Therefore, these buffets appear to be mere formalities that require a minimum amount of commitment from the players, but enable them to symbolically display their belonging to the rugby culture. In such a context, drinking, which may involve additional sharing between opposing teams, is restricted; heavy drinking appears to be reserved for the times when the team alone is together. Here, drinking is strongly associated with out-of-the-ordinary behaviours considered by the players to be unsuitable in this situation. The norm in these matters can be reconstructed from what the players themselves say: "We already get funny looks if we start drinking beers on the pitch (after the match), so imagine if we started the third half time at the buffet!"

For an away match, the return journey lasts between five and seven hours. Our study draws heavily on behaviours witnessed during this time, which, according to all of the players, lies at the heart of the festivities, especially because it involves "togetherness" at its peak: the only men allowed to attend are the trainers and, very occasionally, a third party, but they sit at the front of the coach and therefore far removed from the excesses. As soon as the team has boarded the coach, packs of beers are lavishly distributed. The drinking begins, accompanied by songs, toasts, bodily exhibitions and contests. Voting for the best outfit, for example, gives way to a fashion parade between the seats, with players miming outrageous eroticized poses. These demonstrations enable the showcasing of the third half-time and incite each player to play a role in it, to be fully committed. This creates a break from the ordinary, therefore making it possible to temporarily suspend norms and above all, enables group homogeneity to be built (Nayak, 2006).

We're just playing a role, we're not usually like that. You've always got to go one better than the last time, turn it up a notch, because it's kind of like a competition between us. You've got to be original at all costs: clothes, expressions, gestures, or more outrageous stuff to make everybody laugh. (Andrea)

These demonstrations also involve drinking, an activity that is largely facilitated in the given context. Even if the trainers recommend prohibiting or limiting alcohol to improve sporting capabilities,<sup>3</sup> the women players find such a ban or restriction incomprehensible.

This year we've got two trainers [...] And they've got very strict ideas about lifestyle management. According to them, we shouldn't do the third half-time on the coach. But that's just not possible [...] They kept telling us to tone down the drinking, that we've got to think of our fitness, etc. [...] And I was straight, I told them that there's no way you can stop us from doing that. (Julie)

For these young women, drinking alcohol is self-evident: "That's how it is with rugby" they say. As such, they make a link between drinking and flirting with certain norms (displaying their buttocks at the back of the coach, singing bawdy songs, provoking men in a petrol station, for example). Alcohol contributes to the creation of a context that is out of the ordinary, one that enables out-of-the-ordinary behaviours. In this case, alcohol consumption forms part of a social singularization process constructed by these young women in an effort to uphold their belonging to a particular culture. But contrary to what they may claim, it is not the alcohol that systematically provokes these behaviours. In fact, some light drinkers fully participate in these festivities, as we were able to observe. Therefore, it can be said that alcohol does not produce these behaviours, but provides an enabling environment for them to develop, since it is sometimes used as a socially accepted excuse (Montemurro and McClure, 2005). For this to be possible, drinking must be made visible, as is the case for (abundant) toasts, or the various drinking songs. It is also the case when the women play around with the empty packs of beer, by wearing them as hats during the parades or placing them over the club name at the back of the coach. Clearly ostentatious, this form of drinking, even if it is not necessarily extreme, has a dual objective: that of celebrating both the community of the women players and of claiming a rugby identity. None of the players can escape this, otherwise they risk being marginalized and it is a situation in which drinking is imposed as an implicit norm (Merle and Le Beau, 2004). Here we find a similar mechanism to that identified by Killingsworth (2006) regarding "middle class [Australian] mothers". Indeed, these sportswomen place great importance on these drinking behaviours in their discourse, to the point of becoming far removed from reality. But this is first and foremost of symbolic importance: the main objective of such an act is to emphasize the difference between themselves and all those who do not play rugby, as such ostentatious behaviour is considered non-acceptable, or at the very least inappropriate, in other social circumstances.

Once they have returned to their home town, or after the buffet if it is a home match, quite a lot of the women rugby players go back to *Le Blind*' bar which, over time, has become "their" bar (so much so that sponsoring agreements have been reached with the owner). The fact that they can choose their own music, or that their club name appears on the drinks menu, reinforces the feeling of "togetherness", coupled with the fact that the bar is relatively quiet on Sunday evenings (the team's matches almost exclusively took place on Sundays). However, this is a sporting "togetherness". It is not merely gender-related, because many male rugby players in the region are also regular

customers of the bar, which impacts these women's behaviours; there are fewer bodily exhibitions for example, which are more restrained than in the coach as the presence of men places more of a restriction on the body. More alcohol is consumed. Beer, ever more present, is no longer the only drink. Cocktails and glasses of wine are ordered, sometimes in abundance.

More intense drinking does not increase deviant behaviours. When the women players who wish to carry on partying (rarely more than 10 or so, and often the same ones) move on to the nightclub after last orders at *Le Blind'*, there are fewer bodily exhibitions or simulations of sexual acts, even though their drinking becomes more intense through mixing hard liquor. Therefore, norms may vary throughout the course of the same evening according to whether other people are present, and according to the type of "togetherness" at play.

### *Alcohol and its different meanings*

Here, alcohol is mainly used because of its symbolic power to incite new behaviours. At the same time, it is considered to be an element of sociability linked to rugby, perpetuating the idea that this game is more than just a physical sport, to the point that drinking, to a certain extent, is supported by the club via its reimbursement of a percentage of drinks consumed at the buffet and during post-match activities in the coach. Indeed, these festivities are presented as a means of creating and uniting the group in order to make it more effective on the pitch. In this context, drinking is perceived as legitimate and necessary. This is observed in the way that the other players describe Lisa, the group's only non-drinker. Classed as an exception, Lisa has a special status. Her discretion, that her team mates appear to accept because she is new to the team, is often linked to her abstinence.

There's one girl, for example, who joined last year, who's a bit shy. She doesn't drink. And despite our efforts, she didn't get into it. But, it's funny you know, she always comes along to the evenings when we invite her, but she's never in the centre of things. She'll just go and sit over there in the corner, looking over, but never joining in the conversation. (Julie)

In this context, Lisa is given a discriminatory label even if it is not described as such: not drinking designates a lack of ability to communicate and could, therefore, be a potential threat to the group. By immediately identifying her by her non-drinking status, this player is stigmatized, and her sobriety is regularly mentioned, even if it is not subject to real threats, such as those observed in comparative studies on American student campuses, for example (Herman-Kinney and Kinney, 2012). The players do not rule out the fact that over time, Lisa could "make progress" in this respect.

As an intrinsic part of the third half-time, alcohol may also be considered as a way of binding the group by providing "a sense of collective history and mutual experience" (Nayak, 2006: 819), especially through the creation of rituals and common memories. Numerous authors have evoked the positive social functions of drinking, highlighting both its cohesive and identity-related power, but essentially in worlds that are socially constructed as masculine. For Castelain (1996), drinking may be symbolic of a virile

fraternity among French dockers. Our study shows that female drinking, among women rugby players, also functions as an efficient additive, a means to construct solidarity, that is in line with previous studies on student societies (Cashin et al., 1998) or sporting ones (Ford, 2007; Tewksbury et al., 2008). Here, the use of alcohol is an identity support for the female rugby player.

And then sometimes you get the “Really, women playing rugby!?” We hear that quite a lot [...] We’ve got to show what we’re capable of on the pitch, by coming back with points, you know the normal stuff, winning matches. And then afterwards, we’ve got to show what we’re capable of in the third half-time as well! We just never give up! (Mathilde)

Heavy drinking during all stages of the third half-time, along with active appropriation of songs from “men’s rugby subculture” (Wheatley, 1994) is how these women negotiate (Gill, 2007; Pelak, 2005) their entry into this masculine world. For them, drinking may be a means of proving their social integration skills, with alcohol providing the means to graduate from sportswoman to rugby woman.

## **Becoming a woman rugby player by learning how to drink**

### *Learning how to “handle” one’s drink*

Just like the consumption of marijuana (Becker, 1963), drinking is an activity that must be learned: the new experience is not immediately satisfying enough to be translated into feelings that are agreeable and can be put into words (Demant, 2009). It is the result of an initiation, often a collective one, that must lead to the understanding of the product’s effects. Players refer to these past experiences, full of trial and error. For some, this initiation is a type of “classification”, which marks out the more experienced team members who “can handle things” from the more recent arrivals to the group. Nevertheless, the latter are the object of sustained attention, even particular protective measures. The state of knowing how to drink is doubly binding, as it prohibits both excess and abstinence (Gaussot, 1998).

Following an accident, we banned strong alcohol on the return journeys: banned it completely! It was after some of the younger girls who didn’t know how to pace themselves drunk way too much saying “Oh, it’s just like drinking water”, and then the alcohol took its toll with the delayed effects hitting them all at once. We said, well, the older ones put their foot down and said, “no more strong alcohol, that’s just the way it is” and they accepted it. If it wasn’t for those who piss us off by throwing up everywhere in the coach, well . . . (Sabrina)

This decision, which was made after one of the players suffered from an alcoholic coma on the return coach journey, recalls the stakes involved in handling alcohol, but also its normative dimension in a female group. Thus, a dilemma emerges here between conspicuous consumption, on the one hand, and the need to limit that same consumption, on the other. The group decrees its own system of norms, this drinking being held in a regulated and circumscribed space. Sabrina’s words, in themselves, reveal the collective injunction to handle one’s drink.

When I realize that I'm starting to get a bit too drunk [...] when I'm no longer aware of what's happening... I stop. Because, at the end of the day, we're there to enjoy the evening. Not to end up in a state where we don't remember things and get ill. If this means that we're not going to be able to last till the end of the evening, then I have to say no. Personally, I'm able to judge this, so... but for some blokes, it's another story. Very quickly, they move on to ordering whole bottles directly. I've seen guys staggering around, and some of them are quite aggressive.

Sabrina implicitly refers to "good drinking", that is, not being ill, not becoming aggressive, staying standing, etc., which partly is contrary to that of "the lads". Sabrina insists that by distinguishing themselves from men, these women are not in a position of strictly mimetic behaviour, since they are adapting a type of attitude that is regarded as perfectly normal in the rugby world. This discourse is not only normative, but it is also prescriptive, as it involves ways of drinking, but also and above all, ways of practising the third half-time. Contrary to their male counterparts (Saouter, 1995), these women mould a specific femininity by drinking whilst limiting their alcohol consumption. These women limit their drinking so that their behaviours do not become harmful to themselves. This self-monitoring encourages "positive drinking" (Ettorre, 1997; Rolfe et al., 2009), which leads to a form of playing with alcohol and not submitting to it. The main risk identified is that of tarnishing one's reputation by inappropriate behaviours (such as stripping off in public, or in places where non-rugby players are present) or by increasing male conquests:

We had to tell [one of the younger players] to calm down. Because when you're 18 it's just too tempting, too many blokes... and she was sleeping around with loads of men. Once she'd finished with one guy, she was off looking for the next one straight away! We had to say hey, hold on a minute, you're not a slag. (Aurélié)

Because drinking has a strong collective dimension, insofar as these women always drink together during the third half-times, it enables such regulation of behaviour that cannot be achieved without successfully managing the effects of alcohol with respect to an apparently paradoxical double standard: unrestrained drinking whilst still maintaining a control over one's behaviour, and in particular, one's sexuality. Contrary to what some authors (Ettorre, 1997; Plant, 1997) have shown, here, it is not a case of alcohol consumption that is itself stigmatized, but rather its potential consequences related to a lack of self-control. Therefore, a distinction must be made between the product and its effects.

### *Ritualization as a learning mechanism*

Although these players may already have been drinkers when they joined the club, the drinking habits of many of them have changed. One of the important facilitating mechanisms of this change is the ritualization of certain behaviours. The latter dictates, according to a certain order, the various stages of the third half-time, and thus serves to regulate and promote drinking. Late into the night, toasts and songs structure the festivities and are especially used when the uproar fades.

Extract from the ethnographic notebook: we have been on the coach now for over two and a half hours. The team have split up into several small groups. Overall, the players that don't

drink very much or the non-drinkers all end up at the front of the coach. They're not as noisy, just chatting and reading. At the back, there is a bit of an uproar, but less so than during the first part of the journey. It's during this relatively quiet time that Sarah breaks into song, first of all accompanied by everybody at the back of the bus, and then more progressively by all of the players. The song invites everybody to join in and have a drink, as soon as their birthday month is called out.

These practices (songs or toasts) are used as a means to remobilize the group around a common object and they reactivate the impression of solidarity, and more generally, the feeling of being together. These moments are important elements of ritual sociability in the Durkheim (2008 [1912]) sense. These are ritual signals known by all and to which everybody responds, even through pretence, for example raising an empty glass or drinking a non-alcoholic drink. Ritualization is rousing and exhilarating because everybody masters the codes and can participate. However, these collective demonstrations have their limits: after a certain time, when too many of the players are tired or asleep, these calls to "rally the troops" become out of place due to the lack of participants. The insistence on having a third half-time probably shows that it is far from obvious for women who took up rugby late in life, at least in France (Joncheray and Tlili, 2010). Ritualization is used to create conditions of invisibility, or at least of normalization, for some practices such as stripping off, breaking into bawdy songs or drinking ostensibly. As for bodily exhibitions, their supposedly ritualistic character, as well as the need to "play the game", encourage these behaviours, even for the most reluctant ones.

We don't force anybody. Well, we get people to show their arse at least once in their lives. First away match means new face, new arse, without fail! Even the trainers. (Mathilde)

Therefore, opportunities arise to create the act, as long as the most seasoned players carry it out first and it is presented as a non-discriminatory rite of passage for everybody. By forming the basis of a new ceremonial framework, it dispels confusion (Goffman, 1967). The ritualization goes hand in hand with an essentialization of these behaviours, seen as typical of rugby culture ("It's like that, rugby, you know how to party, you drink and you sing") inscribed in history and traditions that are supposedly unmovable. Calls to tradition are therefore powerful vectors of normalization.

### *"Playing the game"*

Ensuring the widest number of participants is facilitated by the requirement to play the game. This encourages players to respond to these collectively created expectations through the respect of a line of conduct that is presented as obvious, even though most of these players deny, or at least play down, these expectations on the grounds of individual freedom.

Some aren't really into it, and we don't blame them... around half of them do it, I think. Generally, it's from the middle of the coach up that the third half-time starts and at the front there are those who want to sleep, or work, students revising for their exams, etc... In general, this split in the group happens after around three hours, when it's starting to get dark... But the

bottom line is that we're all together, we do the voting, that kind of thing. Those who want to get some kip, we don't bother them, and those who want to carry on partying, having a good time, we put on the music and have a bit of a dance and a sing song. (Noémie)

These assertions are generally played off against the idea of "pushing them a little bit", which is followed by a tension in which negotiation is key, especially because these actors risk losing face, and maybe even their rugby identity.

And the girls are there saying "Go on, it won't hurt, come for just the one drink, you won't get home late". And you're like "No thanks, I'm going home. See?" Well, you get there, you have a Perrier and they say "Go on, have a beer". No. Yeees, it's only a beer. And afterwards it's "No, you can't go home now, come with us to Le Pym's. There's always one who'll try and get you to go along. But at the same time, if you do say no, they stop pushing it. Well, if you've got enough will power, that is. And some of them don't have any will power. (Marie)

In most cases, a mere physical presence is not enough. Here, a particular power is invested in alcohol which, according to Nahoum-Grappe (2010), has the potential to change the register of communication and thus prolong the evening and make it more entertaining. Those who refuse to play that game, by doing so, call into question its very rules, that is to say, the very definition of third half-time behaviours. This modality leads to areas of negotiation in which a refusal must be justified and a legitimate excuse (children, work and distance from home) provided.

## Conclusion

Many women players consider the third half-time to be a period for learning transgressions, for immersing themselves in potentially out-of-the-ordinary behaviours, especially as regards exhibiting oneself or drinking ostentatiously. It could be that women players are in a situation that falls "outside of time" and, therefore, experience behaviours that may breach their daily life as women. For all that, these festivities remain contained, standardized and alcohol use is still partly linked to social constructions, which is especially true for the group of women under study. Of course, it favours excesses of expressiveness by, in turn, diminishing the importance of these potential excesses (Nahoum-Grappe, 2010). However, far from being completely unrestrained, it would appear that drinking is more or less mastered and self-monitored by the group. Even though alcohol remains an essential feature in the identity construction of these players, it is also a stake in group management. Players' accountability for their drinking becomes a type of imperative enabling these women to preserve their integrity, whilst at the same time safeguarding their feminine identity. In this framework, it would seem that social norms are far from being completely disregarded during third half-times; euphemized but not at all abolished, commonplace representations of femininity still permeate these behaviours.

These forms of alcohol consumption therefore call into question the particularities of female rugby players' drinking and, further, those of the construction of the expected contours of "femininity". As we have highlighted, alcohol is simultaneously considered to be a norm (playing rugby implies drinking) and a threat. Most of the women rugby

players in this study resolve this problem by drinking ostentatiously whilst still maintaining overall control over the effects of this consumption of alcohol, both individually and collectively. This is because it is not the act of drinking in itself that poses a problem in this context, but rather its consequences, which are considered to be a gender deviance. As such, most female players seem to be drinking like men by appropriating hegemonic rugby practices, such as drinking in public and participating in rounds, and their ways of carrying out the third half-times. They therefore create a version of femininity that is in collusion with masculinity, but with a few significant differences. For the most part, they are considered as being part of the rugby world by men, as legitimate members of the group (Lyons and Willott, 2008). For all that, this does not in any way suggest a reconsideration of gender. These women are not militants. There is even some evidence to suggest that, like the “gang girls” studied by Messerschmidt (1995), these women rugby players combine “conventional gender practices and atypical gender practices”. Messerschmidt adds that each behaviour therefore refers to specific situations, such as those identified in this study during the different phases of the third half-time.

### Funding

This study was carried out as part of the research programme for Institut de Recherches Scientifiques sur les Boissons (the French Institute for Scientific Research on Beverages). It has received funding of €5000.

### Notes

1. The figures show this difference in France. The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (2012) indicates that in the students group, 46% of boys have consumed five or more drinks on one occasion during the past 30 days, compared to 41% for girls, and 70% of boys have consumed alcohol during the past 30 days, compared to 64% for girls. Although many authors highlight that there is some change in this regard, alcohol use is still largely “gendered”.
2. In order to retain the anonymity of the survey, names of towns, clubs, night clubs and players have been changed.
3. It is likely that this justification is not the only one in use. In fact, during our various ethnographic observations, players and coaches alike expressed concern over the amount of alcohol that these women consumed, believing that it was higher than that of men. This value judgement is proof of a distorted perception of the ordinary representation of femininity; when comparing masculine and feminine third half-times, it would seem, from an objective point of view, that the latter are more restrained. Undoubtedly, it is the gap between the expected image of the sportswoman and that projected by the rugby women under study (or even the similarity of these particular female behaviours to those of male rugby players) that is shocking.

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